

# What Local Feminist Educators want from Global Education Leaders



# Introduction

UNGEI's Global Feminist Coalition for Gender Transformative Education was formed in July of 2022 and convened in New York on the 20th and 21st of September. One of the reasons that UNGEI convened this coalition was to learn from grassroots civil society organizations and young feminist activists from the Global South on what is needed to advance gender equality in and through education in Global South countries

Prior to convening in New York, the coalition was tasked with doing research and conducting consultations within their national and regional contexts. Six regional groups (South Asia, South-East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern and Southern Africa, Western and Central Africa and the Middle East and North Africa) met virtually to discuss the following questions:

- Gender parity in school: are we there yet? Is it an accurate barometer for progress on achieving equality between girls and boys?
- What are the key gendered vulnerabilities faced by girls, boys and LGBTQI children (pre and post COVID)?
- What are the recommendations of CSOs and young feminist activists to global education leaders?



# Gender Parity

The question of whether gender parity has been achieved varies from country to country. Representatives from a few countries reported that they have achieved gender parity in education, but most said their countries have not, especially at secondary and tertiary levels. Reasons for not achieving parity include: religious & cultural norms, gender bias among educators, low access to



WASH facilities, school drop-out due to adolescent pregnancy & child marriage and school-related GBV. Experts and activists from humanitarian settings reported the least progress in achieving gender parity.

However, what the group really focused on was not gender parity but the need for a **more comprehensive approach is needed to monitor progress in achieving gender equality in education.** They noted:

- Gender parity is a quantitative measure: it looks at whether the same number of girls and boys are in school. However, this does not capture the lived realities of those children and young people in schools, especially the gendered ways in which they experience being in school and learning. Examples include gender-biased teaching methods, different opportunities and spaces for girls and boys and stereotypes in textbooks.
- Focusing on gender parity distracts attention from the gendered reasons for children being out of school whether it is fear of sexual violence or bullying, unsafe routes to school or care work/ farm work at home.
- Gender parity is predicated on a binary “girl/boy” understanding of gender which is blind to children’s and young people’s diverse genders. The term itself perpetuates narrow gender norms which in turn is related to gender-based violence and harassment in schools.

## Gendered Vulnerabilities

The coalition analyzed the key gendered vulnerabilities faced by girls, boys and LGBTQI children in education, both pre-covid and post-covid. Although regional specificities exist, many vulnerabilities are common to all regions:

**Systematic gender-based violence (GBV):** The issue of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and abuse, is present in all regions and seriously impacts children’s education opportunities, especially those of adolescent girls. During Covid-19 girls were at an increased risk of

sexual violence, due to school closures and the rise of domestic violence. Homeschooling also increased the likelihood of homophobic and transphobic violence.

**Gender Norms/Stereotypes:** Social and cultural norms such as gender roles have a negative impact on girls' opportunities to access and complete their education and reach their full potential. Girls have the added burden of unpaid labour within the household, which gives them less time to focus on their learning. Cultural and religious beliefs also put girls at risk of child marriage and trafficking.

**Adolescent Pregnancies:** Lack of access to comprehensive sexuality education, limited SRHR services and harmful gender norms put girls at risk of unintended pregnancy, which in turn negatively impacts their chances of completing their education. During Covid-19, as a result of decreased access to SRHR services and less children physically attending schools, there was a large increase in adolescent pregnancies throughout the global south.



**Crisis and Conflict:** Girls living in crisis-affected areas face even more barriers to education. Conflicts and crises make it more difficult for girls to access sexual and reproductive health services, and it puts girls at higher risk of gender-based violence and school drop-out.

**Discrimination and Criminalization of LGBTQ+ children:** LGBTQ+ youth in many countries are often abandoned, homeless, face abuse, or are disowned by their families. When they do manage to access education, they are often bullied and mistreated in school.

**Climate Change:** Climate disasters have a gendered impact on populations. Women and girls are often more at risk of suffering the negative consequences of climate change, and girls drop out of school more easily due to natural hazards.

**Structural Inequalities:** Marginalized groups and communities — particularly, at the intersection of gender, race, class, ethnic group, and handicap — are most vulnerable to various forms of discrimination and violence, including in education. This is largely an issue of inadequate laws and policies, and a lack of feminist governance.

## Thematic Recommendations

Based on coalition members' areas of expertise, the coalition split up into thematic groups to develop a set of recommendations for the following areas:





- access and learning for never-enrolled children,
- Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE),
- child marriage/labour/trafficking,
- climate justice,
- humanitarian and protracted crisis situations.

These groups then brought together their analysis from each thematic group into recommendations for three sets of education decision makers: Ministries of Education, UN agencies and donors.

## Recommendations to Ministries of Education

- Collaborate with gender and other rights experts to evaluate and reform curricula and teaching materials with a gender-sensitive, feminist and intersectional lens at all educational levels, including training for teachers and care providers;
- Develop and implement a national CSE framework, outlining core curricular components and associated teacher training, including social and emotional learning;
- Implement effective prevention and response to school-related gender-based violence, including legal protection and access to justice for survivors, engaging men and boys in the prevention of violence and the promotion of alternative masculinities;
- Guarantee access and support to young people who are married and are parents;
- Guarantee access and support to public education for refugee girls and boys.

## Recommendations to UN Education Teams

- Enhance partnerships with and representation of grassroots organizations representing local communities, especially the most marginalized;
- Build and consolidate evidence on the effectiveness of CSE at country level and identify opportunities to integrate social and emotional learning;
- Spotlight positive stories of change of Girls/ LGBTQI+ Grassroots Leadership, amplify these voices and help them access adequate resources;
- Ensure that all educational data across all reports are sex-disaggregated, so that inequities can be quantified, and appropriate strategies can be developed;
- Collaborate across mechanisms and agencies to implement gender-transformative education in emergencies;
- Mainstream the pairing of gender-transformative education and climate justice through storytelling;
- Resource and elevate the participation of gender and child rights experts internally and in collaborations with government Ministries

## Recommendations to Global Funders of Education

- Support feminist civil society organizations that work directly with communities, particularly those that are youth-led. Trust them and support them to create impact at scale;
- Share grant and funding information in simple ways that are easy to access for small CSOs and activists working at local levels; mandate large grantee organizations to do so the same;
- Make funding of large-scale interventions conditional on: equitable representation of the project participants; dedicated resources and staffing for gender and other rights experts; an intersectional lens and realistic project timelines developed in consultation with community experts.

