

Global Education Coalition Gender Flagship: Highlights of action in 2020

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, UNESCO launched the Global Education Coalition, an international multi-sector partnership aiming to meet the urgent and unprecedented need for continuity of learning.

Most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions at some point in 2020 in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. At its peak, these nationwide closures impacted more than 1.5 billion, or over 90% of the world's student population, from pre-primary to higher education.

The Global Education Coalition selected three flagships, or focus areas, covering: teachers, connectivity and gender. The Gender Flagship is rallying coalition members to work together to highlight and address the gender dimensions of the COVID-19 school crisis and safeguard progress made on gender equality in education in recent decades.

This report presents the work of the Gender Flagship in 2020, and its plans for 2021.

The Gender Flagship's objectives and action areas

This unprecedented disruption to education has potential immediate and longer-term effects on education and gender equality, particularly on the most marginalized.

To mitigate these effects and safeguard progress made in recent decades, the Gender Flagship is catalyzing cooperation among members of the Global Education Coalition, with a focus on:

- Understanding and addressing possible gender gaps in the engagement with, and learning outcomes from, distance learning opportunities during school closures
- Addressing the cross-cutting health, protection, nutrition and education issues linked to disease outbreaks that negatively impact on girls' and boys' continuity of learning and return to school
- Making sure that boys and girls are re-enrolled in school and education programmes after the confinement has ended and that potential learning gaps are closed
- Building back better, strengthening education systems to be gender-transformative, more equitable and more resilient based on lessons learned from COVID-19.

The flagship is targeting 20 countries with the greatest gender disparities in education, and working to achieve the above objectives through:



Data, research and evidence to inform policies, programmes and plans



Advocacy and communication efforts to promote continuity of learning and return to school, partnerships and systems reform



Country-level action to prevent widening gender inequalities in education

The Gender Flagship's Reference Group

While the flagship is open to a broad set of stakeholders within the Global Education Coalition, a small group of Coalition partners is serving in an advisory capacity and as a resource to guide and support the work.

This includes members of the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Girls Opportunity Alliance, Global Affairs Canada, Malala Fund, Norad, the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), UNICEF, and the World Bank, as well as education ministry representatives from Peru, the Philippines, and Sierra Leone.



Data, research and evidence to inform policies, programmes and plans

The Flagship aims to support the generation of gender-sensitive and sex-disaggregated data, research and evidence to better understand the gendered impacts of school closures, including on boys' and girls' learning, and the strategic educational interventions needed to ensure continuity of learning and return to schools by all learners, including the most marginalised. Consideration is given to impacts and interventions that consider gender-based violence, early and forced marriage, early and unintended pregnancy, child labour, and other aspects affecting boys' and girls' learning and continuity of education.

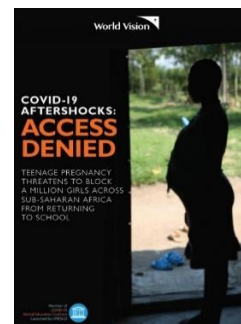
With funding support from the Global Partnership for Education, UNESCO has commissioned a global study on the gender dimensions of COVID-19.

The study will be published mid-2021, and consider gender differences in participation in distance learning programmes; factors facilitating girls' and boys' participation and learning; measures to address the gender digital divide and access to remote learning; assessments of learning loss; and access to accelerated learning and remedial support. It will also look beyond education to consider the health, nutrition and protection outcomes, such as the impact of school closures on rates of early and unintended pregnancy, violence, gender-based violence, malnutrition, early and forced marriage, and other harmful practices.

The study will also identify promising or potentially promising practice undertaken in a wide range of settings to assure: continuity of learning; equitable and safe access to basic services typically provided by schools; support to health, nutrition and well-being including prevention of early and unintended pregnancy, and protection from violence and harmful practices; and return to education, particularly among the most marginalised populations.

While it is a global study, it will aim to understand the experience in different regions and socio-economic contexts, including crisis- and conflict-affected settings, and ensure a particular lens on developing countries where the economic hardships of COVID-19 is anticipated to have the greatest impact on education financing and participation. Aligned with the Gender Flagship's priorities, the study will include a focus on the countries already facing the greatest gender disparities in education prior to the COVID-19 crisis.

Other partners in the Coalition have also been active in considering particular elements of the impact of COVID-19. For example, decision-makers can access evidence-based recommendations aimed specifically at fostering pregnant girls' and young mothers' return to school, thanks to a [report](#) published by World Vision International as a contribution to the Coalition. The report spotlights the increase in adolescent pregnancy during COVID-related school closures. See more [here](#).





Advocacy and communication efforts to promote continuity of learning and return to school, partnerships and systems reform

Intensifying the delivery of coordinated and targeted advocacy and communication campaigns that share evidence, policy and programmatic solutions, and lessons learned in advance gender equality in and through education during and following COVID-19. This includes targeted outreach to parents and communities on the right to education, and engagement with champions for girls' and boys' education. Advocacy campaigns will also aim to stimulate supportive policy environments for re-enrolments during the crisis. This includes the removal of regressive policies that may discriminate against girls, such as not allowing pregnant girls and adolescent mothers the right to return to school.

A new global campaign Keeping Girls in the Picture has reached more than 360 million people, who are now sensitized to the importance of girls' returning to school. The campaign was launched on 31 August and is currently ongoing in regional and national contexts.

The campaign targets girls, communities and education stakeholders at country and regional levels, with a specific focus on South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.



A wide range of campaign materials were developed in 10 languages and launched through a dedicated [website](#), including a comprehensive [social media pack](#), inspiring videos aggregated in a [YouTube](#) playlist, public service announcements, testimonials from the field, a [Back to school guide](#) for national stakeholders, toolkits and resources to engage youth networks and communities and more.

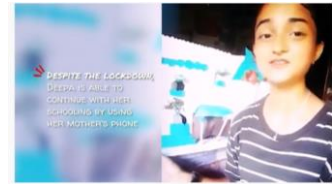
Over 30 influencers from all five regions joined the campaign. This includes Nobel laureate and girls' education activist Malala Yousafzai, through Malala Fund, calling on girls to go back to school, and on parents, teachers and leaders to help girls re-enrol in a video available in [English](#), [Urdu](#), [Hindi](#), [Spanish](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Turkish](#), [Arabic](#), [Dari](#), and [Pashto](#).



H.E Dr Joyce Banda, former President of Malawi, and Nadia Nadim, champion for girls' education and professional football player for Paris Saint Germain and Denmark, also raised their voices for girls' education through a [Facebook Live](#) interview on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child. Local influencers were also engaged, spreading the campaign to Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, India, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Niger and Tanzania.



In an effort to amplify girls' voices, the campaign engaged girls to share their own stories about their lives during lockdown and their efforts to continue learning, including inspiring stories from girls from [Afghanistan](#), [Kenya](#), [Nepal](#) and [Somalia](#).



Youth networks were engaged in the development of the [youth advocacy](#) toolkit for the campaign, and some, like the All-Africa Student Union, have used it to train youth advocates. The [community radio](#) toolkit produced with communication and information experts is also extending the reach campaign's reach within communities.

Media partners in the Global Education Coalition have also contributed to the Campaign. During the week of 21 September, [Gulli Africa](#) launched a special [Back to School](#) issue of Gulli MAG, an African weekly magazine of cultural and societal news, and adapted and screened the Keeping girls in the picture signature video for younger audiences (see video [here](#)). These materials reached 1.5 million subscribers, and 25 countries in French-speaking Africa.



The private sector promoted the campaign and helped reach wider audiences through joint advocacy activities and youth engagement. CJ Group held two large online events, [KCON:TACT 2020 SUMMER](#) and [KCON:TACT Season 2](#) (20-26 June and 16-25 October, respectively) during which the campaign was promoted (see the [video](#)) and funds were raised benefitting the work of the Gender Flagship. These online events replaced KCON – the world's largest Korean culture convention attended by over 1 million youth annually – and reached 4 million viewers from 150 countries for just the first event. CJ Group donated a portion of its channel membership profits and sales of customized goods of K-POP artists to the Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship efforts. In addition to mobilising resources, the second event featured 'pop-up' classes delivered by K-POP artists engaging more viewers and embodying the #LearningNeverStops message behind the campaign.



Prada and UNESCO held an [online event](#) under the same title as the Campaign to highlight the importance of girls' education amid a crisis-stricken education system, promoting the campaign video and messages and the need for more investments for girls' education. This event garnered attention in advance of a successful Tools of Memory auction held with Sotheby's (2-15 October). Prada [donated the proceeds](#) from the auction to the Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship, to further the work of the Flagship and the Keeping girls in the picture campaign.

Policy-makers have also been reached through different channels, as the campaign was promoted during and integrated into a number of events with ministries of education. This includes the [High-Level segment](#) and [Technical segment](#) on inclusion, equity and gender equality of the 2020 Global Education Meeting (22 October), the [Placing gender equality at the heart of education](#) (12 October) online event hosted by UNESCO, the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, and Plan International France, and numerous other events.

For example, UNESCO and UNGEI also launched a collective rallying call to ensure that “girls stay in the picture” through broad support for continued investments in girls’ education and the mobilisation of the education and feminist movements at the inspiring online [event at the Educate4Equality: UNGEI@20 Forum](#) (16 October). The event included short videos, an interactive poll, and an intergenerational ‘real talk’ discussion on what is needed to keep girls in the picture and safeguard progress made on girls’ education.



In parallel to the work around the Campaign, UNESCO and Global Education Coalition partners have fostered strong cooperation with an aim to document efforts undertaken to ensure girls continue learning and safely return to school once these reopen in an ongoing manner, showcasing good practices around the world.



3 stories from Zimbabwe: How communities can help pregnant girls and adolescent mothers continue their education

Under the Gender Flagship, UNESCO continues to develop and produce resources to facilitate knowledge sharing on good practices, practical tips and links to important resources to mitigate the short and longer term impact of school closures. This includes an issue note on addressing the gender dimensions of school closures (available in [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [Portuguese](#) and [Russian](#)), along with other [issue notes](#) on relevant topics. This issue note was released and discussed with over 150 government officials, practitioners and experts from countries around the world through [a webinar](#) at the peak of the pandemic in April.



The success of the Gender Flagship in advocacy and communication were evidence to the value and benefit of cooperation – which is the spirit and essence of the Global Education Coalition. UNESCO serves as a convening, coordinating and link-making founding member, and makes its own contributions to these three pillars, but the impact of the Coalition can only be achieved through the cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder cooperation from its members.



Join the campaign to ensure #LearningNeverStops



What can I do to help advance girls' education?



Social media pack



Girls back to school guide



Community radio toolkit



Youth advocacy toolkit



Issue note on gender dimensions of COVID-related school closures



YouTube playlist

Voices of girls from around the world



How Halima is continuing her education in a refugee camp in Somalia



How Deepa from Nepal is ensuring that her #LearningNeverStops



A young woman in Kenya pursues her dream of becoming a nurse



An Afghan girl's determination to ensure her right to education



↑ 20% EARNINGS
Just one more year of school can increase a girl's earnings, when she is an adult, by up to 20%.

↓ ADOLESCENT PREGNANCIES
10% fewer girls under 17 would become pregnant in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia if they all had a primary education.





Some countries lose more than **US\$ 1 BILLION** a year by failing to educate girls to the same level as boys.

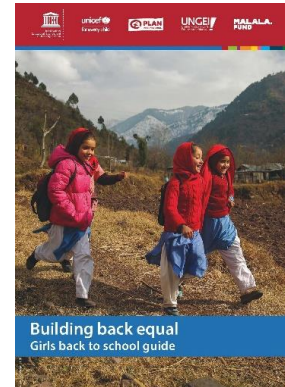


Country-level action to prevent widening gender inequalities in education

Supporting countries to develop gender-responsive education sector contingency plans, accelerating the deployment of gender-responsive distance learning approaches and ensuring continued access to services to prevent risks such as gender-based violence, and fostering psychosocial support and well-being when school reopen.

Supporting the development of gender-responsive education sector plans

In this unprecedented educational disruption, policy-makers and practitioners are keen to understand how to ensure continuity of learning while schools are closed, while at the same time establish comprehensive, timely and evidence-based plans for reopening schools in a way that is safe, gender-responsive and child-friendly, and meets the needs of the most marginalized girls. To support them, UNESCO, Malala Fund, Plan International, UNGEI and UNICEF developed and launched the [Building back equal: Girls back to school guide](#) (available in English, French and Spanish and forthcoming in Portuguese.)



Since its release in August, partners in the Global Education Coalition have been supporting the roll-out of the guide in different contexts. This includes the Pan-African launch of the Guide undertaken with the African Union (AU) in December. The [virtual event](#) reached representatives of ministries of education across the 55 AU Member States. In the words of Sarah Anyang Agbor, African Union Commissioner, during the event, 'The fight against COVID-19 requires an inclusive, participatory approach of the countries' populations with a special attention to the specific needs of the most vulnerable, especially women, children and elders'. Estimates reveal that 1 million girls in Sub-Saharan Africa may never return to school once they reopen due to policies and practices that ban pregnant girls and young mothers from resuming school.

Members of the Flagship are also working with girls and young women to better understand what 'building back equal' means to them, and to work with them to re-open and re-build education systems in the wake of COVID-19. See here this [video](#) produced by UNGEI, released during the Pan-African event.



Accelerating the deployment of gender-responsive distance learning approaches

Technovation, in partnership with UNESCO, [piloted IdeaLab](#), a five-week online programme (27 July-28 August 2020) to scale up girls' complex systems thinking and problem-solving skills and help them to learn how to build with technology. The programme engaged 1,500 girls aged 10-18 in Brazil, India, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan. Volunteer mentors from companies like Ericsson, SAP, Uber, Google, and NVIDIA provided feedback

and support to students throughout the pilot. The Micro:bit Education Foundation supplied micro:bits (tablets with educational resources) as prizes for girls in participating countries.

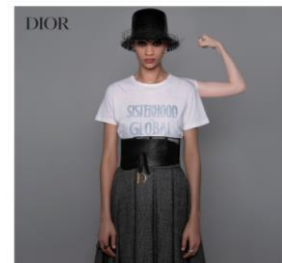
End-pilot survey results found that artificial intelligence (AI) and problem solving were the skills girls felt they had learned in the pilot (reported by over 75% of participants). Girls used their newly-built skills to design AI models to address community problems such as deforestation, contaminated drinking water, and crop disease. See this [video](#) and below the voices of some of the girls. A second phase of cooperation is underway, through Technovation Girls.



**"I chose to solve this problem because it is a global problem that affects my community, too... I also wanted to do my part to protect my home planet because there is no planet B."
- Emerald, Nigeria, Participant in IdeaLab**

The EdTech community's awareness of the need for holistic and comprehensive education solutions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic was raised through an online event hosted by UNESCO, [Building back equal: Addressing the gender dimensions of COVID-19 school closures through technology](#) at the Mobile Learning Week (14 October). The event showcased Global Education Coalition partners' work, including the Technovation IdeaLab pilot, VSO International's work on addressing gender-based violence during school closures, and ITU's [EQUALS Digital Skills Hub](#).

One hundred women from Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Niger, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Tanzania are also being equipped with leadership skills for sustainable development thanks to the ten-month [Women@Dior](#) educational programme established by Christian Dior Couture. The programme includes a mentorship arm. World Skills International and UNESCO's International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training are supporting recruitment to the programme.



Supporting continued access to services during school closures

The impact of the loss of school meals on children's health and nutrition was mitigated by the delivery of 400,000 meals and food parcels in June 2020 by Uber to over 4,000 families in Colombia, Costa Rica, Kenya, Mexico, Panama and the United Kingdom. A second phase of this campaign is now underway in Pakistan, with school hygiene kits and materials being provided by Unilever.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is also supporting an integrated package of health and nutrition interventions under the WFP/UNICEF partnership, with special attention to address the gender dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis and the different barriers to education access, particularly for girls, with an initial focus on Chad, Niger, Mali, South Sudan and Somalia.

Plans for 2021

**"None of us are equal until all of us are equal."
Sewantu, girls' rights activist, Sierra Leone**

The COVID-19 pandemic, and its associated social and economic effects, is evolving quickly and taking different forms around the world. At the time of this report, vaccination campaigns are planned to be rolled out in some countries before the end of 2020; however, only a small sub-sector of the world's population is likely to be reached in the early stages. The education community must be alert to these fluctuating circumstances, ensuring that advances in our knowledge and understanding of the disease are rapidly reflected in sector responses and that attention is paid to the most marginalized.

In this still-unpredictable context, governments and education stakeholders will need to remain vigilant in ensuring that safeguards are in place to protect children, teachers and administrators in school, and that any further school closures are accompanied by quality learning continuity measures that reach all children and adolescents, including the most marginalized girls.

With this in mind, in 2021, the Gender Flagship will continue to rally coalition members to safeguard the progress made on gender equality in recent decades and shield against the potentially devastating effects of declines in girls' learning and return to school.

In line with the Gender Flagship action areas, and in anticipation of further mobilisation and collective by Global Education Coalition members, we aim to:

- Expand evidence to better understand the gendered impacts of school closures, through support to the collection and use of national data, and the publication and launch of a global study on this theme.
- Support the development and implementation of gender-responsive school reopening and contingency planning, drawing on the [Back to school guide](#).
- Build on the Keeping Girls in the picture campaign, intensify the delivery of national and sub-national advocacy and communication campaigns, in partnership with girl- and youth-led organizations, community radios and other local influencers.
- Enhance access to distance learning approaches and contribute to narrowing the gender digital divide through online learning opportunities, digital mentorship and female role models.
- Expand access to education and services to address risks associated with prolonged school closures, including gender-based violence, early and forced marriage, and early and unintended pregnancy.

Contact UNESCO to see how you can join our efforts to address the gender dimensions of the COVID-19 school crisis and safeguard progress made on gender equality in education.

Gender Flagship Members and Supporters in 2020



Support the actions of the Gender Flagship

The Global Education Coalition is an open partnership. UNESCO invites expressions of interest from organizations interested in joining our COVID-19 response to ensure the continuity of education for all learners.

The Gender Flagship provides a solid platform for United Nations agencies, international organizations, the private sector, civil society representatives, media outlets and Member States interested and committed to the promotion of gender equality, and girls' and women's empowerment in and through education.

Interested organizations are invited to contact UNESCO to discuss what support, tools or services they can offer to address the gender dimensions of COVID-related school closures and ensure that #LearningNeverStops.



Stay in touch

COVID-19 Global Education Coalition



COVID19taskforce@unesco.org



<https://on.unesco.org/globaleducationcoalition>



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