

FACTSHEET #2:

GENDER GAPS IN EDUCATION DURING COVID-19



This factsheet presents a quick summary of data and evidence from developing countries on gender gaps in learning through the Covid-19 pandemic. This national-level evidence can help contextualize data and evidence from global databases and reports which aggregate across countries and demographics. This is especially important for data in the context of Covid-19, as [data collection around access and learning were only reported by approximately a third of countries](#), and only upper-middle and high-income countries frequently reported used of these measures. This summary sheet presents national data collected by ministries, UN agencies and citizen-led assessments. Bringing together data and evidence from a diversity of actors is crucial to respond with locally-relevant programmes and policies.

Gender gaps in school re-entry post Covid-19

The papers reviewed indicate the existence of gender gaps in school re-entry post Covid-19. In many countries, girls – and adolescent girls in particular – experienced a higher rate and risk of not returning to school. These gaps often increased in food- and income-insecure contexts. School fees, early pregnancy and child marriage were often noted as some of the biggest risk factors for girls not returning to school at higher rates than boys. In other countries, boys experienced a higher risk of dropout.



Kenya: a survey of 4,000 adolescents aged 10-19 years living in urban settlements and rural counties in Kenya found that 16% of girls and 8% of boys did not return to school at reopening. Lack of school fees was cited as the major reason among 47% of girls and 21% of boysⁱ. (Population Council)



Bangladesh: one in ten girls aged 12-15 reported not going back to school once systems reopened after COVID-19 induced school closuresⁱⁱ. (UNICEF)



Ghana: national re-enrolment was high at 97%, however 60% of the dropouts were girls. 9% of girls did not re-enrol due to pregnancyⁱⁱⁱ. (UNICEF)



Malawi: the dropout rate among girls in secondary education increased by 48% (from 6.4% to 9.5% between 2020 and 2021). Marriage and pregnancy were cited as the main reasons for girls to drop out, whereas boys did not re-enrol due to financial constraints^{iv}. (UNICEF)



Mexico: of the 25% of adolescents aged 14 - 17 in Chiapas and Yucatan who had discontinued their education, boys in Chiapas had the highest dropout rate at 37.5%^v. (UNESCO)



Uganda: Gender gaps in school re-entry appear to be more pronounced among adolescent learners. 10% of grade 10 girls failed to return to school compared to 8% of grade 10 boys. 18% of grade 12 girls did not return to school, compared to 2% of grade 12 boys^{vi}. (Brookings)

i. 2021, Population Council, Promises to Keep: Impact of COVID-19 on Adolescents in Kenya

ii. 2021, UNICEF, The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery

iii. Ibid.

iv. 2022, UNICEF, Are Children Really Learning? Exploring foundational skills in the midst of a learning crisis

v. 2021, UNESCO, When schools shut: gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures

vi. 2021, The Brookings Institution, What do we know about the effects of COVID-19 on girls' return to school?

Gender gaps in learning during Covid-19

Gendered norms and expectations have also affected pupils' ability to participate in remote learning and return to school. An increased burden of household labour, mental health issues, and the gender digital divide in particular have disproportionately impacted girls' learning during school closures.



Rural Pakistan (ASER districts):

girls experienced greater learning losses than boys during the Covid-19 school closures across nearly all competencies and classes. This served to halt or even reverse an existing increasing trend in learning outcomes for girls who had, in some cases, been outdoing boys^{vii}.

(Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi)



India: fewer younger students, girls, government school students and rural students used tech-enabled tools for learning: eight (8) per cent fewer adolescent girls used WhatsApp vs. adolescent boys. 51% of adolescent girls and 59% of adolescent boys used WhatsApp, and this difference was statistically significant. In another study, only 26 per cent of girls reported that they could access the household phone whenever they wanted, compared to 37 per cent of boys^{viii}. (UNICEF)



Sierra Leone: The Sierra Leone 2020 Back to School Study, found that learning performance was better for all learners in this study than in the 2019 assessment. At the same time, school closure may have exacerbated previous inequalities. Boys performed better than girls in English and Maths, and the gender gap in performance widened among older age groups^x. (MBSSE)



Ecuador: Gender differences in remote learning are small, with females doing slightly more schoolwork. Female students also do more household tasks than males, while male students are more likely to be in paid work than females. Girls and boys are equally likely to be pursuing education in the morning, but in the late afternoon relatively more girls continue schooling as boys engage in relatively more leisure activities. In combination with the gender difference in time spent on household tasks, this may indicate a higher risk of fatigue resulting from home schooling for girls. The survey finds higher levels of depression for girls, and for indigenous students^x. (World Bank)



Ghana: grade repetition nearly tripled from pre-Covid level (rising from 3.5% to 10.5%) with boys more likely to be repeating than girls^{xi}. (Brookings)



Ethiopia: in terms of numeracy scores, learning gains for both girls and boys in Ethiopia have slowed, with the gender gap narrowing slightly. 70% of girls spent more time on household work during the pandemic, compared to only 26% of boys^{xii}. (Brookings)

vii. 2021, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, Measuring the impact of COVID-19 on education in Pakistan

viii. 2021, UNICEF, Rapid assessment of learning during school closures in the context of COVID-19

ix. 2021, MBSSE, Back to School (BTS) Study Mixed Methods Technical Report

x. 2020, World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 9252: Remote-learning, Time-Use, and Mental Health of Ecuadorian High-School Students during the COVID-19 Quarantine

xi. Ibid.

xii. Ibid.

Pandemic-related experiences of girls during Covid-19

Estimates and realities of increased school drop-out, child marriage, pregnancy, gender-based violence among girls during Covid-19 mean that several civil society organizations prioritized data understanding the pandemic-related experiences of girls in particular. The impacts of school closures, economic downturn, stay-at-home orders, and loss of livelihoods due to national lockdowns have exacerbated or compounding existing challenges for gender equality in education. Some of these challenges include harmful gender norms, [the gender digital divide](#), a lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services and products, economic precarity and child marriage, which disproportionately impact girls and their right to education.

An [ActionAid survey of 130 teachers](#) working in 82 schools in Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somaliland and Zimbabwe found:

Three in five teachers surveyed say a higher drop-out rate for girls (59%) and poorer children (61%) will be a long-term impact of the pandemic. Nearly half are concerned about increases in early pregnancy (41%) and early marriage (45%) due to the Covid-19 crisis. Over a third (35%) are worried about rising hunger.

Teachers say some of the biggest issues preventing girls from returning to school are parents unable to afford the cost (62%), unpaid care work (59%), child labour (53%) and early marriage (52%).

An [AMPLIFY Girls study](#) of 382 adolescent girls from rural communities in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania, who were school-enrolled prior to the COVID-19 closures, found:

Approximately 56% of the 108 girls who had dropped out of school were currently or recently pregnant, and approximately 30% of girls who said they were planning to return to school also reported being pregnant.

The overwhelming majority of FGD participants cited transactional sex for basic goods (such as food, clothing, and menstrual hygiene products) as the primary cause of unintended pregnancies in their communities. Economic precarity leading to transactional sex and unintended pregnancies was the most common pathway leading to girls' dropout.

UNGEI is a global, intergenerational and multistakeholder platform. Through evidence building, coordinated advocacy and collective action, the UNGEI partnership works to advance progress for girls' education and gender equality in education.

Do you have any addition data on gender, education, and Covid-19 we can amplify?
Contact gdiamond@ungei.org.

