G7 Global Objectives Report
2023

Foreword

The 2022 White Paper on development is a plan to reduce poverty and bring the world back on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. Educating girls and increasing opportunities for them to thrive, will be central to fulfilling this vision. More opportunity means more talent. More talent equals more solutions. It is a simple calculation – if only it were that simple to deliver.

This report, which tracks global progress on educating girls, lays bare the scale of the continuing challenge to crack the global learning crisis. It was this crisis that led the UK in 2021, to rally G7 partners behind an ambitious plan to get 40 million more girls into school, and 20 million more girls reading by age ten in low and lower-middle income countries, by 2026.

There are now far more girls out of school not far fewer. In large part, this is due to an increase in conflict, and specifically, to the Taliban's cruel exclusion of 2.7 million Afghan girls from education. And to the limited operating space during the pandemic. But we must all bear some responsibility. For our part, the UK reduced funding for global education between 2021 and 2022.

This report must act as a warning – but we will not lose heart or hope. The UK is building back its funding for women and girls, including girls' education. And the White Paper sets out our plan for action. We are doubling down in more ways than one.

The UK is a major donor to the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait – reaching children in stable, fragile and conflict affected states as well as children in emergencies. We are spearheading work with the World Bank to fund host governments to educate refugees within their national systems. New donors are coming onboard with the UK-designed and championed International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd). We are rolling out new global programmes focused on improving our understanding of what gets children into school and learning. And we are rallying others to jointly address violence in and around schools, one of the most pernicious barriers to educating girls.

There is an old proverb which states that when you educate a girl, you educate an entire nation. Striving for gender equality in education therefore is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. It has the power to change the world.

Andrew Mitchell

The Rt. Hon Andrew Mitchell,
MP, Minister of State (Development and Africa),
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

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Acronyms

AGEE	Accountability for Gender Equality in Education
AGILE	Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment Programme
BMGF	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
BRiCE	Building Resilience: Education Opportunities in Fragile and Crisis Affected Environments Programme
DEGRA	Djibouti Early Grade Reading Activity
EGER	Evidence for Gender and Education Resource
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FLS	Foundational Learning Skills
G7	Group of Seven
GCI	Gender at the Centre Initiative
GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
GEMR	Global Education Monitoring Report
GPF	Global Proficiency Framework
HCA	Human Capital Africa
LIC	Low-income country
LMIC	Lower-middle-income country
LoI	Language of Instruction
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoFEPT	Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training
NFE	Non-formal education
NSS	National Sample Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OOS	Out of school
PAL	People's Action for Learning Network
SEA-PLM	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics assessment
SEF	Sindh Education Foundation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
TES	Transforming Education Summit
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNGEI	UN Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

In 2021, the G7 heads of state set and endorsed a pair of Global Objectives on girls' education to be achieved by 2026 in low- and lower-middle-income countries:

1. **40 million more girls in primary and secondary school**
2. **20 million more girls reading by age ten or end of primary school**

In 2022, a baseline report was published to support the monitoring of progress towards these objectives. Annual reports will be published to update on progress until 2026.

This is the first of these progress reports and it aims to:

1. Provide a progress update for Objective One, drawing on new data.
2. Review the baseline data for Objective Two, as there is no updated data available for this reporting period.
3. Provide deep dives into contexts that have differing degrees of achievement against the two Objectives.
4. Highlight the targeted work that is being done to make progress towards the Objectives.
5. Discuss what remains to be done and recommendations moving forward.

Progress towards Global Objective One

This Global Objective is significantly off-track. During this reporting period, the total number of out of school (OOS) girls rose by over 2 million, which is largely the result of girls being excluded from education in Afghanistan. Even without this situation, global female OOS numbers have remained largely stagnant.

In order to reach the target for Objective One (which is a reduction of 40 million OOS girls by 2026), approximately 10.5 million OOS girls would need to be supported to return to school year on year. To achieve the overall target, countries with the highest female OOS rates would need to reduce these rates by half; and countries with the greatest female OOS *populations* would need to reduce these numbers by more than half. To illustrate, if the four countries with the highest female OOS populations reduced their numbers by half, this would, in and of itself, total 25 million girls back in school.

There are a number of strategies that country partners, with support from the G7 and other partners, are deploying to reduce the number of girls OOS. However, these interventions need to be increased in number and coverage, and better coordinated, in order to meet this Global Objective by 2026.

Progress towards Global Objective Two

There is no updated reading data for this reporting period, thus this report provides a further analysis of data presented in last year's baseline report. Last year, only 28 out of 82 countries had reading data, which demonstrated that in a majority of the countries (20 of the 28), less than 50% of girls and boys were meeting the minimum reading proficiency at the end of primary. This means that over half of children in these countries leave primary school unable to fluently read and understand simple, short texts.

Using the reported reading data, the baseline number of girls reading at a minimum proficiency at the end of primary is 79 million. In order to reach the target for Global Objective Two (which is an increase of 20 million more girls reading by 2026), an approximate increase of 4 million girls would be needed each year, over the course of five years. However, this annual target will need to be updated when new progress data are available.

Unfortunately, there is very little reading proficiency data, both for the beginning and end of primary. These data are necessary for governments to monitor, assess and strengthen their foundational learning provision. They are also necessary for reporting against SDG indicators 4.1.1a

(early primary) and 4.1.1b (end of primary). Work is being done by UIS and the Coalition for Foundational Learning to pragmatically incorporate and align different types of assessment data in order to supplement governmental data, and improve capacity to undertake, understand and use these data; however, more support at the governmental level is required.

Recommended next steps

This annual report on progress towards the G7 Global Objectives demonstrates that both objectives are significantly off-track. These numbers should be a wake-up call for governments and G7 partners who are genuinely committed to these Objectives, the SDGs and gender equality, more broadly. Given the significant effort that will be needed over the coming years, the following recommendations are strategically organised by aim and timeframe.

Aim: Achieving the Global Objectives by 2026

1. **More multilateral / G7 coordinated support should be focused on contexts where achievement of the Global Objectives is furthest behind.** One of the aims behind the Global Objectives was to select targets that could support aid effectiveness through highlighting where and how investments could be made. This report has contributed to this end. For Objective One, support is needed for countries that have over 50% female OOS rates and/or female OOS populations over 5 million. For Objective Two, support is needed for countries in which 80% of girls do not have a minimum proficiency at the end of primary and/or countries with large populations of girls who are not meeting this proficiency level.

2. **Deploy strategies and/or programming that supports both Global Objectives simultaneously.** This report provides a number of examples of how government target setting and programming can focus both on OOS girls and foundational learning in a cohesive manner. There are ideas on how Foundational Learning initiatives can explicitly focus support to the most poor/rural groups, particularly the girls within them; as well as strategies on how to pre-empt girls'

drop out after primary, in order protect investments and learning gains. Ministry of Education action plans and bilateral donor programmes could/should consider including these types of strategies in programming and acknowledge both Global Objectives in logframes and results frameworks.

3. **Address the challenges around reading data as soon as possible,** particularly regarding aligning data/indicators, supporting government prioritisation, and addressing capacity/funding/infrastructure gaps. This work has already started with the Coalition for Foundational Learning's Compact – Pillar Two; however, additional contributions and collaboration will be necessary to speed progress.

4. **Fully understand the degree to which language of assessment is affecting reading data.** Explore the potential of acknowledging, nuancing or weighting results to recognise a shift in language of instruction, which often occurs during primary, and universally poses difficulties for teachers and students alike.

5. **Mobilise greater domestic spend on education, ensuring that any additional resources are explicitly focused on reducing female OOS rates and/or increasing girls' minimum proficiency in reading.** The Education Finance Watch (2022) noted that education spending lost space in national budgets in low- and lower-middle-income countries in 2021 and 2022. In addition to this, direct bilateral aid to education fell by US$359 million.[1] With total public spending being strained by increasing fiscal pressures, there is a risk that education spending in these countries will not meet the need to implement urgent actions to support OOS children and address already high learning poverty levels. Moreover, the distribution of already constrained resources is highly inequitable in many countries, to the extent that children from the richest households receive 8.9 times the amount of public education spending compared to children from the poorest households (UNICEF, 2020).[2] Mobilising greater domestic/bilateral spend towards the Global Objectives, through both increased funding and a more equitable distribution of education budgets, is imperative.

1 World Bank (2022) Education Finance Watch
2 UNICEF (2020) Addressing the learning crisis: An urgent need to better finance education for the poorest children

Aim: Ensuring a better understanding of gender equality and how it affects educational outcomes

6. **Macro-level analyses of data are important but are not helpful in demonstrating gender inequalities – disaggregation by disadvantaged group and age is necessary.** Country deep dives that provide a disaggregation of data by poverty and rurality demonstrate how gender inequalities are magnified within these disadvantaged groups. Use of qualitative data is imperative in exploring/explaining why gender gaps exist. Moreover, deep dives provide an opportunity to also analyse how gender norms affect boys' outcomes.

7. **Any discussion of boys' marginalisation should be coupled with an analysis of girls from the same group (and vice versa).** In order to fully, and fairly, see the degree to which girls and boys are treated differently based on unequal gender norms, comparisons need to made between girl and boys with the same background characteristics (like poverty and rurality). By doing so, disadvantage due to gender will be more evident through unequal allocations of power, respect, participation, resources, responsibility and safety, amongst others.

8. **Consider including high proficiency reading data from low-income countries in order to more fully see the degree to which gender inequality affects girls' learning outcomes.** This is because more enabling factors are needed for a person to reach their *full* potential, as opposed to a low or minimum level of it. Given the unequal treatment of girls and boys in many low-income countries, in which time, materials and parental support are generally prioritised for boys, this would likely lead to large gender gaps in reading at a high proficiency level. Moreover, as discussed in last year's baseline report, numeracy should also be considered as another data point for learning, given the gender gaps that are often evident.

Aim: Improving girls' educational outcomes in the longer-term, beyond 2026

9. As discussed in the 2003/4 Global Monitoring Report, although SDG 4 uses gender parity as an indicator, **future targets and indicators should consider alternative measures to more sufficiently gauge gender equality in education.** The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) and the Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE) framework are doing significant work that contributes to this end.

10. Although the benefits of being 'in school' are significant, the Global Objective targets don't recognise that **meaningful education can happen in non-formal settings and not in the formal system. Future targets and goals should consider non-formal education (NFE).**

11. Moreover, although re-entry into formal schooling is an important way to safeguard girls' educational rights and improve their life chances, formal education may not always be appropriate or relevant for girls who have been OOS for a number of years. **Integrating non-formal education provision into the 'education system' (which is tacitly formal schooling), should be considered in order to better track and support OOS children.**

12. **More focus is needed on tackling the complex and unconscious gender norms, biases and stereotypes** that often result in girls and boys being afforded different levels of power, respect, participation, resources, responsibility and safety. Solutions to address these norms are often difficult and long-term, which is why explicit research, funding and knowledge sharing is imperative. As sociologist Michael Kimmel (2015)[3] notes, **gender equality benefits everyone and leads to fairer societies, happier countries, and more successful economies – which is why it is a goal well worth aiming for.**

3 Kimmel, M. (2015) The Benefits of Gender Equality for All. Speech given for Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) Talks

1. Introduction

In 2021, with less than 10 years until the Sustainable Development Goal 4 deadline of 2030, the G7 heads of state set and endorsed a pair of Global Objectives on girls' education to be achieved by 2026 in low- and lower-middle-income countries:

1. **40 million more girls in primary and secondary school**
2. **20 million more girls reading by age ten or end of primary school**[4]

These objectives recognise that the most marginalised and vulnerable girls are often left furthest behind as a result of poverty, disability, conflict, climate crises, and gender inequalities that are further magnified by these challenges. The objectives are also intended to be steppingstones towards the 2030 targets of universal primary and secondary completion and minimum learning proficiency for all.

55 of the 82 low-income countries (LIC) and lower-middle-income countries (LMIC) have set their own national SDG 4 benchmarks, including for these two targets[5] (*see figure 1*). Of the 55 countries, 87% set a target for out of school children and 73% set a target for children meeting the minimum reading proficiency by the end of primary school. This demonstrates the commitment of country partners to meet these objectives. This commitment, coupled with support from G7 partners and the work of the Coalition for Foundational Learning,[6] forms the basis for a significant effort towards achieving the Global Objective goals.

As part of its leadership on the Global Objectives, the G7 is monitoring progress towards their achievement. A [baseline report was published in November 2022](#) and annual reports will be published to update on progress until 2026. **This is the first of these progress reports and it aims to:**

1. Provide a **progress update for Objective One**, drawing on new data.
2. **Review the baseline data for Objective Two**, as there is no updated data available for this year. Discuss the reasons for this and make recommendations for next steps.
3. Provide **deep dives into contexts that have differing degrees of achievement against the two Objectives.** The analyses will explore how gender inequalities operate in these contexts and how it affects girls' attendance and reading outcomes.
4. **Highlight the work that country partners, with support from the G7 and Coalition for Foundational Learning,** are doing to make progress towards the Global Objectives.
5. **Discuss what remains to be done** and recommendations moving forward.

It is important to note that although degrees of gender inequality can be seen through the Global Objectives for girls' attendance and reading proficiency, these two educational outcomes are necessary but not sufficient as measures of gender equality. Assessing progress towards the latter requires information, which tends not to be available systematically enough to allow a comparative perspective. That said, degrees of gender inequality can be seen through observing the differences in girls' and boys' educational outcomes (such as the Global Objectives), which is why disaggregating data by sex is imperative. If there are large gaps between girls' and boys' attendance and/or reading proficiency, particularly when all other background characteristics are the same, the gaps would indicate that unequal treatment based on gender (i.e., gender inequality) is constraining girls' opportunities to consistently attend school and/or read proficiently (*see box 1 for a further discussion*).

> **"It is important to note that although degrees of gender inequality can be seen through the Global Objectives for girls' attendance and reading proficiency, these two educational outcomes are necessary but not sufficient as measures of gender equality."**

4 The two objectives relate directly to SDG 4 indicator 4.1.4 and global SDG indicator 4.1.1b. The achievement of these two indicators also contributes to SDG target 5.1 – to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.

5 See https://geo.uis.unesco.org/sdg-4-scorecard for more information.

6 The Global Coalition for Foundational Learning was initiated in 2022 by development partners who share a commitment to improving foundational learning for all. These include FCDO, UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID, the World Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

Thus, this report will provide an analysis of data for each of the Global Objectives disaggregated by gender in order to illustrate the gaps that exist. Whilst the focus of the Global Objectives and this report is girls' outcomes, both genders face significant constraints. There are contexts in which girls' outcomes exceed boys', and here a different yet equally pernicious set of gender norms act to constrain boys' opportunities to realise their full potential. These will also be discussed in this report.

Moreover, this report will look at girls' and boys' educational outcomes through the lens of disadvantage, both for the poorest groups and for rural areas. As Friedman et al. (2020:636) note, "Gender gaps… can also be found along dimensions of wealth, ethnicity, race, ability, and other social groupings. Previous work has shown substantial inequalities in education between urban and rural areas, and along lines of wealth. These inequalities are easy to miss when drawing on national average measures of attainment."[7]
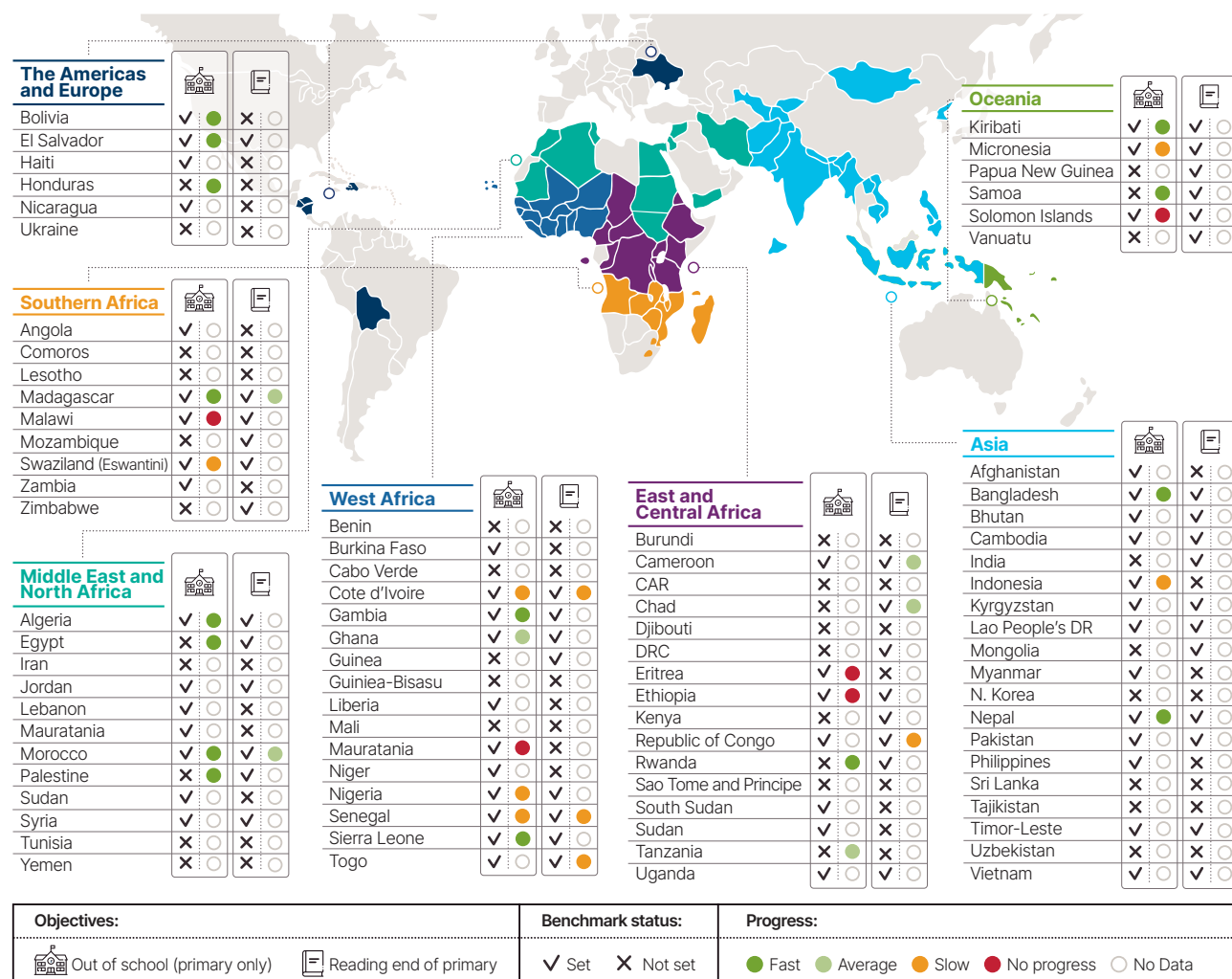
Thus, this report will look at comparisons of girls and boys from similar disadvantaged backgrounds, so that constraints based on poverty or rurality are common to both sexes.[8] As noted, **if school attendance or reading proficiency for one of the sexes is lower than the other, when other background characteristics are the same, this would indicate that different or unequal treatment due to gender is constraining that sex further**. This report will explore this unequal treatment via deep dives in a select number of contexts. These deep dives will look at contexts in which girls are farthest behind, as well as where they are doing well, in order to see what can be learned and what can be done to shift gender inequality, outcomes for girls and ultimately, outcomes for all children.

[7] Friedman, J., York, H., Graetz, N. et al. (2020) Measuring and forecasting progress towards the education-related SDG targets. *Nature*, 580(1), pp. 636–639

[8] It should be noted that within the poorest quintile, there will be girls and boys experiencing urban poverty, as well as rural poverty, which pose differing constraints. Moreover, in the rural areas, girls and boys will come from a number of different wealth quintiles. For the purposes of this report, we acknowledge these differences but do not have the scope to differentiate our analysis to this degree.

Figure 1. Countries that have set National SDG Benchmarks which include the Global Objective targets

The Americas and Europe	Out of school (primary only)		Reading end of primary	
Bolivia	✓	Fast	✗	No Data
El Salvador	✓	Fast	✓	No Data
Haiti	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Honduras	✗	Fast	✗	No Data
Nicaragua	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Ukraine	✗	No Data	✗	No Data

Southern Africa	Out of school (primary only)		Reading end of primary	
Angola	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Comoros	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Lesotho	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Madagascar	✓	Fast	✓	Average
Malawi	✓	No progress	✓	No Data
Mozambique	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Swaziland (Eswantini)	✓	Slow	✗	No Data
Zambia	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Zimbabwe	✗	No Data	✓	No Data

Middle East and North Africa	Out of school (primary only)		Reading end of primary	
Algeria	✓	Fast	✓	No Data
Egypt	✗	Fast	✓	No Data
Iran	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Jordan	✓	No Data	✓	No Data
Lebanon	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Mauritania	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Morocco	✓	Fast	✓	Average
Palestine	✗	Fast	✓	No Data
Sudan	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Syria	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Tunisia	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Yemen	✗	No Data	✗	No Data

West Africa	Out of school (primary only)		Reading end of primary	
Benin	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Burkina Faso	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Cabo Verde	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Cote d'Ivoire	✓	Slow	✓	Slow
Gambia	✓	Fast	✓	No Data
Ghana	✓	Average	✓	No Data
Guinea	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Guiniea-Bisasu	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Liberia	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Mali	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Mauratania	✓	No progress	✗	No Data
Niger	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Nigeria	✓	Slow	✓	No Data
Senegal	✓	Slow	✓	Slow
Sierra Leone	✓	Fast	✓	No Data
Togo	✓	No Data	✓	Slow

East and Central Africa	Out of school (primary only)		Reading end of primary	
Burundi	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Cameroon	✓	No Data	✓	Average
CAR	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Chad	✗	No Data	✓	Average
Djibouti	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
DRC	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Eritrea	✓	No progress	✗	No Data
Ethiopia	✓	No progress	✓	No Data
Kenya	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Republic of Congo	✓	No Data	✓	Slow
Rwanda	✗	Fast	✗	No Data
Sao Tome and Principe	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
South Sudan	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Sudan	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Tanzania	✗	Average	✗	No Data
Uganda	✓	No Data	✓	No Data

Oceania	Out of school (primary only)		Reading end of primary	
Kiribati	✓	Fast	✓	No Data
Micronesia	✓	Slow	✓	No Data
Papua New Guinea	✗	No Data	✓	No Data
Samoa	✗	No Data	✓	No Data
Solomon Islands	✓	No progress	✓	No Data
Vanuatu	✗	No Data	✓	No Data

Asia	Out of school (primary only)		Reading end of primary	
Afghanistan	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Bangladesh	✓	Fast	✓	No Data
Bhutan	✓	No Data	✓	No Data
Cambodia	✓	No Data	✓	No Data
India	✗	No Data	✓	No Data
Indonesia	✓	Slow	✗	No Data
Kyrgyzstan	✓	No Data	✓	No Data
Lao People's DR	✓	No Data	✓	No Data
Mongolia	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Myanmar	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
N. Korea	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Nepal	✓	Fast	✓	No Data
Pakistan	✓	No Data	✓	No Data
Philippines	✓	No Data	✗	No Data
Sri Lanka	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Tajikistan	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Timor-Leste	✓	No Data	✓	No Data
Uzbekistan	✗	No Data	✗	No Data
Vietnam	✓	No Data	✓	No Data

Legend:

Objectives: 🏫 Out of school (primary only) · 📖 Reading end of primary

Benchmark status: ✓ Set · ✗ Not set

Progress: ● Fast · ● Average · ● Slow · ● No progress · ○ No Data

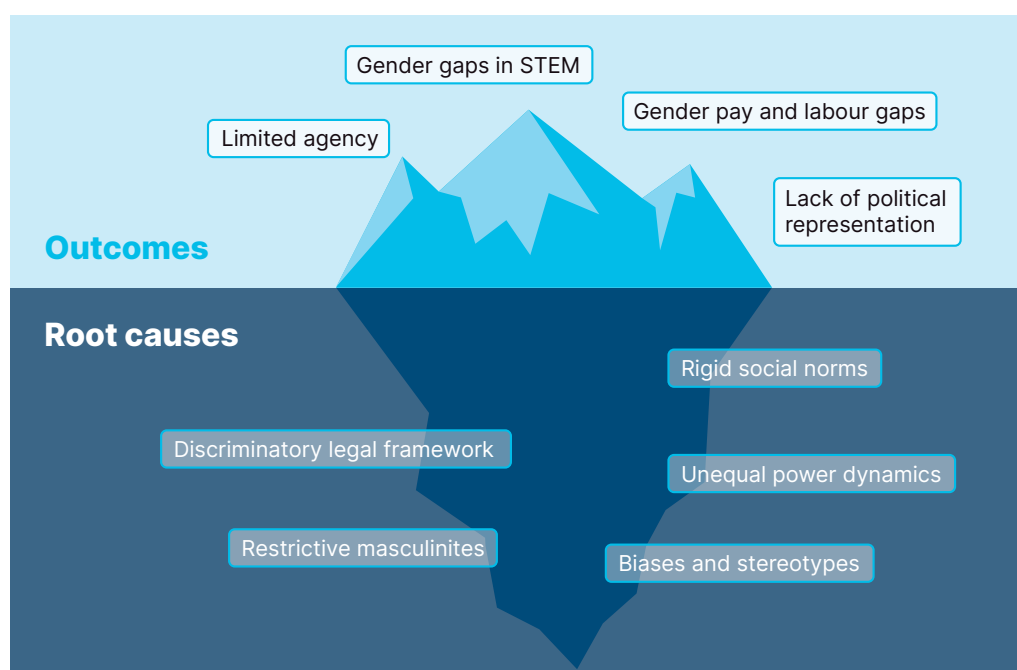## Box 1. Why gender parity does not equal gender equality

As set out in UNESCO's 2003/4 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, there is a need to distinguish between gender parity and gender equality in tracking progress towards education goals:

- **Gender parity** refers to the same proportion of boys and girls – relative to their respective age groups – achieving the same outcomes, such as entering the education system and participating in the full primary and secondary cycles. If the same proportion of boys and girls are achieving the same educational outcomes, this would indicate a degree of gender equality – but it does not give the full picture.

- **Gender equality** refers to similar and/or equal treatment of boys and girls, which lays the foundation for similar and/or equal subsequent outcomes (however, it should be noted that there are additional forms of inequality that intersect with gender, such as those related to race, class, sexuality, etc. Each of these characteristics can be the source of further disadvantage that leads to unequal outcomes, even if the genders are treated equally). Equal treatment of boys and girls entails similar/equal opportunities to go to school and similar/equal treatment by parents and teachers. Ideally, this entails similar/equal levels of power, respect, participation, resources, responsibility and safety, amongst others.

- **Gender *in*equality** means that girls and boys are not afforded similar power, respect, participation, resources, responsibility and safety, which is a result of unequal gender norms, stereotypes and biases that often operate in unconscious or tacit ways. These norms can affect people's attitudes and behaviour, including during the development of policies, laws and systems. Unconscious bias embedded within these institutions can act to reinforce and reproduce unequal outcomes. Some key examples of gender norms which constrain girls in accessing, participating in, and completing education include caring roles and responsibilities, child marriage and gender-based violence. Figure 2 illustrates how, like an iceberg, these unconscious, tacit and unseen norms/biases form the foundation for the unequal outcomes – or gender gaps – that can be seen on a daily basis.

This demonstrates that achieving gender equality involves tackling the complex gender norms, biases and stereotypes that limit girls' opportunities; as well as the policies, laws and systems that reproduce constraint and unequal outcomes.

"If school attendance or reading proficiency for one of the sexes is lower than the other, when other background characteristics are the same, this would indicate that different or unequal treatment due to gender is constraining that sex further."

Figure 2. How unconscious norms create unequal outcomes – from OECD (2023) Social Institutions and Gender Index Global Report

Outcomes

- Gender gaps in STEM
- Limited agency
- Gender pay and labour gaps
- Lack of political representation

Root causes

- Rigid social norms
- Discriminatory legal framework
- Unequal power dynamics
- Restrictive masculinites
- Biases and stereotypes

2. Overall progress towards the Global Objectives

One of the aims behind the Global Objectives was to select targets that could support aid effectiveness by highlighting where and how investments could be made. At a practical level, milestones were selected in order to help put SDG 4 on track and to help G7 members better target their education support. That is why measures were selected that draw on existing SDG 4 indicators (i.e., indicators 4.1.1b and 4.1.4). Moreover, selected targets needed to be easy to communicate, ambitious yet achievable, in order to form the basis for a strong political rallying call.

That said, measuring progress against the two objectives is not straightforward. **Objective One (40 million more girls in primary or secondary school) is a target expressed as an absolute number of girls in school**. However, an increasing number of school-age girls resulting from population growth could, in and of itself, significantly contribute to meeting the target of 40 million more girls in school without reducing the total number of girls who are out of school. The UN Population Division predicts that the cohort of school-age girls in LIC/LMICs is expected to grow by 19 million or 4.2% between 2020 and 2025. Thus, **the definition for this Objectives' target of 'more girls in primary or secondary school' specifically refers to 'girls who would otherwise be out of school'.**[9] This acknowledges the need for governments and donors to recognise and support marginalised girls to get back into education, particularly those who have been pushed or pulled out of school, or have never been enrolled in the first instance.

Therefore, **progress for this indicator is measured by a reduction in the number of out of school (OOS) girls in LICs and LMICs from 2021 to 2026.** These data are absolute numbers, in line with the target, and are provided by UIS. However, this report also looks at the annual female out of school rate in order to compare progress between countries. Such a metric demonstrates the proportion of OOS girls relative to the school-age population, which is important to assess as a small country may have a relatively small number of OOS girls, but this number may represent over 50% of girls in the school-aged population. Moreover, comparing OOS rates between different countries is a way to identify exemplars and cases for concern, which may give insight into the causes and solutions for gender inequalities.

Measuring progress against Objective Two (20 million more girls reading by age ten or the end of primary) is measured by the number of girls achieving a minimum proficiency in reading. This objective aims to measure the quality of education girls have received throughout primary school and their ability to continue learning.[10] Like Objective One, these data are provided as absolute numbers via UIS. However, this report also looks at the rate at which girls are reading at a minimum proficiency in order to assess the degree to which countries are able to deliver a quality primary education to a majority of girls in school.

Table 1 provides an overview of the objectives, estimated annual targets based on baseline numbers from 2021, and actual results for the reporting period of the year 2022. In reality, annual targets are unlikely to move as smoothly as suggested below – these figures serve to provide an illustrative trajectory needed in order to meet the overall target by 2026.

Table 1. Global Objective annual targets and progress

Global Objective	Progress needed to reach target by 2026	Result for this reporting period and new annual targets
Objective One: 40m more girls in primary or secondary school (expressed as a reduction in the number of girls OOS) **Baseline = 105m OOS girls. The aim is to reduce this by 40m by 2026, which would total 65m OOS girls.**	2021= 105m OOS girls 2022 = 97m 2023= 89m 2024=81m 2025=73m 2026= 65m (a reduction of 8m is required each year)	2021= 105m OOS girls **2022 = 107m** 2023= 96.5m 2024=86m 2025=75.5m 2026= 65m (Given the increase in total number of OOS girls between 2021 and 2022, **a reduction of approximately 10.5m girls is now required each year** in order to reach the target of 65m OOS girls by 2026)
Objective Two: 20m more girls reading by the end of primary school (expressed as the number of girls reading at a minimum proficiency by end of primary) **Baseline = 79 million girls.[11] The aim is to increase this number by 20m by 2026, which would total 99m girls.**	2021= 79m girls reading 2022 = 83m 2023= 87m 2024= 91m 2025= 95m 2026= 99m (an increase of 4m is required each year)	N/A (There are no updated data for 2022 – annual targets will be revised in accordance with the next available data)

The following sections will focus on these two objectives, setting out the data for this reporting period, exploring how these are affected by gender inequalities, and what needs to be done in order to shift educational outcomes for girls by 2026 and beyond.

"Progress towards the G7 Global Objectives is significantly off-track. These numbers should be a wake-up call for governments and G7 partners who are genuinely committed to these Objectives, the SDGs and gender equality, more broadly."

[11] This calculation takes the population of girls of primary school age (57 million in LICs and 194 million in LMICs) and assumes that reported minimum proficiency rates are representative for the entire population in these countries. There are 4 million girls in LICs and 75 million in LMICs who achieve minimum proficiency. Therefore, the baseline number is 79 million. This is a new calculation, which was not included in the baseline report. NB: this calculation *includes* girls not in school under the assumption that if they have not completed primary, they have not achieved proficiency. This number averages over several data gaps but is the best possible estimate given the available data.

3.Global Objective One: 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

This section presents data on achievement of the first Global Objective and what progress is needed to achieve it. Progress during this reporting period was stifled by the rollback of women's and girls' rights in Afghanistan. After the Taliban takeover in August 2021, over 2.7 million girls were excluded from school. This was not something that was predicted when the G7 targets were developed early in 2021.

> **Box 2. Key messages**
>
> - **This Global Objective is significantly off-track.** During this reporting period, the total number of OOS girls rose by over 2 million, which is largely the result of girls being excluded from education in Afghanistan. Even without this situation, global female OOS numbers have remained largely stagnant.
>
> - In order to reach the target for Objective One (which is a reduction of 40 million OOS girls by 2026), **approximately 10.5 million OOS girls would need to be supported to return to school year on year.**
>
> - To achieve the overall target, **countries with the highest female OOS *rates* would need to reduce these rates by half; and countries with the greatest female OOS *populations* would need to reduce these numbers by more than half.** To illustrate, if the four countries with the highest female OOS populations reduced their numbers by half, this would, in and of itself, total 25 million girls back in school.
>
> - There are a number of strategies that country partners, with support from the G7 and other partners, are deploying to reduce the number of girls OOS. However, these **interventions need to be increased in number and coverage, and better coordinated, in order to meet this Global Objective by 2026.**

Figure 3 outlines the historical trajectory of female OOS numbers, which captures the rise of 2 million in 2022. It also illustrates the stagnation in female OOS numbers over the previous seven years. Even without the situation in Afghanistan, global female OOS numbers would have remained unmoved at 105 million. There are a number of reasons for this, including population growth, increased disruption and displacement due to conflict and climate crises,[12] a lack of re-entry into education after COVID-19 school closures,[13] and in some cases, a lack of government prioritisation regarding OOS children.[14] The implication is that there is now more pressure for G7 and country partners to reduce female OOS populations if this Global Objective is to be achieved by 2026. Figure 3 also illustrates a forward-looking trajectory that acknowledges the additional numbers of OOS girls that need to be reduced year on year, in order to meet Objective One.

Given the increased effort that will be needed moving forward, the following sections provide a more detailed analysis of Global Objective One, a discussion of how gender inequalities are affecting it, and a consideration of what is required moving forward.

12 Theirworld (2018) Safe Schools: The Hidden Crisis

13 Kidman, R., Breton, E., Behrman, J., Kohler, H., (2022) Returning to school after COVID-19 closures: Who is missing in Malawi? *International Journal of Educational Development*. 93(1), pp. 102645

14 UNESCO (2022) In Pakistan, government inertia is education's greatest enemy

Figure 3. Historical and forward-looking trajectories for this Objective
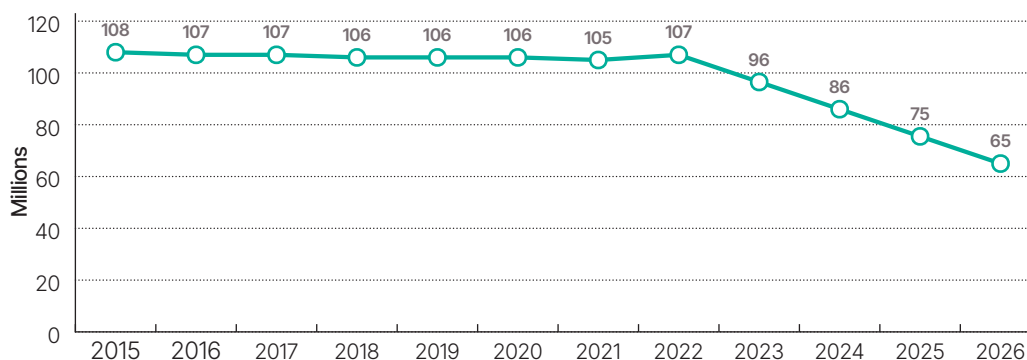
3.1 A detailed look at OOS populations and rates for 2022

Figure 4 illustrates the 20 countries that have female OOS populations of over one million.[15] Of note are countries with populations of over five million girls OOS (i.e., India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Ethiopia), which is generally related to their large overall populations. If these countries were able to support their entire populations of OOS girls to return to school, this would in and of itself reduce the female OOS population by over 51 million. This is a significant number, given the Global Objective target of 40 million.

It should also be noted that although supporting girls to return to school is an important way to safeguard their educational rights and improve their life chances, formal education may not always be appropriate or relevant for girls who have been OOS for a number of years.

Non-formal education pathways also provide a practical solution to support this objective. This will be discussed further in section five.

As illustrated in figure 4, India has a higher population of OOS children compared to other countries and is the only one with a significantly higher number of boys OOS than girls. Although India has an uneven sex ratio within the population that may explain the higher number of boys OOS, a recent study noted that "the likelihood of OOS girls in India is at least 16% higher than that of boys" (Mitra et al., 2022:341).[16] This may be because figures for OOS children put out by different official sources show significant variations due to the questions posed. For example, in 2014, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) reported 6.64 million children OOS based on the survey question, 'how many

"If the four countries with the highest female OOS populations reduced their numbers by half, this would, in and of itself, total 25 million girls back in school."

Figure 4: Countries with the largest numbers of OOS girls in 2022
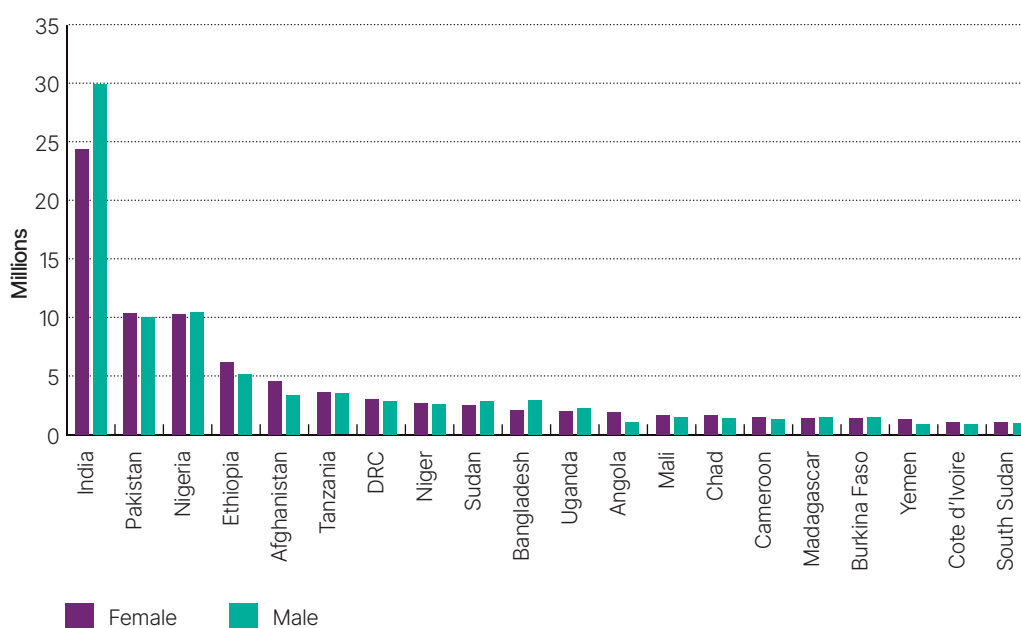
15 The other 62 countries have not been included in this figure given their significantly smaller OOS numbers relative to these 20 countries.

16 Mitra, S., Mishra, S., and Abhay, R. (2022) Out-of-school girls in India: a study of socioeconomic-spatial disparities. *GeoJournal*. 88(1), pp. 341–357

children are not enrolled in any school?'. In that same year, the National Sample Survey (NSS) reported 15.52 million children OOS based on the question, 'how many children are not currently attending school?' (Mitra et al., 2022:344). Enrolling in school is an activity that is done once a year. Attendance on a daily basis is much more difficult to achieve if one is overburdened with domestic chores and care duties, coupled with missing five days a month due to menstruation. Such factors can prevent girls from attending school on a consistent basis, thus contributing to the higher OOS numbers reported by NSS.

Moreover, discrepancies in reported versus actual numbers of OOS girls may also be due to the self-reporting nature of data collection. For MHRD, NSS and other surveys, reporting is reliant on heads of households answering enumerators' questions. This leaves open a situation in which heads may not report the most marginalised children who are residing in the home, either out of shame (as is often the case of children with disabilities) or because they are not considered part of the family/home (such as a low-caste Dalit girl working as domestic labour). A study found that the overall disability rate was 25% higher than reported via the 2011 census (Dandona et al., 2019).[17] This, coupled with the Mitra et al., (2022) findings that the OOS girl population in India may be 16% higher than that of boys, indicates that there are likely large numbers of invisible OOS girls (due to caste and disability, as well as other factors), who are not being acknowledged in the national data.

These tensions related to self-reporting, as well as those regarding enrolment as opposed to attendance, apply to all

[17] Dandona, R., Pandey, A., George, S., Kumar, G., Dandona, L. (2019) India's disability estimates: Limitations and way forward. *PLoS ONE*. 14(9)

countries in this report as they follow similar data collection methodologies. However, the degree to which these issues affect the data on OOS girls is dependent on the degree of gender inequality within each context. In many countries, the invisibility of marginalised girls and their inability to enrol in or consistently attend school, may not be as considerable as what was highlighted by Dandona et al. (2019) and Mitra et al. (2022) in India.

That said, there are three other countries that also have very large OOS girl populations – ranging between five to ten million. These include Pakistan, Nigeria and Ethiopia. These countries also featured in 2021 as having the highest OOS populations overall (*see table 2*). Over the past year, female OOS numbers have remained relatively stagnant in these countries, which means that even without the addition of Afghanistan's 2.7 million OOS girls during this reporting period, progress against Global Objective One would have plateaued at best.
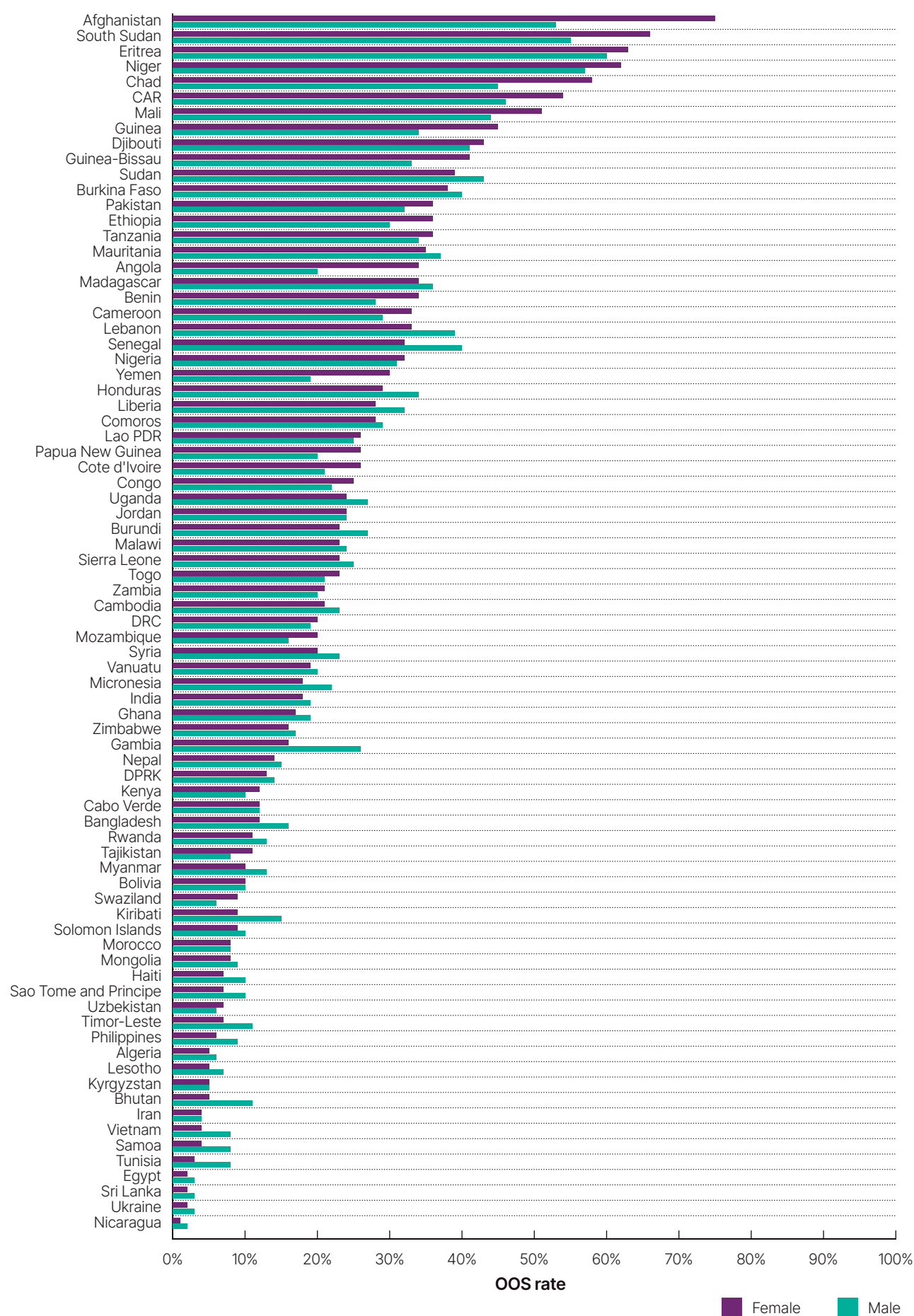
Interestingly, when looking at OOS rates, which illustrate female OOS numbers in relation to the overall population of school-aged girls in the country, India is no longer in front. Figure 5 presents all LIC/LMIC countries, ranging from the highest female OOS rates to the lowest in 2022. Those with the highest female OOS rates are Afghanistan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Niger, Chad, Central African Republic and Mali. With the exception of Afghanistan, the other six countries also had the highest OOS rates in 2021 (*see table 3*). These six countries have *over half* of their population of school-aged girls OOS. The following section, and subsequent deep dives, discuss why this is the case.

Table 2. Largest OOS girl populations for 2021 and 2022

2021 countries with highest numbers	Number of girls OOS	Total number of school-aged girls	2022 countries with highest numbers	Number of girls OOS	Total number of school-aged girls
India	24,991,046	139,614,784	India	24,440,055	138,863,951
Pakistan	10,746,193	28,279,454	Pakistan	10,441,004	28,684,077
Nigeria	10,131,802	31,661,880	Nigeria	10,343,939	32,426,141
Ethiopia	6,127,730	16,696,811	Ethiopia	6,166,235	16,986,872
Total	**51,996,770**		**Total**	**51,391,233**	

Figure 5. Countries with the highest to lowest female OOS rate for 2022

Afghanistan
South Sudan
Eritrea
Niger
Chad
CAR
Mali
Guinea
Djibouti
Guinea-Bissau
Sudan
Burkina Faso
Pakistan
Ethiopia
Tanzania
Mauritania
Angola
Madagascar
Benin
Cameroon
Lebanon
Senegal
Nigeria
Yemen
Honduras
Liberia
Comoros
Lao PDR
Papua New Guinea
Cote d'Ivoire
Congo
Uganda
Jordan
Burundi
Malawi
Sierra Leone
Togo
Zambia
Cambodia
DRC
Mozambique
Syria
Vanuatu
Micronesia
India
Ghana
Zimbabwe
Gambia
Nepal
DPRK
Kenya
Cabo Verde
Bangladesh
Rwanda
Tajikistan
Myanmar
Bolivia
Swaziland
Kiribati
Solomon Islands
Morocco
Mongolia
Haiti
Sao Tome and Principe
Uzbekistan
Timor-Leste
Philippines
Algeria
Lesotho
Kyrgyzstan
Bhutan
Iran
Vietnam
Samoa
Tunisia
Egypt
Sri Lanka
Ukraine
Nicaragua

OOS rate

■ Female ■ Male

Table 3. Largest OOS girl rates for 2021 and 2022

2021 countries with OOS rates over 50%	Female OOS rate	Number of girls OOS	Total number of school-aged girls
South Sudan	0.66	1,100,276	1,672,708
Eritrea	0.62	339,112	547,546
Niger	0.62	2,577,481	4,190,559
Chad	0.58	1,701,605	2,909,702
CAR	0.54	461,216	859,187
Mali	0.52	1,693,285	3,265,036
Total		**7,872,975**	

2022 countries with OOS rates over 50%	Female OOS rate	Number of girls OOS	Total number of school-aged girls
Afghanistan	0.75	4,584,382	6,083,493
South Sudan	0.66	1,116,895	1,702,025
Eritrea	0.63	347,830	553,606
Niger	0.62	2,685,212	4,355,841
Chad	0.58	1,717,337	2,985,666
CAR	0.54	470,473	866,457
Mali	0.51	1,726,552	3,358,613
Total		**12,648,682**	

3.2 How do gender inequalities affect girls' ability to stay in school?

Figure 6 provides a summary of female and male OOS rates for 59 LIC and LMICs. This figure differs from figure 5 in that it only presents countries that have OOS rate data that are disaggregated for wealth quintiles and rural/urban areas, as these data will be used for this report's deep dives regarding disadvantaged groups.[18] The 59 countries in figure 6 are presented on a spectrum from highest to lowest female OOS rates. The spectrum is also divided into three groups: 1) countries with the highest female OOS rate; 2) countries with moderate rates; and 3) countries with the lowest female OOS rates.[19]

Overall, across the majority of the 59 countries, more girls are OOS than boys. In the five countries with the largest female OOS rates (Niger, Chad, Afghanistan, Mali, Guinea), between 50-70% of girls in the population are out of school. In the case of conflict-affected contexts such as Niger and Mali, there is also a relatively high number of boys out of school, as displacement and the closure of schools generally affects both sexes. However, the overall number of countries where the female OOS rate is significantly higher than that of males starts to signal unequal treatment of the sexes, hence the unequal gaps in their OOS rates.
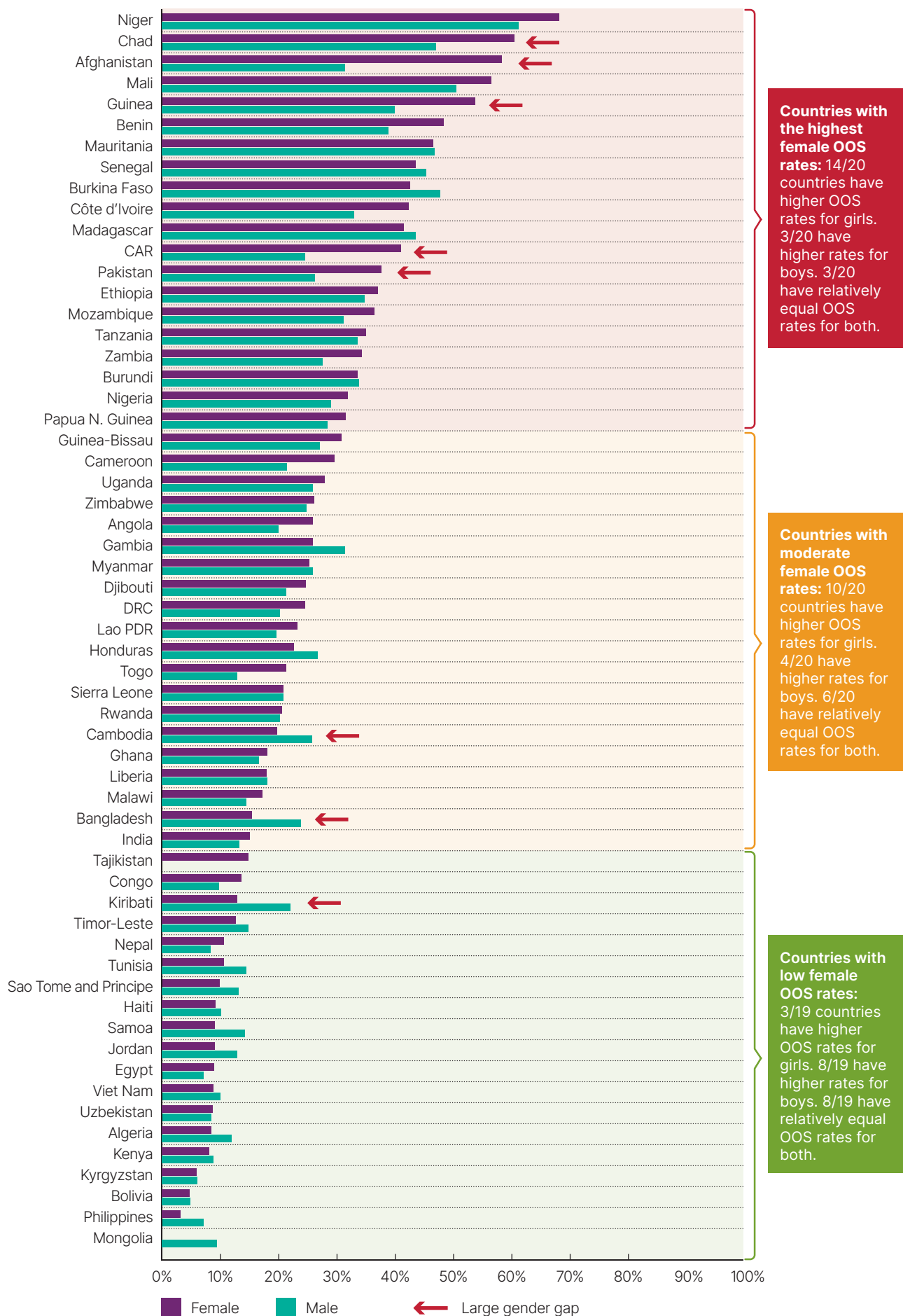
As shown in figure 6, there are of course countries that have higher male than female OOS rates. However, when comparing these countries and their gender gaps (as delineated by the percentage point difference between the female and male OOS rates), the gender gaps for boys are still relatively small in depth (i.e., the largest gender gap for boys is a 9.1 percentage point difference versus 26.9 percentage point difference for girls) and breadth (for boys, there are three countries with gender gaps greater than 6.1 percentage points, whilst there are 12 countries for girls) (*see table 4*).

18 In order to disaggregate to this degree, a composite of data from different sources and years have been used.

19 Grouping for the highest third includes countries ranked from 1-20 (Papua New Guinea is 20th); grouping for middle third includes countries ranked 21-40 (India is 40th); and the remaining 19 countries (who rank 41-59) make up the lowest third

Figure 6. OOS rates for countries with additional data for poor and rural groups

Countries with the highest female OOS rates: 14/20 countries have higher OOS rates for girls. 3/20 have higher rates for boys. 3/20 have relatively equal OOS rates for both.

Countries with moderate female OOS rates: 10/20 countries have higher OOS rates for girls. 4/20 have higher rates for boys. 6/20 have relatively equal OOS rates for both.

Countries with low female OOS rates: 3/19 countries have higher OOS rates for girls. 8/19 have higher rates for boys. 8/19 have relatively equal OOS rates for both.

Female   Male   Large gender gap

Table 4. Comparison of gender gaps for OOS rates

	Female OOS rate	Male OOS rate	Gender gap (% point difference)		Male OOS rate	Female OOS rate	Gender gap (% point difference)
Afghanistan	58.3	31.3	**26.9**				
C. A. R.	41.0	24.5	**16.5**				
Guinea	53.7	39.9	**13.8**				
Chad	60.5	46.9	**13.6**				
Pakistan	37.6	26.2	**11.4**				
Benin	48.2	38.9	**9.4**				
Cote d'Ivoire	42.3	33.0	**9.3**	Kiribati	22.0	12.9	**9.1**
Togo	21.3	12.9	**8.5**	Bangladesh	23.8	15.4	**8.5**
Cameroon	29.5	21.4	**8.2**				
Niger	68.1	61.2	**6.9**				
Zambia	34.3	27.5	**6.8**				
Mali	56.5	50.5	**6.1**	Cambodia	25.8	19.7	**6.1**

Countries with more moderate female OOS rates (between 15-30% of girls out of school) do indeed demonstrate greater parity in rates for girls and boys, apart from Cambodia and Bangladesh, which as noted, have higher male OOS rates. For countries with low female OOS rates (between 3-13% of girls out of school), all 19 countries are lower-middle income.

Although lower degree of gender inequality is associated with higher GDP per capita (Jain-Chandra et al., 2017),[20] macroeconomic growth does not automatically lead to gender equality. Rather, Kabeer and Natali (2013) note that gender equality, particularly in education and employment, contributes far more consistently and robustly to economic growth than the converse relationship of economic growth contributing to gender equality in terms of health, wellbeing and rights.[21]

That said, in countries with higher GDP per capita, there is likely more predictable and increased funding for education year on year, which can have a positive effect on the quality of education provision for all children.[22] Moreover, at a micro level, there are fewer impoverished families who have to choose between a son or daughter to invest their limited resources for education. The number of countries with higher male OOS rates is greater at this end of the spectrum (8 out of 19). The gender gaps are relatively small (*as noted in table 4*) but do point to the ways in which gender norms are adversely affecting boys' educational outcomes.

Recognising that gender inequality can have negative impacts on both girls and boys, the Feminist Network for Gender Transformative Education, co-initiated by the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is working to transform gender norms for all.[23] These harmful gender norms and stereotypes limit the educational pathways of children and young people. Girls in particular, are restricted in their economic, political and social participation from an early age. However, gender transformative education recognises that whilst the focus tends to be on gender norms that adversely affect girls, addressing boys' disadvantage and disengagement in education is also an essential part of a response to the challenge of gender inequality, in education and beyond (for more information, *see box 3*).

20 Jain-Chandra, S. et al (2017) Gender Inequality around the World. IMF e-Library

21 Kabeer, N. and Natali, L. (2013) Gender Equality and Economic Growth: Is there a Win-Win? Institute of Development Studies

22 In 2020, average government per capita spending in sub-Saharan Africa (US$254) and South Asia (US$358) was less than one-tenth of average per capita spending in Europe and Central Asia (US$6,156). Cf: World Bank (2022) Education Finance Watch

23 It should be noted that Germany is also committed to girls' education and gender-transformative education in multilateral partnerships and international processes. This includes supporting the Girls' Education Accelerator (GEA) of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) with €100 million (2021-2025).

Box 3. Feminist Network for Gender Transformative Education (FemNet4GTE)

- **Geographical focus:** Global
- **Duration:** 2023 – 2025
- **Partner:** German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- **Investment:** €1.35 million Euros
- **Target group:** National and international NGOs, feminist activists, academics, government representatives and multilateral partnerships and funds

What is the initiative? The aim of FemNet4GTE is to bring together a network of stakeholders to provide an interdisciplinary exchange on gender-transformative education and to promote gender equality in and through education internationally. The innovative network is characterised by its explicitly feminist bottom-up, intergenerational approach, and the strong participation and co-creation from civil society organisations from the Global South. Members of the network exchange continuously and gather once a year to: increase awareness about gender-transformative education that benefits both girls and boys in all their diversity; advocate for improved programming, increased investment and international awareness; align and coordinate their activities in gender-transformative education.

Global public goods are developed for each of the network's annual meetings. The most recent is a glossary for gender-transformative education and related terms, which aims to create a common understanding of the term, that can be shared globally.

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? With a launch in late 2023, it is still too early to show the impact FemNet4GTE has had on education systems, but it is worth encouraging partners and governments to invest in and engage with FemNet's advocacy platforms and activities. By doing so, they can learn best practices and showcase their impactful work, influencing others in the process.

> "Gender transformative education recognises that whilst the focus tends to be on gender norms that adversely affect girls, addressing boys' disadvantage and disengagement in education is also an essential part of a response to the challenge of gender inequality, in education and beyond."

In summary, given the effort that is required to achieve Global Objective One by 2026, deep dives analysing how gender inequalities operate in different countries can help us see what can be done to shift gender inequalities that affect girls and boys. Section five will aim to do this, with a view to examining countries that have both high and low female OOS rates.

4. Global Objective Two: Minimum proficiency in reading

Box 4. Key messages

- **There is no updated reading data for this reporting period,** thus this report provides a further analysis of data presented in last year's baseline report.

- **Last year, only 28 out of 82 countries had reading data, which demonstrated that in a majority of the countries (20 of the 28), less than 50% of girls and boys were meeting the minimum reading proficiency at the end of primary.** This means that over half of children leave primary school unable to fluently read and understand simple, short texts.

- Using the reported reading data, **the baseline number of girls reading at a minimum proficiency at the end of primary is 79 million.** In order to reach the target for Global Objective Two (which is an increase of 20 million more girls reading by 2026), an approximate increase of 4 million girls would be needed each year, over the course of five years. However, this annual target will need to be updated when new progress data are available.

- **There is very little reading proficiency data, both for the beginning and end of primary.** These data are necessary for governments to monitor, assess and strengthen their foundational learning provision. They are also necessary for reporting against SDG indicators 4.1.1a (early primary) and 4.1.1b (end of primary).

- **Work is being done by UIS and the Coalition for Foundational Learning to pragmatically incorporate and align different types of assessment data** in order to supplement governmental data, and improve capacity to undertake, understand and use these data; **however, more support at the governmental level is required.**

This section presents data on the achievement of the second Global Objective and how progress needs to accelerate to achieve it. Data on learning are scant. Currently, only 28 out of 82 LICs and LMICs report on girls' minimum reading proficiency by the end of primary school.[24] This total is concerningly low and points to the challenges surrounding collating government data on annual reading achievements, which include:

1. Not having comparable or aggregable reading indicators, measurements or assessments across the 82 countries

2. Governments not prioritising the systematic collection of these data on an annual basis

3. Insufficient government funding, capacity and infrastructure to systematically collect these data, even if prioritised

These challenges are even more pronounced in early primary, where data on reading proficiency in grades 1-3 is particularly low. This is concerning as the dearth of data could lead to a de-prioritisation of early grade reading within the SDG indicator framework (*see box 5*).

In addition to traditional national assessments, there are several other reading assessments available, both at the early primary and end of primary grades. These include the USAID's Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), UNICEF's Foundational Learning Skills (FLS) module within its Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and the People's Action for Learning Network's Common Assessments (PAL) (*see box 6*). Historically, these assessments have not been directly comparable, but have proven useful for supplementing gaps in government data.
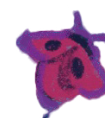
[24] These data come from five cross-national assessments (*see Annex 2*), while one country has reported data from its national assessment. These countries correspond to 33% of the population in low-income, 16% in lower-middle-income and 20% in all countries; therefore, they are not a representative sample.

> **Box 5. Global repercussions of not having data**
>
> It is vital to track progress against all SDG indicators and targets because if reporting does not meet the required coverage by 2025, it will be removed from the global SDG indicator framework by 2025, as noted by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators.
>
> SDG 4.1.1a regards learning achievements in grades 1-3 and SDG 4.1.1b regards learning achievements by end of primary (grades 5-7, depending on context). Both indicators have experienced difficulty in meeting the required data coverage, however, more so for 4.1.1a. Losing this indicator would signify that focusing on foundational learning skills in the early grades is no longer a priority in global education monitoring. Without a globally recognised and supported indicator, it will be challenging to assess progress and take unified action where needed to ensure that all learners, especially those who are behind, gain the skills they need to advance in school and in life.

> **Box 6. The PAL Network's Common Assessment for Language and Literacy**
>
> - **Geographical focus:** 15 low and middle-income countries across Africa, America and Asia
> - **Duration:** Ongoing
> - **Partners:** Hewlett Foundation, Open Society, Include, BMGF, FCDO, IDRC, Wellspring Fund, Echidna Giving
> - **Target group:** These assessments are used to support advocacy campaigns regarding foundational learning targeting communities, organisations and governments
>
> **What is the initiative?** The PAL Network's Common Assessments are based on open-source, easy-to-use tools, available in 11 languages, that offer international comparability of results aligned to SDG 4.1.1a. Core features are that the assessments can: 1) Be conducted in households to include all children irrespective of schooling status; 2) Be implemented orally and one-on-one as many children cannot read; 3) Cover foundational learning content taught in early primary classes; 4) Offer simple-to-use tools that produce easy-to-understand data to ensure wider engagement; and 5) Ensure collaboration with local stakeholders to create awareness and fuel local action
>
> **What insights can be drawn from this initiative?** The large-scale implementation of these assessments have demonstrated proof of concept through: 1) The feasibility of using a common assessment framework and set of tools across very different country contexts; 2) The ability to use data to showcase issues and possible solutions; and 3) Generating estimates that respond to important questions on foundational learning confronting countries in the Global South.

In order to address the comparability and aggregation issue, UIS has developed a Global Proficiency Framework (GPF), which facilitates the alignment of all the assessments noted previously, so that they can contribute to a common set of reading proficiency data, both at the beginning and end of primary. By aligning government and additional data sources, there can be a significant increase in data coverage and reporting. That said, choosing which data to use for reporting is the responsibility of government, and some governments do not accept non-governmental data sources.[25] This may be because assessments are not conducted in the language of instruction, government partners may not have been consulted, or governments may want to retain responsibility for results, amongst other reasons.

25 Government endorsement is a UIS requirement for reporting reading proficiency data for the SDGs and this Global Objective.

Box 7. The Accelerator Programme

- **Geographical focus:** Brazil (state of Ceará), Ecuador, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria (Edo State), Pakistan, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone
- **Duration:** Ongoing
- **Partners:** World Bank, UNICEF, BMGF, FCDO, UIS, USAID
- **Investment:** $9.5 million USD
- **Target group:** Governments

What is the initiative? The Accelerator Programme, which is part of the Foundational Learning Compact, is strengthening governments' provision of Foundational Learning by supporting them to: 1) set and monitor key targets; 2) develop an action plan to reach targets; and 3) strengthen capacity to deliver on the plan. Countries that are part of the programme must show strong political and financial commitment to reduce learning poverty.

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? Whilst it is still too early to show results of the Accelerator Programme, there are exemplars to note, such as Rwanda. As part of its action planning, the Ministry of Education (MoE) proactively requested to do research on OOS girls in order to inform both formal and non-formal programming for foundational learning. This demonstrates how **the Rwandan MoE is considering OSS girls in their target setting and action planning in order to support their return to education and their foundational learning.** Such an effort directly reflects both Global Objectives and is an example that other governments and donors should draw on.

That said, a number of governments have expressed interest in strengthening their foundational learning provision, and to respond to this, the Coalition for Foundational Learning launched the Accelerator Programme. The Accelerator Programme works with select governments to improve foundational literacy and numeracy in a systemic and scaled way (*see box 7*). In addition to this, Human Capital Africa, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, Acasus and Africa Practice, is specifically working with governments in sub-Saharan Africa to use evidence to mobilise action to improve foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes within their contexts (*see box 8*).

Box 8. Human Capital Africa (HCA)

- **Geographical focus:** sub-Saharan Africa
- **Duration:** Launched in September 2021
- **Partners:** BMGF, Acasus, Africa Practice
- **Investment:** $3.1 million USD
- **Target group:** African Heads of State and Ministries of Education

What is the initiative? HCA brings government leaders together with three goals in mind: 1) to increase awareness on Foundational Learning amongst African leaders and influencers; 2) to increase commitment of country leaders to improve Foundational Learning; and 3) to increase mutual accountability amongst regional and country leaders to track progress. Through HCA's expertise, networks and data and evidence, HCA is in a strong position to engage with African leaders to improve foundational learning.

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? One key tool developed by HCA is a learning scorecard allows countries in sub-Saharan Africa to review their performance on the quality of primary education, take corrective actions, and track progress. It comprises three parts: 1) Macro scorecard: which tracks macro-level indicators (i.e., enrolment, completion, learning, resourcing and progression); 2) FLN policy adoption tracker: tracks if requisite system-level inputs are in place, as well as pedagogical inputs and managerial and delivery inputs; 3) Micro-learning indicators: tracks frequently changing indicators that represent building blocks for reading and numeracy (i.e., sentence comprehension (reading) and number recognition (numeracy) and allows for frequent and granular performance review. In addition to tools, HCA's leadership team consists of individuals who have a track record of driving change in their governments across Africa, and it has leveraged its social and political capital through hosting events and facilitating roundtables at UN General Assembly and the African Union Summit. HCA, together with the Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), has also set up a Ministerial Coalition of African Ministers of Education who have made commitments to improve foundational learning outcomes in their country. HCA demonstrates that in order to make progress towards foundational learning, it is important that solutions are driven locally.

Despite the lack of new learning data – and bearing in mind the work that is being done to increase reporting – it is still important to look at the baseline data to take stock of Global Objective Two, understand the gender differences, and consider what is required moving forward.

Although only 28 countries reported data for children meeting a 'minimum' reading proficiency by the end of primary (the criterion for this Global Objective), there are some countries that have data for children meeting a 'low' reading proficiency. The difference between these two levels is the following:[26]

- **Minimum proficiency:** Students independently and fluently read simple, short narrative and expository texts. They retrieve explicitly stated information. They interpret and give some explanation about the main and secondary ideas in different types of texts and establish connections between main ideas in a text and their personal experiences.

- **Low proficiency:** Students accurately read aloud and understand written words from familiar contexts. They retrieve explicit information from very short texts. When listening to slightly longer texts, they make simple inferences.

Generally speaking, 'minimum proficiency' is related to skills and competencies that should be achieved by the time a child finishes primary school and 'low proficiency' is related to those gleaned in the early years of primary. In order to provide a broader picture around reading progress and demonstrate the degree to which children can or can't read after several years of primary schooling, the analyses in the following sections will include 'low' reading proficiency data points where relevant.

[26] UIS Technical Corporation Group (2022) Minimum Proficiency Levels Unpacked. Global Alliance to Monitor Learning

4.1 A detailed analysis of baseline reading levels

In order to see the degree to which different countries are supporting girls to meet a minimum reading proficiency by the end of primary, figure 7 presents the baseline reading rates for 28 countries, from the lowest to highest rates for girls at the end of primary.

In 20 of the 28 countries, less than 50% of girls and boys were meeting the minimum reading proficiency at the end of primary. This means that over half of children leave primary school unable to fluently read and understand simple, short texts. In half of these low-performing countries, less than 20% of girls and boys are meeting the minimum proficiency, meaning that 80% of children leave primary school unable to read fluently. In order to provide a broader picture around reading progress and see how many children can't read at the end of primary school, it is possible to look at levels of 'low' proficiency, the most basic level of proficiency, as there is data from 31 countries at this level.

In figure 8, almost half of the countries (16 out of 31) have less than 50% of girls/boys meeting a low/basic proficiency at the end of primary, which entails being able to read aloud and understand written words. After several years of primary schooling, these children's comprehension of a text is very limited. Overall, in seven of the 31 countries, girls are farther behind boys (see CAR, Gambia, Chad, amongst others). In eight countries, boys are farther behind girls (see Philippines, Cambodia, Kiribati, amongst others).

Figure 7. Lowest to highest percentage of girls reading at a minimum proficiency level
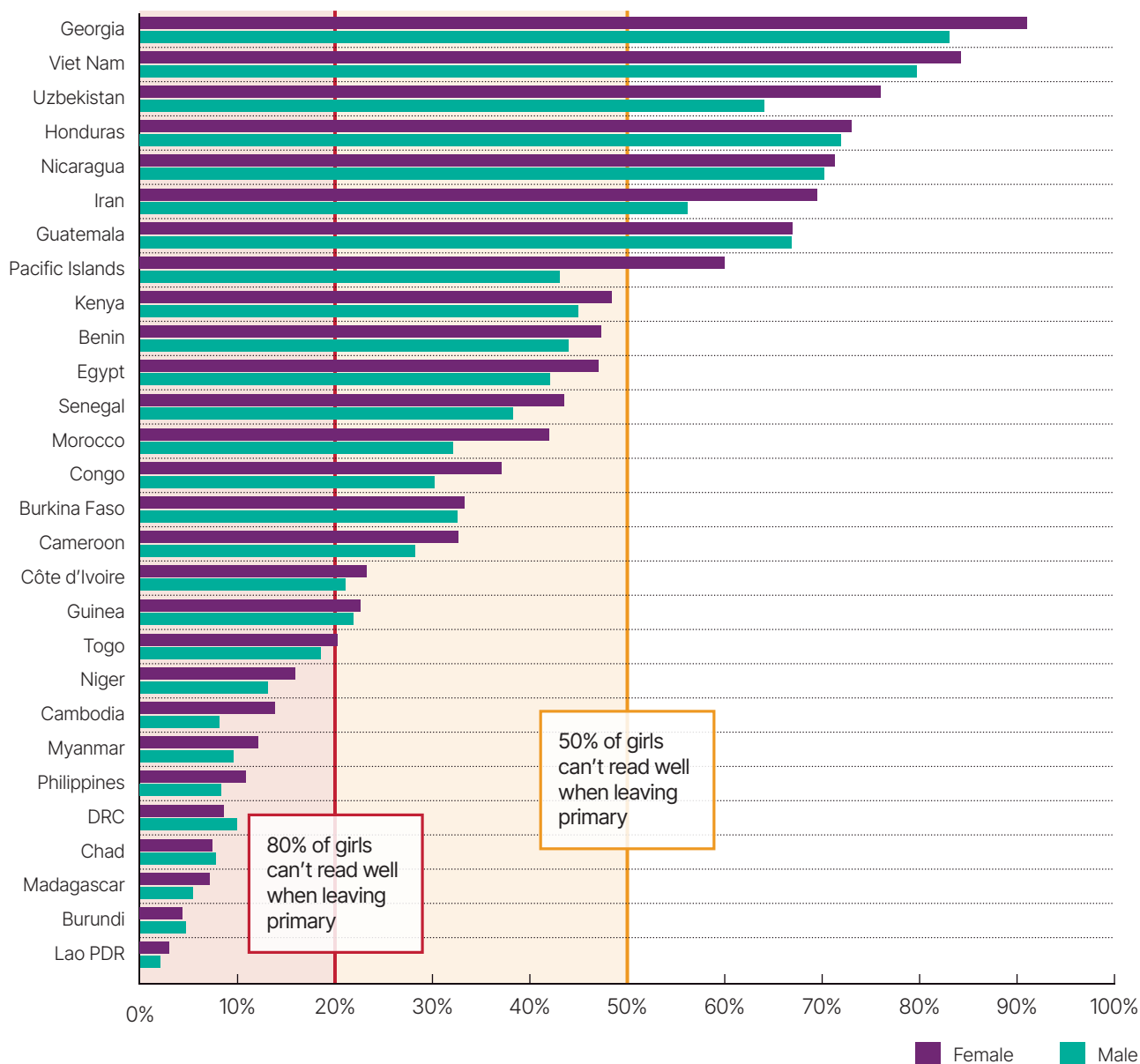
Figure 8. Lowest to highest percentage of girls reading at the most basic level

Viet Nam
Tunisia
Madagascar
Zimbabwe
Benin
Bangladesh
Mongolia
Kyrgyzstan
Burkina Faso
Guinea-Bissau
Togo
S. Tome/Principe
Samoa
Congo
Cameroon
Nepal
DRC
Guinea
Chad
Sierra Leone
Ghana
Côte d'Ivoire
Kiribati
Cambodia
Niger
Myanmar
Burundi
Gambia
Philippines
Lao PDR
CAR

50% of girls cannot read at a basic level when they leave primary

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Female   ■ Male

4.2 How do gender inequalities affect girls' reading outcomes? When viewing the reading data, one might conclude that although reading outcomes for girls and boys are low, they are relatively equal. However, it is important to note that **equality of outcomes at a low or minimum level is not indicative of gender equality within education.** A better indication of whether girls and boys are being treated more equally is through their performance at a high proficiency level. This is because **a person needs more enabling factors to reach their *full* potential** (i.e., high proficiency), **as opposed to a low level of it.** These enabling factors include having adequate time to study, relevant materials, parental support, as well as physical and social-emotional health (i.e., food, water, shelter, freedom from violence – *see Box 9*). Having such enabling factors allow for a learner to more meaningfully engage in the learning process and thus realise their full learning potential.[27]

Given the unequal treatment of girls and boys seen in many LICs, in which limited time, materials, parental support and physiological/social-emotional care are generally prioritised for boys within a family, this could be expected to lead to large gender gaps at a high proficiency level. Although there are no high proficiency reading data for LICs to confirm this hypothesis, Fors and Lindskog (2023:1456) found that gender bias "can create large education inequalities between girls and boys." Their research in India found that gender gaps in boys' favour were "...2.4 percentage points larger for enrolment (compared to the mean enrolment of 85%), two hours more for time spent on school activities (compared to the mean of 35.6 hours), 5.5 percentage points larger for the probability to attend a private school (compared to the mean of 27.7%), and 460 rupees larger for school expenses (compared to the mean of 2694 rupees)" (Fors and Lindskog, 2023: 1456).[28]

That said, there are some high proficiency data in LICs for numeracy that demonstrate a gender gap. UNESCO (2022) found that although girls outperform boys in numeracy at a minimum proficiency, there are large gender gaps at the high proficiency level. For example, "In Pakistan, only one girl achieves the top proficiency level for every three boys but the absolute [gender] gap between them is only 0.1 percentage point because overall performance levels are low" (UNESCO, 2022:10).[29] There are indeed universal social norms that can shape girls' and boys' aspirations, achievements and preferences for reading or maths, and these have had an effect on the proportion of boys and girls performing high levels in these subjects across the globe.[30] However, in order for a person to reach their full potential,

"Equality of outcomes at a minimum level is not indicative of gender equality within education. People need a number of enabling factors to reach their full potential, as opposed to a low level of it."

27 Hart, C., Brando, N. (2018) A capability approach to children's well-being, agency and participatory rights in education. *European Journal of Education*, 53(3), pp. 293-309.

28 Fors, H. and Lindskog, A. (2023) Son preference and education Inequalities in India: the role of gender biased fertility strategies and preferential treatment of boys. *Journal of Population Economics*. 36(1), pp. 1431–1460

29 UNESCO (2022) Global Education Monitoring Report– Gender Report: Deepening the debate on those still left behind

30 Cf: Salikutluk, Z., and Heyne, S. (2017) Do gender roles and norms affect performance in maths? The impact of adolescents' and their peers' gender conceptions on maths grades. *European Sociological Review*. 33(3), pp. 368-381.

> **"Although more equal treatment outside school will better support girls to reach their full potential (and likely reduce gender gaps at the high proficiency level), equal treatment of girls and boys inside schools is also important."**

enabling factors are generally needed, irrespective of social norms. To perform at a minimum level, much lower amounts of time/materials/parental support are required, which could explain why girls were able to outperform boys in numeracy at a minimum proficiency level.

It should be noted that there are some reading data from lower-middle-income countries, such as Egypt, Georgia, Iran, Morocco and Uzbekistan, that demonstrate more equal reading outcomes at the high proficiency level between girls and boys.[31] As Fors and Lindskog (2023:1433) note, "Economic development appears to reduce preferential treatment of boys...When families become richer, they can afford to invest (equally) in all their children." Although more equal investment is positive, and girls may be performing at higher levels as a result, it does not necessarily signal equal treatment of the genders on the whole, as general levels of power, respect, participation, resources, responsibility and safety remain highly unequal in many of these contexts.

That said, although more equal treatment outside school will better support girls to reach their full potential (and likely reduce gender gaps at the high proficiency level), equal treatment of girls and boys inside schools is also important. It is imperative that any work to improve foundational learning does not reinforce unequal treatment of girls and boys through teacher's attitudes/behaviour and curricular materials such as textbooks. The Djibouti Early Grade Reading Activity (DEGRA), supported by the US government, explicitly uses a gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) approach, which considers unequal power relations and disadvantages experienced by individuals as a result of their social identities, including gender, race, location, disability, wealth, caste/ethnicity, sexuality, etc. Embedding a GESI approach within all foundational learning activities provides an example that other programmes could draw from (*see box 10 for more details*).

Box 10. Djibouti Early Grade Reading Activity (DEGRA)

- **Geographical focus:** Djibouti
- **Duration:** 2019-2024
- **Partner:** United States Agency for International Development
- **Investment:** $12.3 million USD
- **Target group:** All public primary school children in grades 1-5 (58,0000 children in total)

What is the initiative? DEGRA's goal is to improve reading skills of primary school children in grades 1-5 using inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches for: 1) Enhancing the quality of primary reading instruction; 2) Increasing community engagement in support of reading; 3) Developing comprehensive policies for reading.

DEGRA embeds GESI in all activities. The project aims to reshape gender norms both in school and at home. By revising teaching and learning materials using a gender-sensitive lens and addressing knowledge and attitudes of teachers and parents by sensitising them on the importance gender equity in schools and girls' education, DEGRA is addressing some of the root causes of gender inequality so that all children have equal opportunity to learn and thrive.

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? Although the DEGRA midterm evaluation showed meaningful improvement in girls' reading scores, there was limited analysis of the overall impact of the GESI approach. That said, DEGRA still demonstrates the importance of integrating GESI into foundational learning programming, not only to improve the reading achievement of girls, but to also prevent the drop-out that often occurs at the end of primary. Thanks to DEGRA's focus on gender equity, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training has committed to conducting a follow-on analysis on gender. In addition, workshops reflecting on the gender-sensitive approach and its institutionalisation are being organised for Ministry of Education staff with support from the National Gender Observatory.

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31 It should also be noted that assessments used to provide high-proficiency data tend to be more complex and thus, more expensive. This situation explains why there is a dearth of high-proficiency data for LICs.

Another example of an initiative that aims to ensure gender equality and social inclusion is central to *all* education provision is the Gender at the Centre Initiative, launched in 2019 during the G7 summit in Biarritz, France, and supported by the French government. This initiative aims to strengthen gender equality within education systems through the implementation of gender-responsive educational policies and budgets. It also works outside the education system, by strengthening the advocacy capacities of civil society organisations, in order to drive lasting transformations in gender-related attitudes and norms (*see box 11*).

Given the effort that is needed in order to achieve Global Objective Two by 2026, it is helpful to undertake deep dives to understand how gender inequalities affect reading outcomes, particularly amongst disadvantaged groups. Thus, the following sections will look at four countries in relation to girls' OOS rates and minimum reading proficiency, in order to understand how gender inequality affects outcomes, what can be done to address these and ultimately, outcomes for girls.

Box 11. Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI)

- **Geographical focus:** sub-Saharan Africa
- **Duration:** Launched in 2019
- **Partner:** Agence Française de Développement
- **Investment:** €1.5 million Euros
- **Target group:** Ministries of Education (MoE)

What is the initiative? GCI implements a number of activities that support more gender responsive MoEs and civil society organisations in order to ensure gender equality and social inclusion is central to all education provision. For example, GCI supported MoEs in Chad, Mali, Niger and Guinea to pilot a Gender Equality in Education Snapshot Tool, which gave stakeholders a quick snapshot of where their country stood with regard to gender equality within and beyond its education system.

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? The Gender Equality in Education Snapshot Tool was easy to use, interactive and allowed MoE participants to rapidly generate a powerful visual overview of the status of gender equality in their education systems. Making data accessible and meaningful to stakeholders is the first step in creating gender champions and ownership within government.

5. Country deep dives

The following sections provide deep dives into countries at the two ends of the OOS rate spectrum to show how gender inequality operates in disadvantaged groups and within different age ranges. The countries have been chosen due to their OOS rates, and also the availability of reading data, in order to explore linkages between the two Global Objectives. We deep dive into two countries with high female OOS rates (Benin and Pakistan), and two with low female OOS rates (Nepal and the Philippines).

These deep dives aim to explore how and to what degree female OOS rates and reading rates change within disadvantaged groups, primarily the poorest quintile and those in rural areas. This is to ensure that comparisons of girls and boys are done for those of a similar background, so that constraints based on poverty or rurality are common to both sexes. If outcomes for one of the sexes are lower than the other, particularly when background characteristics are the same, this would indicate that different or unequal treatment due to gender is constraining that sex further. As discussed in section 3, these gender gaps can be discerned by the difference between the percent of girls OOS or reading, and the percent of boys OOS or reading (also referred to as the percentage point difference). If 25 percent of girls are OOS and 20 percent of boys are OOS, the gender gap is equal to five percentage points. If this difference is relatively high, when all other background characteristics and disadvantages are the same, this would indicate there is significant gender inequality – or unequal treatment of girls and boys due to social norms relating to gender.

With regard to Global Objective One, the data will be presented for all age groups (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary) in order to demonstrate how and to what degree drop out increases with age. For girls, unequal treatment due to gender compounds and multiplies as girls get closer to adolescence, with domestic chores, sexual violence, early marriage and menstruation (both the management of it and shame around it) being ways in which girls are treated differently from boys and suffer greater disadvantage – often at the expense of consistent attendance and remaining in school. This gender inequality, or unequal treatment, is often magnified by poverty and rurality.

For Global Objective Two, data for different age ranges are not relevant as the objective is focused specifically on the end of primary school. However, the deep dives will explore how and to what degree girls' reading rates change within poor and rural groups, in order to discern the degree to which unequal treatment affects reading outcomes. As noted previously, 'low/basic' proficiency data will be used to provide a broader picture of progress, particularly where minimum proficiency data are not available.

The deep dives will also draw from selected qualitative and quantitative research in order to provide hypotheses and explanations for outcomes in the data. However, it should be noted that these analyses are high-level, are not based on in-depth literature reviews, and should be viewed as illustrative only. The deep dives will also feature case studies of initiatives spearheaded by country partners, the G7 and the Coalition for Foundational Learning, which aim to address highlighted issues and facilitate better access and learning outcomes for girls. A discussion will be had of what is working, as well as where gaps remain, in order to support the focus and investment that is required to achieve the Global Objectives by 2026.

"If outcomes for one of the sexes are lower than the other, particularly when background characteristics are the same, this would indicate that different or unequal treatment due to gender is constraining that sex further."

5.1 Countries with high female OOS rates

5.1.1 Benin – children out of school

When looking at the overall OOS rate for Benin (*figure 9*), it appears that there is close to parity in primary school, with girls' OOS rates only marginally higher than boys' (27% for girls vs 25% for boys). However, once girls reach adolescence, this relative parity recedes with girls' OOS rates jumping to 47% in lower secondary and then 67% in upper secondary (compared to 40% and 53% for boys). As discussed, this greater increase is often due to the unequal treatment of girls that multiplies and compounds as they get older (such as increased domestic chores, sexual violence, early marriage, etc.).

Figure 9. Benin overall percentage of girls and boys out of school
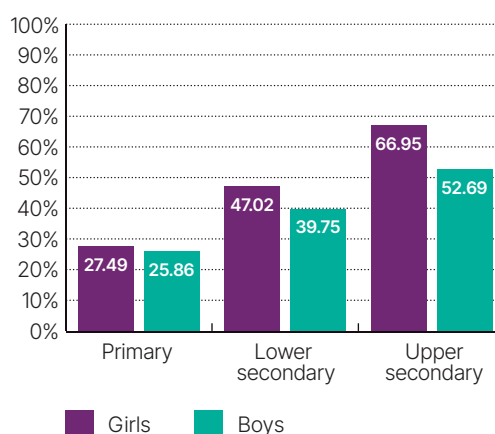
In the poorest groups (*figure 10*), the OOS rates for both girls and boys more than double the national rates at the primary level (64% for girls and 55% for boys, compared to 27% and 25% nationally). At the lower secondary level, 73% of girls and 59% of boys are out of school; and this increases to an alarming 88% of girls and 77% of boys at the upper secondary level. This would indicate that poverty has a significant effect on children's ability to stay in school, with a greater effect on girls. In 2016, Benin began implementing a programme underpinned by the principle of 'Leaving no one behind'. The Action Programme 2016-2021 aimed to reduce poverty for 4 million people by 2021;[32] however, the very high OOS rates for both girls and boys within the poorest quintile would suggest that more needs to be done. Currently the government, donors and civil society organisations have adopted the P20 approach, which focuses attention on the poorest 20% in order to meet SDG targets.[33]

Figure 10. Benin percentage of girls and boys out of school within the poorest groups
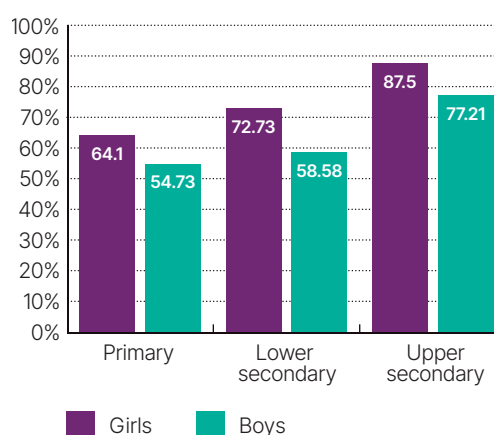
In rural areas (*figure 11)*, the OOS rates for the same age groups are lower, but still concerning (75% girls OOS and 57% boys OOS at upper secondary). This suggests that it is wealth, not geographical location, that has the highest impact on school access and gender inequality.[34]

That said, research on Benin and the causes for girls' drop out are sparse. The available evidence focuses on factors affecting children aged 6-11, which include parental literacy levels, the household's standard of living, mothers' level of education and age, the child's sex, women's participation in decision-making and the type of union between the parents (Onambele and Semevo, 2023).[35] A number of these factors point to how greater gender equality between parents can have an effect on the equality of opportunities they afford their children, which demonstrates the intergenerational reproduction of both positive and negative norms.

Figure 11. Benin percentage of girls and boys out of school in rural areas
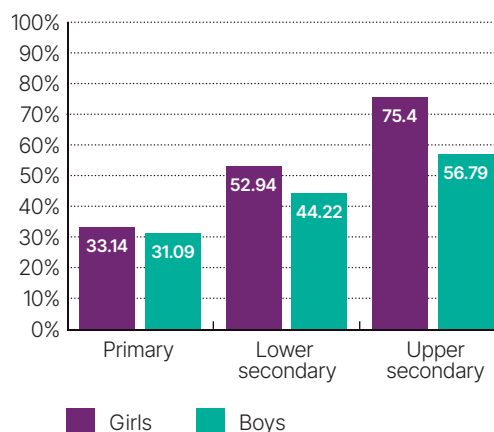
32 OECD (2018) Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining Forces to Leave No One Behind

33 P20 Initiative (2017) The P20 Initiative – Baseline Report

34 A more detailed analysis that includes isolating poverty and rurality is beyond the scope of this report but may be explored in further deep dives in the future.

35 Onambele, G., and Semevo, O. (2023) School Enrolment Factors for Children Aged 6 to 11 in Benin, *London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences*. 23(5), pp. 1-14

The following case study looks at the neighbouring country of Nigeria, in which the female OOS rate is also very high. The Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) programme, supported by the World Bank, has deployed a number of strategies to reduce the country's very large female OOS population and has recently gone to scale (*see box 12*).

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Box 12. <u>Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE)</u>

- **Geographical focus:** Northern Nigeria
- **Duration:** Implementing since 2020 and further scale up is scheduled from September 2023
- **Partner:** World Bank
- **Investment:** $500 million USD in 2020 and $700 million USD for scale-up
- **Target group:** Adolescent girls aged between 10- and 20-years old

What is the initiative? AGILE consists of four main components: 1) creating safe and accessible learning spaces (mainly construction/ renovation projects); 2) promoting social behavioural change through communications, engagement with traditional leaders and advocacy campaigns; 3) empowering girls with skills which will be useful as they transition into adulthood (life skills training, digital literacy, etc.); and 4) gender responsive capacity building with Federal and State governments. The scale-up encompasses an expansion from 7 states to additional 11 states (18 in total) with a specific focus on marginalised girls.

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? Although many girls' education programmes focus on support specifically to girls, AGILE demonstrates the importance of social behavioural change to create wider enabling environments for girls. By doing so, phase 1 increased the number of girls who had not been previously enrolled in secondary school from 900,000 to 1.6 million. Phase 2 aims to broaden the OOS groups to include married girls and girls with disabilities.

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5.1.2 Benin – reading achievements

When looking at the overall reading achievements of girls and boys (*figure 12*), both at the minimum proficiency level (the requirement for Global Objective Two) and at low proficiency level (a more basic level of proficiency – see section 4 for definitions), girls are doing marginally better than boys at the end of primary school. Relative to the other 13 sub-Saharan countries featured in figure 7, Benin's minimum proficiency reading outcomes for both girls and boys are second only to Kenya's. 47% of girls and 43% of boys are reading at a minimum proficiency (the two bars to the right in figure 12), which is a very positive achievement.

Figure 12. Benin overall percentage of girls and boys reading at low and minimum proficiency
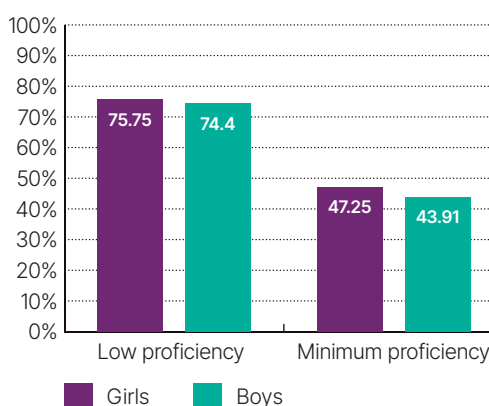
It is interesting to note that there is a 29 percentage point difference between the proportion of girls reaching a *low/basic* proficiency (the far-left bar in figure 12) and those reaching a *minimum* proficiency. One could posit that this difference represents the time/resources/support that are needed for a girl to reach her *minimum* potential, as opposed to a very low or basic level of it. As discussed previously, these resources contribute to a learner's ability to meaningfully engage/learn, which includes having adequate time to study, relevant materials, parental support, and physical and social-emotional health.

Amongst the poorest girls (*figure 13*), it appears that these resources are not often available, as the gap between meeting a low/basic proficiency level and a more complex minimum proficiency level rises to 36 percentage points. This suggests that 58% of girls have the resources needed to reach their lowest,

most basic reading potential, whilst only 22% of girls have what is needed to reach a minimum proficiency. This difference demonstrates the degree to which coming from a poor group affects learning outcomes. It should also be noted that within this poorest quintile, girls are no longer doing marginally better than boys. Here, 27% of boys are achieving a minimum proficiency, which is five percentage points greater than the girls' rate of 22%. Although a small difference – with levels for both boys and girls much too low – it does suggest a greater allocation of time/resource/support goes to boys. As Dessy et al. (2023:170) note:

Cash-constrained households may lean on culture to select the gender of offspring whose outcomes will be sacrificed to enhance survival.... we find that patrilocal households, but not matrilocal ones, sacrifice their daughters' schooling in favour of sons' when they experience droughts and schooling requires payment of fees. These results survive numerous robustness checks and are driven by disparities in women's empowerment and the extent of son preference between matrilocal and patrilocal groups.[36]

"A high proportion of girls who have achieved minimum proficiency will be pushed or pulled out of school after they leave primary. Although having some foundational literacy is better than none, there is a need to prevent drop out in order to protect these literacy gains."

Figure 13. Benin percentage of girls and boys reading within the poorest groups
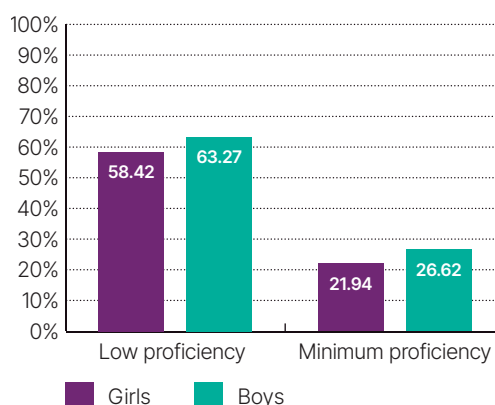
In rural areas (*figure 14*), there is more parity between girls and boys, and achievement compared to the national average is slightly less stark than it is for the poorest quintile. However, the pattern of boy preference is similar. Here, 61% of girls have the resources needed to reach a low/basic reading potential vs 64% for boys. There is greater parity for minimum proficiency, with 27% of girls reaching this level and 28% for boys.

Figure 14. Benin percentage of girls and boys reading in rural areas
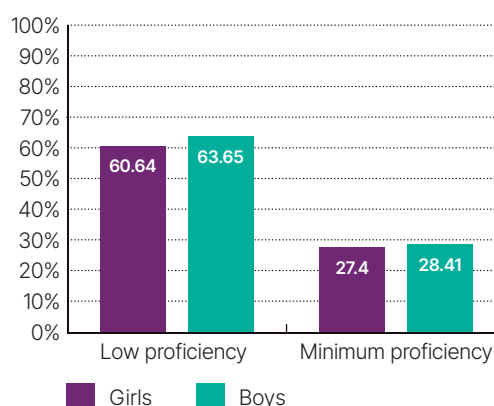
Despite the likelihood of boy preference, the effects are small and Benin's overall progress in supporting 47% of girls to achieve a minimum proficiency by the end of primary is laudable in comparison to other sub-Saharan countries. **However, it should be noted that a high proportion of these girls who have achieved minimum proficiency in reading, will be pushed or pulled out of school after they leave primary** (*see figure 15*). As noted in section 5.1.1, 47% of girls who are of lower-secondary age in Benin are out of school, and a further 67% are out of school at upper secondary age (*see figure 9*). The implication here is that a large **proportion of the girls who leave primary able to read will not be able to build on their reading gains as they will drop-out of school** (*figure 15*). A similar pattern affects boys, with 44% achieving minimum proficiency when they finish primary; but 40% dropping out during secondary. **Although having** *some* **foundational literacy is certainly better than none, there is a need to prevent drop out after primary school, in order to protect these literacy gains.**

The following case study looks at the neighbouring country of Niger, in which the BRiCE programme, supported by the European Union, acknowledges the need to focus on both improving girls' foundational learning, but also ensuring that girls do not drop out (*see box 13*).

36 Dessy. S., Tiberti, L., and Zoundi, D. (2023) The gender education gap in developing countries: Roles of income shocks and culture, *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 51(1), pp. 160-180

Figure 15. A large proportion of girls reading at the end of primary will then drop out

Almost half of girls in school are able to read at the end of primary (47.25% reading rate)

But a large proportion of these girls will drop out during lower secondary (47.02% OOS rate)
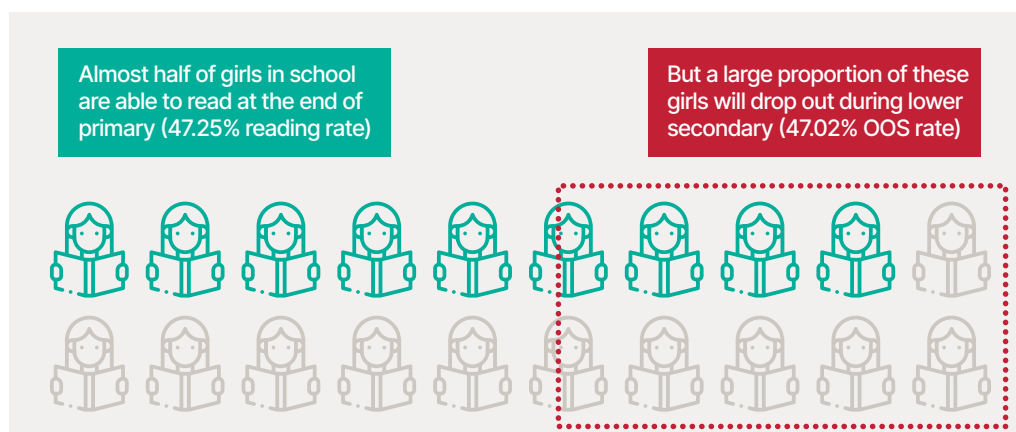
Box 13. Building Resilience: Education Opportunities in Fragile and Crisis Affected Environments (BRiCE) Programme

- **Geographical focus:** Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.
- **Duration:** March 2018 to February 2022
- **Partner:** European Union funding (Implemented by Save the Children)
- **Investment:** €24 million Euros
- **Target group:** BRICE reached 235,000 children across seven countries in Africa. This case study focuses on Niger, in which 23,653 girls and 22,808 boys were targeted.

What is the initiative? BRiCE Niger aimed to provide safe and quality foundational learning for children in crisis contexts, with four areas of focus: safe learning environments, quality teaching, evidence-based policy, and conflict sensitivity. The programme's endline evaluation noted impressive results in student literacy, from a baseline of 5.5% to 30% at endline in target schools. This was attributed to the programme's aim of putting children at the centre of programme, ensuring that child protection and psychosocial support were adequately prioritised while also supporting teachers to boost student literacy.

In addition to the BRiCE programme, which ended in 2022, EU support to similar approaches will continue under the €100 million Euro Regional Teacher Flagship programme, which aims to accelerate gender responsive teacher reforms in sub-Saharan Africa (i.e., teaching methods, recruitment, deployment and career progression).

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? BRiCE Niger demonstrates the significance of creating safe learning environments including addressing child protection and psycho-social needs, in order to enable girls to learn and keep them in school. This is particularly true in fragile contexts like Niger, where girls' exposure to risks of conflict, abduction and displacement is high. Children under duress, particularly girls, will not learn to read well; thus, deploying strategies to support safety and wellbeing within foundational learning programmes is a good way to increase learning and protect learning gains by pre-empting drop out.

5.1.3 Pakistan – children out of school

In Pakistan, the overall gender gap between girls and boys who are out of school is significant (*see figure 16*). For example, at the primary level, girls' OOS rates are eight percentage points higher than boys' (27% for girls and 19% for boys). At the lower secondary level, the gender gap increases to 10 percentage points (32% for girls vs 22% for boys) and at upper secondary, girls' OOS rates are 17 percentage points higher than boys' (54% for girls and 37% for boys). Although these percentages and gender gaps are significant, they are much more significant amongst the poorest groups (*see figure 17*), which are often associated with the lowest castes.[37]

Figure 16. Pakistan overall percentage of girls and boys out of school

Tamim and Tariq (2015:51)[38] have noted that there is "evidence that caste identity continues to play a powerful role both in access to education and school performance." For both poor girls and boys, who are likely from untouchable castes, the average OOS rates are almost double the national average across all age ranges (*see figure 17*).

Figure 17. Pakistan percentage of girls and boys out of school within the poorest groups

Moreover, lower/poorer caste identity magnifies unequal treatment between the sexes, as the International Dalit Solidarity Network (2018:3) notes:

Caste-affected countries such as India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh remain deeply patriarchal societies where women are often oppressed by men and socially restrained from accessing the same rights, services and privileges. Intersectional caste and gender discrimination leaves Dalit women and girls as some of the furthest behind when it comes to achieving the UN Global Goals and therefore this type of discrimination needs special focused attention.[39]

The magnification of gender inequality amongst poor groups can be seen at the primary level, as girls' OOS rates are 17 percentage points higher than boys; 30 percentage points higher at lower secondary; and 28 percentage points higher at upper secondary.

Tamim and Tariq (2015:51) also note that, "while in India, caste has merited much attention both in research and public policy debates, in Pakistan, its presence is often denied on the assumption of a prevailing Islamic 'egalitarian' ideology. However, limited but in-depth ethnographic research has shown that although the caste system in Pakistan is different from that in India, it persists in large regions of rural Punjab setting off processes of social marginalisation and social exclusion for low- caste groups." This social marginalisation is worse for women and girls as they "are doubly disadvantaged: their minority group status interacts with a patriarchal culture to produce deplorable living conditions... relative to men, women in these groups have far more limited access to both educational and employment resources" (Dunn, 1993:1).[40]

With regard to rural areas (*figure 18*), the data demonstrate that OOS rates and gender gaps are not as large as they are when isolating for poverty. As with Benin, this suggests that poverty magnifies gender inequality more than rurality. Moreover, Rutstein (2008:9) notes that "...although the great majority of people in rural areas are in the poorest wealth quintiles, there will always be a few people in the fourth and highest wealth quintiles".[41]

37 Although caste and class both describe systems of social stratification, caste stratification is based on religious doctrine, whilst class stratification, is based on wealth, income, and occupation. Given that caste *determines* educational and economic opportunities for people, which in turn creates stratification based on wealth/income, this report acknowledges that class and caste can be used interchangeably. See International Dalit Solidarity Network for more information.

38 Tamim, T., and Tariq, H. (2015) The intersection of caste, social exclusion and educational opportunity in rural Punjab, *International Journal of Educational Development,* 43(1), pp. 51-62

39 International Dalit Solidarity Network (2018) Caste and Gender Justice: Delivering on the UN Global Goals for Dalit women and girls

40 Dunn, D. (1993) Gender Inequality in Education and Employment in the Scheduled Castes and Tribes of India. *Population Research and Policy Review.* 12(1), pp. 53-70

41 Rutstein, S. (2008) The DHS Wealth Index: Approaches for Rural and Urban Areas. *DHS Working Papers series.*

Figure 18. Pakistan percentage of girls and boys out of school in rural areas
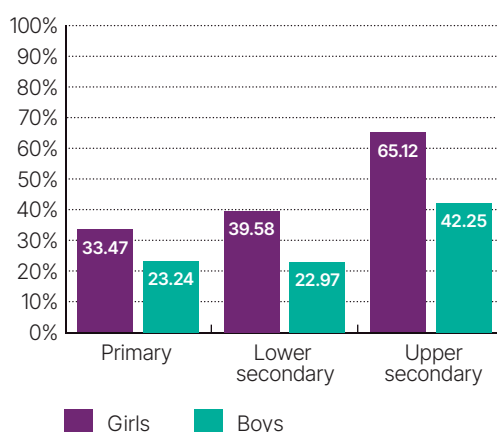
That said, the gender gaps between girls' and boys' OOS rates remain high (17 percentage points at lower secondary and 23 percentage points at upper secondary), with girls more likely to be OOS. This demonstrates how gender inequalities are magnified within the most disadvantaged groups, often because the very limited resources, power and opportunities that may exist amongst these groups are prioritised for boys. This unequal treatment that girls experience, appears to contribute to a high proportion of girls OOS, particularly at the upper secondary level for the poorest and most rural groups.

There are a number of programmes within Pakistan aiming to address this situation, including the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC), supported by the UK government (see box 14). The GEC is the largest global fund aiming to improve educational opportunities for the most marginalised girls, of which two projects are based in Pakistan: one that focuses on rural girls in Balochistan and another that focuses on girls from the poorest groups in Sindh and the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas.

Box 14. Girls' Education Challenge (GEC)

- **Geographical focus:** 17 countries across sub-Saharan Africa and Asia
- **Duration:** 2012-2024
- **Partner:** UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office
- **Investment:** £855 million GBP
- **Target group:** 1.6 million marginalised girls

What is the initiative? The GEC entails 41 projects that aim to improve the educational opportunities for the world's most vulnerable girls – either those who are in school but at risk of dropping out; or those who have already been pulled out or have never been allowed to enrol in school. For example, the Closing the Gap project, implemented by ACTED, recognised the multiple barriers to education that the most marginalised girls in Pakistan face, such as financial barriers, deeply embedded gender norms, and gender-based violence at home, at school and in the community. It also recognised the need for innovative thinking to address these issues, such as non-formal accelerated learning programmes and learning centres that used mobile libraries and home learning; bringing in boys and men in efforts to reduce violence; integrating positive discipline into teacher training and providing childcare support so that young mothers could participate. Project evaluations indicated a statistically significant increase in literacy and numeracy scores, which supported the project to exceed its learning targets.

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? Recognising the importance of sustaining project activities to support marginalised girls, the Closing the Gap project entered into a formal agreement with the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) to ensure all girls graduating from the accelerated learning programme could transition to mainstream SEF schools. Findings showed 100% transition of GEC beneficiaries to post-primary education, adoption of ACTED learning centres by SEF and continued training on teaching and learning and safeguarding.

5.1.4 Pakistan – reading achievements

Unfortunately, there were no baseline data points at the minimum proficiency level for Pakistan. However, as discussed in section four, there are a number of reading assessments and data sources that report on low/basic proficiency levels. Although these data do not officially correspond to SDG indicator 4.1.1b (or the criteria for this Global Objective), they can be used for illustrative purposes, particularly when comparing reading achievements for the sexes in disadvantaged groups.

Figure 19 presents low/basic reading proficiency data overall, for the poorest groups, and rural areas. It shows that overall, the percentage of children achieving the most basic level of reading proficiency is very low, with only 47% of girls attaining low/basic proficiency by the end of primary and only 43% for boys. For the poorest groups, this drops to 8% for girls attaining a low/basic proficiency level and 12% for boys. In rural areas, girls are doing marginally better at 19%, as are boys at 22%.

Figure 19. Pakistan low/basic reading proficiency for poorest groups, rural areas and overall
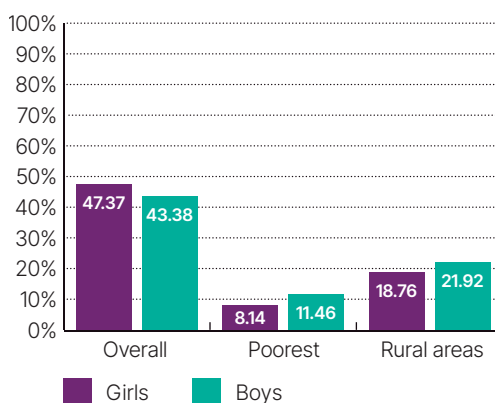
This throws into sharp relief the need to improve efforts in foundational learning in Pakistan. It also highlights how the language of reading assessments has the potential to affect results as well (see section 5.2.4 for a further discussion regarding the Philippines). The data in figure 19 are predicated on reading assessments conducted in both English and Urdu.[42] However, there are 14 languages spoken in Pakistan, of which Urdu is the fourth most commonly spoken and English is the least.[43] Children from minority and marginalised groups (such as those from the poorest/lowest castes or rural areas) are often further disadvantaged as their mother tongue is not aligned with the language of instruction,[44] or in this case, assessment. This may be a factor in the findings featured in figure 19.

That said, the Pakistani government is proactively working to drive systemic improvements in foundational learning at a national scale through the Ministry of Education's Foundational Learning Hub, supported by the UK government and the World Bank (*see box 15*).

Box 15. Pakistan Foundational Learning Hub

- **Geographical focus:** Pakistan
- **Duration:** Launched in September 2023
- **Partners:** FCDO and World Bank
- **Investment:** $190,000 USD
- **Target beneficiaries:** Provincial Ministries of Education and all primary schools within their remit

What is the initiative? The Pakistan Foundational Learning Hub is a Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT) initiative aiming to improve foundational learning in Pakistan. It plans to improve foundational learning and drive systemic improvements through three main channels: 1) evidence and analysis coordination; 2) technical support to provinces; and 3) school reading hour support.

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? The Pakistan Foundational Learning Hub will become a keystone in Pakistan's Learning Movement, working with all partners to enable quality learning opportunities for all by providing evidence-based strategies and support to policymakers across Pakistan to make tangible improvements in foundational learning. Although still in its infancy, the Hub is a good example of how to localise national priorities to ensure an approach is sustainable and appropriate at the local level.

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42 UNICEF (2019) Balochistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-20 Survey Findings Report

43 Translators without Borders (2023) Language data for Pakistan

44 Mohanty, A. (2010) Languages, inequality and marginalisation: Implications of the double divide in Indian multilingualism

Figure 20. Out of school rates and low reading proficiency rates for the poorest girls in Pakistan

Poorest: % girls and boys out of school

% girls and boys achieving low proficiency by end of primary

Although the Foundational Learning Hub is a promising initiative, it is imperative that this effort explicitly targets support to the most disadvantaged groups, particularly the girls within them. Figure 20 reiterates that girls from the poorest groups have the most concerning outcomes. 60% of primary-aged girls are OOS (compared to 42% of boys) and for the 40% of poor girls who have actually been able to attend and complete primary school, only 8% of these girls can read at a low/basic level when they leave. Pakistan's Foundational Learning Hub has an opportunity to acknowledge these staggering statistics and prioritise efforts to do something about them.

5.2 Countries with low female OOS rates

The aim behind conducting deep dives into countries with low female OOS rates is to provide a balanced look at how gender equality and/or inequality may be operating differently in these contexts, and whether lessons can be learned to speed progress in achieving the two Global Objectives. As discussed, the following sections will focus on Nepal and the Philippines.

5.2.1 Nepal – children out of school

When looking at the overall OOS rates for girls and boys in Nepal (*figure 21*), the picture is very promising. At the primary level, only 7% of girls and 5% of boys are OOS. This drops to 4% for girls and 4% for boys at the lower secondary level, indicating a very large proportion of girls and boys are successfully transitioning/

progressing through education. That said, these gains are slightly reduced at the upper secondary level, with 14% of girls and 14% of boys in this age range being OOS. Overall, the gender gap between boys and girls is clearly very marginal, at all age ranges.

Figure 21. Nepal percentage of girls and boys out of school overall

That said, like Benin and Pakistan, poverty has an effect on OOS rates, although not to the same degree. Amongst the poorest groups, OOS rates for girls and boys remains generally the same at the primary and lower secondary levels (*figure 22*). However, within the upper secondary age range, there is a noticeable increase in which 20% of girls and 19% of boys are OOS.

Figure 22. Nepal percentage of girls and boys out of school within the poorest groups
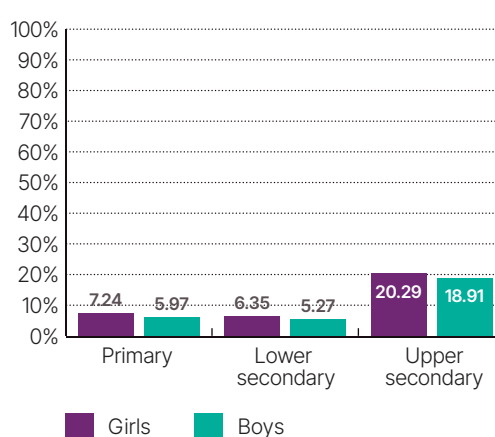
Research suggests that the reason for this increased drop out may be due to the significance of early marriage and the corresponding dowries, which act as a strategy to offset family poverty. With 33% of girls married before the age of 18,[45] Ghimire and Samuels (2020)[46] found that girls drop out due to early marriage and boys drop out to seek economic opportunities to support their families, which include contributing to their sisters' dowries. "Social norms around responsibility for financial support mean that parents start expecting sons to earn for the family (including for dowries for any sisters) relatively early on, already when they enter into late adolescence. We have found cases where boys who are just two years older than their sisters have to start earning so that they can help their fathers earn enough money for their dowries" (Ghimire and Samuels, 2020:6). In this instance, we can see how the gender norms around early marriage disadvantage *both* girls and boys by limiting their agency, choice and opportunity to continue their education.

The pattern of drop out for both girls and boys at the upper secondary level, relative to pre-adolescent age ranges, remains high within rural areas as well (*figure 23*). It should be noted that rural areas in this context refer to highly remote mountainous areas, which are much harder to reach than the 'open country and small settlements' traditionally associated with rural areas (Morton et al., 2014).[47] That said, in addition to early marriages that are also common in Nepal's remote areas, another contributing factor is the practice of *chhaupadi*, in which women and girls must stay in *chhau* or 'menstruation huts', as they are considered impure, unclean, and untouchable during

menstruation or immediately following childbirth. These practices, that are specific to the remote provinces of Karali and Sudurpaschim, often result in poor menstrual hygiene, physical and mental health outcomes.[48] Thakuri et al. (2021) note that chhaupadi is rooted in sociocultural and religious factors including superstition, stigma, existing gender-based discrimination, cultural, traditional, and religious beliefs and the poor implementation of laws against it. They found that 84% of girls aged 15-17 years in their sample experienced chhaupadi during their last period and its prevalence was greater if their mother was illiterate. This demonstrates that chhaupadi continues to be a barrier preventing girls from going to school, across generations.

Figure 23. Nepal percentage of girls and boys out of school in rural areas
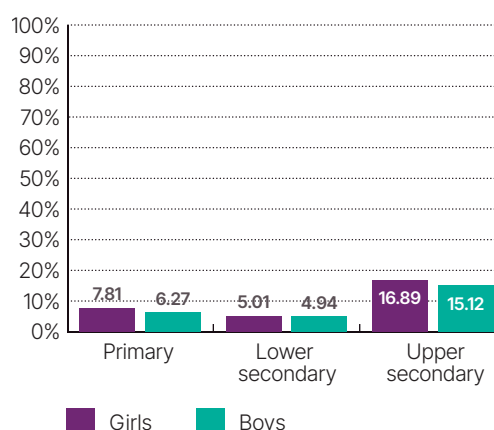
It is clear that deeply embedded traditions and social norms have an effect on girls in adolescence. When poverty is a factor, the norm of early marriage is seen as a viable way to address family poverty in addition to other income generating activities, even though this norm pulls both girls and boys out of school. Traditions such as chhaupadi are more prevalent in remote areas, and this works to disadvantage adolescent girls further, by pulling them out of school for five days a month. There are a number of initiatives that aim to address these types of traditions and social norms, both in Nepal and in other countries. For example, in the provinces of Nampula and Niassa in Northern Mozambique, where 62% of girls are married before the age of 18, the She Belongs in School project, supported by the Canadian government, implements a number of interventions to eliminate significant factors that force vulnerable girls out of school.

45 Seta, R. (2023) Child marriage and its impact on health: a study of perceptions and attitudes in Nepal. *Journal of Global Health Reports*

46 Ghimire, A. and Samuels, F. (2020) A tale of contradictions: understanding the impact of social norms on Nepali men and boys.' Policy Brief. London: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence

47 Morton, P., et al. (2014) Rural areas. In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

48 Thakuri, D., Thapa, R., Singh, S., Khanal, G., and Khatri, R. (2021) "A harmful religio-cultural practice (Chhaupadi) during menstruation among adolescent girls in Nepal: Prevalence and policies for eradication." *PLoS One* 16.9

Box 16. She Belongs in School

- **Geographical focus:** Northern Mozambique
- **Duration:** August 2021- November 2026
- **Partner:** Global Affairs Canada
- **Investment:** $30 million CAD
- **Target group:** 10 to 19-year-old girls (both in and out of school) at risk of dropping-out

What is the initiative? This programme aims to reduce girls' dropout by 1) improving behaviours and practices among families, husbands, and communities (including religious leaders) that promote and support women and girls' rights, particularly the right to education; 2) increasing self-belief, decision-making power and leadership exercised by adolescent girls to pursue education; and 3) enhancing provision of safe and supportive learning environments that build the skills and competencies of adolescent girls, and are responsive to their specific needs.

Key project activities include; 1) supporting Gender Equality Champions to change how students, families and communities think about gender norms; 2) creating safe spaces for teenage girls and boys to teach life skills and build resilience; 3) working with teachers, school leaders, and local government to strengthen School Councils and set up early warning systems to mitigate drop-out; and 4) providing ongoing teacher training to ensure that schools and non-formal learning spaces are safe, gender responsive, and offer high-quality foundational learning.

What insights can be drawn from this initiative? One aspect of the programme includes the training and deployment of 280 Gender Equality Champions, who reach and engage with more than 28,000 caregivers and community leaders. Their purpose is to help shift views around discriminatory and harmful gender norms, including early marriage. Particular attention has been paid to supporting men to be Gender Equality Champions, as they can relate to, positively influence and be role models for other males in the community – like fathers, husbands, brothers, male extended family members, and leaders.

5.2.2 Nepal – reading achievements

Similar to Pakistan, there were no baseline data at the minimum proficiency level for Nepal. However, we will again use low/basic proficiency data to provide an illustrative picture and compare reading achievements for the genders in disadvantaged groups.

When looking at the low/basic reading data nationally (*figure 24*), it is possible to see that 55% of girls and 49% of boys are reading at least at a basic level by the time they finish primary. This gender gap, in favour of girls, is opposite of what occurs with OOS rates, with girls having slightly higher OOS rates than boys across all age groups (*as noted in figures 21-23*). This would indicate that when girls are able to attend primary school, their reading achievements at a low/basic level are generally better than boys. As discussed in section 4.2, achievement at a low level does not require significant amounts of time/materials/support, so it would be interesting to see if this gap holds at a high proficiency level, particularly as Nepal is a lower-middle income country.

Figure 24. Nepal low/basic reading proficiency for poorest groups, rural areas and overall
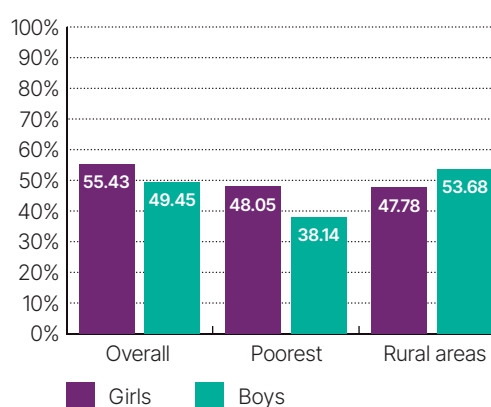
Amongst the poorest groups, there is an even larger gender gap in favour of girls, with 48% of girls and 38% of boys reaching a basic proficiency level by the end of primary. However, in the rural areas, there is a slightly different picture. When looking at the low/basic reading achievements, girls appear to be doing

**49** Shyam, K. C. (2007). Society and infrastructure: Geographical accessibility and its effects on school enrolment in Nepal. University of Maryland, College Park.

50 Angeles, L. (2001) The Filipino Male as "Macho-Machunurin": Bringing Men and Masculinities in Gender and Development Studies. *Kasarinlan Journal of Third World Issues*, 16(1), pp. 9-30

51 Lam, T. and Yeoh, B. (2018) Migrant mothers, left-behind fathers: the negotiation of gender subjectivities in Indonesia and the Philippines, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(1), pp. 104-117

52 UNDP (2020) Conflicting Identities: The Nexus between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia

53 Plummer, D., McLean, A., and Simpson, J. (2008) Has Learning Become Taboo and is Risk-taking Compulsory for Caribbean boys? Researching the Relationship between Masculinities, Education and Risk. Caribbean Review of Gender Studies. 2(1), pp. 1-14

worse than boys (48% for girls and 54% for boys). As well, girls' reading outcomes are slightly worse than those for girls within poor groups. Shyam (2007:2) notes that "...isolated children are served by distant and low-quality schools and also lack basic services such as electricity...isolation operates beyond the socio-economic, familial and institutional disadvantages."[49] Although the OOS data in figures 22 and 23 demonstrate that poverty has a marginally larger effect on girls than living in a remote area, as Shyam (2007) notes, the secluded nature of Nepal's remote mountainous areas can indeed affect the quality of schools, which as the data shows, appears to have a greater impact on girls over boys.

5.2.3 Philippines – children out of school

When looking at the overall OOS rates for girls and boys in the Philippines (*figure 25*), the picture is again encouraging. At the primary and lower secondary level, girls have very low OOS rates, ranging from 2% in primary to 4% in lower secondary, compared to 3% and 6% for boys. However, this gender gap grows in upper secondary, with boys out of school at a greater rate (12% for boys and 4% for girls).

Figure 25. Philippines percentage of girls and boys out of school overall

This may be due to "the expansion of female-dominated work in both domestic and global economies....While sons are generally preferred over daughters in land inheritance, daughters are given more education in the Philippines" (Angeles, 2001:14).[50] This is due to the transnational labour opportunities that began in the 1980s and 1970s, which

have resulted in women "...migrating to plug the caregiving gaps in richer economies within a global chain of care labour" (Lam and Yeoh, 2018:104).[51] Whilst increased economic opportunities for women might be interpreted as a positive outcome, this has not necessarily "produced gender equality, as much of the labour has remained in stereotypically feminine roles...and has limited men's capacity to live up to patriarchal ideals of masculinity" (UNDP, 2020:18).[52] Angeles (2001:16) notes that although there are 'well-adjusted' men who have managed and renegotiated their new gender roles in the modern economy, the converse can be said for men who demonstrate "...even more destabilising and destructive expressions of masculinities as a way of [reasserting] their former place in society."

These destructive expressions of masculinity may be exacerbated by disadvantage, such as poverty, particularly if males are not able to fulfil hegemonic notions of being the 'breadwinner'. In addition to this, populist political leaders have also fortified the model of strongman masculinity in public discourse through the "use of vulgarity, threats of sexual violence and use of martial law in 2017" (UNDP 2020:18).

Therefore, it appears that masculine identities, particularly the 'breadwinner' identity, have been under threat by women's actual role of being breadwinners through their care work abroad (a product of patriarchal hierarchies in those contexts) that has allowed them to send substantial remittances home. Although there is a cultural preference for sons, girls and their education have been prioritised to support this breadwinner end. Thus, the resulting tension for boys has manifested itself in sometimes resentful or self-destructive ways, which includes dropping out of school. Although it is not possible to make a causal link between these toxic masculinities and the higher OOS rate for upper secondary-aged boys in the poorest quintile (26% for boys and 14% for girls – *see figure 26*), there has been research in other contexts that establish such links.[53]

Figure 26. Philippines percentage of girls and boys out of school overall

That said, disadvantage due to rurality (*figure 27*) seems to have less of an effect on boys' drop-out (14% at upper secondary for boys and 4% for girls), which is a reminder that well-off quintiles may also be located in rural areas, and that poverty generally has a greater effect on drop-out.

**Figure 27.** Philippines percentage of girls and boys out of school in rural areas
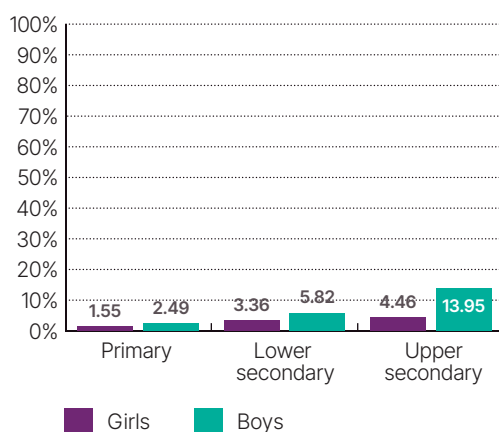
These analyses are not meant to overstate identity issues without paying adequate attention to the nuanced dynamics of masculinity. Masculinities are multiple and have multiple articulations depending on context. In addition, there are likely regions where girls are particularly disadvantaged. Thus, this analysis offers only a brief explanation for what may be affecting the data and that further research and exploration are required.

5.2.4 Philippines – reading achievements

When looking at the overall reading achievements for the Philippines, both at the low/basic proficiency level and minimum proficiency level (for which there are data), girls are doing marginally better than boys at the end of primary school (*see figure 28*). However, these rates are incredibly low. Figure 28 shows that only 11% of girls and 8% of boys are able to read with a minimum proficiency at the end of primary this puts into question the quality of the foundational learning provision in the Philippines. These data were provided by Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) assessment, which conducts regional assessments for Grade 5 reading, writing, maths and global citizenship.[54] The 2019 SEA-PLM Report for The Philippines (2019:2) agrees with the above analyses, noting that:

Only 10% of [female] Filipino Grade 5 students were able to meet the reading proficiency level at the end of primary education as described by SDG 4.1.1b. They can understand texts with familiar structures and manage competing information when locating ideas and details....On the other hand, more than 25% of [female] Filipino Grade 5 students belonged to the lowest proficiency band in reading literacy...suggesting that they would likely struggle to transition to secondary school.[55]

Figure 28. Philippines percentage of girls and boys reading overall
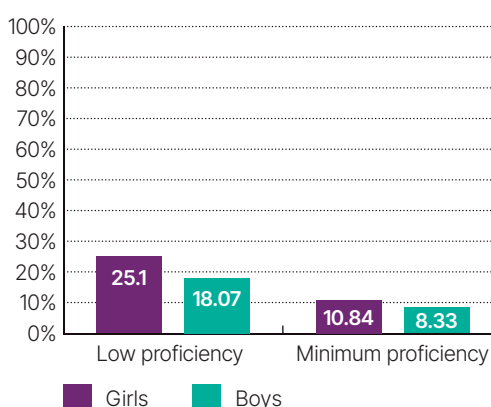
54 UNICEF and SEAMEO. (2020). SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report, Children's learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries

55 UNICEF (2019) SEA-PLM 2019 National Report of The Philippines

This pattern of low achievement is magnified within disadvantaged groups. Although there are no data for minimum proficiency within the poorest quintile (*figure 29*), only 13% of girls and 6% of boys are reading at a low/basic proficiency. This indicates that around 87% of the poorest girls and 94% of the poorest boys cannot read fluently when leaving primary school. In the most rural areas (*figure 30*), only 5% of girls and 4% of boys are reaching a minimum proficiency at the end of primary (with 16% of girls and 10% of boys reaching a low/basic level). Again, it appears that a significant proportion of rural girls and boys cannot read well when leaving primary school.

Figure 29. Philippines percentage of girls and boys reading within the poorest groups

Figure 30. Philippines percentage of girls and boys reading in rural areas
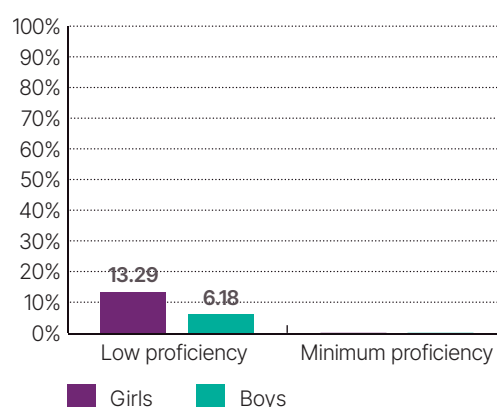
Although such data are very concerning, a recent independent evaluation of the SEA-PLM assessment found that:

The major challenge in the delivery of the assessment (and likely uptake of results) is the mismatch between the language of the testing and the language spoken by students. This challenge is prevalent in multilingual environments and not easily resolved. In the Philippines, children learn in their mother-tongue until Grade Three and then switch to English or Filipino as the Languages of Instruction (LoI) in Grade Four. The Department of Education decided to use English as the testing language for all three domains (Cambridge Education, 2021:5). [56]

As discussed, the SEA-PLM reading assessment was conducted in Grade 5, only one year after children switched to learning in English or Filipino. Such a situation implies that the findings actually reflect that 11% of girls and 8% of boys are able to read in English with a minimum proficiency at the end of primary. Given the short amount of time that children are fully learning and reading in English, a significant proportion of these assessments are testing children's understanding of the English language instead of, or in addition to, their ability to read. This was noted in the evaluation, which stated that "some stakeholders question if the lower proficiency levels observed in the Philippines were a consequence of learners' poor English language skills, rather than their true knowledge of the domains tested" (Cambridge Education, 2021:8).

The challenge of multilingual environments and how/when to transition to a different language of instruction affects a number of LICs/LMICs, and there is a wide literature surrounding this debate.[57] Moreover, testing reading in a relatively new language leads to a number of questions regarding language of assessment. Should an assessment, or a proportion of it, be conducted in the language that was used when reading was taught, in order to increase confidence in the results? Should assessments reflect the language policy of the country, even if it produces problematic results? Is the aim of the assessment to gauge the quality of reading instruction, or the quality of teaching transition into the national LoI?

56 Cambridge Education (2021) Evaluation of Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics

57 Cf: Tollefson, J. and Tsui, A. (2004). Medium of instruction policies. Which Agenda? Whose Agenda? New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers; Rassool, N., and Edwards, V. (2010) Multilingualism in African schools: constraints and possibilities. *Language and Education.* 24(4), pp. 277-281

Given the impasse that these questions often produce, it may be worth exploring the potential of acknowledging, nuancing or weighting results to recognise a shift in LoI, which often occurs during primary, and universally poses difficulties for teachers and students alike.

That said, the independent evaluation noted that the SEA-PLM reading data have prompted much reflection within the government. "There are a range of issues highlighted by participants as being potential avenues for policy change, the most prominent being the simplification of the curriculum, and the revisiting of the language policy" (Cambridge Education, 2021:8). However, although the Department of Education is aiming to respond to results, the likelihood of the annual implementation of the SEA-PLM assessment has been questioned. "The cost of external technical assistance (TA)... of USD 236,000 for the first round were paid by the UNICEF Country Office.... Unless an alternative is found, either by reducing the need for external TA or by finding a more affordable provider, the TA element represents a sustainability threat to the programme in the Philippines" (Cambridge Education, 2021:4). This speaks to the challenges around governments being able to report reading data (discussed in section four), as insufficient government funding, capacity and infrastructure poses barriers to systematically collecting these data on an annual basis, even if prioritised.

"Given the short amount of time that children are fully learning and reading in English, a significant proportion of these assessments are testing children's understanding of the English language instead of, or in addition to, their ability to read."

6. Conclusion: Summary of progress towards the Global Objectives

The previous sections aimed to provide progress updates for both Global Objectives and deeper analyses and explanations for the findings. Regarding Global Objective One, we saw that since the 2021 baseline, **the total number of girls OOS rose by over 2 million, which is largely the result of girls being excluded from education in Afghanistan. However, OOS numbers were generally stagnant across many countries, irrespective of this situation.** There are a number of reasons for this, including population growth, increased disruption and displacement due to conflict and climate crises, a lack of re-entry into education after COVID-19 school closures, and in some cases, lack of government prioritisation of addressing this issue. The implication is that there is now more pressure for G7 and country partners to reduce female OOS populations if this Global Objective is to be achieved by 2026.

The general trend across the majority of the 82 countries, especially low-income countries, is that **girls are disproportionately OOS, particularly as they reach adolescence. These outcomes are likely the result of girls and boys not being afforded similar power, respect, participation, resources, responsibility and safety, particularly within the poorest families and rural communities.** As discussed, this is a result of unequal gender norms and biases that often operate in unconscious or tacit ways, which can influence allocations of time/support/finances, the delegation of domestic roles and responsibilities, the potential for child or early marriage and girls' vulnerability to sexual violence. **These unconscious/tacit norms and biases form the foundation for the unequal outcomes – or gender gaps – that can be seen in education and more broadly.**

With regard to Global Objective Two, there are two broad conclusions that can be made when looking across the 28 countries that had minimum proficiency reading data last year (but not for this reporting period). **First, that reading levels are concerningly low for both girls and boys.** In 20 of the 28 countries, less than 50% of girls/boys were meeting the minimum reading proficiency at the end

of primary. This means that over half of children leave primary school unable to read competently. In ten of these low-performing countries, less than 20% of girls/boys are meeting the minimum proficiency, meaning that 80% of children leave primary unable to read.

The second conclusion is that it is deeply concerning that we only have reading data for 28 of 82 countries, which is from last year's baseline report. As discussed, the challenges around common indicators, political prioritisation and the funding/capacity/ infrastructure required to conduct annual data collection, makes tracking progress against Global Objective Two a difficult task – both at a national and global level. It is very difficult to improve results without learning data and the international community needs to prioritise this issue. As outlined in some of the case studies, there is promising work in train and we need to build on this.

In addition to these two conclusions, several observations and hypotheses were made. When viewing the available data, it appears that reading outcomes for girls and boys are relatively equal – parity in minimum reading proficiency is much more common than it is for OOS rates, and in some cases, girls are doing

marginally better than boys. However, as discussed, **equality of outcomes at a basic or minimum proficiency level is not a sufficient indicator of gender equality within education.**

This is because more time/materials/ parental support are needed for a person to reach their *full* potential, as opposed to a low level of it. Given the prioritisation of sons, particularly within low-income countries, a majority of this time/resource/ parental support often goes to boys within a family. This would likely lead to large gender gaps in reading at a high proficiency level. Although there are no high proficiency reading data from low-income countries to confirm this, there have been studies that demonstrate that although girls outperform boys in numeracy at a minimum proficiency, there are large gender gaps at the high proficiency level.

As discussed, there are some high proficiency reading data for lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) that demonstrate more equal reading outcomes between girls and boys. In LMIC households, where fewer parents have to make difficult decisions about allocating their limited resources to sons over daughters, a more equal distribution of the time/materials/support required to reach full potential is more likely; thus, leading to more equal reading outcomes between girls and boys. Although more equal educational outcomes are positive, they do not signal full gender equality within or outside education, as general

levels of power, respect, participation, resources, responsibility and safety, remain highly unequal. There is notable literature on what gender equality looks like, both inside and outside school,[58] and there are corresponding initiatives that aim to systematically collect data on a comprehensive set of indicators in order to assess progress towards gender equality in education.[59]

That said, ensuring that the international community keeps a focus on and implements actions to support achievement of the Global Objectives is imperative. Although the annual G7 reporting against these objectives will facilitate this, a consortium of partners co-led by UNESCO and UNICEF have initiated a mechanism that allows for more immediate tracking of efforts related to the objectives. The Global Platform for Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education's Accountability Dashboard, launched in October of 2023, monitors progress against key indicators on gender-transformative education, drawn from the Call to Action on Advancing Gender Equality in and through Education and country commitments made at the 2022 Transforming Education Summit (TES). The Dashboard enables leaders and decision-makers to demonstrate the proactive and transformative measures they are taking to address the key barriers to gender equality in and through education, focusing on the most marginalised (*see box 17*).

> **"Minimum proficiency is not a sufficient indicator of gender equality within education. This is because more time/ materials/ parental support are needed for a person to reach their full potential, as opposed to a low level of it."**

58 Unterhalter, E. (2015) "Measuring gender inequality and equality in education." *Proceedings of workshop hosted by UNGEI.* United Nation Girls' Initiative (UNGEI), 2015.; Unterhalter, E., & Aikman, S. (Eds.). (2007). Practising gender equality in education. Oxfam.

59 See: the Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE) framework. The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index has also made a significant contribution in aiming to measure the root causes of gender inequality, through assigning countries scores that indicate the degree of gender discrimination within social institutions, norms, policies and practices that affect women's and girls' outcomes. This SIGI index is one of the official data sources for monitoring SDG Indicator 5.1.1.

6.1 Deep dive summary

This report conducted four deep dives that provided an opportunity to analyse two countries with high female OOS rates and two countries with low female OOS rates. For Global Objective One, the disaggregated data for Benin and Pakistan demonstrated that girls in poor and rural groups had even higher OOS rates than national averages. The data also demonstrated that **when background characteristics, such as poverty or rurality, are the same for girls and boys, unequal treatment due to gender often puts girls at an even greater disadvantage, which can be seen through girls' higher OOS rates.**

That said, **the deep dives also demonstrated that gender norms can have a harmful impact on boys.** As the data showed in Nepal and the Philippines, boys had similar and/or higher OOS rates than girls, particularly when they reached late adolescence. Qualitative research demonstrated that masculine notions

of being the 'breadwinner' pulled many boys out of school in both contexts, but for different reasons. In Nepal, this masculine identity prompted boys to drop out of school in order to earn money to contribute to their sisters' dowries. In the Philippines, this 'breadwinner' identity was under threat by women's *actual role* of being breadwinners through their care work abroad, which allowed them to send substantial remittances home. Although there is a cultural preference to prioritise sons, girls and their education has been prioritised to support this breadwinner end. Thus, the resulting tension for boys has manifested itself in sometimes resentful or self-destructive ways, which includes dropping out of school.

For Global Objective Two, in Benin, the minimum proficiency reading rates for girls and boys were generally equal and generally high relative to the other 13 sub-Saharan countries with data (around 50% of girls/boys leaving primary able to read). This is an impressive achievement. However, given Benin's large female

OOS rate at lower and upper secondary, a **significant proportion of girls who leave primary will not be able to build on their reading gains as they will drop out of school.** Although having some foundational literacy is certainly better than none, there is a need to prevent girls' drop-out after primary in order to safeguard educational investments and these literacy gains.

Unfortunately, there were no minimum proficiency data available for Pakistan or Nepal, however, low/basic proficiency data was used to provide an indicative picture of progress. In Pakistan, of the 40% of poor girls who are able to enrol in and complete primary school, only 8% of these girls can read at a low/basic level when they leave. When looking at the low/basic reading data for Nepal, it is possible to see that 55% of girls and 49% of boys are reading at a basic level by the time they finish primary. This marginal gender gap in favour of girls is opposite of what occurs with OOS rates, with girls having slightly higher OOS rates than boys across all age groups. This would indicate that when girls are able to attend primary school, their reading achievements at a basic level are generally better than boys. It would indeed be interesting to see in this instance, if this pattern holds at the highproficiency level.

Finally, for the Philippines, girls are reading marginally better than boys at the end of primary school. However, the rates for both girls and boys are incredibly low: only 11% of girls and 8% of boys are reaching a minimum proficiency nationally. Although this calls into question the quality of education in the Philippines, an independent evaluation noted that the language of instruction switch to English occurs in grade 4, and the assessments on which these data are based were conducted in English in grade 5. **This situation prompts further scrutiny, as results may be more indicative of children's ability to read in a second or third language, as opposed to reading in general.**

6.2 Recommendations moving forward

This annual report on progress towards the G7 Global Objectives has demonstrated that both objectives are significantly off-track. In order to reach Global Objective One's target of 65 million OOS girls (which is a reduction of 40 million against last year's baseline), **approximately 10.5 million OOS girls would need to be supported to return to school year on year, in order to achieve this goal by 2026.**

In order to reach the Global Objective Two's target of 20 million more girls reading at a minimum proficiency by end of primary, **an increase of at least 4 million girls per year is needed in order to achieve this goal by 2026 (however, given the absence of data for this reporting period, it is possible that this yearly target is now higher, if progress has not been made).**

These numbers should be a wake-up call for governments and G7 partners who are genuinely committed to these Objectives, the SDGs and gender equality, more broadly. Given the significant effort that will be needed over the coming years, the following recommendations are strategically organised by aim and timeframe.

Aim: Achieving the Global Objectives by 2026

1. **More multilateral / G7 coordinated support should be focused on contexts where achievement of the Global Objectives is furthest behind.** One of the aims behind the Global Objectives was to select targets that could support aid effectiveness through highlighting where and how investments could be made. This report has contributed to this end. For Objective One, support is needed for countries that have over 50% female OOS rates and/or female OOS populations over 5 million. For Objective Two, support is needed for countries in which 80% of girls do not have a minimum proficiency at the end of primary and/or countries with large populations of girls who are not meeting this proficiency level.

2. **Deploy strategies and/or programming that supports both Global Objectives simultaneously.** As discussed in box 7, the Rwandan government is considering OSS girls in their Foundational Learning Accelerator Programme target setting and action planning, in order to support their return to education and their foundational learning. The DEGRA programme (*box 10*), the BRiCE programme (*box 13*), the GEC programme (*box 14*) and the She Belongs in School programme (*box 16*) all provide examples of how programming can focus both on OOS girls and foundational learning in a cohesive manner. There are ideas on how Foundational Learning initiatives can explicitly focus support to the most poor/rural groups, particularly the girls within them; as well as strategies on how to pre-empt girls' drop out after primary, in order protect investments and learning gains. Ministry of Education action plans and bilateral donor programmes could/should consider including these types of strategies in programming, and acknowledge both Global Objectives in logframes and results frameworks.

3. **Address the challenges around reading data as soon as possible,** particularly regarding aligning data/indicators, supporting government prioritisation, and addressing capacity/funding/infrastructure gaps. This work has already started with the Coalition for Foundational Learning's Compact – Pillar Two; however, additional contributions and collaboration will be necessary to speed progress.

4. **Fully understand the degree to which language of assessment is affecting reading data.** Explore the potential of acknowledging, nuancing or weighting results to recognise a shift in language of instruction, which often occurs during primary, and universally poses difficulties for teachers and students alike.

5. **Mobilise greater domestic spend on education, ensuring that any additional resources are explicitly focused on reducing female OOS rates and/or increasing girls' minimum proficiency in reading.** The Education Finance Watch (2022) noted that education spending lost space in national budgets in LICs/LMICs in 2021 and 2022. In addition to this, direct bilateral aid to education fell by US$359 million.[60] With overall total public spending being strained by increasing fiscal pressures, there is a risk that education spending in these countries will not meet the need to implement urgent actions to support OOS children and address already high learning poverty levels. Moreover, the distribution of already constrained resources is highly inequitable in many countries, to the extent that children from the richest households receive 8.9 times the amount of public education spending compared to children from the poorest households.[61] Mobilising greater domestic/bilateral spend towards the Global Objectives, through both increased funding and a more equitable distribution of education budgets, is imperative.

Aim: Ensuring a better understanding of gender equality and how it affects educational outcomes

6. **Macro-level analyses of data are important but are not helpful in demonstrating gender inequalities – disaggregation by disadvantaged group and age is necessary.** Country deep dives that provide a disaggregation of data by poverty and rurality demonstrate how gender inequalities are magnified within these disadvantaged groups. Use of qualitative data is imperative in exploring/explaining why gender gaps exist. Moreover, deep dives provide an opportunity to also analyse how gender norms affect boys' outcomes.

7. **Any discussion of boys' marginalisation should be coupled with an analysis of girls from the same group (and vice versa).** In order to fully, and fairly, see the degree to which girls and boys are treated differently based on unequal gender norms, comparisons need to made between girls and boys with the same background characteristics (like poverty and rurality). By doing so, disadvantage due to gender will be more evident through unequal allocations of power, respect, participation, resources, responsibility and safety, amongst others.

60 World Bank (2022) Education Finance Watch
61 UNICEF (2020) Addressing the learning crisis: An urgent need to better finance education for the poorest children

8. **Consider including high proficiency reading data from low-income countries in order to more fully see the degree to which gender inequality affects girls' learning outcomes.** This is because more enabling factors are needed for a person to reach their full potential, as opposed to a low or minimum level of it. Given the unequal treatment of girls and boys in many LICs, in which time, materials and parental support are generally prioritised for boys, this would likely lead to large gender gaps in reading at a high proficiency level. Moreover, as discussed in last year's baseline report, numeracy should also be considered as another data point for learning, given the gender gaps that are often evident.

Aim: Improving girls' educational outcomes in the longer-term, beyond 2026

9. As discussed in the 2003/4 Global Monitoring Report, although SDG 4 uses gender parity as an indicator, **future targets and indicators should consider alternative measures to more sufficiently gauge gender equality in education.** The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) and the Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE) framework are doing significant work that contributes to this end.

10. Although the benefits of being 'in school' are significant, the Global Objective targets don't recognise that **meaningful education can happen in non-formal settings and not in the formal system. Future targets and goals should consider non-formal education (NFE).**

11. Moreover, although re-entry into formal schooling is an important way to safeguard girls' educational rights and improve their life chances, formal education may not always be appropriate or relevant for girls who have been OOS for a number of years. **Integrating non-formal education provision into the 'education system' (which is tacitly formal schooling), should be considered in order to better track and support OOS children.**

12. **More focus is needed on tackling the complex and unconscious gender norms, biases and stereotypes** that often result in girls and boys being afforded different levels of power, respect, participation, resources, responsibility and safety. Solutions to address these norms are often difficult and long-term, which is why explicit research, funding and knowledge sharing is imperative. As sociologist Michael Kimmel (2015)[62] notes, **gender equality benefits everyone and leads to fairer societies, happier countries, and more successful economies – which is why it is a goal well worth aiming for.**

62 Kimmel, M. (2015) The Benefits of Gender Equality for All. Speech given for Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) Talks

Annex 1. Methodology Note for the Global Objective indicators

This annex sets out the history, rationale, and methodology of the two G7-endorsed global objectives, to get 40 million more girls into school and 20 million more girls reading by the age of 10 or the end of primary education, in low and lower-middle-income countries by 2026. The Declaration on girls' education: recovering from COVID-19 and unlocking agenda 2030 stated that:

'Recognising that time-bound targets help to galvanise international action, we call upon the international community to adopt and rally behind two new, ambitious SDG4 milestone objectives, which will serve as benchmarks in our efforts to reach all children by 2030. We call on the international community to join forces to deliver the following two targets:

- **Target 1:** 40 million more girls in school by 2026 in low and lower-middle-income countries; and
- **Target 2:** 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or the end of primary school in low and lower- middle-income countries by 2026.'

The aim was to identify two specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound measures that would help the G7 achieve its prior commitment to 12 years of quality education for all girls. These two objectives were selected as complementary and mutually reinforcing, each coming at the problem for girls from different angles:

- Access is the focus of the first indicator: substantially increasing girls' access to school, particularly at secondary level and reducing out-of-school rates.
- Learning and reaching the most marginalised girls are central to our ambition for the second target.

The aim was also to select targets that matter for aid effectiveness. At a practical level, milestones were selected that would help both put SDG 4 on track and G7 members better target their education support. That is why measures were selected that draw on existing SDG 4 indicators, i.e. indicators 4.1.1 (a)/(b) and indicator 4.1.4. Finally, selected targets needed to be easy to communicate, ambitious yet achievable and sounding a strong political rallying call.

It is important to note that the G7 2021 declaration also stated that 'at the forefront of our efforts will be the most marginalised and vulnerable girl, most at risk of being left behind – whether on account of poverty, disability or the effects of conflict, displacement, and natural disasters'. It takes greater effort and resource to reach these populations, which makes the targets ambitious:

- **Access target:** It implies a 40% reduction of the pre-COVID out-of-school rates for girls in the next five years in low and lower-middle-income countries. Such rates of progress in enrolment were achieved between 2000 and 2005, so it a feasible target. However, progress has stalled in the last 10 years and may have further slowed down, or even reversed as a result of COVID.
- **Learning target:** Data are lacking in terms of long-term progress in the share of students achieving minimum proficiency but the best estimates suggest that annual progress is well below one percentage point per year. Achieving the target would imply an annual rate of progress of 1.2 percentage points, which is well below what is required to halve 'learning poverty' by 2030 but much faster than the historical progress rates.

An additional 40 million out-of-school girls in education in low- and lower-middle-income countries by 2026

	TARGET 1: An additional 40 million out-of-school girls in education, in LICs and LMICs, by 2026
Data source:	UIS data on enrolment and out-of-school rate data; and UN Population Division.
What is the definition?	Additional girls in school means girls who would otherwise be out of school assuming pre-COVID-19 out of school rates.
Who does it refer to?	Girls in primary and secondary education.
What geographies does it refer to?	Low- and lower-middle-income countries, based on World Bank classification of countries by income for 2019-2020, available here.
How was the target derived?	The targets were modelled by the GEM Report and UIS using data on out-of-school (OOS) children and youth as of 2019. The broad overview of the methodology is as follows:

Step 1: The current OOS rates and number of girls enrolled in school were taken from the UIS database and grouped by education level and country income classification (Table A1). It was important to consider the effects of population growth in deriving these targets.

Table A1: Out-of-School rate and number by education level and income classification, 2019

	Out of school, rate (%)			Out of school, number (million)		
	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
Low income	21.6	39.8	65.2	11.3	9.9	13.4
Lower middle income	10.1	16.7	46.3	15.3	14.3	43.0
Total	13.0	21.9	49.7	26.6	24.2	56.4

Changes in the preceding 5-year period were relatively small and for some groups such as lower secondary girls in low-income countries, small reductions in OOS rates did not prevent an increase in OOS numbers because a faster population growth rate offset those positive gains.[63]

Table A2: Changes in OOS rate and number by education level and income classification, 2014 - 2019

	Rate (Percentage points)			Number (million)		
	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
Low income	-3.7	-1.9	0.9	0.5	0.6	1.8
Lower middle income	-0.8	-3.1	-4.0	0.9	-1.8	-1.9
Total	-1.3	-2.6	-3.0	1.4	-1.2	-0.1

A target expressed as an absolute number of children in school must therefore take population growth into account. In the period 2021–2026, it is expected that the cohort of school age children in low- and lower-middle-income countries will increase by 19.2 million on 4.2%.

Step 2: Population data from UNDP were used to project the total number of girls expected in each school year from grade 1 to 12 between 2021 and 2026 (Table A3).

Table A3: Population growth rate assumptions, 2021-2026

	Annual school age population growth rate (%)		
	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
Low income	1.89	2.13	2.37
Lower middle income	0.26	0.41	0.69
Total	0.69	0.84	1.10

63 While this conclusion on out-of-school rates is based on administrative data, evidence from household surveys suggests that completion rates has increase faster throughout the period and that gender gaps are smaller (Annex 2).

Step 3: Annual OOS rates and numbers were projected for 2021-2026, assuming that annual OOS rates will fall by varying degrees depending on education level and country income (Table A4). The following assumptions in the annual absolute decline of the out-of-school rate were used by level, consistent with an overall absolute increase in the number of girls in school by 40 million in 2021 – 2026.

	Annual decline in OOS rates, 2021–2026 (percentage points)			OOS rate, 2026 (%)		
	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
Low income	-0.75	-1.50	-3.00	0.5	0.6	1.8
Lower middle income	-0.50	-1.10	-2.30	0.9	-1.8	-1.9

Table A4: Assumed percentage point decline in annual OOS rate and numbers

Step 4: Estimates on the number of OOS girls were cross-checked and harmonised with existing data on the number of girls enrolled in school. Intuitively, if the number of girls enrolled in school is added to the number of girls out of school, one should arrive at the total number of girls of schooling age. In practice, the datasets do not perfectly match, as they are sourced from different places in different years, which leads to a slight misalignment in the OOS and enrolment numbers.

Step 5: Projections were subtracted from 2021 figures, aggregated and then totalled by level and country income classification, to arrive at the target of 40 million by 2026 (Table A5).

Table 5: Aggregated target for number of additional girls in school, 2021-2026

	Annual school age population growth rate (%)			
	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Total
Low income	6.5	4.0	4.7	15.2
Lower middle income	5.6	6.4	13.2	25.2
Total	12.2	10.4	17.9	**40.4**

	TARGET 2: 20 million more girls able to read by age 10 in low- and lower-middle-income countries
Where does it come from?	UIS database
What is the definition?	A minimum proficiency level is the basic knowledge in a domain (mathematics, reading, etc.) measured through learning assessments.
Who does it refer to?	It refers to girls at age ten or at the end of primary school. Minimum proficiency levels are measured around age ten: data from grade 4-6 may be used depending on the country data availability. The measure is indicative of the quality of education children have received in primary school and their ability to continue learning.
Where does it refer to?	Low- and lower-middle-income countries, based on World Bank classification of countries by income for 2019-2020, available here.
How was the target derived?	The target for girls reading was based on a determination of what would be a feasible rate to reduce female reading lack of proficiency. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, a 33% reduction in female non-proficiency has been considered as an ambitious, yet feasible goal. However, such a reduction seemed out of reach given the pandemic-related disruptions to education, therefore the level of ambitin was lowered.

Table A6: Projected levels of girls with minimum learning proficiency by 2026

	% with minimum learning proficiency			Girls with minimum proficiency by the end of primary education (million)		
	2019	2026	Change	2019	2026	Change
Primary						
Low income (LIC)	19%	28%	47%	10	15	5
Lower middle income (LMIC)	48%	58%	21%	72	85	15
Total LIC and LMIC			24%	82	102	20

Annex 2. Cross-national reading data used for Global Objective Two

Assessment	Region	Countries	Grade	Year
LLECE: Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of the Quality of Education	Latin America	3	6	2019
PASEC: Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems of the CONFEMEN	Francophone Africa	12	6	2019
PILNA: Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment	Pacific	6	6	2018
PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study	Cross-national	2	4	2016
SEA-PLM: Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics	South-eastern Asia	5	5	2019