

Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI)

October 2019

Over the past 25 years, substantial progress has been made in school enrolment. At the global level, gender parity has been achieved in both primary and secondary education. However, global figures mask the large gender gaps that remain between countries and between regions within countries.

In sub-Saharan Africa alone, 52 million girls and young women are still excluded from school and millions more face major barriers in education. Increased school enrolment of girls is essential, but this will not be enough to achieve the gender equality outcomes we need and have committed to through the sustainable development goals (SDGs). A strategic shift is needed to move beyond gender parity in access to education to a broader focus on gender equality by ensuring that gender-related barriers are addressed through education sector analyses, planning, strategy development, implementation and monitoring. The G7-endorsed *Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI)* is an opportunity to mobilize the advocacy, resources, and expertise needed to support governments to accelerate progress in gender equality, both in and through education.

What is the Gender at the Centre Initiative?

Launched in July 2019, the Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI) was developed by the G7 Ministers of Education and Development in collaboration with multilateral and civil society organizations committed to advancing gender equality in education.

Under the leadership of the Government of France, the G7 leaders recognized the urgency of ensuring that all girls and boys around the world are able to access a quality education as a fundamental right and foundation for gender equality. The [Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#) issued at the G7 Leaders' Summit in Biarritz, France, August 2019, gave new momentum to this global commitment and provided powerful support for the [Gender at the Centre Initiative](#) (GCI).

The Initiative is rooted in gender-responsive education sector planning (GRESPI), an approach which has been developed and implemented by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) in partnership with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and with support from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP) and civil society partners.

To date, teams from 28 countries across Africa and Asia have been supported through national and regional GRESP workshops to develop action plans to better address gender-related issues through education sector plans, policies and budgets. Through this process, participants identify barriers to gender equality in education and develop strategies to address them. Workshops have brought together education planners and gender experts, development partners and CSO representatives to exchange knowledge, resources and experiences around tackling gender-related issues in the national education context.

The Initiative mobilizes additional technical resources to support the leadership of ministries of education and other national actors to advance gender equality in education through sector planning and monitoring. An initial eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa, which include Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, will be invited to join the initiative and help further develop its initial design.

The GCI programme will be implemented by the partner countries who choose to take part, with support from a multi-stakeholder partnership which includes UNGEI, GPE, UNESCO-IIEP, UNESCO, Plan International, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the African Network Campaign for Education for All (ANCEFA), and the African Union - International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa

(AU/CIEFFA). Together with the G7 donors and participating countries, this partnership of agencies forms the *GCI Alliance*.

What does the Gender at the Centre aim to achieve?

As an alliance of partners, the GCI aims to enhance:

- Political and public support for policies and strategies to advance gender equality in education
- Implementation of systemic approaches to achieve gender equality in education systems
- Cross-sectoral policy dialogue and coordination amongst relevant ministries
- Quality, availability and use of sex-disaggregated data and evidence
- Gender-responsive budgeting and policies
- Coherence and coordination among all stakeholders
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks to better track progress on gender equality in education

Over an initial three-year period (2019-2021), the GCI will build upon the experience and momentum of the GRESP approach. The Initiative does not intend to create new country-level processes. Instead, it seeks firstly to support the ministries of education and other education partners to take stock of the country context and identify how best to address country level issues (i.e. strategic or operational plan development processes, joint sector reviews, capacity development workshops). Secondly, the Initiative aims to mobilize expertise and other resources among country level partners to ensure that country-owned interventions, strategies and plans are financed, implemented and monitored for sustainable results.

The Initiative will also provide an opportunity for knowledge generation and sharing around advancing gender equality in education between countries and partners to support learning and application in other settings. Evidence from the Initiative will be gathered to improve the effectiveness and impact of future work on gender-responsive education sector planning.

How will the Gender at the Centre Initiative be implemented?

UNGEI, which has been responsible for delivering the GRESP workshops, will serve as the coordinator for the GCI Alliance and continue to facilitate the approach in GCI partner countries and beyond. UNESCO-IIEP will establish a dedicated GCI team of gender and planning specialists based at the UNESCO-IIEP-Pôle de Dakar office in Senegal.

Country partners, including ministries of education and other stakeholders, will strengthen their education sector plans in order to advance gender equality in education. National and regional civil society partners will lead national and sub-national consultations and advocacy efforts, mobilizing communities to help build public support and accountability for the implementation of education sector plans and policies. The G7 donors who have joined the Alliance will maintain the needed high-level political advocacy and encourage governments to strengthen inter-ministerial dialogue and coordination. The African Union (represented by AU/CIEFFA) will also play a critical role in ensuring alignment with regional and continental commitments to education and gender equality¹ as well as strengthening links between the GCI and all 55 member states.

¹ Gender Equality Strategy for the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25)