

The Global Scorecard: Progress since Jomtien

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Shifting from primary enrollments to completion rates as the basic measure of MDG progress may seem like moving back the goal post in a game already lost. Universal primary completion is undeniably a more challenging goal than universal primary enrollment. Of 155 developing countries, about half have already built sufficient schools and places to educate 100 percent of their primary school-aged children. But only 37 of those countries today retain 100 percent of children in school through primary graduation. Unlike universal access, universal completion cannot be achieved without ensuring schooling quality, students' learning progress, and household demand for education—all of which are interlinked.

Nonetheless, countries from Brazil and Nicaragua in Latin America to Cambodia in East Asia to South Africa, Guinea, and The Gambia in Africa have proven over the 1990s that dramatic progress in increasing primary completion rates is possible—provided that political will is strong, effective reforms are adopted, and international support is adequate. Improvements of 20 percentage points in the primary completion rate in less than a decade—or more than 2 percentage points increase per year—have been registered in these countries and a number of others (annex tables B.3 and B.4).

On the other hand, progress is not automatic, nor is sustained status assured. In a troubling number of countries, primary completion rates have slid backwards since Jomtien. Thirteen middle-income and 15 low-income countries saw their completion rates stagnate or decline over the 1990s (annex tables B.5 and B.6). The case of Afghanistan (which dropped from an already low 22 percent in 1990 to an estimated 8 percent in 1999) is obvious and dramatic. But several middle-income Gulf states, Latin American countries such as Venezuela and Belize, and African countries such as Zambia, Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Kenya, and Madagascar have also lost ground.

Later in this chapter we explore global, regional, and country-by-country trends in primary completion rates more fully. But first, we turn to the definition of the primary completion rate and associated methodological issues: How it is calculated? How reliable is it as a statistic? And why hasn't it been compiled before?

WHAT IS THE PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE?

The primary completion rate (PCR) is a flow measure of the annual output of the primary education system. It is calculated as the total number of students successfully completing (or graduating from) the last year of primary school in a given

year, divided by the total number of children of official graduation age in the population. It is an application of the OECD methodology for measuring secondary school completion rates to the primary level.

It should be emphasized that the primary completion rate is not the same as the “cohort survival rate” estimated by UNESCO. That indicator measures the survival to grade 5 among those children who enroll in school. But this has the important limitation of not reflecting the sometimes large share of children, especially in low-income countries, who do not have access to primary school.

The PCR measures the proportion of all children of official graduation age who complete primary school in a given year. As the numerator in the primary completion rate counts all children completing the final grade of primary school, it will typically include overage children who either started school late or have repeated one or more grades of primary school, but are now graduating successfully. In countries where there is some repetition yet the dropout rate is low, the primary completion rate can, in a particular year, exceed 100 percent. However, completion rates consistently above 100 percent can be assumed to reflect data weaknesses, in either reported enrollment statistics or age-specific population estimates.

The primary completion rate focuses on capturing the share of children who *ever* complete the cycle; it is not a measure of “on-time” primary completion. An on-time completion rate could also be calculated, by netting overage children out of the numerator. But data for this are not readily available. More fundamentally, though, the philosophy of this study is that the key number of policy interest to countries from a human capital standpoint is the share of children who eventually obtain a primary-level education.

It should be understood that even though overage children may appear in the numerator of the primary completion rate, they appear only once. Since children are counted only when they actually graduate from, or complete, the cycle, steady-state monitoring of the completion rate will give an accurate picture of trends over time in the average share of students in a population cohort who complete primary school. As school system flow distortions eventually decline, the share of overage or underage children will be reduced as well. However, as noted in chapter 1, they may never disappear altogether.

In education systems that are not in a steady state—that is, where either the size of the school-age population is changing or the coverage of the education system is expanding rapidly—the current primary completion rate may not be a good reflection of the likely future completion rate for the cohort now entering primary school. But if the primary completion rate is monitored over time it will reflect these trends and give a good sense of progress toward the MDG goal of universal primary completion. As such, it may be used to set meaningful targets.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Primary completion rates are calculated from the same two basic data sources used to compute gross and net enrollment ratios: (a) enrollment data from national ministries of education, and (b) United Nations population data.

The grade-specific enrollment data required for the primary completion rate are collected in all countries and published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. We used this database to calculate a baseline (1990) value of the PCR for all countries.

However, since developing the most up-to-date picture possible of where countries currently stand in relation to the MDG target was a priority of this exercise, we collected enrollment data for the most recent year possible directly from national education ministries, through World Bank task teams. In most cases, that meant the year 2000. When it was impossible to obtain more recent data, we relied on published UNESCO data, most often for 1997. In some cases, the only available data were for even earlier years.

The primary completion rate is both conceptually and practically a fairly straightforward education statistic. But there are some methodological and data issues. The first is the differing length of the primary cycle across countries (which also affects gross and net enrollment ratios). For this study, primary education is defined as UNESCO's ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) Level 1: "the beginning of systematic apprenticeship of reading, writing and mathematics; the start of compulsory education; primary education; first stage of basic education."

As UNESCO notes, this stage in most countries is covered in a five- or six-year cycle. About 45 percent of countries have six-year, and another 13 percent of

Table 2.1
Length of the Primary Cycle in 155 Developing Countries, circa 2000

Years in Primary Cycle	Number of Countries	Percentage of Developing Countries	Typical Regions/Countries
3	2	1 ^a	Russia, Armenia
4	26	18	Europe and Central Asia Africa
5	20	13	South Asia East Asia and the Pacific
6	70	45	Africa East Asia and the Pacific Latin America and the Caribbean Middle East and North Africa
7	21	14	Africa Latin America and the Caribbean
8	12	8	Europe and Central Asia Africa
9	2	1	Libya, Rep. of Yemen
10	2	1	Jordan, West Bank/Gaza

a. Less than 1 percent.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

countries have five-year, primary cycles. But in 24 percent of countries, the official primary cycle is longer. As countries develop economically and educationally, the length of compulsory education is typically extended to the next cycle, which UNESCO defines as Level 2: “lower secondary education” or the “second stage of basic education.” However, in many countries this integrated cycle of Levels 1 and 2 of compulsory education is called primary education.

In some countries this cycle is seven years, and in four countries it is nine or 10 years. Two of these four countries, the Republic of Yemen and Lebanon, have decided to consider the primary cycle as the first six years of schooling for EFA monitoring purposes. We have accordingly done so in this study.

About 20 percent of countries have a shorter primary cycle, usually four years. Many lusophone and former Soviet Union countries follow this pattern. In 2000, Armenia adopted a three-year primary cycle. The Russian Federation recently extended its three-year cycle by an additional year, effective 2003.

Our database calculates the primary completion rate based on the official cycle length in each country. Obviously, it is considerably easier to get 100 percent of children through three grades of primary school than through eight. But since gross enrollment and net enrollment ratios are also estimated on the basis of countries’ official cycle length, this ensures that the primary completion rates are consistent and therefore comparable with those series.

A second issue arises from the fact that not all countries report the number of children completing primary school. Typically, this requires the collection of end-of-year enrollment data, and many low-income countries only report enrollments at the beginning of the year. For countries where actual primary graduates are reported, the primary completion rate estimate uses that number. In these cases, accounting for dropouts is not an issue, as students who drop out during the course of the year naturally do not appear in the end-of-year enrollment numbers.

For countries that do not report end-of-year enrollments, we calculated a “proxy primary completion rate” defined as follows:

Proxy primary completion rate = (the total number of students in the final year of primary school, minus repeaters) divided by (the total number of children of official graduation age in the population).

The reasoning is that the repetition rate in the final year of primary schooling typically does not change dramatically from one year to the next, although steady improvement over time can occur. Thus, the share of children repeating the grade this year, having failed it the previous year, is a reasonable approximation of the share of students who are likely to fail the grade this year. Subtracting this number from the total number of children enrolled in the grade at the beginning of the year gives a reasonable approximation of the number of children who will successfully complete the grade and graduate from primary school in the current year.

When estimating a proxy primary completion rate, ideally one would also make an adjustment for students who drop out during the year. Where estimates of dropout existed, they were used. However, data on dropout rates in the final year of schooling typically were not available, and thus most of the proxy primary completion rates present an overstatement of the true primary completion rate, and

should be taken as an upper-bound estimate. For a few countries in the sample, even recent data on repetition rates could not be obtained; for those countries, the proxy PCR further overstates the true primary completion rate.

The third and final issue concerns the population data used in the denominator of the primary completion rate. All population data used in this report were taken from the United Nations/World Bank population database used for all World Bank work, including the calculation of the World Development Indicators. This series is compiled for all countries from national census data, with regular review and adjustments of national data by a panel of international demographers using emerging demographic and household survey data, medical registries, and other agreed sources. This data series includes total population estimates, population estimates by age and gender, and projections through 2015. The age-specific population estimates for boys and girls needed for calculating the primary completion rate are readily available in this database.

This data series is the best internationally comparable set of population estimates available. However, there is a somewhat higher risk of error in the age-specific data used for the primary completion rate than in the overall population estimates, which may have discouraged the systematic estimation of PCRs in the past. And for countries that have not carried out national censuses for some time or have experienced war, mass migration, or other major dislocations, these estimates may not be very accurate even though they are the best available.

In sum, strenuous efforts have been made to develop an internationally consistent set of estimates of the primary completion rate in 155 developing countries. But this first set of primary completion rate and proxy estimates needs to be regarded as just that—an initial data set that can be improved greatly in terms of both robustness and timeliness if national governments and international partners work together to refine them.

Even a cursory review will point up many gaps in the data, particularly for small countries, earlier years, and gender breakdowns, and obvious anomalies and estimates that are suspect. There is work to be done to encourage countries to collect end-of-year data on the number of graduates, to allow true PCRs to be estimated for all countries. There is scope for more systematic quality assurance and maintenance of this database through collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. And there is the prospect of improved population data becoming available soon, as more countries complete the detailed age-specific analysis of 2000 censuses or carry out new household surveys.

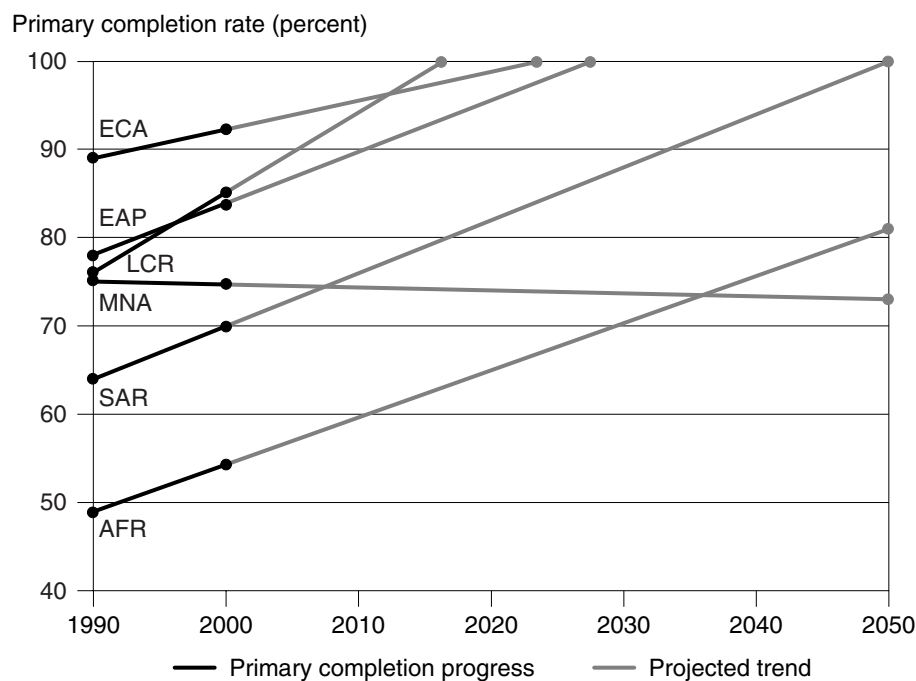
Thus, the PCR and proxy estimates in this report are only a point of departure. But they represent the most direct effort to date to measure progress toward the MDG target of universal primary completion and to provide a basis for future monitoring. Within the limitations of available data, the completion rates presented here reasonably capture the reality of primary education system coverage and student attainment in many of the 155 developing countries measured. With a collaborative international effort to improve the quality of this database, it could be an increasingly valuable tool.

ADVANCES IN PRIMARY COMPLETION DURING THE 1990s

Since Jomtien in 1990, the global average completion rate for the developing world has improved only from 72 to 77 percent (see Annex figure B.1). Underlying this average, as figure 2.1 shows, is substantial variance across regions in both the distance from UPC and the progress made over the 1990s. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest completion rate by far, with barely half of all school-age children completing primary school; it is followed by South Asia, with a regional average completion rate of about 70 percent. The Middle East and North Africa showed a disturbing pattern of stagnation over the 1990s, with the average completion rate remaining around 74 percent. The Europe and Central Asia region (92 percent) is closest to the goal, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (85 percent) and East Asia and the Pacific (84 percent).

Table 2.2 presents changes in median completion rates, as well as regional means, because in many cases the means are skewed by a few extremely high- or low-performing countries, some of whose data are questionable. In Africa and Latin America, for example, the increase of only 3 percentage points in the regions' median completion rates over the period indicates that increases in their mean completion rates were driven by high numbers for a few countries. On the other hand, in South Asia the median completion rate improved from 50 to 67 percent

FIGURE 2.1 Primary Completion Progress by Region, 1990–2000, and Projected Trends (Country-Weighted)



Source: Annex figure B.3.

Table 2.2

Primary Completion Progress by Region, 1990–2000, Country-Weighted

Region	1990			MOST RECENT YEAR ^a		
	Mean	Median	Range	Mean	Median	Range
Africa	49	42	11–135	55	45	19–117
East Asia and the Pacific	78	89	39–99	84	90	54–108
Europe and Central Asia	89	90	67–100	92	93	77–109
Latin America and the Caribbean	76	86	28–112	85	89	40–110
Middle East and North Africa	75	75	32–102	74	76	30–104
South Asia	64	50	22–111	70	67	8–112
All developing countries	72	81	11–135	77	83	8–117
IDA-eligible countries	50	45	11–112	62	64	8–117
IBRD-eligible countries	84	89	43–135	87	92	44–111

a. Usually 1999/2000.

over the decade—an impressive trend that is largely masked in the comparison of means by the dramatic decline in Afghanistan. Both the means and medians for low-income countries improved more than those for middle-income countries.

On a population-weighted basis (table 2.3) the global progress is more encouraging, with the global completion rate increasing from 73 to 81 percent over the decade. The population-weighted average is dramatically more positive for East Asia (97 percent compared with 84 percent on a country-weighted basis), reflecting the high reported completion rate in China. For the Middle East and North Africa, the population-weighted average of 83 percent is also significantly higher than the country-weighted average, influenced by Egypt's weight. For the remaining regions there is relatively little difference. But in Sub-Saharan Africa, the average completion rate of 51 percent on a population-weighted basis is even more discouraging than the country-weighted mean.

Globally, even though completion rates for girls improved more than those for boys over the decade, girls' average completion (76 percent) continues to lag that of boys (85 percent). Every region showed a significant increase in girls' completion rates, with the 14 percentage point improvement in Latin American countries the most impressive change. On the other hand, it is sobering that the population-weighted completion rate for boys actually declined in the Africa region over the decade, was stagnant in Europe and Central Asia, and was virtually stagnant in East Asia and in the Middle East and North Africa. Only the South Asia and Latin

Table 2.3

Primary Completion Progress by Region, 1990–2000, Population-Weighted

Region	1990			MOST RECENT YEAR ^a		
	Girls	Boys	Both	Girls	Boys	Both
Africa	43	57	50	46	56	51
East Asia and the Pacific	92	97	96	98	98	97
Europe and Central Asia	85	95	90	93	95	93
Latin America and the Caribbean	71	64	69	85	81	83
Middle East and North Africa	71	84	78	78	86	83
South Asia	59	77	68	63	84	74
All developing countries	65	79	73	76	85	81

a. Usually 1999/2000.

America regions showed a significant increase in the share of boys completing primary school. Latin America's increase of 17 percentage points over the decade was even stronger than the increase for girls in that region.

AFRICA

Data for African countries are presented in table 2.4, sorted from highest to lowest completion rate in the most recent year available. The first five countries listed have achieved universal primary completion according to available data and our working definition of universal completion as 95 percent or higher. South Africa has reached the goal since Jomtien. By contrast, Zambia, which had essentially achieved universal primary completion in 1990, has since then suffered a substantial decline to 83 percent (in 1995).

Both in 1990 and today, Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the lowest average completion rate, at 55 percent. More than half the countries in the region for which data are available are less than halfway to the MDG target. The encouraging news, however, is that a substantial number of African countries have been able to increase completion rates over the 1990s, and some—such as Guinea, Eritrea, Mali, and Mauritania—have made truly impressive progress from very low starting levels. The Gambia, starting from a slightly higher base, has made even faster progress, with the primary completion rate increasing by more than 3 percentage points per year from 1991 to 2000. Malawi's rate of increase in the first half of the decade was extremely high, 4 percentage points per year, but it is doubtful that it has been sustained. On the other hand, Uganda's improvement (see box 2.1) may accelerate further over the next two years, as the wave of children who entered school following the elimination of fees in 1996 make their way to graduation from the seven-year system.

Box 2.1 Primary Completion Progress in Uganda

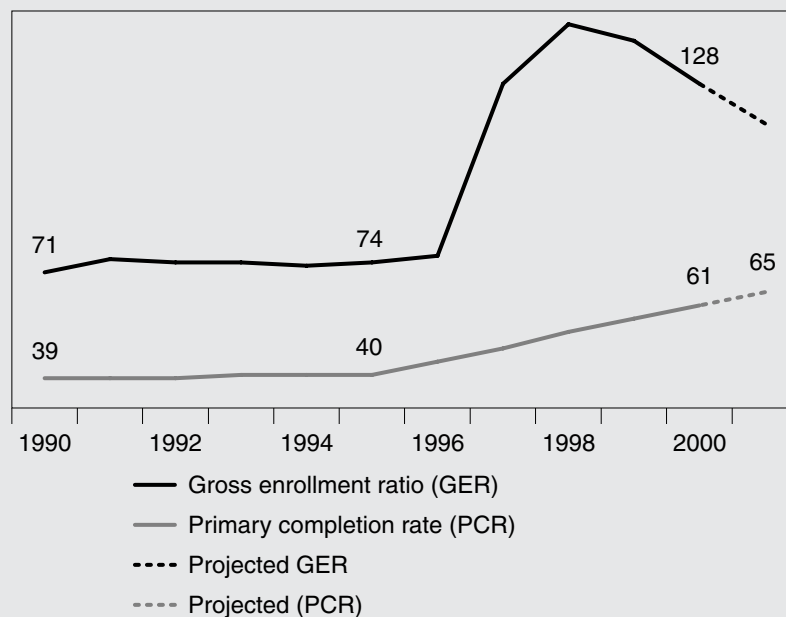
In 1990, only an estimated 39 percent of Ugandan children completed the seven-grade primary cycle. By 2001 that share was 65 percent and growing rapidly, as the result of a bold reform in 1996 that eliminated primary school tuition fees for up to four children per family. President Museveni's dramatic action removed a key obstacle for poor families and emphasized the importance of education.

The impact on demand for primary schooling was immediate and tremendous. In 1997 total primary school enrollments jumped from 3.4 million to 5.7 million children, with the greatest increases coming among girls and the poorest children. By 1999 the wealth bias that had characterized access to primary education was all but eliminated, and by 2000 there was virtually no gap between male and female net enrollment ratios (89.3 percent vs. 88.8 percent).

The primary system has had to scramble to deal with the swell in enrollments, however. Pupil-teacher ratios shot up from 40:1 to 60:1 by 1999, and unqualified teachers had to be deployed to many areas, until the Ministry of Education could ramp up the production of additional trained teachers. Input ratios for textbooks and materials also deteriorated. Although the government acted quickly to reallocate spending to primary education and to mobilize additional donor support, the loss of tuition income at the school level and the huge influx of new students led to palpable declines in schooling quality. With any large enrollment expansion, a decline in average student learning outcomes can be expected. But in Uganda, the drop has been precipitous: between 1996 and 1999, the share of students receiving a satisfactory score fell from 48 percent to 31 percent in mathematics, and from 92 percent to 56 percent on the English oral test.

Uganda's experience—and the earlier experience of Malawi with a similar elimination of tuition fees—provides strong evidence that schooling demand in low-income countries is more elastic than previously estimated. But Malawi, where schooling quality has continued to erode

Uganda: Primary GER and PCR, 1990–2001 (percent)



Box 2.1 continued

since the elimination of fees in 1995, has already provided sobering evidence that enrollment gains, and especially completion rate progress, will not persist if schooling quality does not meet minimum standards. For poor parents in particular, the opportunity costs of children's school attendance are high, and parents will not keep children in primary school through to completion unless they perceive that school conditions are minimally adequate, the curriculum content is relevant, and students are learning. The fiscal priority Uganda has given to primary education and the ministry's systematic actions since 1997 to improve quality have attracted substantial donor support, but there is still considerable progress to be made. Uganda's experience shows, however, that rapid progress in primary completion is possible, with bold actions to eliminate demand-side constraints where they exist and strong complementary attention to schooling quality.

Table 2.4
Africa: Changes in Primary Completion Rates during the 1990s

Country	Eligible for IDA/IBRD lending	Years in primary cycle	PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE							
			1990				MOST RECENT YEAR			
			Girls	Boys	Both	Year	Girls	Boys	Both	Year
Cape Verde	IDA	6	—	—	—	—	119	115	117	1997
Zimbabwe	IDA	7	94	100	97	1990	111	116	113	1997
Mauritius	IBRD	6	135	136	135	1990	108	115	111	1997
Botswana	IBRD	7	126	102	114	1990	107	96	102	1996
South Africa	IBRD	7	81	72	76	1990	100	95	98	1995
Namibia	IBRD	7	80	59	70	1990	94	86	90	1997
Zambia	IDA	7	84	110	97	1988	75	90	83	1995
Swaziland	IBRD	7	—	—	71	1990	85	78	81	1997
São Tomé and Príncipe	IDA	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	84	2001
Gabon	IBRD	6	77	66	71	1991	80	79	80	1995
Gambia, The	IDA	6	35	45	40	1991	—	—	70	2000
Lesotho	IDA	7	82	45	64	1990	83	55	69	1996
Nigeria	IDA	6	62	82	72	1990	61	73	67	2000
Uganda	IDA	7	30	49	39	1990	—	—	65	2001
Ghana	IDA	6	54	71	63	1990	—	—	64	1999
Togo	IDA	6	26	55	41	1990	52	73	63	1999
Tanzania	IDA	7	45	46	46	1989	60	58	59	1997
Kenya	IDA	8	57	69	63	1990	57	58	58	1995

Table 2.4 (continued)

Africa: Changes in Primary Completion Rates during the 1990s

Country	Eligible for IDA/IBRD lending	Years in primary cycle	PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE							
			1990				MOST RECENT YEAR			
			Girls	Boys	Both	Year	Girls	Boys	Both	Year
Malawi	IDA	8	22	38	30	1990	40	61	50	1995
Mauritania	IDA	6	26	41	34	1990	43	48	46	1998
Equatorial Guinea	IBRD	5	—	—	—	—	43	48	46	1993
Congo, Rep. of	IDA	6	55	68	61	1990	60	28	44	2000
Cameroon	IDA	6	52	61	57	1990	39	46	43	1999
Burundi	IDA	6	43	49	46	1990	—	—	43	1998
Senegal	IDA	6	35	56	45	1989	34	48	41	2000
Côte d'Ivoire	IDA	6	32	55	44	1990	33	48	40	1999
Congo, Dem. Rep. of	IDA	6	35	60	48	1990	34	45	40	2000
Benin	IDA	6	15	31	23	1990	30	47	39	1998
Mozambique	IDA	5	23	36	30	1990	22	50	36	1998
Eritrea	IDA	5	20	23	22	1991	31	40	35	1999
Sudan	IDA	8	—	—	—	—	33	38	35	1996
Guinea	IDA	6	9	24	16	1990	24	44	34	2000
Comoros	IDA	6	32	38	35	1991	34	32	33	1993
Sierra Leone	IDA	7	—	—	—	—	30	36	32	2000
Guinea-Bissau	IDA	6	12	21	16	1988	24	40	31	2000
Madagascar	IDA	5	35	33	34	1990	26	26	26	1998
Burkina Faso	IDA	6	14	24	19	1990	20	30	25	1998
Rwanda	IDA	6 ^a	35	33	34	1990	27	30	28	2000
Ethiopia	IDA	6	18	25	22	1990	12	36	24	1999
Mali	IDA	6	9	14	11	1990	18	29	23	1998
Niger	IDA	6	13	23	18	1990	15	23	20	1998
Central African Republic	IDA	6	19	37	28	1990	—	—	19	2000
Chad	IDA	6	7	31	19	1990	9	29	19	2000
Angola	IDA	4	35	42	39	1990	—	—	—	—
Liberia	IDA	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Seychelles	IBRD	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Somalia	IDA	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

— Not available.

a. Rwanda 1990 data are for a seven-grade primary cycle; 2000 data are for the new six-grade cycle.

These examples provide clear evidence that a path of rapid and sustained improvement in primary completion rates can be achieved by countries no matter what their starting level of education system coverage, and no matter what their level of income per capita.

EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Five countries in the East Asia and Pacific region have achieved universal primary completion. But in general, the stellar pace of education progress seen in East Asian countries over the 1970s and 1980s has not been sustained since Jomtien. With the exception of Cambodia, which has registered tremendous improvement from a low base in the last several years, and to a lesser extent the Lao People's Democratic Republic, primary completion rates in the East Asia and Pacific region have largely stagnated or declined over the past decade (table 2.5). According to these estimates, none of the East Asian and Pacific countries that had yet to achieve universal primary completion as of Jomtien has done so since, except possibly Vietnam.

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

European and Central Asian developing countries inherited an extensive education infrastructure, and at the beginning of the transition in 1990 were characterized by virtually universal primary enrollments and the highest average primary completion rate of any region—89 percent. The most recent data (table 2.6) still show Europe and Central Asia (ECA) as the region closest to universal primary completion. Eleven of the 23 countries in the region for which data are available have achieved the goal and it can be considered within reach of all the ECA countries, most of which are also helped by a relatively short official primary cycle.

However, the region faces very significant quality issues, increasing evidence of demand constraints, and the challenge of adapting educational content and goals to the needs of more open societies and market economies. With the severe economic declines that accompanied transition, along with the social, demographic, and political upheaval the region has experienced, many countries have had great difficulty maintaining the inherited education infrastructure, let alone improving the quality of education delivered. Many of the former Soviet republics relied heavily on subsidies from Moscow to develop and maintain their education systems; the withdrawal of these, plus the sharp economic declines of the 1990s, have placed education systems in the region under stress.

The dislocations of the 1990s have had a particularly strong impact on the poorest countries, in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans, all of which are now struggling to maintain a basic level of education services in the face of public finance constraints and institutional weaknesses. Very high officially reported enrollments and completion rates in several Central Asian countries—especially Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Uzbekistan—are not included in our database, as they are not corroborated by household survey data which reveal troubling declines in schooling attendance. Population data for many countries in the region are also problematic, in some cases based on censuses from 1980.

Available data show Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Tajikistan as the ECA countries farthest from the MDG, and of these, only Moldova appears to have

Table 2.5

East Asia and the Pacific: Changes in Primary Completion Rates during the 1990s

Country	Eligible for IDA/IBRD Lending	Years in Primary Cycle	PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE							
			1990				MOST RECENT YEAR			
			Girls	Boys	Both	Year	Girls	Boys	Both	Year
China	IBRD	5	95	107	99	1990	106	111	108	1996
Vietnam	IDA	5	—	—	—	—	98	104	101	2001
Samoa	IDA	8	—	—	—	—	92	105	99	1997
Korea, Rep. of	IBRD	6	96	96	96	1990	98	95	96	2000
Fiji	IBRD	6	—	—	—	—	93	97	95	1992
Philippines	IBRD	6	91	88	89	1989	—	—	92	1996
Indonesia	IDA	6	93	93	92	1990	92	90	91	2000
Thailand	IBRD	6	90	95	93	1990	—	—	90	2000
Malaysia	IBRD	6	91	91	91	1990	90	89	90	1994
Vanuatu	IDA	6	90	89	89	1990	81	92	86	1992
Mongolia	IDA	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	82	1998
Cambodia	IDA	6	32	46	39	1997	—	—	70	2001
Lao PDR	IDA	5	—	—	56	1995	64	73	69	2000
Solomon Islands	IDA	6	59	70	65	1990	54	77	66	1994
Papua New Guinea	IBRD	6	51	55	53	1990	53	64	59	1995
Timor-Leste, Dem. Rep.	IDA	6	—	—	—	—	53	55	54	2001
Kiribati	IDA	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Korea, DPR	n. a.	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Marshall Islands	IBRD	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Micronesia, Fed. States of	IBRD	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Myanmar	IDA	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Palau	IBRD	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tonga	IDA	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

n. a. Not applicable.

— Not available.

registered progress over the 1990s. Albania's completion rate declined over the 1990s. Overall, the region is characterized by a growing gap in performance between states that are developing rapidly, such as the Baltic and Central European countries—with the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, and Hungary all showing completion rate progress—and those such as Albania, Armenia, Georgia, and the Central Asian countries, whose economic problems are increasingly reflected in the education sector.

Table 2.6

Europe and Central Asia: Changes in Primary Completion Rates during the 1990s

Country	Eligible for IDA/IBRD Lending	Years in Primary Cycle	PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE							
			1990				MOST RECENT YEAR			
			Girls	Boys	Both	Year	Girls	Boys	Both	Year
Czech Republic	IBRD	4	86	92	89	1992	107	110	109	1995
Hungary	IBRD	4	90	97	93	1989	102	102	102	1995
Azerbaijan	IDA	4	—	—	—	—	101	99	100	1998
Romania	IBRD	4	91	100	96	1989	98	99	98	1996
Slovak Republic	IBRD	4	92	100	96	1992	97	96	97	1996
Poland	IBRD	8	98	102	100	1990	97	96	96	1995
Serbia and Montenegro	IDA	8	68	77	72	1990	—	—	96	2000
Russia	IBRD	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	96	2001
Croatia	IBRD	8	86	85	86	1992	96	95	96	2001
Lithuania	IBRD	4	84	92	88	1992	94	97	95	1996
Ukraine	IBRD	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	94 ^a	2002
Belarus	IBRD	4	94	100	97	1992	92	95	93	1996
Turkey	IBRD	5	82	99	90	1990	89	95	92	1994
Bulgaria	IBRD	4	87	93	90	1990	92	92	92	1996
Macedonia, FYR	IBRD	8	84	94	89	1992	87	94	91	1996
Albania	IDA	8	92	102	97	1990	95	84	89	1995
Bosnia and Herzegovina	IDA	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	88	1999
Estonia	IBRD	6	91	95	93	1992	86	89	88	1995
Latvia	IBRD	4	75	77	76	1992	84	87	86	1996
Armenia	IDA	4	—	—	—	—	95	70	82	1996
Georgia	IDA	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	82	1998
Moldova	IDA	4	65	68	67	1991	—	—	79	1999
Tajikistan	IDA	4	—	—	—	—	75	80	77	1996
Kazakhstan	IBRD	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kyrgyz Republic	IDA	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Slovenia	IBRD	4	93	106	99	1992	—	—	—	—
Turkmenistan	IBRD	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Uzbekistan	IDA	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

— Not available.

a. Staff estimate.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Twelve of 30 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have achieved UPC and three more countries are on the cusp of doing so. The remaining 15 countries have varied widely in their progress since Jomtien (table 2.7). Two countries, Nicaragua and Brazil, have raised primary completion rates by more than 20 percentage points over the decade, and for Brazil especially, with an eight-year primary system, this is truly impressive progress (box 2.2). Bolivia has similarly increased completion through an eight-grade primary system from 55 to 72 percent over the decade.

Only slightly less dramatic is the progress in El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Peru, all of which started with a higher base and increased their completion rates by more than 15 percentage points over the decade. Colombia has also shown significant improvement.

However, a few countries in Latin America have shown the reverse trend. Countries that appeared to have universal primary completion within close reach, such as Venezuela, Guyana, and Belize, have seen completion rates decline by as much as 8 percentage points over the decade. Ecuador and Honduras show basically stagnating trends.

Table 2.7

Latin America and the Caribbean: Changes in Primary Completion Rates during the 1990s

Country	Eligible for IDA/IBRD Lending	Years in Primary Cycle	PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE							
			1990				MOST RECENT YEAR			
			Girls	Boys	Both	Year	Girls	Boys	Both	Year
St. Kitts and Nevis	IBRD	6	—	—	—	—	104	115	110	2001
Grenada	IDA	7	—	—	—	—	104	107	106	2001
St. Lucia	IDA	7	106	117	112	1990	104	109	106	2001
Dominica	IDA	6	—	—	—	—	107	99	103	2000
Mexico	IBRD	6	89	88	89	1990	93	85	100	2000
Antigua and Barbuda	IBRD	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	95–100 ^a	2000
Cuba	n. a.	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	95–100 ^a	2001
Chile	IBRD	6	97	92	94	1990	—	—	99	2000
Uruguay	IBRD	6	98	93	95	1990	101	95	98	2000
Peru	IBRD	6	—	—	85	1988	—	—	98	2000
Ecuador	IBRD	6	98	99	99	1992	96	96	96	1999
Argentina	IBRD	7	—	—	—	—	95	91	96	2000
Jamaica	IBRD	6	94	87	90	1990	98	91	94	2000
Trinidad and Tobago	IBRD	5	93	95	94	1990	94	94	94	2000

Table 2.7 (continued)

Latin America and the Caribbean: Changes in Primary Completion Rates during the 1990s

Country	Eligible for IDA/IBRD Lending	Years in Primary Cycle	PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE							
			1990				MOST RECENT YEAR			
			Girls	Boys	Both	Year	Girls	Boys	Both	Year
Panama	IBRD	6	87	88	87	1990	—	—	94	2000
Costa Rica	IBRD	6	74	72	73	1990	—	—	89	2000
Guyana	IDA	6	93	90	92	1990	95	84	89	2000
Colombia	IBRD	5	83	61	72	1990	—	—	85	2000
St. Vincent	IDA	6	—	—	—	—	84	85	84	2001
Belize	IBRD	6	90	89	90	1990	83	81	82	1999
El Salvador	IBRD	6	62	59	61	1989	—	—	80	2000
Paraguay	IBRD	6	65	65	65	1990	—	—	78	2000
Venezuela	IBRD	5	96	87	91	1990	79	77	78	1999
Bolivia	IDA	8	—	—	55	1990	—	—	72	2000
Brazil	IBRD	8	54	42	48	1990	—	—	72	1999
Honduras	IDA	6	63	68	66	1991	—	—	67	2000
Nicaragua	IDA	6	50	40	45	1990	70	61	65	2000
Dominican Republic	IBRD	8	—	—	—	—	67	56	62	2000
Guatemala	IBRD	6	39	46	43	1991	—	—	52	2000
Haiti	IDA	6	27	29	28	1990	—	—	40	1997

n.a. Not applicable.

— Not available.

a. Staff estimate.

Box 2.2 Primary Completion Progress in Brazil

In the space of one decade, Brazil has increased the share of children who complete primary school from 48 to 72 percent, one of the 10 fastest rates of improvement observed in our global sample. How Brazil did it provides a good picture of how sensitive primary completion rates are to schooling quality, particularly for the poor.

Before 1990, entry to primary school was practically universal in Brazil (recall the schooling profile pictured in figure 1.3), but less than half of all children completed the eight-year cycle. Dropout was worst in the poor northeast region, and especially in rural schools. But after 1995, Brazilian education policy under Minister Paulo Renato Souza focused strongly on improving the quality of primary education overall, and especially for the poor.

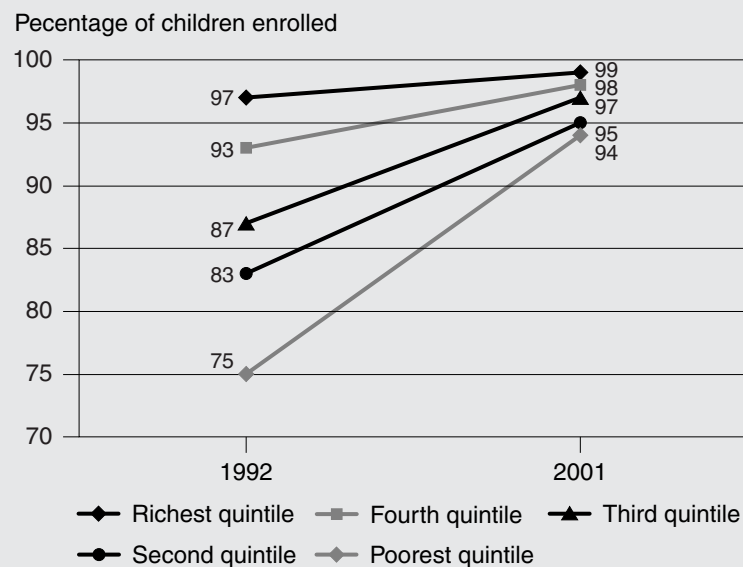
Box 2.2 continued

First, Brazil passed a major constitutional change in the distribution of fiscal resources for education. The FUNDEF reform established a yearly per-pupil spending floor to ensure a minimum standard of education for all children. National tax revenues began to cross-subsidize the states and municipalities least able to mobilize their own fiscal resources for education, thereby reducing the gulf in teacher salaries and school quality between richer and poorer regions. Innovative programs also channeled increased resources directly to schools, so they could implement their own development plans.

Second, the federal ministry strengthened its role in norm setting and quality assurance. It established the first national student assessment system and developed new national curriculum guidelines that stressed problem solving, independent learning, and critical thinking. A national commission set new quality standards for textbooks and learning materials and the ministry made on-time delivery of adequate learning materials to schools a visible national priority. New legislation was passed to sort out the confused and overlapping roles of the federal, state, and municipal governments in primary education, with the federal ministry for the first time assuming clear responsibility for guaranteeing equity and quality.

Third, heavy emphasis was placed on upgrading teacher quality—and teacher motivation. Higher qualifications were set for teacher certification, and the hiring of teachers without competitive examination, part of old-style patronage politics, was disallowed. A federally funded in-service teacher training program, using cost-effective distance delivery and high-quality materials, helped raise the share of primary teachers with a complete secondary education. Teacher salaries and pensions were increased, and civil service reforms began to allow for dismissal based on performance.

Brazil: Primary Education Access by Income Quintile, 1992–2001



Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, Brazil.

Box 2.2 continued

Fourth, innovative demand-side programs such as *bolsa escola*, which channels subsistence grants to low-income mothers whose children stay in school, and home visits from health agents who also check on school attendance helped send the message to very poor families that “every child belongs in school” and “every child can succeed.”

In short, adequate and more equitable financing and a concerted program of quality improvements, efficiency enhancements, and demand-side interventions have combined in Brazil to raise the primary completion rate from 48 to 72 percent in the space of one decade. As the figure shows, the bulk of the progress has come from improvement in the quantity and quality of services delivered to children in the poorest income quintiles. Brazil’s experience shows that with political commitment and comprehensive strategies, simultaneous rapid progress in educational quality and equity is possible.

Nonetheless, the major story in the region is the significant number of countries that have progressed rapidly, some from a very low base, suggesting that this region may have many lessons to share. Estimates for this region are also more reliable than for the other regions, as most Latin American and Caribbean countries report actual primary completion, and educational statistics are reasonably good.

In terms of gender equity, in Guatemala, El Salvador, St. Lucia, and Bolivia completion rates for girls lag those for boys, but an equally common pattern in Latin America is the opposite: boys’ completion rates are lower than girls’, sometimes significantly so, as in Uruguay, Jamaica, Mexico, and Nicaragua.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Only two of the 19 countries in the Middle East and North Africa have achieved universal primary completion—Jordan and the Arab Republic of Egypt, whose statistics indicate a dramatic 22 percentage point improvement over the decade. In general, data for this region are of questionable quality and most of the completion rates are proxy rates.

The available data show substantial progress in Tunisia, which increased from 75 to 91 percent, as well as improvements in Kuwait, Algeria, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, the last from a low base. Although the average completion rate for the region as a whole changed very little over the decade, this region more than any other is marked by great underlying variation at the country level (table 2.8). Fully half of the countries for which two data points exist show declining completion rates over the period.

Bahrain, which in 1990 reported 100 percent completion, has apparently suffered a decline to 91 percent since then. Although the data showing a tremendous drop in Qatar must be considered questionable, completion rates in Iraq, Syria, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Djibouti all appear to have fallen.

Gender disparities in completion rates are evident in Morocco (47 percent completion for girls, 63 percent for boys), in Egypt (92 percent for girls, 104 percent for boys), in Djibouti (24 percent for girls, 36 percent for boys), and dramati-

Table 2.8

Middle East and North Africa: Changes in Primary Completion Rates during the 1990s

Country	Eligible for IDA/IBRD Lending	Years in Primary Cycle	PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE							
			1990				MOST RECENT YEAR			
			Girls	Boys	Both	Year	Girls	Boys	Both	Year
Jordan	IBRD	6	102	101	102	1990	106	102	104	2000
Egypt, Arab Rep.	IBRD	5	70	84	77	1990	92	104	99	1996
Iran, Islamic Rep.	IBRD	5	88	101	94	1990	89	95	92	1996
Bahrain	n.a.	6	101	100	101	1990	99	85	91	1996
Tunisia	IBRD	6	70	80	75	1990	90	93	91	1996
Algeria	IBRD	6	76	89	82	1990	88	93	91	1996
Syrian Arab Rep.	IBRD	6	92	103	98	1990	86	95	90	1996
United Arab Emirates	n.a.	6	98	90	94	1990	86	76	80	1996
Oman	n.a.	6	63	70	67	1989	76	76	76	1996
Kuwait	n.a.	4	55	57	56	1991	71	69	70	1996
Lebanon	IBRD	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	70	1996
Saudi Arabia	n.a.	6	56	64	60	1990	69	68	69	1996
Yemen, Rep.	IDA	6	—	—	—	—	38	77	58	2000
Iraq	IBRD	6	57	69	63	1990	52	63	57	1995
Morocco	IBRD	6	35	58	47	1991	47	63	55	1996
Qatar	n.a.	6	74	74	74	1990	43	45	44	1995
Djibouti	IDA	6	24	40	32	1990	24	36	30	1999
Libya	n.a.	9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Bank/Gaza	IDA	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

n.a. Not applicable.

— Not available.

ically so in the Republic of Yemen (38 percent for girls, 77 percent for boys). Tunisia, on the other hand, has made clear progress in narrowing the gender gap over the decade, and Egypt and Morocco also appear to have made some progress. In a troubling number of cases in this region, however, gender parity has improved only because boys' completion rates have fallen.

SOUTH ASIA

The average primary completion rate for the South Asia region (70 percent) is the second lowest in the world, above only that of Africa. Even the higher population-weighted average of 74 percent still means that only three out of every four children

Table 2.9

South Asia: Changes in Primary Completion Rates during the 1990s

Country	Eligible for IDA/IBRD Lending	Years in Primary Cycle	PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE							
			1990				MOST RECENT YEAR			
			Girls	Boys	Both	Year	Girls	Boys	Both	Year
Maldives	IDA	5	111	111	111	1992	110	113	112	1993
Sri Lanka	IDA	5	94	106	100	1990	114	108	111	2001
India	IDA	5	61	78	70	1992	63	88	76	1999
Bangladesh	IDA	5	47	54	50	1990	72	68	70	2000
Nepal	IDA	5	29	67	49	1988	58	70	65	2000
Bhutan	IDA	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	59	2001
Pakistan	IDA	5	30	57	44	1989	—	—	59	2000
Afganistan	IDA	6	14	29	22	1989	0	15	8	1999

— Not available.

in the region complete a primary education, which for most of the countries is only a five-year system.

Two countries in the region have achieved universal primary completion: Sri Lanka and the Maldives (table 2.9). Three others have made very impressive progress: Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Bangladesh has also made exceptional progress in gender equity, with girls' completion rates now apparently higher than boys'.

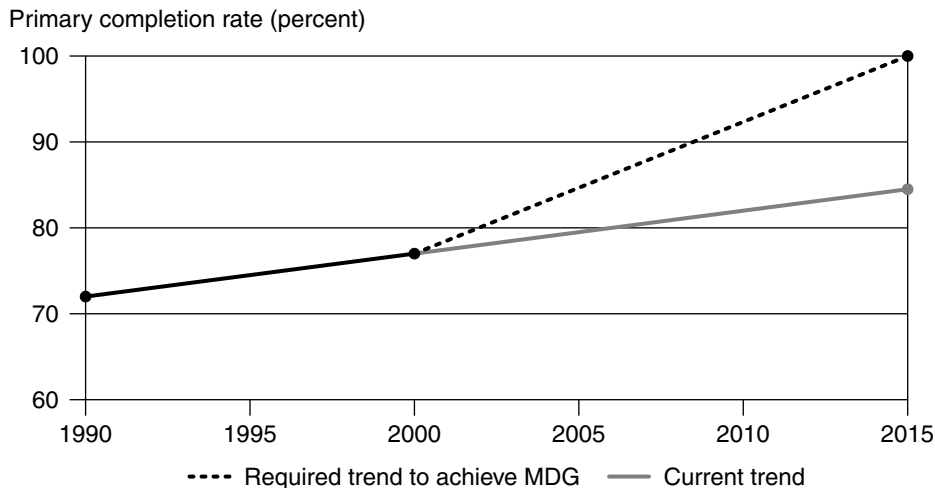
The largest country in the region, India, shows encouraging signs that strong efforts at educational improvement since the mid-1990s, especially at the state and district levels, are beginning to produce results. However, this rate of progress will need to be accelerated if the country that is home to the largest number of children out of school globally is to meet the MDG.

Trend analysis is not possible for Pakistan, but it is evident that the completion rate started the decade from a low base and with a substantial gender disparity and that progress has been minimal. The data also show the terrible erosion of primary education in Afghanistan during the 1990s, especially for girls. However, early reports for 2002 indicate a massive return of children to Afghan primary schools, with a very high share of them girls. Data for countries in this region are quite limited and, for most countries, of poor quality. Inconsistencies between official enrollment data and household surveys are not uncommon.

THE GLOBAL PROSPECTS FOR UNIVERSAL PRIMARY COMPLETION BY 2015

Figure 2.2 provides a graphic picture of global prospects for achieving the education MDG by 2015 on current trends. At the current rate of progress, by 2015 the

FIGURE 2.2 Global Progress in Primary Completion, 1990–2000 and Projected Trends (Country-Weighted)



Source: Annex figure B.1.

global primary completion rate will not exceed 83 percent. On a population-weighted basis, the world will come closer to the MDG, with about nine out of every 10 children globally completing primary school (see annex figure B.2).

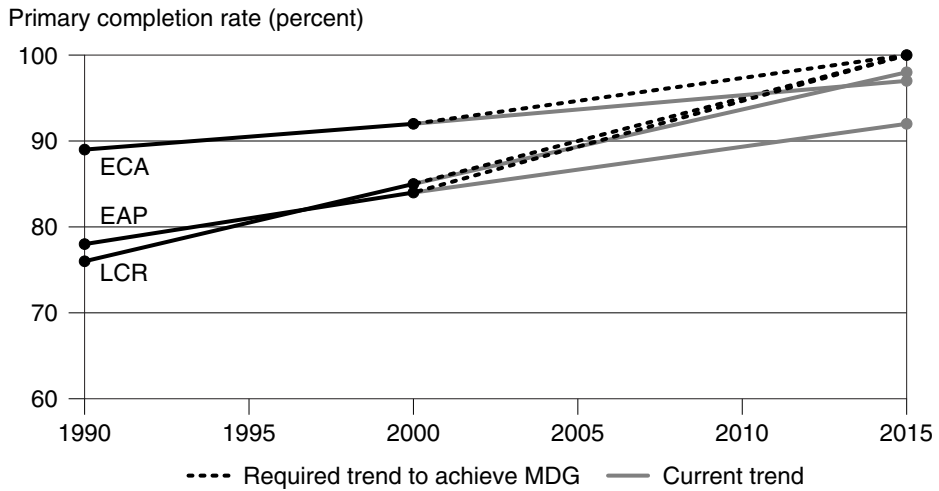
But as figures 2.3 and 2.4 show, these global averages substantially conceal the gulf that would exist across regions in 2015. Three regions—Europe and Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean—would come close to the goal, if not achieve it. Three other regions—South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and Africa—would be left behind, and in the case of Africa, significantly behind. On current trends, in 2015 only 60 percent of all African children will complete a primary education.

Ultimately, the MDG will not be attained unless every child in every country has the chance to complete primary school, and change will have to happen at the level of national education systems in order to reach the goal. Therefore, the focus of this analysis is the country-by-country prospects for reaching universal primary completion by 2015.

Summary results of an exercise to project the country-by-country prospects for achieving the education MDG are shown in table 2.10. Among the world’s 155 developing countries, the best available data indicate that 37 countries (including 11 low-income countries) have achieved universal primary completion. At the trend rates of progress registered over the 1990s, another 32 countries can also be expected to reach the goal. Even though, as the previous sections showed, primary completion rates clearly can go down as well as up, for the purposes of a baseline estimate we labeled as “on track” the countries whose past trends, if continued, would be sufficient to reach the goal. Thus, 69 countries (including 22 low-income ones) are likely to reach the goal by 2015.

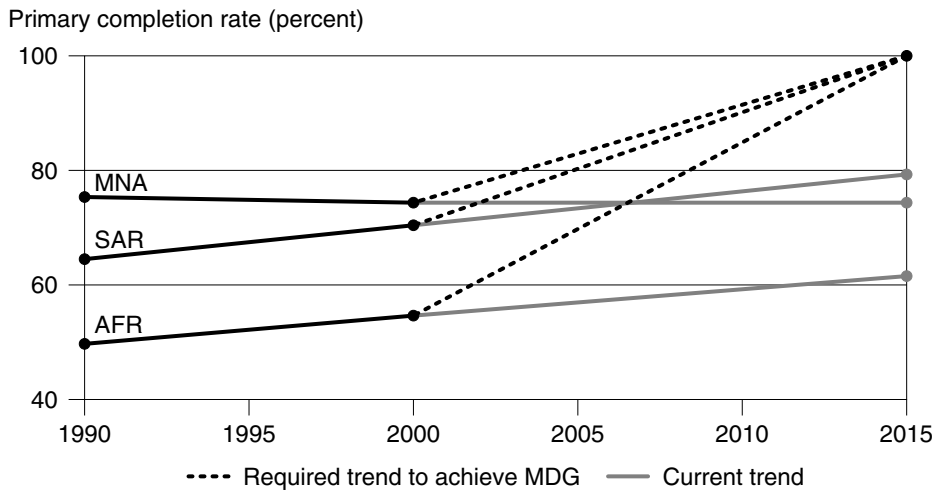
The other 86 countries, however, are at risk of not reaching the goal. Forty-three of these countries, labeled “off track,” are countries that are short of the goal

FIGURE 2.3 Primary Completion Progress in Europe and Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean Regions, 1990–2015, Country-Weighted



Source: Annex figure B.5.

FIGURE 2.4 Primary Completion Progress in Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia Regions, 1990–2015, Country-Weighted



Source: Annex figure B.5.

but could be expected to reach it with a reasonable acceleration of progress or reversal of a mild declining trend. But another 27 countries, considered “seriously off track,” will not even reach 50 percent primary completion by 2015 on current trends. Of these 70 off-track and seriously off track countries, 51 are low-income countries. A final set of 16 countries has no available data, including countries such

Table 2.10

Prospects for Universal Primary Completion by 2015

Progress Rating	Low-income Countries ^a	Middle-income Countries ^b	All Developing Countries
On track	22	47	69
Achieved UPC	11	26	37
On track to achieve UPC by 2015	11	21	32
Off track	51	19	70
Off track to achieve UPC by 2015	28	15	43
Seriously off track	23	4	27
No data available	9	7	16
At risk, subtotal	60	26	86
Total	82	73	155

a. IDA-eligible and “blend” countries (eligible for IDA and IBRD lending), plus non-member low-income countries such as Cuba.

b. IBRD-eligible plus non-member middle-income developing countries.

as Somalia, Liberia, and Libya. We consider this subgroup also at risk, for a total of 86 countries at risk of not achieving the MDG.

What would happen if all of the countries currently off track could accelerate their progress to achieve the trend improvement rate of 3 percentage points per year registered by the best-performing countries over the 1990s?¹ Although this would mean achieving and sustaining historically high rates of progress, there are three reasons why this scenario might be possible. First, in the context of a national commitment to the MDGs, countries might reassess their past performance and focus on accelerating it. Second, there is a growing number of success cases over the 1990s from which to learn. Third, linear projections of historical rate improvement in some cases lead to implausible projections, particularly in the case of declining trends (Qatar and Afghanistan would have primary completion rates below zero in 2015).

If all 70 of the off-track countries were able to increase their primary completion rates from 2003 to 2015 at an average rate of 3 percentage points per year, the world would come much closer to meeting the MDG target, but it would still fall short. Under this accelerated improvement scenario, however, all 19 of the middle-income countries—whether off track or seriously off track—would reach the goal. Thirty-five of the at-risk low-income countries would also meet the MDG. This scenario should be considered an achievable goal.

However, the 16 low-income countries that are furthest from the goal would need to achieve and sustain an even faster rate of progress in order to reach universal

1. This was calculated by finding the median of the trend improvement rates for the 10 best-performing IBRD countries and the 12 best-performing IDA countries, which represented the entire subset of countries averaging more than 2 percentage points per year improvement over the 1990s.

primary completion by 2015. Thirteen of the countries would need to raise primary completion rates by more than 4 percentage points per year; and three countries (including Afghanistan) would require a sustained increase of more than 5 percentage points per year. The prospects for these countries—heavily concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, many scarred by conflict—are sobering at best.

As can be seen from annex tables B.3 and B.4, only six countries have registered trend rates of improvement in the primary completion rate of more than 3 percentage points per year. In two of these cases, the trend was observed over less than a full decade, and in several cases, the data are somewhat questionable. In short, for the 16 countries furthest from the goal to reach it by 2015 will require completion rate progress at historically unprecedented rates.

But there is some basis for hope that the trend rates of primary completion progress *will* increase in coming years. A good number of developing countries have achieved dramatic gains in primary completion over the past decade. Faster diffusion of their experiences and knowledge about reform strategies that work may help countries at all levels of educational development to accelerate progress. In the next chapter, we analyze key features of the primary education systems in these higher performing countries, and the lessons they hold for countries at risk.