

This fact sheet was made in the context of the 25-year anniversary of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, the most ambitious roadmap for the empowerment of girls and women.



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



# #HerEducationOurFuture

The latest facts on gender equality in education

## FACT SHEET ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

There has been a continuous move towards gender parity in the past generation.

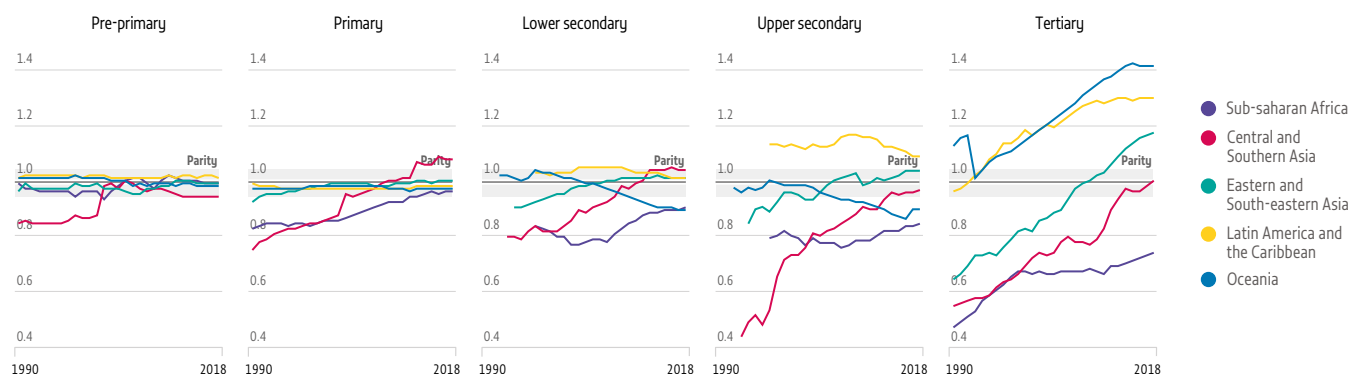
- Girls' enrolment rates in primary and secondary have almost doubled in low-income countries over the past 25 years. Gender gaps in primary enrolment have halved.<sup>1</sup>
- Some regions have made dramatic improvements: Central and Southern Asia has gone from having girls extremely far behind in 1995, to achieving gender parity in lower secondary education mostly thanks to dramatic progress in India.<sup>2</sup>



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### Progress towards gender parity varies around the world

Gender parity index for gross enrolment ratios by level



Source: UIS database, 2019.

Animated chart available at: <https://www.education-progress.org/en/articles/equity/>

This pace of change is not fast enough.

- The primary enrolment rate of girls over the past 25 years has only increased ten percentage points from 78% to 88%, less than half a point per year.<sup>3</sup>
- At this rate, getting every girl into primary school will not happen until 2050.<sup>4</sup>

# We are a long way from gender equality in education

## ACCESS

- While gender parity has been achieved globally, on average, just two in three countries have achieved gender parity in primary, one in two in lower secondary, and one in four in upper secondary education enrolment.<sup>5</sup>
- A quarter of countries have a large disparity against boys in upper secondary education, with no change since 2000.<sup>6</sup>
- In sub-Saharan Africa, for every 100 boys of primary school age out of school, there are 123 girls denied the right to education.<sup>7</sup>

## SKILLS

- Technical and vocational programmes account for 22% of upper secondary education enrolment and are disproportionately male. Globally, the share of females enrolled in upper secondary technical and vocational programmes is 43%, with regional shares ranging from 32% in Central and Southern Asia to 50% in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Within the female student population in higher education globally, only around 30% choose science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields of study. Across more than 120 countries, women make up only just over 25% of students in tertiary engineering, manufacturing and construction programmes and in information and communications technology. The countries where women make up the smallest shares of graduates from both these programmes are largely in western Africa (Benin, Ghana, Mali) and western Europe (Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland).

## LEARNING

- Girls are doing better than boys in reading from the early years. The gap is small but significant in high-income countries in Europe, becoming larger in countries throughout Northern Africa and Western Asia. In South Africa, the score gap of 52 points is equivalent to more than a year of schooling. The trend is more evident in some countries, including Bulgaria, Slovakia and the United States.<sup>8</sup>
- Parents tend to read more often to girls, one of the factors associated with them outperforming boys in reading in primary school assessments.<sup>9</sup>

## QUALITY

- School-related gender-based violence, in its physical, sexual and psychological forms, affects children and youth around the world in terms of their school attendance, well-being and learning.
- In 2016, 18% of primary schools and 13% of secondary schools around the world had no sanitation facilities.<sup>10</sup> In 2016, around 335 million girls went to primary and secondary schools that lacked essential ingredients of menstrual hygiene management.<sup>11</sup>
- Nearly 94% of teachers in pre-primary education, but only about half those in upper secondary education, are female. Disparity between male and female teachers exists not only across education levels, but also across regions. The proportion of women among primary school teachers in low-income countries (41%) is half that in high-income countries (82%) as a result of multiple factors, including the legacy of gender disparity in access to education and norms that prevent employment of women as teachers.

# Girls' education has a huge impact on all of society

- Some countries lose more than US\$1 billion a year by failing to educate girls to the same level as boys.<sup>12</sup>

## Education increases women's **agency and decision making**:

- Achieving universal secondary education could increase by one tenth women's reported ability to make decisions within the household.<sup>13</sup>

## Educating women increases **economic growth**:

- Africa could add US\$316 billion or 10 percent to GDP in the period to 2025 if each country makes advances in women's equality to match the country in the region that has achieved the most progress towards parity.<sup>14</sup>

## Educated women are **less likely to die in childbirth**:

- If all mothers completed primary education, maternal deaths would be reduced by two-thirds, saving 98,000 lives.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, if all women completed primary education, maternal deaths would be reduced by 70%, saving almost 50,000 lives.

## Educating girls **can save millions of lives**:

- If all women had a primary education, there would be 15% fewer child deaths.
- If all women had a secondary education, child deaths would be cut in half, saving 3 million lives.

## Mother's education improves **child nutrition**:

- If all women had a primary education, 1.7 million children would be saved from stunting from malnutrition.
- If all women had a secondary education, 12 million children would be saved from stunting from malnutrition.

## Girls with higher levels of education are **less likely to have children at an early age**:

- 10% fewer girls would become pregnant under 17 years in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia if they all had a primary education.
- Universal secondary education could lead to an increase in modern contraceptive use of a fourth from the base.<sup>15</sup>

## Educating girls is a key factor in hastening the demographic transition to **lower birth rates**:

- In sub-Saharan Africa, women with no education have 6.7 births, on average. The figure falls to 5.8 for those with primary education and to 3.9 for those with secondary education.

## Girls with higher levels of education are **less likely to get married at an early age**:

- If all girls had a primary education, there would be 14% fewer child marriages.
- If all girls had a secondary education, there would be two-thirds fewer child marriages.

## Educated women are **more likely to find decent work**:

- One additional year of school can increase a woman's earnings by up to 20%.<sup>16</sup>
- When women have a secondary education level, they are 9.6 percentage points more likely to work than if they only have a primary education or less. With tertiary education, they are of 25.4 percentage points more likely to work than if they only have a primary education or less.<sup>17</sup>
- Women with secondary education could expect to make almost twice as much as those with no education, and women with tertiary education almost four times as much.<sup>18</sup>

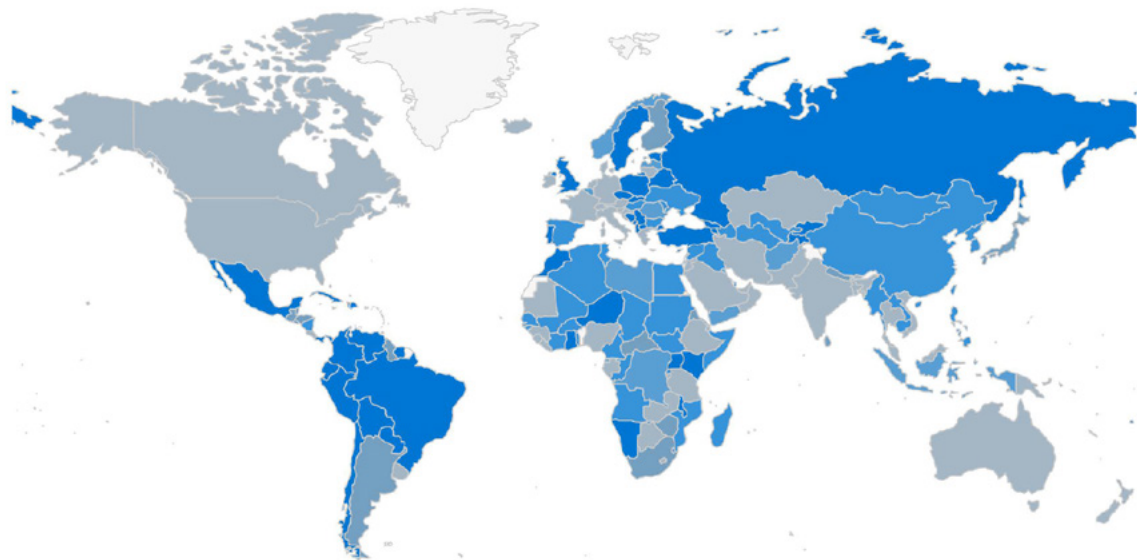
# There has been progress in countries' commitment to girls' right to education

In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action urged countries to eliminate gender discrimination in education. Today, 90 countries prohibit it in their constitution.<sup>19</sup>

Since the Beijing Platform for Action, the number of States that have ratified UNESCO Convention against discrimination in education (CADE) has increased from 82 to 105. However, this still means almost half have not signed it.<sup>20</sup>

By 1995, 150 States had ratified the UN CEDAW Convention, which provides for equal rights between men and women. It has now been ratified by 189 States Parties, but 27 countries signed it with objections to particular articles on child marriage or discrimination policy.<sup>21</sup>

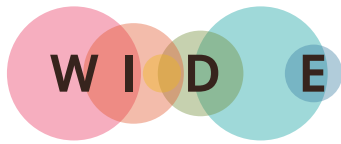
## Constitution enshrines the right to education for all girls and women



- 1. Does not enshrine right to education.
- 2. Enshrines the right to education or provides for a limited protection of this right.
- 3. Enshrines the right to education without discrimination or contains a provision on equal rights to education.
- 4. Enshrines the right to education without discrimination based on sex/gender, or equality of rights provision without distinction based on sex/gender, but it is limited to a group of persons.
- 5. Enshrines the right to education without discrimination based on sex/gender, or equality of rights provision without distinction based on sex/gender, for all within the territory.

Source: UNESCO, Her Atlas.

Note: The designations employed and the presentation of the material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.



# The bottom ten countries for girls' education

## Mean years of education of poorest females, ages 20–24

Country	Year	Mean years of education
01 Guinea	2018	0.72
02 Pakistan	2018	0.84
03 Mali	2018	1.00
04 Afghanistan	2015	1.39
05 Ethiopia	2016	1.44
06 Benin	2017	1.55
07 Chad	2015	1.63
08 Senegal	2017	1.87
09 Nigeria	2018	1.92
10 Angola	2015	2.53

Source: WIDE

## Out of school

Country	Year	Out-of-school rate (%)
<b>Primary school, approx. 6–11 yrs of age</b>		
01 Mali	2015	74%
02 Nigeria	2016	74%
03 Guinea	2016	65%
04 Benin	2018	64%
05 Pakistan	2018	59%
06 Mauritania	2015	59%
07 Senegal	2017	55%
08 Afghanistan	2015	52%
09 Ethiopia	2016	43%
10 Angola	2015	40%
<b>Lower secondary school, approx. 12–14 yrs of age</b>		
01 Mali	2015	84%
02 United Republic of Tanzania	2015	81%
03 Guinea	2016	78%
04 Nigeria	2016	78%
05 Benin	2018	73%
06 Pakistan	2018	70%
07 Mauritania	2015	63%
08 Afghanistan	2015	62%
09 Senegal	2017	58%
10 Côte d'Ivoire	2016	57%
<b>Upper secondary school, approx. 15–17 yrs of age</b>		
01 United Republic of Tanzania	2015	98%
02 Côte d'Ivoire	2016	95%
03 Guinea	2016	94%
04 Mali	2015	92%
05 Pakistan	2018	89%
06 Benin	2018	88%
07 Uganda	2016	86%
08 Nigeria	2016	86%
09 Senegal	2017	83%
10 Lao People's Democratic Republic	2017	82%

Source: UIS database released on Feb 26, 2020

The [World Inequality Database in Education \(WIDE\)](#), managed by the GEM Report and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, highlights the powerful influence of gender, combined with other factors such as ethnicity and location, over which people have little control but which play an important role in shaping their opportunities for education and life.

WIDE data shows that, in 9 countries around the world, the poorest girls spend less than 2 years in school on average. And in 10 countries, none of the poorest young women have completed upper secondary school, all but 8 of which are in sub-Saharan Africa: Belize, Burundi, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Nepal, Senegal, the U.R. Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Looking at UIS data on out-of-school numbers, in primary school, more than two-thirds of girls are not enrolled in 2 countries. In lower secondary school, more than two-thirds of girls are not enrolled in 6 countries, with Benin, Nigeria and Mali featuring on both lists. In upper secondary education, in the bottom 10 countries, no more than 2 out of 10 girls can expect to attend among those aged 15–17 years.

Girls' disengagement from education is due to so many factors, including child-marriage, early pregnancy, discriminatory gender norms in society, child labour and the lack of easy and safe access to schools near where they live. These girls need to be given a second-chance to re-join education systems, and accelerated learning opportunities so that they can catch-up on their time lost.

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