Guiding Notes for Panel Discussion Two:

Demographic Trends, Migration and Urbanization in the Asia-Pacific Region and Implications for Education

Introduction

The Asia-Pacific region is home to over four billion people, constituting 61 per cent of the world’s population (UNESCAP 2011). Yet this population is far from evenly distributed. The region contains a number of the world’s most populous countries – Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan, which together account for almost half of the world’s population – as well as its smallest island states. It also houses some of the most (Macau-China, Singapore, Hong Kong-China) and least (Mongolia, Australia) densely populated regions in the world.

This population is also changing, with significant demographic shifts occurring over recent decades. The demographic profile of Asia-Pacific region is characterized by a large share (estimated at 60 per cent) of the world’s youth\(^1\) population. This is both an asset and a challenge. Youth represent the most valuable asset for development and growth. Yet, there are many young people who are provided with insufficient and inadequate education. Forthcoming statistics suggest there are as many as 69 million illiterate youth (UNESCO and UNICEF forthcoming) suffering from unemployment in the region (UNESCO and UNICEF forthcoming).

While the working-age population will continue to grow for some time in the region as a whole, this growth has started to slow and will decrease sharply over the next two decades. Many countries in the region are already increasingly concerned with ageing populations. These trends will create a polarized pattern of a very large youth population in South and West Asia and increasingly older populations in East and South East Asia. In the long run, there will be a gradual demographic shift towards an older population in all countries which will have deep social, economic, political and educational implications.

Increasing economic integration of the region coupled with high unemployment in some countries have given rise to increasing migration across countries, both permanent and

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\(^1\) Youth: 15-24 year olds (UN Definition)
temporary, and both low-skilled and high-skilled labour. In the Asia-Pacific region, cross-border movements of labour have been growing two times faster on average than the growth of the labour force of the origin countries. Over 50 per cent of the migrants in the region come from South Asia (primarily from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), and the rest mainly originate from South-East Asia (Indonesia and the Philippines) (ILO 2006).

While the region as a whole has historically had a relatively rural population, internal migration (mainly rural to urban) has also accelerated as countries move away from agriculture-based to manufacturing and services-based economies (UNESCAP 2011). This requires planning for and action to cater for social and educational needs of migrants and their families of the receiving urban centres. Increasing human pressure on arable land, growing scarcity of water per inhabitant, environmental degradation, and infrastructure bottlenecks are also challenges facing governments in the region and more globally posed by these population trends.

**Implications for education**

The implications of demographic changes for education is manifested not only by increased numbers of learners to be catered for, but also through the changing socio-cultural and economic profiles of children, men, and women who compose the diversity of populations. These changes affect the demand for and supply of education as well as the type and content of education required to respond to changed and diverse educational needs.

The region is still marked by wide disparities across and within countries as regards educational attainment with highly educated societies versus large numbers of unreach ed populations concentrated in a few countries, leading to questions of equity, quality and inclusiveness of education. This diversity of educational needs requires diverse education policy approaches.

Youth bulges in some countries and ageing populations in the others have important implications for educational policies and will require diverse educational responses to evolving skills needs in the perspective of lifelong learning.

In addition to demographic shifts, the implications of migration need to be taken into consideration for developing education policies. Increasing migration of labour has given rise to new training needs as regards work and language skills. This requires enhancing access and quality of lifelong learning opportunities, including through non-formal channels. Moreover, learners must be prepared for work and live not only in their own locations but also beyond, implying a new regional and international character for
education and the need to respond to an increasingly mobile workforce. At the same time, receiving countries have to adjust their education systems to deal with increasingly multi-cultural and multi-lingual school populations. The same is true within countries with important internal migration from rural to urban areas. It is of paramount importance that urban policies acknowledge the interdependence among actors in areas such as education and environment.

The growing mobility of labour across borders has benefited sending and receiving countries as well as the migrants themselves. Increased mobility and migration, however, also can bring about negative consequences such as cultural conflicts, brain-drain (migration of highly skilled workers), brain waste (educated and skilled migrants from developing countries being only able to find unskilled jobs in developed countries) and the risk of dependency on foreign labour. Student mobility, in particular in the higher education sector, and labour mobility require regional and cross border collaboration and harmonization and mutual recognition of educational and skills qualifications.

This panel discussion will examine the implications for education of rapid demographic shifts, and important migration and urbanization in the region. It will discuss how education policies should best respond to the resulting challenges while seizing the opportunities and shape education policies for the future.

**Key questions for discussion:**

1. What are the key current and future demographic challenges and opportunities impacting on education and what are the implications for education policy making?

2. In particular, what are the implications for education policies of youth bulges and increasingly ageing populations?

3. What national and regional education policies are required to best respond to migration and growing urbanization challenges and opportunities?

4. In particular, what would be adequate educational responses in terms of policies and content in the light of rapidly changing societal structures and increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies?

5. How should education policies best respond to disparities within countries to deliver equitable, inclusive and quality education in particular to marginalized and unreached populations?
References

