

KIX Europe | Asia | Pacific Hub

Thematic Priorities in 21 GPE Partner Countries of the Europe | Asia | Pacific Region

Volume 1: Report
June 2020

About KIX

The Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) initiative is funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). It is an exciting new way to connect the expertise, innovation and knowledge of GPE partners to help developing countries build stronger education systems

With a budget of over US\$75 million, KIX is the largest fund solely dedicated to meet global public good gaps in education.

Through the sharing and funding of proven solutions and innovations, KIX will ensure that:

- Evidence-based solutions get in the hands of national policy makers and directly feed policy dialogue and planning processes.
- Build capacity to produce, integrate and scale knowledge and innovation in GPE partner countries.

The International Development Research Centre ([IDRC](#)), Ottawa, is the grant agent for KIX.

About KIX EAP Hub

The hub for the KIX EAP (Europe | Asia | Pacific) region serves twenty-one countries in the region over the duration of the project: April 2020 – December 2023. The KIX EAP hubs supports knowledge production in these countries and supports national education and policy experts in these countries to get their voices heard and their knowledge shared regionally. The hub also offers opportunities for peer-learning and exchange by means of professional development and inter-country visits.

There are globally four KIX hubs or Regional Learning Partners, overseen by IDRC. The one for the EAP region is implemented by NORRAG.

About NORRAG

NORRAG is a global membership-based network of international policies and cooperation in education, established in 1976, by an initiative that was similar in objectives to today's KIX initiative. Half of the NORRAG members are based in the global South. NORRAG is an associate programme of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland. NORRAG is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, and the Open Society Foundations.

About this Report

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

DCP	Developing Country Partners
DP	Development Partner
EAP	Europe – Asia – Pacific
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ESP	Education Sector Plan
ESPIG	Education Sector Program Implementation Grants
EMIS	Education Management and Information Systems
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
NORRAG	Network for International Policies and Cooperation in Education + Training
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
TEP	Transitional Education Plan

Volume 2: Appendix (separate document)

Appendix 1 – Findings of Desk Review
Appendix 2 – Survey (English version)
Appendix 3 – Survey (Russian version)
Appendix 4 – Raw Data (Whole Survey)
Appendix 5 – Raw Data (All countries except Maldives)
Appendix 6 – Raw Data (Maldives)
Appendix 7 – Raw Data (Kyrgyzstan)

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from an empirical study on thematic priorities, challenges, and innovations in the following 21 countries of the East – Asia – Pacific (EAP) region that are partner countries of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE): Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), Maldives, Moldova, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor Leste, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Yemen.

The study fulfills a **dual purpose**: on one hand it helps to inform the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) about current issues in the region. It is expected that IDRC uses some of the information to design a regional call that responds to the needs and priorities in the region. On the other hand, it contains valuable information for the KIX EAP hub itself as it embarks currently on developing a detailed workplan for the 45-month project in its capacity as the KIX Regional Learning Partner for the EAP region.

Methodologically, the study draws on data collected by means of content analysis (21 Education Sector Plans/Transitional Education Plans as well as other national policy documents), an online survey that was administered in English (209 respondents) and in Russian (67 respondents), 22 individual interviews, and six focus group interviews (85 participants). In total, the findings are based on a content analysis of 55 documents and data collected from 383 individuals. All 21 countries are represented in the study, albeit with a great variation in terms of participations. Kyrgyzstan (Russian version of online survey) and Maldives (English version of the online survey) had an overproportional high response rate, enabling us to carry out cursory one-country case studies.

The 3 top thematic priorities: Teaching and learning as well as EMIS emerged as top priorities in the online survey. During the interviews (individual and group), the impact of COVID-19 on education surfaced as an additional topic. The following highlights those aspects that are considered essential for future actionable research, policy, and planning:

Making teaching more effective and improving learning outcomes:

- Elements of the education system are not aligned with the new curriculum framework
- Lack of infrastructure, equipment as well as teaching and learning materials
- Lack of female teachers at secondary school level
- Lack of qualified, bilingual teachers who are able to teach in the mother tongue of the students
- Lack of knowledge and skills on how to use standardized tests to improve the quality of teaching and learning

Enhancing the utility of EMIS for planning purposes:

- Using EMIS for planning rather than merely for reporting
- Insufficient application of EMIS at provincial/district and at school level

- Need for capacity-building to improve data entry and data interpretation

Impact of COVID-19 on educational priorities

The GPE partner countries used a multitude of strategies to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. More often than not, however, schools were for the majority of students simply closed and no alternatives were made available.

In comparison to the three top thematic priorities listed above, equity and inclusion, early childhood education care and education (ECCE), and gender were considered moderately important. One possible interpretation for this unexpected finding is that several governments in the region have included ECCE reforms in their Education Sector Program Implementation Grants (ESPIG) and also address, at least on paper, gender equity and inclusion initiatives in their Education Sector Plans.

The study also includes two brief summaries of the survey results from Kyrgyzstan (N = 61) and Maldives (N = 135) to demonstrate the variety of thematic priorities across the region. Nevertheless, the three thematic priorities, listed above, apply to all 21 countries of the EAP region.

The KIX EAP Hub, based at NORRAG in Geneva, offers the **proposition to consider three topics as thematic priorities** for the 21 GPE partner countries in the EAP region. The data suggests that these topics are, at this point in time and to various degree, relevant for all the GPE partner countries in the region:

1. Systematic implementation of the new curriculum: Identifying gaps and misalignments

In most countries a new curriculum framework has been issued on paper five, ten or fifteen years ago, but has not been—for a variety of reasons—implemented in actual practice. The misalignment of teacher education, textbook publishing, student assessment, teaching and learning material with the revised curriculum is regarded as one of the main causes for the low quality of teaching and learning.

2. Using data for planning: Exchange and peer-learning from best practices in the region

All countries have established EMIS for project reporting (mostly towards development partners), but only a few use EMIS for their own planning at school, district/provincial, and central/federal level. This thematic priority, identified by participants from most of the 21 countries, lends itself for peer-learning and exchange given that some countries, more than others, use data for planning.

3. Leaving no one behind in times of a crisis: Lessons drawn from COVID-19 and other disasters

The COVID-19 crisis has surfaced and in fact exacerbated inequalities in the educational system. Bridging the digital divide constitutes but one of the strategies to overcome inequalities in times of distant learning. In addition to learning how to integrate ICT in teaching and use it for distance learning, what other innovative approaches to ensure equal access and outcomes for vulnerable groups have been successfully tried during the COVID-19 crisis or during other recent disasters, triggered by climate change, natural disasters or conflict and war?

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings from an empirical study carried out in 21 countries of the KIX Europe | Asia | Pacific (EAP) region that are partner countries of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The study was carried out by the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) EAP hub which serves the following 21 GPE partner countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Maldives, Moldova, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor Leste, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Yemen.

The KIX EAP hub is based at NORRAG in Geneva, Switzerland. It reports to IDRC, the organization that administers and oversees all KIX projects, funded by the Global Partnership for Education.

This comparative, 21-country study examines thematic priorities, challenges and innovations in the region. It fulfils a dual purpose: on the one hand, it helps to inform the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) about current issues in the region. It is expected that IDRC will utilize some of the information to design a regional call that responds to the needs and priorities in the region. The Concept Note on KIX Regional Calls, issued by the IDRC (February 20, 2020), has therefore guided the methodological design of the study (see next section). On the other hand, it contains valuable information for the KIX EAP hub itself as it is currently in the process of developing a detailed work-plan which includes, amongst others, thematic priorities for the upcoming webinars as well as the first learning cycle (with a focus on feasibility studies on scaling innovations/pilot projects), which is scheduled to begin in September 2020.

The research team consisted of the following experts:

Gita Steiner-Khamsi, Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University & Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies and Director, NORRAG & KIX EAP Hub

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Julia Levin, Lecturer, University of Hamburg, and Research Associate, KIX EAP hub (Russian-speaking countries), based in Hamburg

The study was coordinated by Wajeeha Hazoor Bajwa. The report has been written by Wajeeha Hazoor Bajwa in collaboration with Gita Steiner-Khamsi and Julia Levin.

2 Methodology

This section of the report presents the methodology of the mixed-methods design and provides more detailed information on the following four data collection instruments:

1. A desk review of 21 Education Sector Plans (ESP) or Transitional Education Plans (TEP), respectively, as well as desk review of one additional document. As explained below, we refer to this sampling procedure as “ESP/TEP + 1.” The content analysis covers 55 documents.
2. An online survey, administered in English and Russian, structured along the six thematic priorities of the KIX discussion papers. A total of 209 surveys were filled out in English, and 67 in Russian.
3. Individual interviews and meetings with key informants resulting in 7 formal interviews and meetings with 12 representatives of development partners (DPs)
4. Focus group discussions (FGDs): The launch of the KIX EAP hub on May 27, 2020, was used as a venue to solicit answers on thematic priorities, challenges and innovations in the region. Six breakout room were established and responses from 85 participants were recorded

Table 1 provides an overview of the sample sizes and the numbers of EAP countries covered listed by data collection instruments.

Table 1 Sample Size and Country Representation by Data Collection Instrument

Data Collection Instrument	Sample Size	Countries Covered/ Country Responses
Content analysis: ESP/TEP + 1	55 documents	21
Online survey:		
English version	209	17
Russian version	67	3
Individual interviews:		
Key Informant Interviews	7	
Meetings with DP representatives	12	7
Focus group discussions:		
6 groups by sub-region	85	18
Total	383	

In total, this study draws on data collected by means of four different instruments (documents, surveys, individual interviews, group interviews), from 383 individuals, 55 documents, covering all 21 countries of the EAP region.

2.1 Content Analysis

The desk review entailed a content analysis of policy and planning documents, that were produced with international funding (Education Sector Plans or Transitional Education Plans) and, if accessible, from domestic resources (national action plans, programs, initiatives). The

“ESP/TEP + 1” sampling procedure for the selected documents was purposefully chosen to ensure that the study does not only cover current, externally funded projects, typically reflected in the ESPs/TEPs, but also national debates and priorities. Appendix 1 presents the report of the content analysis that was based on 55 documents, that is, 21 ESPs/TEPs and 34 other documents (see Volume 2, Appendix 1). We analyzed the documents with regard to three aspects: (i) reform priorities in the country, (ii) international cooperation modalities, and (iii) the

following six thematic priorities which GPE and IDRC used for issuing the KIX discussion papers:

- Teaching and learning
- Learning assessment systems
- Equity and inclusion
- Gender equality
- Early childhood care and education
- Data systems

The results of the content analysis are summarized, by country and sub-region, in the Desk Review Report (see Appendix 1). The findings from the content analysis were used as a foundation to develop the questionnaire items for the online survey.

2.2 Online Survey

The survey was administered through the Survey Monkey platform. The survey started out with general questions on the respondent and then asked the respondent to identify the top three priorities among the list of six KIX priority themes, listed above. Once the respondents decided on their top three choices, they were directed to the three thematic areas of choice and were asked to explain their choice in greater depth. This way, we are able to keep the survey short (15 minutes) and at the same time, due to a combination of closed and open-ended questions, sufficiently specific and contextual.

The English version of the survey is listed in Appendix 2. The survey was made accessible to individuals based in the 21 countries of the EAP region over the period May 15 - May 30, 2020. Several invitations to fill out the survey were sent by email to the participating countries (GPE focal points, coordination agencies) and the link to the survey was disseminated over social media and the [KIX EAP hub website](#).

At survey closure (May 30), a total of 209 responses were collected on the English version of the survey and 67 responses were collected on the Russian version. Participants from all three Russian-speaking countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) and all the other GPE partner countries—except one (Lao PDR)—filled out the English version of the survey.

Two countries were (positive) outliers in terms of the high response rate:

- English version: 135 of the 209 filled out surveys were from the Maldives
- Russian version: 61 of the 67 filled out surveys from Kyrgyzstan

The survey was filled out by individuals representing government, civil society organizations, practitioners (early childhood care educators, teachers and school directors), professional associations (including teachers), and research entities and universities. Overall, the greatest proportion of responses was from government officials and representatives of civil society organizations, followed by research institutions and the private sector. In the Maldives, in particular, the respondents were largely from the Government. In Kyrgyzstan and the Russian-speaking region, by mid-level government officials and researchers in education mostly filled out the survey. In interpreting the findings of the survey, we kept the over-representation of

responses from the Maldives and Kyrgyzstan in mind. That is, we excluded their responses when reporting on overall trends in the region. Section 4 of this report presents a summary of the two case studies (Maldives and Kyrgyzstan respectively) that had an exceptionally high participation rate in the survey.

2.3 Individual Interviews

The individual interviews were composed of survey respondents that agreed to be contacted for a follow-up interview and other volunteers that expressed an interest to share their views on thematic priorities, challenges and innovations in their country. In addition, the KIX EAP team used the opportunity during meetings with project partners and developing partners to solicit input on the topic of the study. These interviews and meetings with experts served to contextualize the findings from the desk review and from the responses obtained from the survey. A total of 18 persons, based in the EAP region, provided their assessment of thematic priorities, challenges and noteworthy innovations in their country and region. The individual interviews were carried out both in English and in Russian.

An unexpected finding emerged during the semi-structured interviews as well as during the focus group interviews/discussions: a focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational planning and administration as well as on teaching and learning. The focus on the crisis was unsolicited leading us to suggest that the impact of COVID-19 or of crises in general should be considered one of the three thematic priority areas.

2.4 Focus Group Interviews

The group discussions in the six breakout rooms during the launch of the KIX EAP Hub lent themselves to solicit responses on the topic of the study and identify, if applicable, sub-regional, crosscutting themes and priorities. The six groups were composed as follows:

- South Asia
- Europe
- South East Asia and Pacific
- Central Asia and Mongolia
- North Africa and Middle East
- Strategic partners of the KIX EAP Hub (ACER, FHI 360, Nazarbayev University, UNESCO Bangkok, UNICEF Regional Offices and Country Offices) as well as GPE and IDRC

A summary of the findings from the group discussions (or focus group interviews) were shared with the 85 participants of the launch event, are posted on the [KIX EAP Hub website](#), and are incorporated in this report.

3 Findings

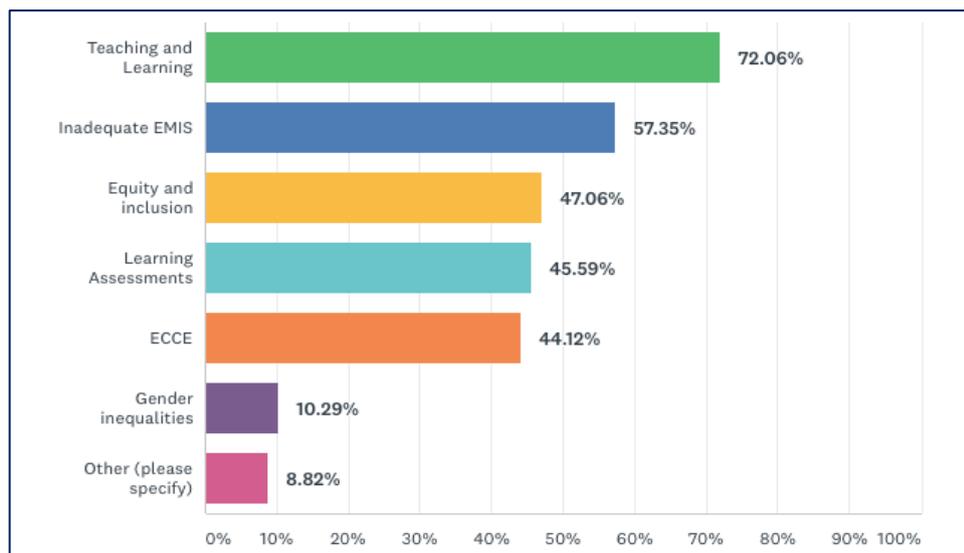
This section presents the main finding from the survey (section 3.1), proceeds with discussing in detail the top two challenges (sections 3.2 and 3.3), briefly addresses the other topics that were not considered regional priorities or challenges (section 3.4), continues with a discussion

of the third thematic focus (the impact of COVID-19 on the education system) that emerged during the interview (section 3.5), country case studies from Maldives and Kyrgyzstan respectively (Section 4.1 and 4.2.) and concludes with recommendations.

3.1. The League Table of Thematic Priorities

The findings from the survey (N = 209) are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Key Challenges in the Education Sector of 20 Countries of the EAP Region



As shown in Figure 1, teaching and learning (72%) as well as EMIS or education management information system (57%) are ranked as the top priorities.

We will therefore focus on the content of these two priorities but also include the thematic focus on learning assessments, identified as an issue by close to half of all respondents (46%), into the discussion of the two priorities:

- Teaching and learning, including learning assessment systems
- EMIS

The content analysis (desk review), the survey, and the interviews (individual and group) enabled us to make sense as to why these two topics emerged as the two main challenges. The triangulation of data, enabled by the use of diverse data collection instruments, helped us to understand what the respondents and interviewees *mean* and subsume under teaching and learning challenges or EMIS, respectively, and what aspects exactly they find challenging for their education system.

3.2. Making Teaching More Effective, Improving Learning Outcomes

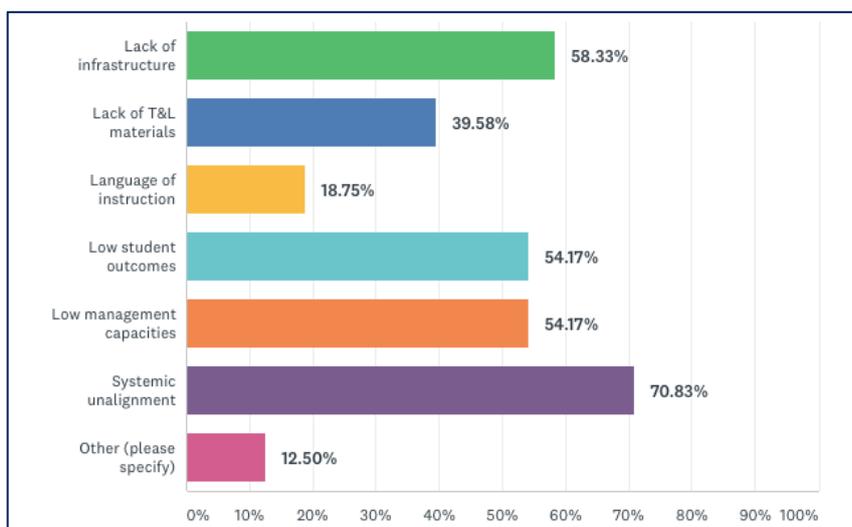
The poor quality of teaching and learning (T&L) is a major challenge in the EAP region as confirmed by the desk review and the interviews (individual and group).

According to the respondents, the challenges that lead to a poor quality of teaching and learning are related to several factors:

Elements of the educational system are not aligned with curriculum reform. Apparently, several countries have undergone a major school reform in recent years that is, depending on the country, characterized and labeled as competency-based, standards-based or outcomes-based curriculum reform. In some countries, the countries have been accompanied by structural reforms such as, for example, extension of compulsory education to lower education completion (South East Asia and South Asia), adding additional years of schooling at upper secondary school level (Central Asia and Mongolia), or introduction of internal tracking at secondary school level (vocational versus academic tracks or different profiles or specializations within secondary education). These fundamental, structural reforms were seen as windows of opportunities to revamp the curriculum in ways that reflect global developments in curriculum reform, perhaps best illustrated in the multitude of frameworks that attempt to specify 21st century skills or OECD’s Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) framework. In fact, close to three-quarters of the survey respondents found the systematic implementation of the competency-based curriculum—a curriculum that teaches, amongst others, critical thinking, problem solving, team work and related 21st century skills, as a priority in their country.

Today, five, ten or even fifteen years after the initial reform, the curriculum reform (i) only exists as a broadly defined curriculum framework on paper with little impact on teaching and learning, (ii) has not replaced an old curriculum that is crowded with a plethora of subjects, each with very little instructional time (in Moldova, for example, 12 subjects in primary school), or (iii) has not been implemented systematically. As shown in Figure 3, the third reason—non-alignment of the revised curriculum with textbooks, teacher education, student assessment systems—has been identified an issue for more than two thirds of the respondents in the survey (70%). Even though the curriculum is revamped, other crucial elements of the system lag behind in terms of reform and alignment.

Figure 2. Challenges Associated with Poor Quality of Teaching and Learning



Lack of infrastructure, equipment and teaching and learning materials. The second reason for the poor quality of teaching and learning is the lack of infrastructure (furniture, school boards),

equipment (computers) as well as the lack of teaching and learning materials are seen as indispensable for effective teaching and learning (see Figure 2). The lack of equipment (including computers) has become an acute issue during the COVID-19 crisis. The lack of infrastructure was highlighted in particular by respondents based in Bangladesh, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia, and Sudan.

Lack of female teachers at the secondary school level. The respondents from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen identified the underrepresentation of female teachers at secondary level as the main barrier for enrolling and retaining female students beyond primary school. This obstructs gender equality and significantly curbs the educational attainment of females in countries where schools, in particular secondary schools, are separated by gender.

Lack of qualified, bilingual teachers who teach in the mother tongue of the students. As seen in Figure 2, the language of instruction has been identified as one of the key reasons for the low quality of teaching and poor learning outcomes in primary school. When asked specifically about multilingual teaching (later on in the survey), two-thirds of the survey respondents identified teaching in community languages as a major challenge in the country, due to the unavailability of qualified bilingual teachers or due to a lack of sufficient provision of schools offered for linguistic and ethnic minorities. As a result, ethnic and linguistic minorities in some countries are enrolled in a non-formal education system, taught by non-qualified teachers in the mother tongue of the students, or instructed in a language that neither the students nor the teachers fully master. Even though there is agreement that the issue of multilingual teaching (teaching in the language of ethnic and linguistic minorities) should be tackled with greater priority, the situation varies widely across the region. Recurrent challenges identified by the survey respondents are the lack of qualified teachers (Georgia, Mongolia, Vietnam), the lack of teaching and learning materials (Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar) and the lack of a national framework to improve the situation (Tajikistan).

Lack of knowledge and skills on how to use standardized tests to improve the quality of teaching and learning. As mentioned above, the selective adoption of competency-based curriculum reform had generated confusion and in effect deteriorated rather than improved the quality of teaching. One of the key areas not aligned with the curriculum reform is the system of student assessment. As before, students continue to be tested on what they know (knowledge) rather on what they can do (competencies). Of course, intra-regional variances exist. For instance, Bhutan is seeking participation in international large-scale student assessments (ILSAs). In Kyrgyzstan, the focus is on decentralizing learning assessments to support decision-making whereas Uzbekistan seeks to create a learning assessment system using the framework of PISA to facilitate a cross-national comparison in terms of students' learning outcomes. Survey respondents consider the strengthening of national-level assessments to provide formative evaluation/feedback to students for improving their learning. They also considered to be an important tool to support planning and monitoring, that, integrated with the EMIS could enhance management capacities to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Thus, both aspects of standardized testing seem to matter to survey respondents: (i) test-based accountability with the purpose of improving the quality of education in the system, and (ii) formative evaluation of students to enhance learning.

3.3. Improving the Utility of EMIS for Planning Purposes

As Figure 1 had shown, the improvement of EMIS is considered the second highest priority, following improving teaching and learning. The desk review, survey findings and the results from the focus group discussions reveal that across the board, countries possess EMIS capacities but at varying levels of development and usage. The majority of respondents identified problems with data collection, accuracy of the data, and updating of data for policy and planning. This confirms that even in countries with more advanced systems – such as Bhutan in South Asia (discussed below), there is ample room for capacity-strengthening on how to optimize the usage of data for planning and monitoring purposes.

The survey results as well as the qualitative data obtained from the desk review help us to specify the EMIS-related matters that are considered to be in need of improvement. The following provides a summary of the key problems related to the utility of EMIS:

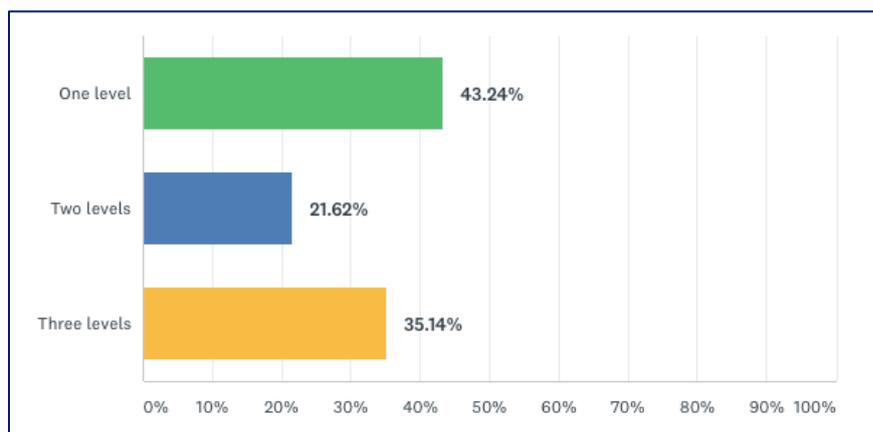
Using EMIS for planning rather than merely for reporting. All countries in the EAP region are accustomed to collecting data on enrollment, transition or completion rates and other basic statistical information. In externally funded projects, additional data on a set of indicators—identified in baseline studies—are collected. The data is subsequently used either for inter-ministerial communication (mainly between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance) or for reporting vis-à-vis development partners. In stark contrast, however, EMIS is rarely used for internal planning or policy analysis.

Insufficient application of EMIS at provincial/district and school level. The content analysis of ESPs/TEPs and other national policy documents suggested that EMIS is used predominantly at the central level. In many countries, the data collection and entry occur at central level, generating large delays and great inaccuracies. In a similar vein, the data is in most countries exclusively used at the central level, if it is used at all for planning and policy purposes. Based on the preliminary finding from the desk review, we included one questionnaire item in which the respondents were asked to specify at how many levels (one, two or three) EMIS information was predominantly used. The three levels are defined as follows:

- One level: using EMIS only at the central/federal level
- Two levels: using EMIS at the central/federal level *and* the province/district level
- Three levels: using EMIS at the two levels, listed above, *and* at the school level

Figure 3 presents the results of the questionnaire item. Around 42% of the respondents indicated that EMIS is used only at the central/federal level. Surprisingly, quite a few countries (one-third) utilize EMIS at all three levels, that is, including at the school level.

Figure 3. EMIS Usage by Level of Educational Governance



Nepal stands out as a country that utilizes EMIS for planning and monitoring purposes only at one level (the federal or central level), whereas the respondents from Bhutan claim that the government utilizes EMIS ubiquitously at all three levels, that is, at the central/federal, provincial/district, and school level.

Schools not receiving feedback on the basis of EMIS findings are additionally a concern, and are regarded as a missed opportunity to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Additionally, the lack of linkages to the school level are problematic as they are not motivated to provide accurate data, nor is a culture of performativity promoted, as improved educational outcomes are not rewarded. Overall, despite efforts spanning decades under internationally pushed efforts on national governments to collect, analyse and utilize data, EMIS is not integrated comprehensively with other planning tools, such as learning assessment data. Furthermore, capacities to implement the system adequately remain limited.

It is noticeable that the questionnaire item on the different levels of usage was apparently difficult to understand. We detected discrepancies in the responses to this question even within the same country. This leads us to suggest that the question regarding EMIS only concerns a very small group of statisticians and planners in the government. This in and of itself deserves an interpretation as it could mean that EMIS is indeed only used by a very small group of experts in the country that hold office at the central/federal level.

Need for capacity-building to improve data entry and data interpretation. The need for capacity building has been identified specifically by respondents in countries with a very basic EMIS infrastructure and with little commitment to evidence-based policy and planning. The lack of capacity, however, has also been highlighted by respondents in countries with well-functioning, comprehensive EMIS. For example, the respondents from Bhutan where EMIS seems to be quite advanced and where data is used at three levels for planning and monitoring, the need to improve capacities and add a Student Achievement Tracking System (SATS) to support policymaking and delivery has been highlighted.

In the Caucasus, Central Asia and Mongolia, there is great interest to learn more on how to analyze and communicate data for decision-making. For example, Uzbekistan seeks to design

a comprehensive and harmonized EMIS for the entire education sector. There will be a need to design and adequately train government officials, notably those in planning units, for the introduction of such a comprehensive system. While Kyrgyzstan and Georgia have a well-functioning EMIS in place, policy decisions are not always taken based on evidence. Furthermore, the desk review reveals that in Moldova, the type of data that is collected does not lend itself for generating insights on how to improve the quality of education.

Similarly, in South Asia, there are variations in internal capacities to operationalize EMIS systems adequately. Limited development and usage of EMIS is also reported by some provinces of Pakistan. In the Middle East, a major concern is limited capacities to collect and analyse data in a timely manner, which is additionally a concern in South East Asia (Lao PDR) where the delayed release of data limits its utility for planning. In South East Asia in general, the national/central level seems to have the tools and capacities for effective planning and monitoring of the system but capacities for monitoring and data system strengthening are rather lacking at the provincial/subnational/local level (and down to the level of the school). Cambodia, for instance, lacks capacities for data-entry, analysis and utilization as well as coordination of other information management systems. In the Middle East, the inadequate consideration of EMIS for internal planning or decision-making is identified as one of the major challenges of the EMIS. The need for better quality of data collection, management and analysis, and utilization of data for performance of educational systems has been raised in the group interviews or meetings.

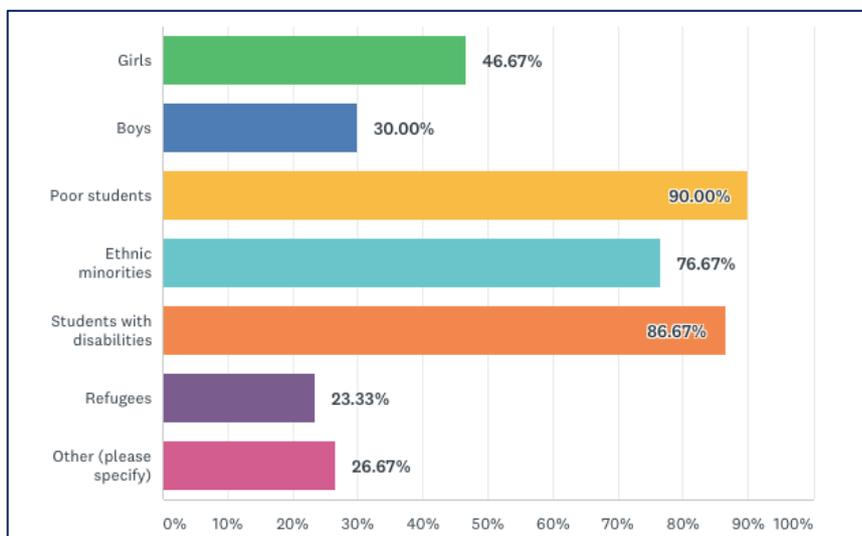
Most of the challenges, listed above, relate in one way or the other to the larger issue of how to better utilize data for planning and policy decisions.

3.4. Moderately Important Thematic Priorities: Equity and Inclusion, Gender and ECCE

In addition to the two top thematic priorities—teaching and learning, including learning assessment, as well as EMIS—equity and inclusion as well as early childhood care and education (ECCE)—were listed as important by slightly less than half of all respondents. The following presents a few key findings related to these two, moderately important thematic priorities.

Equity and Inclusion. One of the questionnaire items required that the respondents identify the marginalized and disenfranchised groups in their country that are currently underserved and deserve to be addressed with greater priority. Figure 4 presents a summary of the responses.

Figure 4. Marginalized Groups that Deserve to Be Treated with Greater Priority in School Reform

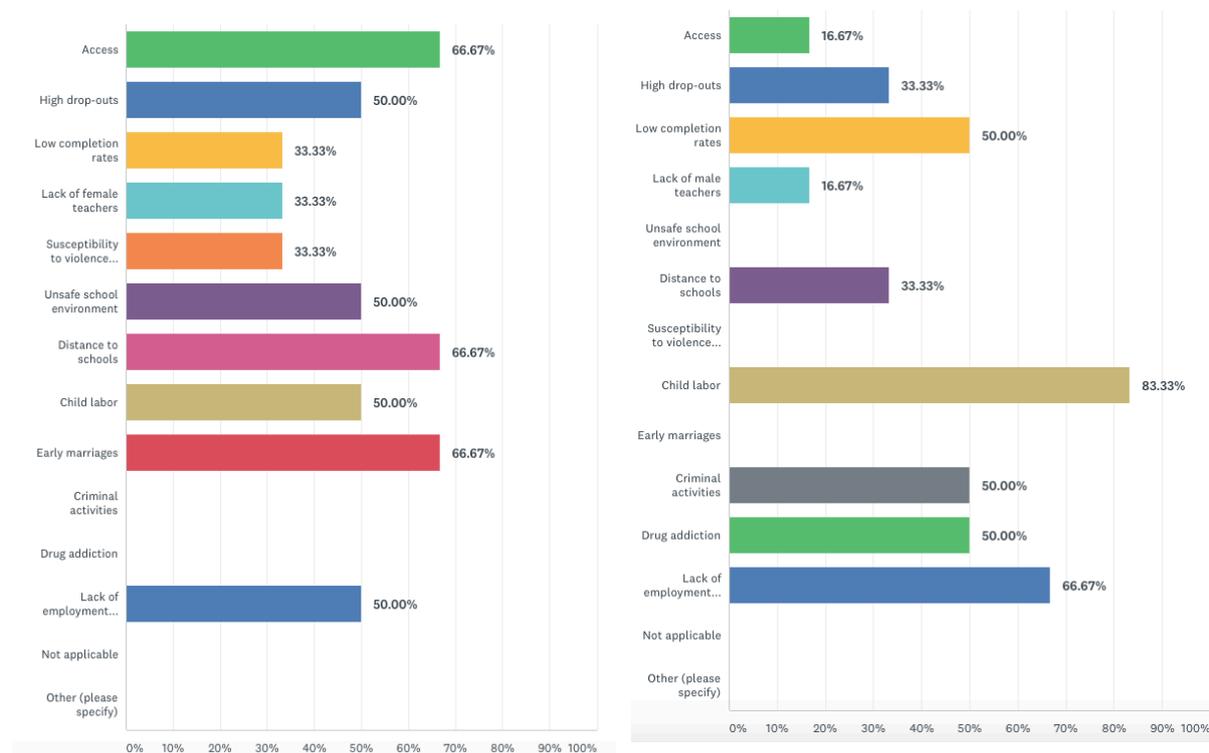


As illustrated in Figure 4, poor students and students with disabilities or with special learning needs, followed by ethnic minorities, are considered to be the top three marginalized groups that the respondents found to be neglected in current school reform initiatives. In several countries, including Sudan and Yemen, the focus is on provision of schooling for children and youth from refugee groups or Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) in their mother tongue. The desk review also identified special programs for ethnic minorities in Lao PDR, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam. The respondents from the five post-communist countries — Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan — highlighted the lack of special provisions and the underperformance of students from remote rural areas as well as students with an ethnic or linguistic minority background.

Interestingly, respondents from quite a few countries (Albania, Bhutan, Cambodia, Georgia, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan) found that vocational skills development at secondary school level is indispensable. Several of the respondents pointed out that vocational skills development would reduce dropouts because the families from poor households would see the value of education for generating income.

Gender. The analysis of the survey findings reveals that only 8 respondents out of 209 respondents considered gender inequalities to be one of the three greatest educational challenges affecting the country. This does not imply that the issue does not hold importance in the countries of the EAP region. Rather, other educational challenges, related to the quality of education, data systems and equity and inclusion in general, overtake it in terms of priority. Even though gender equity did not surface as a priority, as compared to other vulnerable groups, the issue deserves attention. Strikingly, the respondents identified quite distinct reasons for educational challenges for girls as opposed to those for boys. Figure 5 compares the key challenges by gender.

Figure 5. Key Educational Challenges for Girls (Left) versus Boys (Right)



As shown in Figure 5, the main challenges for girls’ education are early marriage, long distance to school, and access to school. In contrast, for boys’ education the main barriers are considered to be child labor, low completion rates, and lack of employment.

Early Childhood Care and Education. ECCE emerged as a moderately important thematic priority possibly because several Education Sector Program Implementation Grants (ESPIG), funded by GPE, already draw attention to improving coverage and the quality of ECCE. In contrast to the survey, where ECCE ranks in the middle of the league table of thematic priorities, the Education Sector Plans of the 21 countries, examined for the desk review, frequently mention ECCE as a priority. This confirm the assumption that quite a few reforms are currently on the way to improve the situation in ECCE.

3.5. The Impact of COVID-19 on Educational Priorities

At the time of the writing of this report, countries in the EAP region are still coming to terms with the immediate and long-term impacts of Covid-19 on the educational sector. There is a variation in readiness and progress on adapting to virtual educational delivery, with the expectation that it may affect the overarching priorities identified in this report in the coming years. There seems to be consensus among the participants of individual and group interviews that consultations involving educational sector stakeholders, need to be organized to process and analyze the existing and expected long-term impacts of Covid-19 on the educational sector.

“Educational priorities have not changed (in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic) but the crisis has forced us to become imaginative and adaptive. In particular, the role of technology in the teaching-learning process has increased even more.”

Government Official, Georgia

The digital divide has made it impossible to switch to virtual teaching in most of the countries of the region with the exception of a few schools in the capitals or large cities or in high-fee private schools. Clearly, the COVID-19 crisis has had a disproportionate negative impact on vulnerable groups. A common impediment to providing distance learning cited across countries in the Middle East, South Asia and Caucuses, Central Asia and Mongolia, is the lack of consistent

access to the internet as well as unequal access to technological equipment for vulnerable groups, along lines of poverty and geographical distance from urban infrastructure.

Here, it is pertinent to note that governments across the EAP region generally considered the inclusion of technology in the delivery of education prior to the onset of Covid-19 as an integral part of overarching efforts to participate in the global knowledge economy. For example, countries across South Asia were veering towards the integration of ICT in education to improve quality and equity in education, and to improve student achievement and outcomes. Bangladesh developed a Master Plan laying out a pathway for the inclusion of technology across its educational sector as early as 2012. The respondents in one of the group interviews mentioned that countries such as Maldives are already seeking support related to data management in relation to Covid-19.

Yet, countries seem to vary greatly in their capacity to deliver education through virtual platforms according to individual and group interviews, and even middle-income countries are “learning by doing”. In Yemen, curriculum development for distance education is a major priority as is the need to capacitate staff from schools and even relevant government departments in delivering virtual education. In Georgia, while a TV school program was launched, children still were deprived of educational access due to lack of access to the internet and technological devices. Similarly, in Kyrgyzstan an anti-crisis plan for the education system was developed on short notice and 1,400 video lessons were prepared so that the fourth quarter of studies could be conducted online. In Tajikistan, the response is still under discussion and preparations are being made to deliver virtual education beginning in September 2020. There, the pandemic further obstructed the adoption of the new national education sector strategy that was scheduled for the summer of 2020. In the majority of the countries in the region, teachers are at loss on how to better integrate Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in their teaching. In the Caucuses, Central Asia and Mongolia and South East Asia, ensuring the inclusion of marginalized children and equity in virtual learning processes is a major concern. In South East Asia, resuming classes after months of disruption constitutes a great challenge.

As an interviewee from Moldova convincingly argued, the “discovery” of online learning has raised hopes on how to improve access and the educational experience of children with physical disabilities who are currently excluded from traditional schooling. To ensure equity and inclusion in the long-term, virtual educational delivery tailored to students with disability and other students with special needs, must be taken into consideration and adequately addressed.

4 Case Studies

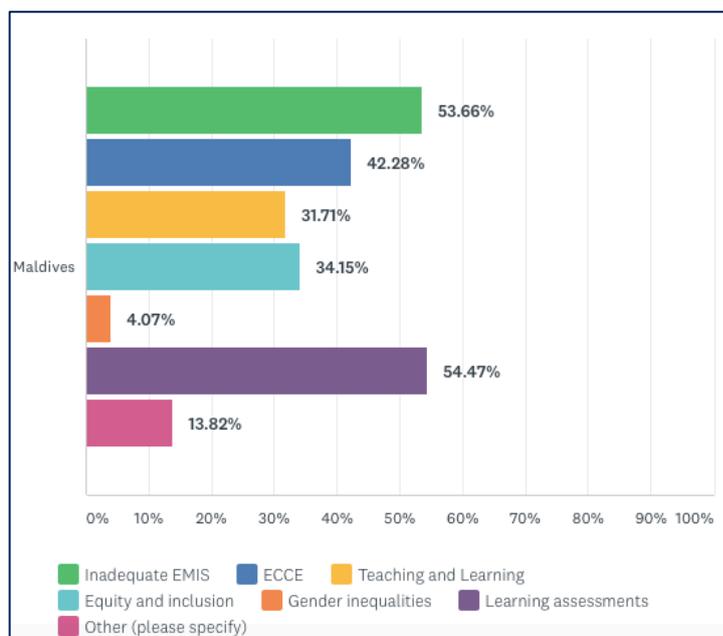
The high response rate from Kyrgyzstan (N = 61) and from the Maldives (N = 135) lends itself to a case study analysis.

4.1. Thematic Priorities in Maldives

It is important to bear in mind that the majority of survey responses from Maldives were submitted by government officials. As shown in Figure 6, the top three thematic priorities in Maldives are:

- inadequacy of data collection and analytical systems (54%)
- limited quality of early childhood education and care (42%)
- poor quality of teaching and learning (32%)

Figure 6. Key Educational Challenges in Maldives



In terms of EMIS, the country faces major constraints pertaining to its internal capacities to use EMIS. An additional major challenge is that it is not utilized or considered uniformly for internal planning or decision-making. This experience is in line with the EAP region in general, where the need for increased data utilization for decision-making is considered a priority. Maldives is further prioritizing the collection of data that is disaggregated along measures of equity (i.e. location of residence, gender, economic status) in order to mainstream equity in the educational sector.

Additionally, the country faces challenges related to the ECCE system which is said to insufficiently cover the demand. Here, the major challenges are limited facilities and infrastructure, lack of adequately qualified staff and poor quality of teaching and learning. These limitations are aligned with the challenges related to the quality of teaching

Finally, in terms of teaching and learning, the identified challenges coincide with those in the EAP region in general, with different elements of the system, such as curriculum, textbooks and teacher capacity-building, not being aligned, followed by lack of infrastructure for effective teaching and inadequate management capacities.

There is a strong focus on improving the quality of education in terms of closing the learning gap in education, as the country lags behind other countries in South Asia in the subjects of English and math. Furthermore, it also maintains a strong focus on equity and inclusion and seeks to reduce higher incidents of dropouts following the completion of the lower secondary school level, by improving educational delivery by teachers, investing in teacher development, applying innovative teaching approaches and having teachers engage in formative assessments, that is, provide students feedback on their performance. Similar to other countries in the EAP region, teachers are also considered central to improving the quality of education. The country suffers not only from teacher shortages, but also from a high attrition rate amongst teachers. The government attempts to improve the conditions for the teaching profession by providing better career advancement opportunities and more professional development options for teachers.

While the introduction of a competency-based curriculum has been a priority, the implementation of the new curriculum in actual practice has encountered a number of challenges. In addition to limited teacher capacities, respondents found that the so-called standards or the curriculum framework are too difficult for teachers to understand and to implement. In addition, there is a lack of political will to systematically implement the new competency-based curriculum and align all elements of the education system with the new curriculum. One of the innovations introduced in Maldives was the introduction of social-emotional learning (SEL), a focus that was added to the already existing emphasis on math and science.

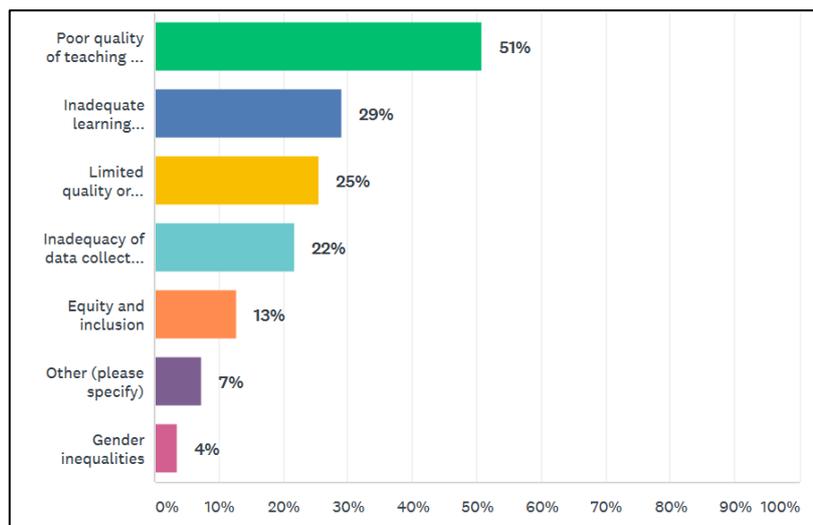
In terms of gender equity and inclusion, the country seems to face significant challenges pertaining to boys' completion of education due to participation in child labor, criminal activities and drug addiction. For girls' education, the major challenges are the lack of economic opportunities following school completion. These factors have been confirmed through both the desk review and survey findings. Furthermore, there are gaps in achievement based on the location of residence of students, and delivering education adequately to students with disabilities remains a priority.

4.2. Thematic Priorities in Kyrgyzstan

The majority of the respondents from Kyrgyzstan were from research and educational institutions, followed by representatives from government as well as the private sector. Figure 7 shows that the top three priorities are the following:

- poor quality of teaching and learning (51%)
- inadequate learning assessment systems (29%)
- limited quality or coverage of early childhood education & care (25%)

Figure 7. Key Educational Challenges in Kyrgyzstan



The main challenges as specified by the participants were low educational outcomes, limited alignment of different elements of the educational systems, insufficient teaching and learning materials, and limited management capacities. In Kyrgyzstan, the implementation of a competency and standards-based curriculum is a top priority. Yet, the standards-based curriculum remains only moderately implemented. The greatest challenges stem from a lack of financial and human capacity at the school, university and regional level. Teacher training at universities is not sufficiently reflecting competency-based approaches and teaching materials in the Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek languages are not aligned with the standards-based curriculum. In a similar vein, 48% of the respondents stated that teaching in several community languages or multilingual education is a challenge for the country. Reasons include the lack of human capacity, teaching materials, and low quality of teacher preparation. Teachers are a key resource at the school level. Yet, a shortage of teachers in specific subjects and regions exists according to 62% of the participants. The essential challenges are low wages of teachers (81%), low qualification levels of teachers (54%), lack of career perspectives (46%), and continuous professional development (46%). To attract and support teachers, the preferred strategies of the governments consist of periodical increases of wages and benefits (95%), organization of professional development (88%), and provision of mentoring schemes for young teachers (65%).

5 Recommendations

We offer the proposition to consider three topics as thematic priorities for the 21 GPE partner countries in the EAP region. The data suggests that these topics are, at this point in time and to various degrees, relevant for all the examined partner countries in the region:

1. Systematic implementation of the new curriculum: Identifying gaps and misalignments

In most countries a new curriculum framework has been issued on paper five, ten or fifteen years ago, but has not been—for a variety of reasons—implemented in actual practice. The misalignment of teacher education, textbook publishing, student assessment, teaching and learning material with the revised curriculum is regarded as one of the main causes for the low quality of teaching and learning. The various policy elements related to teaching and learning (delivery, assessment, content) have become disjointed because the curriculum reform (often funded by development partners) was not systematically scaled and therefore only managed to revise some elements but not other crucial ones that are necessary for a coherent and sustainable reform.

2. Using data for planning: Exchange and peer-learning from best practices in the region

All countries have established EMIS for project reporting (mostly towards development partners), but only a few use EMIS for their own planning at school, district/provincial, and central/federal level. This thematic priority, identified by participants from most of the 21 countries, lends itself for peer-learning and exchange given that some countries, more than others, use data for planning.

3. Leaving no one behind in times of crisis: Lessons drawn from COVID-19 and other disasters

The COVID-19 crisis has surfaced and in fact exacerbated inequalities in the educational system, which are manifested in unequal access to education and poor learning outcomes of students that are poor, have disabilities or special needs, constitute ethnic and linguistic minorities, live as refugees or Internally Displaced People, reside in remote rural areas, or, depending on the country, are female or male, respectively. Bridging the digital divide constitutes but one of the strategies to overcome inequalities in times of distant learning. In addition to learning how to integrate ICT in teaching and use it for distance learning, what other innovative approaches to ensure equal access and outcomes for vulnerable groups have been successfully tried during the COVID-19 crisis or during other recent disasters, triggered by climate change, natural disasters or conflict and war?