



UNESCO's efforts to achieve gender equality
in and through education

2020 Highlights

UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners and responding to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.



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The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to **"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."** The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



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Designed by Claudia Tortello

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This report presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2020 to advance gender equality in and through education. These achievements would not have been possible without the support of our partners, including governments, civil society organizations and the private sector. With this report, we wish to warmly thank our partners for their support to realizing the right to education for all, and gender equality in and through education.

Strategic context

While gender gaps in educational access have dramatically decreased over the past 25 years, girls still face the worst forms of exclusion, while boys' disengagement from education is an emerging concern.

According to the 2020 *Gender Report* building on the *Global Education Monitoring Report*, **girls' access to education has much improved over the past 25 years, closing the global gap in enrolment ratios.** In this period, the percentage of countries that have achieved gender parity in education rose from 56 percent to 65 percent in primary education, from 45 percent to 51 percent in lower secondary and from 13 percent to 24 percent in upper secondary education over the past 25 years. The number of girls enrolled in primary and secondary education has risen by 180 million since 1995. The enrolment of women in tertiary education has tripled. In 2018, fewer men were enrolled in tertiary education in 74 percent of countries with data.

Girls are equal to or have overtaken boys in learning outcomes in mathematics and reading. Yet, new gender gaps are developing in digital literacy skills and the majority of the adult illiterate population remains female.

Of the 38 countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) both in 2000 and 2018, girls' advantage over boys increased in over half of the countries and territories. In mathematics, girls do as well as boys in over 50 percent of countries and outperform boys in 25 percent. However, women in many countries are 25 percent less likely than men to know how to use information and communication technologies (ICT) for basic purposes and the gender gap grows with the complexity of the task. While the share of women among illiterate youth has decreased, women represent 63 percent of illiterate adults.

Despite progress, girls still face the worst forms of exclusion. Three quarters of children at primary school age who may never be in school are girls. Gender interacts with other factors of disadvantage, exacerbating exclusion. For instance, hardly any poor, rural young women complete upper secondary education in at least 20 countries. Some subjects still remain male-dominated, including engineering,

manufacturing and construction, and ICT. Globally, women comprise below 25 percent of higher education students in these fields in more than two thirds of countries, which seriously constrains girls' and women's career choices.

A year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic

Most governments around the world temporarily closed educational institutions in 2020 to try to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. At its peak in 2020, these nationwide closures impacted more than 1.6 billion students, or over 90 percent of the world's student population, from pre-primary to higher education.

This unprecedented disruption to education has had immediate and is projected to have long-term impacts on education and gender equality, particularly among the most marginalized. School closures are expected to exacerbate girls' and women's unpaid care work, disrupting girls' learning opportunities and limiting the time to learn at home. The absence of schools as venues for safe spaces may heighten the risks faced by many adolescent girls of gender-based violence, early and forced marriages and unintended pregnancy, sexual exploitation and abuse. The crisis is also expected to exacerbate boys' disengagement from education through increased participation in income-generating activities, particularly in poorer contexts.

These challenges make the work of UNESCO in the area of gender equality in and through education more relevant than ever.

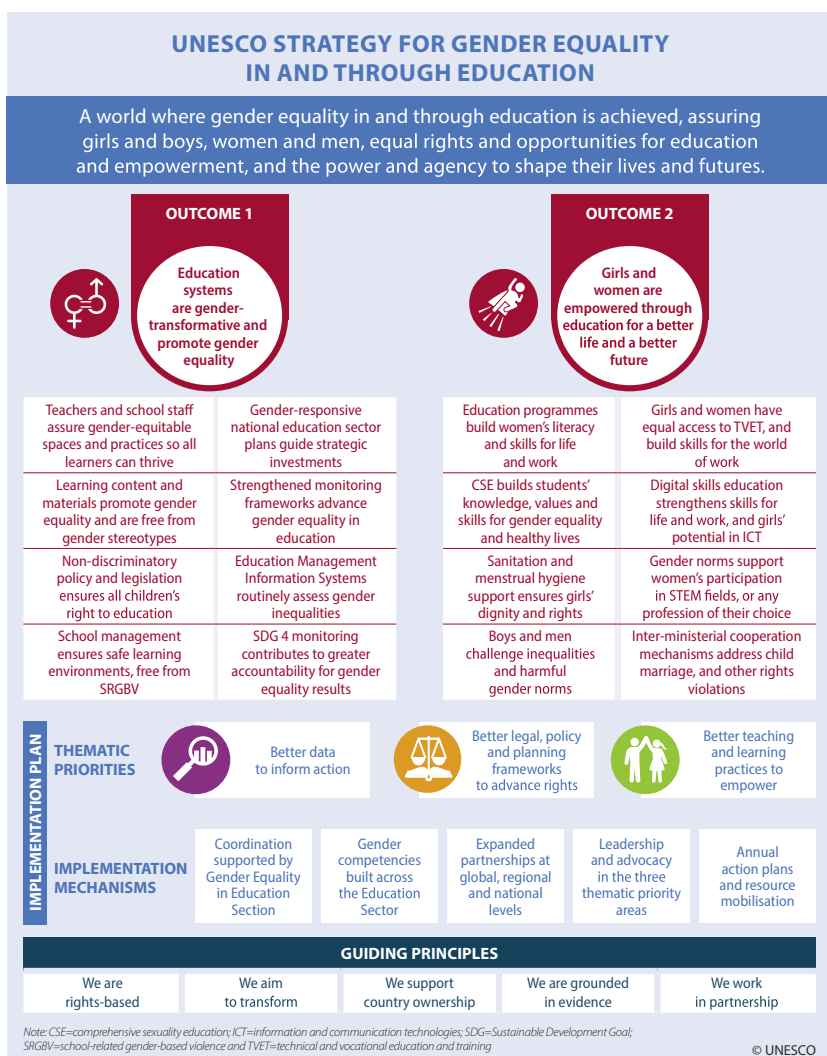


UNESCO's strategic approach

UNESCO's work on education and gender is guided by the *UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019–2025*. The strategy aims to guide UNESCO's programmes and actions for 'a world where gender equality in and through education is achieved, assuring girls and boys, women and men, equal rights and opportunities for education and empowerment, and the power and agency to shape their lives and futures'. The strategy considers the entire education process, at all levels and delivery modalities, to ensure equality in access, including equal representation of boys and girls, men and women, at all levels and in different aspects of education; the learning experience through

gender-transformative teaching and learning content, processes and environments, and policies, plans and resources that support equality; educational outcomes, including the translation of education into broader societal gains, such as participation in public life and decision-making, access to decent work and resources, and autonomy. The strategy is underpinned by a broad theory of change (see **Figure 1**), and supported by *Her education, our future*, which was launched in parallel with the strategy, to leverage political and financial commitments, cooperation and joint action for girls' and women's education.

Figure 1: Theory of change



Box 1: Building UNESCO capacity to mainstream gender in education programmes

UNESCO continued to mainstream gender equality in its education programme cycle in 2020. This included gender analysis of over 400 work plans of the Education Sector, and guidance on the integration of gender across all thematic areas of work. A draft toolkit with operational tools to advance gender equality in and through education was developed for all Education staff. The toolkit aims at building capacity among staff to improve project design, monitoring and reporting, thereby responding to the recommendation of the *2020 IOS Evaluation of the UNESCO Global Priority Gender Equality*. It will be released in 2022, with the aim to inform the next programme cycle.



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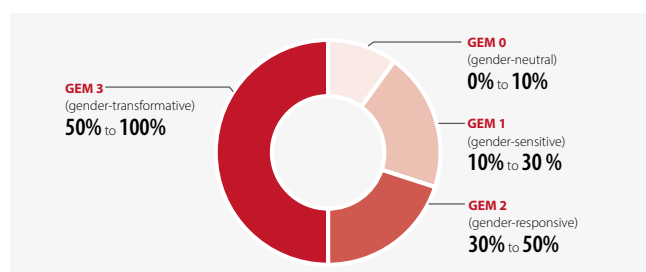
Source: UNESCO (2019), p.9.

UNESCO is also leveraging partnerships for results. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, UNESCO launched the *Global Education Coalition*, an international multi-sectoral partnership aiming to support continuity of learning. To understand and help countries address the gender dimensions of school closures, UNESCO established a *Gender Flagship* within the Coalition. In 2020, the Gender Flagship was a key platform for collective action with over 50 members and supporters, drawn from the private sector, civil society, development partners and international organizations. UNESCO also leveraged the SDG 4 cooperation mechanism for joint action. Convened by UNESCO, the Global Education Meeting 2020 has adopted equity, inclusion and gender equality as a cross-cutting priority theme in its *2020 Global Education Meeting Declaration*, which includes time-bound commitments until the end of 2021. Moreover, a working group on inclusion and education was established within the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, which is hosted by UNESCO.

Funding highlights

UNESCO has adopted a mechanism, the Gender Equality Marker (GEM; see **Figure 2**), for tracking the proportion of funds devoted to advancing gender equality. In 2020, US\$ 42.9 million expenditure contributed to Priority Gender Equality in the Education Sector, representing almost one third (29 percent) of the total expenditure of the Sector (excluding regular programme staff costs).

Figure 2: Financial resources to support gender equality in and through education



Source: UNESCO (2021), p.32.

While gender equality cuts across all expected results (ERs), there is one ER entirely dedicated to gender equality in and through education, ER 7: 'National capacities strengthened to address gender equality holistically in national education systems.' For this ER, the regular programme budget was US\$11 million in 2020, leaving a funding gap of US\$18.5 million. Voluntary contributions under this ER totalled US\$19.9 million, leaving a funding gap of US\$9.5 million. The funding gap designates the funds that still need to be mobilized to achieve the programmatic targets set over the biennium.

Extrabudgetary funding is critical to the implementation of many activities on gender equality in and through education, as evidenced by the many donors referred to throughout this report supporting projects in a wide range of settings and programme areas. Norway and Sweden are the only donors that provide flexible and predictable funding to UNESCO's work to advance gender equality in and through education, including new commitments from Norway to ER 7 US\$ 648,000 for 2020-21. UNESCO has a multi-donor fund modality through the UNESCO Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education (see **Box 2**); in 2020, CJ Group remained the primary funder to Fund, which supports equal access to education for girls and women, especially those hardest to reach and affected by conflict and disaster. Other private sector companies committing to support UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education this year include Intel and Prada.

UNESCO will continue to support the mobilisation of resources for gender equality in and through education to achieve the ambitions outlined in the UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019–2025.

In 2020, UNESCO'S Education Sector invested

US\$ 42.9 million to advance Priority

Gender Equality

Highlights: Better data to inform action

The key ingredients for policymaking, planning and the delivery of strategic interventions to advance gender equality in and through education are high quality and timely data and evidence. This section presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2020 to ensure better data to inform action.

Monitoring SDG 4

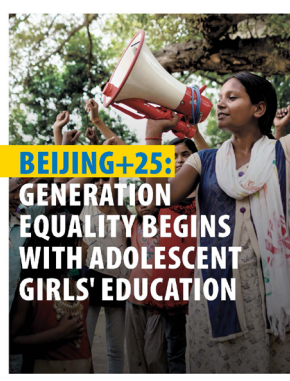
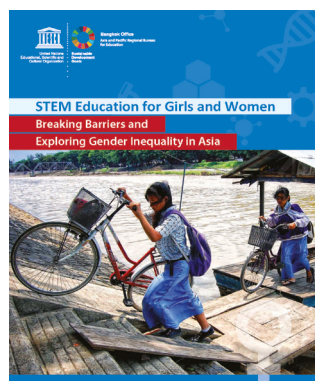
UNESCO continued to lead the global monitoring of progress towards SDG 4, providing internationally comparable sex-disaggregated statistics, analysis of progress and capacity building. The UIS data release includes 25 SDG 4 indicators disaggregated by sex, across 160 countries.

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Strengthening national data capacity to understand and address gender inequality

UNESCO helped to strengthen relevant tools, including Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), to better understand and address gender inequality in education in countries including Cambodia, Kenya, Myanmar, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda. One notable innovation was in Myanmar where, under the Capacity Development for Education (CapED) programme, UNESCO supported the Ministry of Education with the design and development of a sector-wide, decentralized and integrated EMIS that is software-based, and allows for comprehensive gender analysis.

Select UNESCO publications



UNESCO assisted countries to collect and use data for national strategies and policies. This included sex-disaggregated data on SDG 4 indicators for the National Strategy for Development of Education Statistics in Bangladesh. All indicators concerning teaching staff were disaggregated with technical support from UNESCO's CapED programme for Mali's national teacher policy. UNESCO ensured that education sector plans included sex-disaggregated data, for example, in Afghanistan and Uganda.

UNESCO supported data collection on learning achievements. The 2019 Regional Comparative and Explorative Study was implemented by the Latin American Laboratory for the Quality of Education, a network coordinated by UNESCO, in all Latin American countries to explore the learning achievement of 3rd and 6th grade students in math, language, science and socio-emotional skills. The main findings will be released through a publication in 2021, including a gender review for each subject and school grade.

Reviewing 25 years of progress since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The year 2020 marked 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. To review progress, and as a contribution to UNESCO's 2020 *Global Education Monitoring Report's Gender Report*, UNESCO and the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report commissioned a series of *case studies* to review how selected strategies were implemented in 11 countries: Argentina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Comoros, Ethiopia, Germany, Nepal, Sierra Leone, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom. The case studies

covered early pregnancy and education; gender-sensitive school and career counselling for girls and women to access male-dominated fields of studies including TVET and STEM; the development of textbooks and teaching aids that are free of gender-based stereotypes and bias; and women's presence in educational workforce and leadership and decision-making positions.

UNESCO published with the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and Plan International, *Beijing+25: Generation equality begins with adolescent girls' education*, which reviewed progress, obstacles and levers of action to advance adolescent girls' education. The report provided recommendations for the Action Coalitions of the Generation Equality Forum, taking place in 2021, convening governments, corporations and change makers from around the world to define and announce ambitious investments and policies to advance gender equality. With partners, UNESCO developed recommendations for the integration of education across the six Action Coalitions of the Generation Equality Forum and undertook advocacy, including through an Open Letter, which was signed by over 100 stakeholders in 2020.

Conducting research and foresight

UNESCO has produced a range of quantitative and qualitative research and analysis on gender equality in education. This includes analytical reports on girls' participation and achievement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), including a report of *regional case studies in Asia* and an analysis of *girls' participation in STEM-focused TVET*. This builds on UNESCO's 2017 *Cracking the Code* publication, which was the first global study to document factors contributing to low rates of participation of girls and women in these fields.

The UIS also carried out analysis of data on out-of-school children in crisis-affected countries that was published in a *20-year anniversary report* by the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. The data highlighted disparities between boys and girls and demonstrated that girls in crisis-affected contexts are more likely than boys to be out of school. The UIS also contributed to *The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics*, published by the UN Statistics Division.

Documenting progress and practices to advance women's literacy and education

Within the framework of the fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) conducted a survey in 160 countries to collect disaggregated information on the participation of women and men in adult learning and education programmes. Analysis of the survey will be launched in 2022. To empower women through learning, eliminate gender-based discrimination and foster equitable, inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities, UIL launched a *video tutorial* in six languages through the Global Network of Learning Cities.

Advancing understanding of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures

Through the UNESCO Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship, UNESCO has advanced understanding of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures. An issue note addressing the gender dimensions of school closures was released and discussed with over 150 government officials, practitioners and experts. Gender was integrated into over 20 UNESCO COVID-19 Education issue notes, and COVID-19 school closures with sex-disaggregated information were reported, with detailed analysis provided upon request to Member States. Finally, UNESCO commissioned a global study on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures, which will be published in 2021 along with a systematic review of the broad gendered impacts of extended school closures.

Highlights: Better legal, policy and planning frameworks to advance rights

The right to education lies at the heart of UNESCO's mission, and is enshrined in international law through numerous legally binding international treaties. This section presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2020 to ensure better legal, policy and planning frameworks to advance rights.

Monitoring the right to education

UNESCO continued to develop *Her Atlas*, which is an interactive atlas of girls' and women's right to education and a monitoring and advocacy tool. As of 31 December 2020, 122 country profiles were available online examining the educational rights of girls and women around the world.

UNESCO also provided technical support to reviews of the implementation of the right to education in legal frameworks, with a focus on gender, in different contexts including Burundi. Furthermore, UNESCO leveraged its conventions to monitor relevant action. The tenth consultation on the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education was conducted, including a gender perspective.

122 country profiles on the right to education for girls and women online

Protecting the right to education, including in emergencies

UNESCO developed *guidelines on strengthening the right to education* in national systems with a focus on gender equality. UNESCO, through CapED, launched a planning and capacity-building process for Education in Emergencies, which resulted in the development of an Emergency Preparedness and Response Framework in Myanmar.

UNESCO is an active member of the UN Gender-Sensitive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism Working Group. In 2020, UNESCO contributed to the conceptualization of and participated in the Global Digital Consultation on 'Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counterterrorism responses'. Investment in high-quality and inclusive education was identified as a top priority for prevention efforts and the empowerment of women's and girls' rights.

Providing technical assistance for gender-responsive education sector plans

The UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) plays a lead role in supporting countries to establish gender-responsive education sector plans. In 2020, IIEP-UNESCO held its first University on gender-responsive education sector planning with the representation of 16 francophone African countries, 56 percent of whom were women planners. Moreover, an online course to strengthen alternative and non-formal education for youth and adults in sector plans, including mainstreaming gender equality, was launched by UIL and IIEP-UNESCO. IIEP-UNESCO is responsible for the technical leadership of the Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI), established during the 2019 G7 summit. GCI promotes gender-responsive education

sector planning and progress towards gender equality in the educational systems of eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In 2020, with support from UNESCO, gender was mainstreamed in the education sector plans of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

UNESCO is advancing gender mainstreaming in education planning and programming through the newly reactivated Gender in Education Network in Asia-Pacific (GENIA), a network of gender focal points in 19 Ministries of Education across the Asia-Pacific region hosted by UNESCO Bangkok. An online regional training on gender equality in and through education was held based on the revised GENIA toolkit.

Supporting the integration of gender in COVID-19 response plans

To support gender-responsive education COVID-19 plans, UNESCO, the Malala Fund, Plan International, the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and UNICEF, through the Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship, developed and launched *Building back equal: Girls back to school guide*. The guide was released with the African Union, and used, for example, in the Liberia national strategy for girls' education and Nepal's back to school planning. UNESCO supported the integration of gender in other plans, including in Myanmar, which introduced targeted strategies to address gender disparities. UNESCO also organized many webinars to advance COVID-19 planning. Most notably, in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO organized 22 webinars (including two specifically devoted to gender and education) to support Ministries of Education and education actors in the COVID-19 response, reaching over 100,000 participants.

UNESCO also supported many countries in their COVID-19 response, reprogramming funds to support national efforts. For example, in Afghanistan, girls and their families were supported with 'learning baskets' and radio programming, and longer-term support was provided to the Ministry of Education to accelerate distance learning for students and teachers in training. In Bangladesh, remote learning programmes for primary education, based on radio and mobile phones, were implemented to ensure learning continuity during school closures; 52 percent of participants were girls.

Facilitating the mainstreaming of gender equality in national policies and strategies

UNESCO assisted governments to advance national policy and legislation. Through the UNESCO-HNA Funds-in-Trust project, Ghana's Girls Education Unit was supported to develop a five-year Girls Education Strategy document to guide its work. In Guatemala, a National Policy of Educational Equality for Women and an Action Plan were developed with assistance from UNESCO. In Jordan, UNESCO provided technical support to the Ministry of Education on key activities related to the Strategy for Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Education 2018–2022, as part of a three-year (2019–2022) System Strengthening Partnership with the Ministry. In Liberia, UNESCO provided technical support to the development of the Strategy for Girls' Education. Mali's national teacher policy (2021–2025) was developed with the help of UNESCO's CapED, addressing gender dimensions in the training, management and deployment of teachers. In Bangladesh, UNESCO has started to review the Master Plan for ICT in education with gender equality as a cross-cutting lens of analysis.

Conducting advocacy on girls' right to education during COVID-19



UNESCO's Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship's Keeping Girls in the Picture campaign reached some 360 million people in 2020, supported by a dedicated *website*, *social media pack*, inspiring videos aggregated in a *YouTube playlist*, public service announcements, testimonials from the field, and *youth and community radio toolkits*. Girls shared their own stories about their lives during lockdown and efforts to continue learning.

More than 30 influencers, including Nobel laureate *Malala Yousafzai*, joined the campaign. H.E. Dr Joyce Banda, former President of Malawi, and Nadia Nadim, UNESCO champion for girls' education and professional football player, raised their voices for girls' education through a *Facebook Live* interview on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child. Partners involved in the campaign included *Gulli Africa*, *Prada*, and *CJ Group*, supporting the adaptation of the campaign for different audiences and the mobilization of resources for further advocacy.

Policymakers were reached through the integration of the campaign into the High-Level segment and technical segment on inclusion, equity and gender equality of the 2020 Global Education Meeting, the Placing gender equality at the heart of education for a new generation (12 October) online event hosted by UNESCO, the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, and Plan International France, and other events such as the online Educate4Equality: UNGEI@20 Forum. In addition, 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 during Mobile Learning Week.

UNESCO continued to engage in campaigning and advocacy for girls' education in many settings including Afghanistan, Mexico and Nepal. Over 875,000 children, parents and other community members were reached through campaigns on women's empowerment and girls' right to education in Nepal, Nigeria and the United Republic of Tanzania.

UNESCO reached over 360 million people in 2020 through its Keeping Girls in the Picture campaign



Box 2: Leaving no one behind

UNESCO works to improve access to education for girls. In Iraq, for instance, UNESCO has improved access to education for out-of-school children. Over 100,000 children, of which 45 percent were girls, were enrolled in formal schooling or accelerated learning over the last two school years.

Over 45,000 out-of-school girls enrolled in Iraq

A major instrument for UNESCO is the UNESCO Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education, established in 2012, with a significant initial investment from the Government of Pakistan of US\$10 million.

The Fund aims to expand girls' access to quality and gender-responsive education and ensure safe learning environments, especially among the hard-to-reach and those affected by conflict and disaster.

UNESCO established the Girls' Right to Education Programme in Pakistan in 2015 through the Fund. The programme started with US\$7 million and is now over US\$18 million with additional support from KOICA, the Norwegian Embassy, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, Qatar Foundation's Educate a Child programme and Volvo. The programme has supported the enrolment of over 50,000 marginalized girls; trained 2,400 female teachers and 11,000 School Management Committee members; repaired over 600 classrooms; and held over 26,000 advocacy events.

In Guatemala, in partnership with municipalities and local educational institutions, two UNESCO-Malala Centers were created, expanding the education of more than 500 indigenous girls, adolescents and young women. In Viet Nam, UNESCO is cooperating with the Ministry of Education and Training and its Departments of Education and Training to support education for ethnic minority girls, and address limited employment opportunities for ethnic minority girls and women. In 2020, UNESCO initiated the countries first online training course on gender-responsive counselling for lower secondary teachers, benefiting over 700 teachers and school administrators.

Highlights: Better teaching and learning practices to empower

For education to empower people, it must challenge and change unequal power relations, and address practices, norms and expectations that prevent girls, boys, women and men from realizing their full potential. It must ensure that all learners achieve the competencies needed for today and tomorrow. This section presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2020 to ensure better teaching and learning practices to empower.

Supporting curriculum and textbook reform to integrate gender equality and rights

UNESCO assisted efforts to ensure curriculum, textbooks and teaching and learning materials promote gender equality in many contexts, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Iraq, Myanmar and in eight Latin American countries. For example, UNESCO worked with the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan to integrate gender equality in the Curriculum Framework for General Education, which will guide the national curriculum of over 9 million students. In Myanmar, UNESCO supported the development and validation of a draft Teacher Competency Standards Framework; a gender review of curriculum materials in Education Degree Colleges; the strengthening of the capacity of 25 Education Degree Colleges to address gender through teacher policy, curriculum development and training; and a gender review framework for curriculum reform. A *training manual* on gender mainstreaming in teacher education was approved and published in Burmese and English. UNESCO also built the capacity of National Curriculum and Textbook Board officials to mainstream gender into curricular plans for global citizenship education in Bangladesh and supported eight Latin American countries to implement the Education Contingency Plan adopted by Ministers of Education in September 2020, which includes citizenship education and recommendations to advance gender equality.

UNESCO also assisted with the reviews of teaching and learning materials for gender bias and stereotypes. A gender analysis tool for curriculum has been developed in Jordan as part of a one-year project between the Ministry of Education and UN Women, with technical support from UNESCO. As part of the COVID-19 response, UNESCO mapped and assessed distance learning material from a gender and inclusion perspective in Nepal. In Iraq, UNESCO



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Box 3: Joint Programme for Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education

The Joint Programme on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education is a partnership between UNESCO, UN Women and UNFPA, supported with US\$15 million from the Republic of Korea through the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). Implemented in Mali, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania from 2016 to 2021, the project aims to ensure that girls and young women benefit from a full cycle of quality education; empower girls and young women with relevant knowledge and skills; and support girls and young women in their transitions into adulthood and the labour market, and to fully participate in society.

To date, over 12,600 out-of-school girls and young women gained access through the programme to non-formal basic education including literacy, vocational training and reproductive health issues. Over 5,600 teachers, school administrators and non-formal education facilitators have received training on a variety of themes to support girls' increased access to improved quality education, including on CSE and SRGBV in the three countries.

Over 13,000 students benefitted from improved water and sanitation facilities built in 24 schools in Mali. More than 1,000 school management committee members were trained on monitoring school performance and gender practices. An SRGBV prevention and monitoring mechanism was established in Mali with 6 pilot schools identified for the set-up of a SRGBV reporting and monitoring system, followed by training of over 500 teachers on the system. Awareness campaigns on gender-based violence reached 45,000 girls in Mali.

School-based interventions benefited some 57,000 school learners through curriculum integrated with comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), teacher training and adolescent-friendly learning spaces in Nepal, while 2,000 central and local government officials were trained to mainstream CSE and address gender-based violence at the policy level.

In the United Republic of Tanzania, 100 government officials were trained to promote the implementation of gender-responsive plans and budgets in support of girls' education. UNESCO also developed a prototype early childhood care and education system with a focus on gender equality. Data collection mechanisms to capture information on out-of-school girls and young mothers, including their access to non-formal education, were also strengthened. Four ICT-based learning centres were established supporting out-of-school programmes in the United Republic of Tanzania. And over 210,000 learners benefited from improved access to sexuality education and information.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, awareness-raising campaigns related to health and the education of girls reached over 240,000 people in Mali, Nepal and United Republic of Tanzania. In Mali, 3,600 girls benefited from access to intensive courses. In Nepal, over 2,300 girls received immediate relief assistance and information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and during school closures, over 90,000 mobile phone users were reached to encourage girls and boys to participate in radio lessons. For more on Nepal, see **Figure 3**.

reviewed primary school training materials including the school management guide to incorporate a gender-responsive approach to preventing violent extremism through education. Finally, UNESCO facilitated the design of new gender-responsive literacy and numeracy textbooks for non-formal education in Cambodia and trained over 700 non-formal education teachers.

Building teacher capacity for gender-responsive pedagogy

In 2020, UNESCO trained over 1,700 teachers and administrators on gender equality in education in Ghana, Myanmar and Viet Nam. Under the CapED COVID-19 response programme, gender-responsive training was provided to teachers in South Sudan to ensure that girls attend distance learning sessions.

The HNA Group supported UNESCO to accelerate gender equality in education in Africa and Asia in 2015–2020, with a strong focus on teachers' capacity development, through a US\$5 million five-year project, including over US\$260,000 in 2020. In 2020, through this project, over 5,000 teachers were trained on gender-responsive media and information literacy, gender-responsive pedagogy and gender-responsive planning and management and teacher education courses. This work will continue through a stand-alone course, 'Gender and Education', with corresponding 'Guidelines on Developing a Course on Gender Equality and Education at Teacher Education Institutions', delivered at teacher education institutions in Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan.

In Viet Nam, UNESCO developed an e-learning course on gender-responsive school counselling for lower secondary school teachers with support from the Department of Teachers and Educational Administrators in the Ministry of Education and Training and the Hanoi Open University. The course has been endorsed by the government and will be rolled out in three northern provinces, aiming in particular to reach schools serving ethnic minority children.

Ending school-related gender-based violence

UNESCO is generating knowledge and standards to end school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), and building education systems' capacity to ensure safe, inclusive learning environments. UNESCO continues to co-chair the Global Working Group to End SRGBV

alongside UNGEI, which supports coordination around SRGBV and strategic partnerships. In 2020, for the working group, UNESCO and the GEM report published a *paper on SRGBV*, its impact on those affected and programmes to address it. Building on interest raised through the 2019 UNESCO report *Behind the Numbers: ending school violence and bullying*, UNESCO co-hosted, with France, an international conference to mark the first-ever International Day against Violence and Bullying at School including Cyberbullying in November 2020, attracting over 75,000 participants.

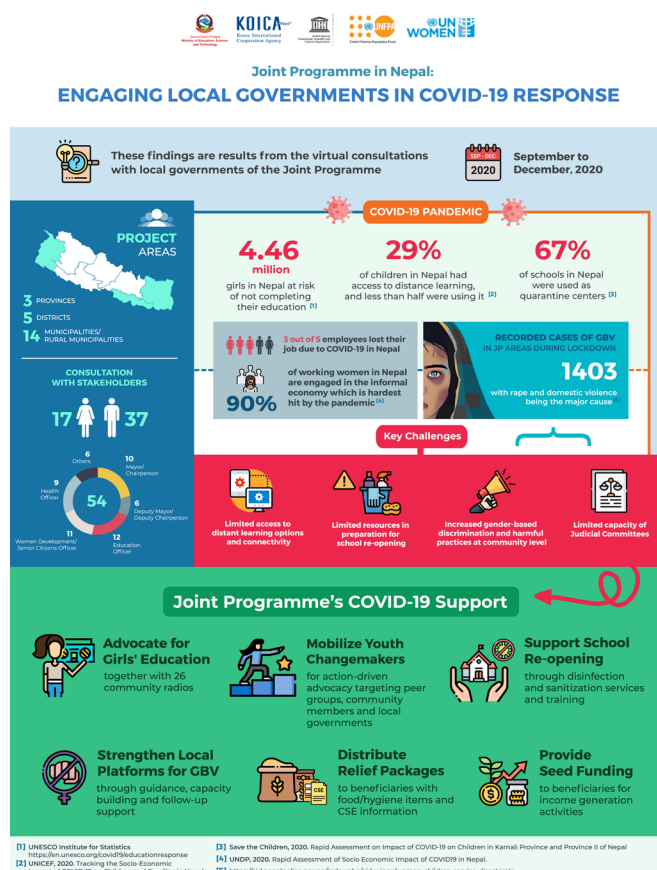
UNESCO helped enhanced the evidence base on the role of teachers in ensuring safe learning environments through a global survey of nearly 35,000 teachers in 148 countries, alongside focus group discussions with teachers in Nepal, Thailand, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. Results will inform UNESCO activities in the Safe to Learn campaign.

UNESCO built the capacity of teacher and education sector staff to prevent and respond to school-related gender-based violence. In India, UNESCO developed a *training toolkit* on the prevention of SRGBV for teachers and students in collaboration with the National Council of Educational Research and Training and State Education Departments of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. UNESCO developed teacher guides on the prevention of SRGBV in the Russian Federation and Ukraine. UNESCO trained over 700 teachers in Mali, Mozambique and Viet Nam on SRGBV and how to report on it, and in Viet Nam an additional nearly 300 students were also trained on soft skills to prevent SRGBV.

The curriculum tool '*Connect with Respect*', which assists teachers to prevent and address SRGBV, and build skills for respectful relationships, was piloted in Eswatini and Zambia with over 150 teachers and over 4,000 students. It was effective in increasing knowledge and understanding of gender and social norms; positively influencing learners' attitudes and behaviours; and positively influencing teachers' professional practices, increasing teachers' confidence and competencies. In Zambia, over 87 percent of the teachers reported positive impact, and in Eswatini, some teachers reported abandoning practices such as corporal punishment. In Tanzania and Togo, which had already piloted the tool, follow-up trainings for students reached 4,700 learners in Tanzania and nearly 400 teachers in Togo across 100 schools.

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Figure 3: Joint Programme in Nepal: Engaging local governments in the COVID-19 response



Source: UNESCO (2021), p.9.

Comprehensive sexuality education

UNESCO leads global efforts to promote the scale-up of gender-responsive comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and supported over 80 countries in 2020 to strengthen good-quality CSE. UNESCO is facilitating a better coordinated and informed global approach to CSE through the Global Partnership Forum, co-convened with UNFPA, and launched in December 2020. The Forum aims to enhance collaboration and harmonization; grow strategic information and research; strengthen and expand evidence-informed policy, operational and technical guidance; and increase coordinated advocacy.

UNESCO is also the co-convenor of a major new high-level advocacy initiative, ‘Education Plus’, which is promoting universal access to quality secondary education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and a ‘plus’ package of empowerment interventions that young women need to build healthy, vibrant futures. UNESCO will contribute to this initiative by synergizing efforts with ongoing initiatives in the area of girls’ education and quality comprehensive sexuality education, notably the ‘Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future’ (O3) programme (see **Box 4**).



Box 4: Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future (O3) programme

Between 2018 and 2023, Sweden, UNAIDS, Norway, France and Irish Aid and others have pledged over US\$ 75 million towards UNESCO’s work on Education for Health and Wellbeing, of which more than US\$ 57 million towards the “Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future Programme.” The O3 programme supports the implementation of good-quality CSE in 33 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Since the programme’s launch in 2018, over 28 million learners have been reached with life skills–based HIV and sexuality education, already exceeding the goal set for 2022. Several tools in 2020 guided action: the *Our Talks Manual*, aiming to improve parent–child communication on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including a digital format established during COVID-19; an *implementation guide* and a monitoring tool; and *new minimum standards guidelines* on school-related gender-based violence, established with funding from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, and developed in collaboration with a local NGO, the Youth and Cultural Development Foundation. In 2020, the programme began its rollout in Botswana, Eswatini, Malawi and Namibia.

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To review and catalyse progress on CSE, UNESCO launched the preparation of a milestone global report which will provide a composite picture of the status of CSE in 155 countries. UNESCO, with UNFPA and IPPF, engaged 30 countries in the Asia-Pacific region in a *regional review on the status of CSE implementation* and a multi-stakeholder dialogue on CSE delivery during COVID-19.

In 2020, UNESCO convened the international symposium, 'Switched On: Sexuality Education in the Digital Space', in Istanbul, Turkey, with UNFPA in partnership with International Planned Parenthood Federation's European Network and the Federal Centre for Health Education (Germany). With a potential digital reach of 2.1 million people, the symposium explored opportunities and challenges for capitalizing on digital spaces to strengthen efforts to deliver CSE to adolescents and young people. UNESCO also facilitated the development and promotion of digital educational and awareness-raising resources in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and media campaigns, reaching 3.5 million young people.

Capacity development to deliver CSE is a core area of work. In 2020, UNESCO trained over 800 teachers in Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mozambique, Myanmar and South Sudan on CSE and built capacity among religious leaders in Kenya and local government authorities in the United Republic of Tanzania. UNESCO provided technical support to Cognita, a Chilean network of subsidized schools serving 17,000 vulnerable students to review and strengthen their sexuality education and life skills programme. In 2020 in Brasilia and São Paulo, Brazil, UNESCO supported 150 HIV prevention activities with a focus on CSE and HIV treatment education for key populations, including young men who have sex with men, female sex workers and transgender people.

Addressing early and unintended pregnancy

UNESCO has been undertaking broader efforts to ensure that all adolescents are empowered and have the knowledge, information, agency and support to prevent early and unintended pregnancy. Through the Let's Talk! multimedia and social mobilization campaign in 21 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, UNESCO has been working with champions to address early and unintended pregnancies. Over 10 million people were reached with messages from the campaign in 2020. A *mid-term evaluation* of the campaign in July 2020 found that the campaign enabled policymakers at regional and country levels to be more open to dialogue on early and unintended pregnancy, and that the campaign demonstrated positive signs towards changes in early and unintended pregnancy. Country efforts are at scale: for example, UNESCO trained over 80,000 adolescents on reproductive health education to prevent early unintended pregnancies in Ghana.

Building girls' and women's digital skills



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UNESCO helped build girls' and women's digital skills, which are more important than ever before in the context of COVID-19. In 2020, UNESCO continued to co-lead the EQUALS Skills Coalition with the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, which aims to close gender gaps in digital skills. UNESCO also developed and launched the *EQUALS Digital Skills Hub*, an online platform with resources, tools, case studies and good practice to advance girls' digital skills.

UNESCO leveraged cooperation through UNESCO's Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship. Over 1,500 girls aged 10 to 18 in Brazil, India, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan built their digital skills through Technovation's *five-week programme*, supported by mentors from Ericsson, SAP and

other Coalition industry partners. Cooperation was also facilitated for grassroots impact and the training of 100 women on leadership skills for sustainable development through the 10-month *Women@Dior* educational programme. And UNESCO mobilized Coalition partners to organize remote workshops on distance learning solutions, particularly focusing on gender equality and teacher empowerment, in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Nauru, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tajikistan, Tonga and Uzbekistan.

UNESCO took steps to close the gender digital divide through ICT education efforts. UNESCO partnered with Huawei to launch a three-year project (2020–2023) to support Member States to design, pilot test and scale up technology-enabled open school systems that connect school- and home-based learning; female teachers and students are priority groups for the project. The joint UNESCO–Chengdu Fund project on integrating artificial intelligence (AI) and digital innovations to strengthen inclusion and equity of education in Africa promotes AI in Mauritius and Rwanda. In 2020, a needs assessment for inclusive education and gender equality was completed in Rwanda which will facilitate the development of implementation strategies and guidelines on AI and digital innovations.

Expanding girls' and women's participation in STEM education

In addition to efforts to build the evidence base on girls' and women's participation in STEM education as described previously, UNESCO expanded efforts to increase girls' and women's participation in STEM education in countries where they are a minority in higher education. In Africa, UNESCO secured funds from the Government of Bulgaria to deepen teacher capacity in gender-responsive STEM education, building on three successful 2018–19 regional trainings for over 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, which reached 200 teacher educators, teachers and school administrators. Through 2020 Africa Code Week, over 100 teachers were supported from 30 African countries.

Through support to government-led extracurricular STEM camps, school-based clinics and mentorship programmes, particularly on the African continent, UNESCO is building girls' interests in the STEM fields and their understanding of STEM careers. UNESCO's scientific camps of excellence in Kenya, were transformed into a digital mentorship programme due to COVID-19, with excellent results.

The programme aims to provide girls and boys with information on different STEM fields and to dismantle gender stereotypes, and included a psychosocial support component to respond to challenges faced by students during the pandemic. The UNESCO digital STEM mentorship programme was implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation, the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, Safaricom and the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science programme, reaching over 10 million students. It included a short code messaging platform, community radio messages and connecting with role models for mentorship.

Over 10 million students were reached with STEM mentorship activities in Kenya

Boosting gender equality through technical and vocational education and training

One of UNESCO's priorities outlined in its *Strategy for TVET* (2016–2021) is mainstreaming gender equality and promoting equity through policies and programmes related to technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In Jordan, Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanian youth, of which over 50 percent were women, have been awarded internationally accredited certificates in different TVET programmes within the project 'Provision of TVET, On-the-Job Training, and Entrepreneurship Education to Youth Affected by the Syria Crisis', funded by the Republic of Korea. Over 50 percent of the participants of the UNESCO TVET programme in South Sudan, supported through CapED and the Peace Building Fund, were women and young girls, and in Nepal nearly 50 percent of those who completed TVET trade programmes were female. UNESCO ensured meaningful participation of women in the drafting of the Unified National TVET Policy in South Sudan. In Madagascar, women living around the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Tsingy de Bemaraha were trained on crafts and tourism. Over 5,000 women were reached as potential TVET trainees through radio programmes and through face-to-face outreach guidance and counselling events in Malawi. In Chile, UNESCO with the Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism initiated a pilot mentoring project to provide career guidance and develop entrepreneurial skills of female high school TVET students. UNESCO also promoted women's participation in TVET in Argentina, Mexico and Uruguay.

Promoting gender equality in and through higher education

As well as promoting young women's representation in STEM fields in higher education, UNESCO supports other efforts to promote gender equality in and through higher education. In Egypt, UNESCO supported upgrades of the necessary e-learning infrastructure for the National E-Learning Center at Egypt's Supreme Council of Universities. 1,500 faculty members will be trained, aiming for a high percentage of female faculty. Through the UNESCO-Shenzhen Project on Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 10 countries have followed project guidance on adopting a gender-responsive approach to planning and designing quality assurance frameworks. UNESCO is conducting a policy analysis of access and inclusion in higher education; 67 Member States and 150 universities have completed the survey. The results will be presented in a report to the Third World Higher Education Conference in October 2021. Finally, UNESCO has developed several relevant reports including on women's participation in senior management positions of higher education institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean (to be launched in 2021) and on gender interactions at universities in Brazil.

Supporting non-formal and life-long learning

UNESCO enrolled over 90,000 girls and women in out-of-school programmes in Nigeria and provided over 37,000 out-of-school girls and young women with remedial lessons and life skills programmes. UNESCO has continued to implement the 'Better Life for Out-of-School Girls to Fight Against Poverty and Injustice in the Philippines' project, in partnership with the Philippine's Department of Education and funded by KOICA. The project seeks to provide significant life-long learning opportunities, enabling out-of-school girls and those at risk of dropping out to develop individual capacities, not only in basic skills for daily living such as in reading, writing and counting, but also in life skills that are necessary for the better future of out-of-school girls.

The action plan of the *UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020–2025)* was endorsed by the Executive Board at its 209th session in 2020. Gender is addressed specifically by 'Strategic priority area 2: Addressing the learning needs of disadvantaged groups, particularly women and girls. Implementation of the strategy has

started in Afghanistan, Chad, Chile, Haiti, Mozambique and South Sudan. Aligned with the UNESCO strategy, also in 2020, within the framework of the Global Alliance for Literacy (GAL), the *GAL strategy for 2020–2025* was finalized and launched; the strategy aims to strengthen gender-responsive policies in the 29 GAL member countries.

In 2020, UNESCO offered several capacity-development opportunities, for example, 26 countries participated in an online course for Member States launched by UNESCO together with the Commonwealth of Learning on planning family and intergenerational literacy and learning programmes. In Afghanistan, UNESCO has trained over 100 trainers on the provision of basic general literacy to youth and adult learners, ensuring gender-responsive delivery of literacy to 15,000 youth and adults. With the Literacy Movement Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNESCO focused on improving the quality of literacy programmes for female learners, developing a new course and application and distributing 30,000 booklets.

UNESCO is leveraging technology for learning. UNESCO established four ICT-based literacy and numeracy centres in United Republic of Tanzania, equipping over 1,700 out-of-school adolescent girls and young women with literacy and numeracy skills. UNESCO has developed a partnership with the Adult Education Authority of Egypt and the Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education to train facilitators from the Adult Education Authority to use ICT-based curricula for marginalized women's and girls' literacy and empowerment, previously developed with support from the UNESCO Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education. UNESCO also equipped 1,500 women with functional literacy skills in Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire and Mozambique. Nearly 90 percent of the women trained within the project on market traders in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, successfully passed the evaluation test nine months after the training.

UNESCO together with French Development Agency has initiated a study on literacy strategies in the G5 Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. The analysis focuses particularly on young people, especially young women, who continue to constitute a particularly disadvantaged population segment in the Sahel.



Box 5: UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education

The *UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education*, funded by the government of the People's Republic of China, has been renewed for another five years (2021–2025). Established in 2015, the UNESCO Prize rewards outstanding innovation and contributions made by individuals, institutions and organizations to advance girls' and women's education. The prize is conferred annually to two laureates and consists of an award of US\$50,000 each. In 2020, the prize went to the Shilpa Sayura Foundation, Sri Lanka and the Girl Child Network, Kenya.

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Challenges and opportunities

UNESCO's work to advance gender equality in and through education has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The closing of schools constrained UNESCO's ability to deliver activities as planned, in particular capacity-development, policy dialogue and other interventions requiring convening and face-to-face interaction. Some analytical work which required interviews, focus groups or field consultations was also not possible. Most of these activities have been repurposed to ensure outcomes within the biennium, including support to countries' COVID-19 response plans.

At the same time, the pandemic sparked innovation and gave rise to new multi-stakeholder partnerships like the Global Coalition for Education's Gender Flagship, including deepened engagement from the private sector to advance action for gender equality in education. UNESCO's strong

network of national and local partners has also helped with continuity of programming.

The pandemic required the development of a rapid and flexible response capacity to meet emerging data needs and the building of partnerships to provide an integrated approach to data collection, analysis, and guidance. Data gaps remain, however, a key challenge. Sex-disaggregated data on school-drop out in particular is needed to design strategies to get all girls and boys back to school. Other data challenges include: the collection of data on the participation and performance of girls and women in STEM-related TVET; sex-disaggregated data on teachers; and data on SRGBV due to limited consensus on how to define the gendered aspects of violence.

Focusing on gender remains politically sensitive in some countries and has become more challenging in others, which makes it difficult to design and develop policies, programmes, and projects on gender equality. In some countries a rising opposition to CSE has been observed. There is also limited effort to include sexual orientation, gender identity and expression in the education agenda.

While the concept of gender parity seems to be global understood, gender equality in all its dimensions still needs to be better comprehended. For instance, policy makers often understand gender equality in education as being about girls and women, whereas it is also about boys' and men's education. Moreover, efforts to empower women and girls through education can be more successful when also engaging men and boys.

Education systems have yet to become fully gender-transformative. A main challenge is the institutionalization of gender equality. While many countries include gender-related indicators in projects, a system-level change is yet to be achieved. This requires both political and administrative commitment to take action.

UNESCO's use of digital platforms has provided opportunities for engaging with people who would have not been reached otherwise. However, the pandemic also shed light on the urgency to close the digital gender divide, including gaps in access to technology for education, as well as gender gaps in STEM.

Lack of resources and staff was a barrier for implementation of UNESCO's programmes and led to the prioritization of implementation in several contexts. The UNESCO strategy has helped with defining priorities and clearly still remains relevant and needs to be fully funded.

Next steps for UNESCO's work

The COVID-19 pandemic is a significant challenge that has required focusing on ensuring girls' continuity of learning and return to school and broader efforts to support system resilience and gender-responsiveness. In response to COVID-19, UNESCO launched the Global Education Coalition which has enabled us to work more efficiently with partners to deliver interventions, such as the *Building Back Equal Guide*. Countries now need to be supported in implementing this guide and to ensure that girls continue learning. This will require better understanding the consequences of the pandemic on learning and education.

Reprogramming of activities on gender equality in and through education is not envisaged in 2021, as many of the activities have already been repurposed in 2020 and many are ongoing through virtual modalities. Work for gender equality in and through education continues through the renewed and strengthened partnerships garnered in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Numerous online platforms have been established during COVID-19. They should continue to be used strategically to train and reach out to adolescent girls and boys on gender and education. Online technical support must be made continually available to ensure the implementation of project activities.

While girls and women continue to face the worst forms of education exclusion, there is increasing evidence of boys' disengagement from education in several contexts. This will require different approaches to ensure gender equality in and through education.

Advocacy work on gender equality with higher-level officials in the government needs to be strengthened to facilitate the development and implementation of policy on gender equality in and through education.

The significance of timely, reliable and quality sex-disaggregated data needs to be promoted. Coordination between the UIS and the education sector needs to be strengthened in the development of data needs to support gender-responsive strategies and monitoring of results, while reducing the burden of reporting for Member States.

The capacity of UNESCO staff, gender focal points and partners on mainstreaming gender equality and programming gender equality in and through education needs to be reinforced. Moreover, gender needs to be better integrated into UNESCO's results frameworks.

More financial and human resources for gender equality in and through education at UNESCO should be mobilized. Partnerships need to be diversified and leveraged to pool resources.

UNESCO will continue to scale up good practice, monitor and leverage results, and support Member States to ensure transformative action to achieve gender equality in and through education.

If you would like to support UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education or have any questions, please contact the Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality: gender.ed@unesco.org



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United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

UNESCO's efforts to achieve gender equality in and through education

2020 Highlights

This report presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2020 to advance gender equality in and through education.

UNESCO's work in this area is guided by the UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019–2025, and supported by Her Education, Our Future, which was launched in parallel with the strategy, to leverage political and financial commitments, cooperation and joint action for girls' and women's education.

If you would like to know more about or further support UNESCO's work to achieve gender equality in and through education, please get in touch!

Stay in touch

UNESCO
7, place de Fontenoy - 75352 Paris 07 SP France

 gender.ed@unesco.org



 @UNESCO



@UNESCO

