



2ND ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL EDUCATION MINISTER'S CONFERENCE (APREMC II)

5-7 JUNE 2022, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL BANGKOK, THAILAND

MEDIA RELEASE
30 MAY 2022

2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference (APREMC-II) to urgently address learning recovery for 760 million children and 'education transformation' in the region

— Education stakeholders from throughout the region are gathering in Bangkok for the Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference II (APREMC-II) from 5 through 7 June, to ensure safe return to schools and recovery of lost learning, as well as creative transformation of education systems for greater resilience, equity, and quality for all learners. —

BANGKOK/KATHMANDU, 30 May 2022: The COVID-19 pandemic, now well into its third year, has resulted in the biggest disruption of education in history, adversely affecting some 760 million children across the Asia-Pacific region since early 2020.

Schools in East Asia and the Pacific, for example, have been fully closed for 18 weeks on average. Meanwhile, South Asia has faced some of the longest school closures in the world, with schools fully shut for 35 weeks on average. This translates to over 1 trillion hours of lost in-person learning for children and youth in South Asia and East Asia and the Pacific.

Substantial learning losses and worsening access due to the pandemic have led to a significant setback in the region's prospects for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) — the 'education SDG' — of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Many educators and education stakeholders are already speaking of an imminent emergence of a 'lost generation' of learners if swift action is not undertaken throughout the region, now home to some 4.7 billion people, or about 60% of the world's population. It is thus urgent for Asia-Pacific countries immediately re-open schools and ensure a safe return to learning; at the same time, educators must transform education and learning content to be more relevant, inclusive and resilient to future shocks.

Given the critical moment, **Ministers of Education from across Asia will convene in Bangkok for the second Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference (APREMC-II), from 5 to 7 June 2022.** APREMC-II is jointly organized by the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and the UNICEF Regional Offices for East Asia and Pacific, and South Asia. The Conference will be co-hosted by the Royal Thai Government and is organized with the generous support of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) of Japan and the Thailand Equitable Education Fund (EEF).

The overarching theme of APREMC-II is 'Education Recovery and Transformation towards more Responsive, Relevant and Resilient Education Systems: Accelerating Progress towards SDG 4- Education 2030'. The Conference is framed around three interlinked themes:

1. Ensuring safe return to schools and achieving learning recovery that will improve learning outcomes for all;
2. Achieving a deep transformation of education systems and building into them enhanced capacities of resilience (e.g. more flexible, inclusive, resilient, digitally equipped, blended, and more environmentally friendly and sustainable systems); and
3. Achieving increased and better investment in education and enablers for transformation.

The Conference will serve as a platform for education stakeholders to share successful and innovative education initiatives, discuss challenges, and explore opportunities to accelerate learning for all children and youth, especially for the most vulnerable, including the poor, the disabled, and young girls who have dropped out of school and are at increased risk of never returning to their classrooms.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has presented the region with untoward challenges, it has notably *exacerbated a pre-existing learning crisis in the region*. Prior to the pandemic, 27 million children and adolescents in the region remained functionally illiterate, 95% of whom resided in South Asia. In many of the region's countries today, 50% of children are unable to read and understand a simple sentence by age 10, despite completing their early grades. The COVID-19 crisis also revealed many education systems' fragilities and limits in terms of inclusion, flexibility, and resilience. Asia and the Pacific reflect a global crisis as well: early estimates suggest that the proportion of children around the world who cannot read or write a simple text by the age of 10 will increase from 53% in 2019 to 67% in 2021^[1]. The World Bank has [projected](#) that interruptions in education may result in financial losses valued at US\$15 trillion in terms of children's future earnings, thus having a devastating long-term effect on wellbeing and quality-of-life prospects for a current generation of learners.

The priority actions and recommendations that will emerge from APREMC-II will serve as building blocks for the *Bangkok 2022 Statement - Towards an Effective Learning Recovery for All and Transforming Education in Asia-Pacific*. The statement will constitute a 'roadmap' for the region seeking to rebuild and transform its ailing education systems. It will be shared at the SDG4 Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee meeting in July 2022, and then feed into the upcoming global UN *Transforming Education Summit (TES)* in September 2022 in New York, to help generate tangible actions and partnerships for the transformation of education for all learners, both regionally and globally.

UNICEF and UNESCO are urgently calling on Asia-Pacific governments and education partners to take immediate action across the region to ensure that every learner reaches his/her full potential. Nobody should be left behind and miss out on their right to education and learning. The region must act now, both individually and collectively, to reverse the looming Asia-Pacific learning crisis.

***** Attention Members of the Press:** *APREMC-II is an invitation-only event, but selected, pre-registered members of the press will be admitted for a brief Press Conference and for coverage of the opening ceremonies on the morning of Mon., 6 June, where Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn will be presiding; in addition, a select group of regional education ministers will be making statements and may be available for brief interviews. Please contact us for further information. ****

For additional information/questions contact:

- Peter Prix, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education: p.prix@unesco.org
- Shima Islam, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office: ssislam@unicef.org
- Pravaran Mahat, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia: pmahat@unicef.org