



South East Asia Pacific Perspectives: Lifelong Learning

Education Day 24 January 2025

UN Education Day on 24 January is celebrated every year by Soroptimist International South East Asia Pacific, and this year our theme is Lifelong Learning. Education is a strong pillar of our global mandate for Soroptimist International to educate, empower and enable, and operationally a specific objective for our South East Asia Pacific federation. The sustainable development goals include: SDG 4 for formal education, SDG 8 for decent work, and others.

The concept of lifelong learning has evolved since the 1980s and in summary, is defined simply as ‘the self-motivated pursuit of formal or informal knowledge and skills for personal and professional development’. It follows that gaining those attributes may be found anywhere from early education, primary or secondary formal schooling, life-skills, vocational or community education. Professional bodies provide continuing professional and personal development catering for their membership. Furthermore, scope may include universities of the third age for retired people. This scope is one’s journey of choice into areas of interest and expertise. During our evolving working lives, we may experience as many as seven professions with the hunger for intellectual stimulation and for re-inventing oneself as a requirement for resilience. (McKenzie Research: 2024)

In Asia Pacific, the progress towards Sustainable Development Goals is monitored annually, illustrating regression or stagnation in most targets across the board since covid. (UNESCAP 2024) In SISEAP, we concentrate on 13 countries that fall into 2 sub-regions – the Pacific and South East Asia. In November 2024, UNESCAP proposed a future for education to be inclusive, green and digital, and funded. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2024/charting-new-paths-gender-equality-and-empowerment-asia-pacific-regional-report-beijing30>

Pacific Countries	South East Asian Countries
 <p>QUALITY EDUCATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Effective learning outcomes 4.3 TVET and tertiary education 4.a Education facilities 4.c Qualified teachers 4.2 Early childhood development 4.5 Equal access to education 4.4 Skills for employment 4.6 Adult literacy and numeracy 4.7 Sustainable development education 4.b Scholarships 	 <p>QUALITY EDUCATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Effective learning outcomes 4.2 Early childhood development 4.3 TVET and tertiary education 4.6 Adult literacy and numeracy 4.a Education facilities 4.c Qualified teachers 4.5 Equal access to education 4.4 Skills for employment 4.7 Sustainable development education 4.b Scholarships

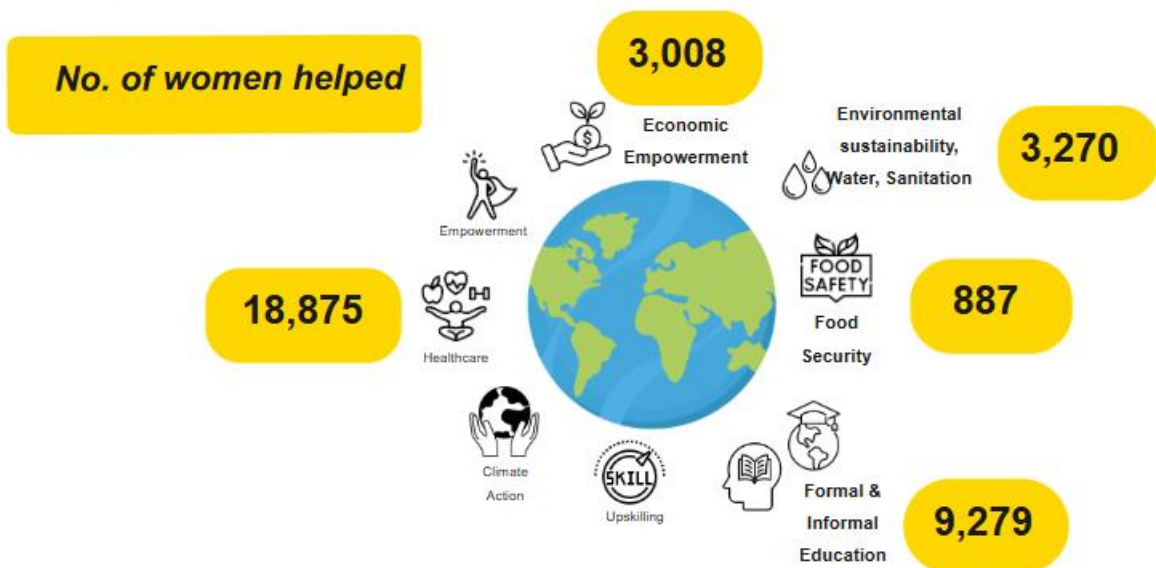
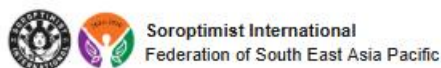
Even access to basic primary education is regressing for all children and more so for girls. (UNESCAP: B+30 review 2024). So, the opportunities for children, girls and women have an unstable foundation upon which to build resilience in life.

Across our countries there is significant variability from free education for all 4-year-olds in rich countries with government-supported systems, in stark comparison against lower developmental countries that are plagued with conflict or corruption where there is diminished commitment for basic human rights, economic stability, and resilience.

However, when we think of lifelong learning, we think of older girls and women re-entering education after early marriage, pregnancy and raising a family. Others escaping disasters or conflict need to learn different life skills, especially physical and mental health management for themselves and others. For entrepreneurial women, they seek economic empowerment skills for running small business, managing growth, navigating markets, excelling in innovation and embracing technology. These women demonstrate skills in leapfrogging in industry measured under SDG 9 – the only target to improve during covid in Asia Pacific.

When a child is educated the community benefits, when a community is educated the country benefits (GDP), when a country is educated the world benefits (SDGs).

SISEAP delivers in many ways



SISEAP provides donations, scholarships, bursaries, voluntary teaching hours, facilitating care centres, schools and safe learning environments, specific skills facilitation, and advocacy enabling governments to advance the opportunity and delivery of better educational outcomes. The following includes samples from our 8 objectives.

Objective	# of Project Reports submitted	Total Project Costs	# of Advocacy reports submitted	Advocacy Hours	# of women girls helped	Total donated	AUD money spent on scholarship	Service Hours donated
Environmental sustainability/water and sanitation	20	9373	6	70	3270	2672	0	1322
Food security	6	17120	1	10	887	19497	0	1005
Healthcare	57	100306	20	645	18875	136969	3110	5917
Economic empowerment	24	87102	25	1590	3008	34654	0	10201
Education	59	277490	8	1303	9279	94161	80271	13690
Conflict resolution/peace promotion	0	0	7	226	0	500	0	0
Disaster relief, mitigation and resilience	1	1400	0	0	1000	4031	0	300

In SISEAP, many projects support vulnerable children, adolescents and women. Other ways include:

- scholarships, bursaries, to pursue educational outcomes
- donations for educational supplies, equipment, uniforms, breakfast and meals onsite
- donations of technology/ access and connectivity
- formal training for entrepreneurship
- education in life skills (if children were traded at a young age and adopted by the justice system)
- second chance education for young mothers
- re-education of widows or women escaping violence
- customised training for migrant and refugee women and girls, families
- re-training for older women who re-enter the workforce
- broad opportunities for green and digital education (STEM, Climate resilience)
- opportunities for older women to engage in society, paid work, academia, and community eldership.

**Life skills
SI Damansara, Malaysia**



**Success Timor scholarships
SI Joondalup (Australia & Timor)**



**Conference of Clubs – Climate Change
Australia (many speakers)**



**SI Penang Computers for STEM
Malaysia**



**Food Security
SI Lautoka Fiji**



**Food Security
SIROM**



**SI Lautoka Fiji
Library**



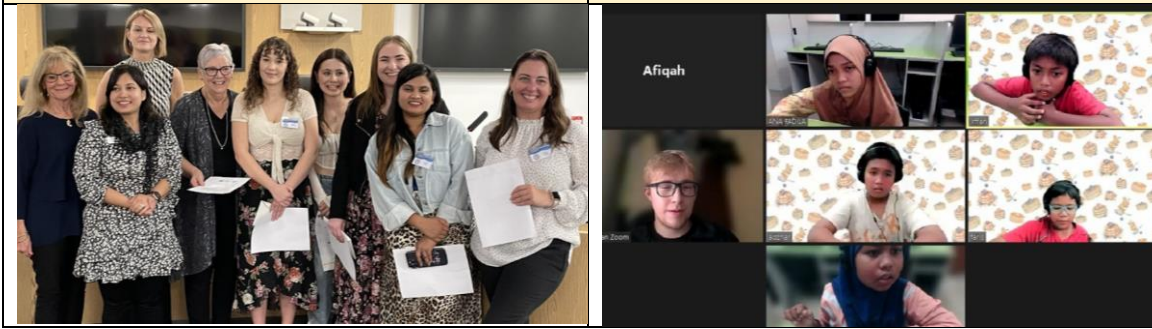
**Sex Education
Malaysia**



The floor is yours

Learning English online

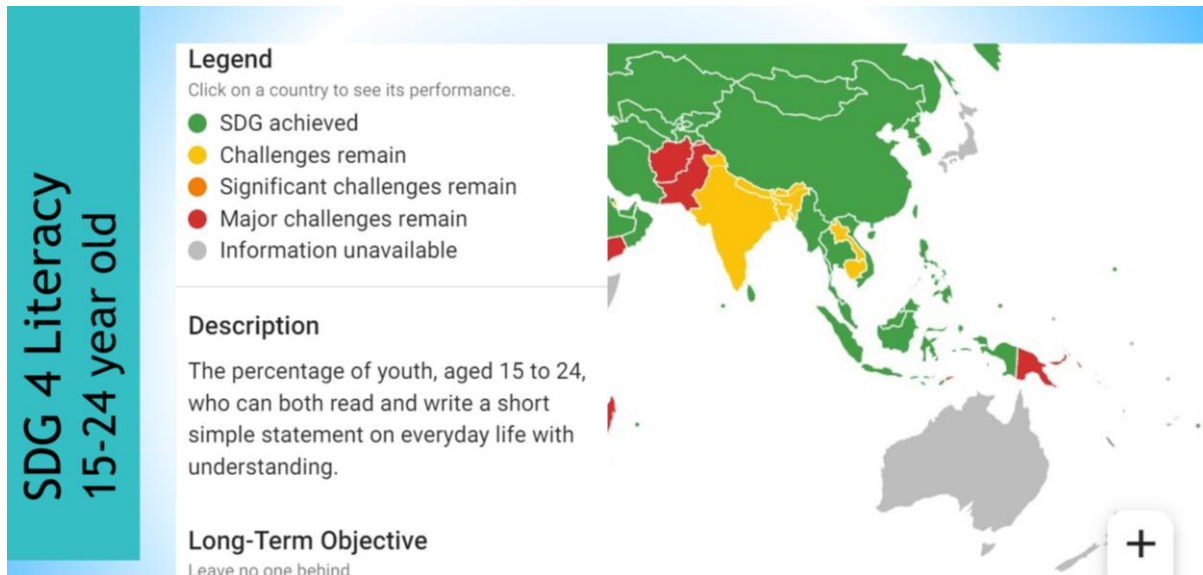
Western Australia (4 clubs)

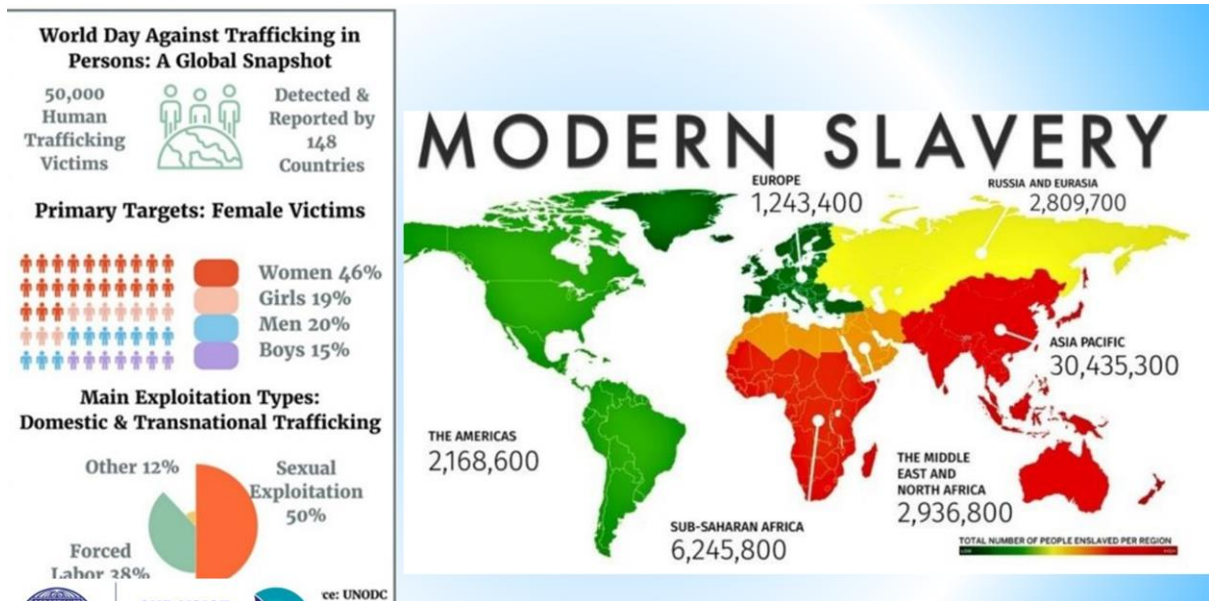


What happens if we don't facilitate lifelong learning?

In Asia Pacific, the risk of modern slavery is high because those poorly educated populations are prime targets for economic exploitation, human rights violation, and international human trafficking. In 2022, 85 million people were on the move in our region. In 2024, IOM reports that where half the world's population is in Asia Pacific, 40% of those are "migrants". With 46% being women and 19% girls, there is a higher chance of forced labour, forced marriage, early pregnancies, sex trafficking and intensive manual labour. (UNODC 2022) There are restricted opportunities for those females to continue lifelong learning, or indeed a long life at all.

this age group (15-24 year old) is most at risk of poverty and exploitation





Source: UNODC and SDG 8.7 report card

Lifelong learning starts with a sound foundation to underpin continuing personal and professional development and those tools help for identifying and realising the unique potential of each person. This is the basis of a healthy future for the community, the economy, and in the pursuit of global goals.

Join Soroptimist International to get involved in meaningful change. QR code

End of blog

Extra summary -

SDG 4 and education aspects in Asia Pacific (Nov 2024)

From Beijing +30 charting new paths (video) <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/2024-11/Beijing%2B30%20Synthesis%20Report.mp4>

Full report: <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2024/charting-new-paths-gender-equality-and-empowerment-asia-pacific-regional-report-beijing30>



*The shaded areas of the map indicate ESCAP members and associate members.**

Chapter 2 – what is happening in Asia Pacific as a whole?

Quality education and skills development:

Major progress in education attainment has been achieved for both women and men in Asia and the Pacific; but inequalities remain in the mean years of schooling across countries. Gender matters in education attainment while the dynamic varies across countries, age groups and levels of education.

- When enrolled in school, **girls are more likely than boys to complete education** across primary and secondary levels in all Asia-Pacific countries, with few exceptions.¹⁷
- Poor women **aged 20 to 35 years are the furthest left behind** in secondary education completion in 15 out of 30 countries analysed while poor men are the furthest left behind in nine countries. The disadvantage of poor women aged 35 and older increases significantly, being the furthest left behind group in 21 countries.¹⁸
- Children’s disadvantage in access to early childhood education is found to be associated with no or **low education of mothers in 13** out of 26 countries.¹⁹

- Participation of women and girls in **tertiary STEM education is low even in high-income countries** in the region. 20

The foundational **learning crisis persists**, threatening to compromise children’s learning outcomes in the longer term.

- Inadequate foundational learning is particularly prevalent in low- and middle-income countries in South Asia, where the share of children **not acquiring basic proficiency in literacy by age 10** was estimated at 78 per cent in 2022. 21
- Despite the importance of early childhood education in building foundational skills, enrolment in early childhood education remains under 70 per cent in most parts of the region. 22 Early childhood education is failing to challenge gender stereotypes and biases that continue to be absorbed by the youngest children. **Many girls in the region are denied schooling.**
- This is an injustice frequently suffered by women and girls in countries **affected by armed conflicts** and by women and girls with **disabilities**.
- Insufficient coverage of menstrual health services and education in schools in most countries in the region, compounded with **stigma and stress** about menstruation, and threats of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), hinder girls’ school attendance and access to quality education. The Asia-Pacific region is **significantly underinvesting in education** and public expenditure on education is dropping.
- Public education expenditure in East Asia and the Pacific has **dropped from 15.3 per cent** of the total public expenditure in 2019 to 12.8 per cent in 2020. It has not recovered the pre-pandemic level (per latest data as of 2021). In South Asia, the spending level has been declining since 2016 and is merely at 10.2 per cent in 2021.23
- The **poorest children are benefiting the least from public spending on education**. 21 World Bank and others, The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update (Washington, D.C, 2022). 22 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023: Technology in Education: A Tool on Whose Terms? (Paris, 2023). 23 World Bank, “World Development Indicators: Government expenditure on education, total (% of government expenditures)”. Available at: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.XPD.TOTL.GB.ZS&country=EAS&_gl=1*1ng1bj*

The **skills portfolio for women and girls**, particularly the most vulnerable groups, needs to be transformed to enable access **to formal, green and decent jobs**. This transformation is essential to developing countries in Asia and the Pacific where informality and

underemployment prevail in the job market. In Asia and the Pacific, many women are being left behind by digital and technological transformation.

- Fewer women (63 per cent) than men (69 per cent) use the **internet**, and wide gaps in internet usage and **mobile phone ownership** exist between the poorest and the wealthiest, and the less educated and the better educated. 24
- Data from seven countries in Southeast Asia indicate that the gender gap is more evident when it comes to more **advanced digital skills**. 25
- Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems and curricula need to be modernized to meet modern labour market demands, in the context of the **green and digital** economies and demographic shifts.

Priority must urgently be given to training and re-skilling of women, young people, people with a lower level of education, and those more at risk of being excluded from the job market, such as older persons and persons with disabilities. Reducing multidimensional poverty that is **disproportionately experienced by women and girls requires a multifaceted strategy**. This must combine targeted measures and **financing** to improve access to productive resources and services, social protection and healthcare. A **focus** on sexual and reproductive health is particularly important, as is education and skills development.