

COUNT ME IN!

World Bank Education Global Practice
Improving Education Outcomes
for Girls and Young Women





Ensuring that all girls and young women receive a quality education is their human right, a global development imperative, and a strategic priority for the World Bank.

Achieving gender equality is central to the World Bank Group twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity on a livable planet. As the largest financing development partner in education globally, the World Bank ensures that all of its education projects are gender-sensitive, and works to overcome barriers that are preventing girls and boys from equally benefiting from countries' investments in education.

Girls' education goes beyond getting girls into school. It is also about ensuring that girls learn and feel safe while in school; have the opportunity to complete all levels of education, acquire the knowledge and skills to succeed in the labor market; gain socio-emotional and life skills necessary to navigate and adapt to a changing world; make decisions about their own lives; and contribute to their communities and the world.



WHY IS IT CRITICAL TO INVEST IN GIRLS' EDUCATION?

Both individuals and countries benefit from girls' education. Education is fundamental to improving girls' and young women's lives. Better-educated women tend to be more informed about nutrition and healthcare, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and their children are usually healthier, should they choose to become mothers. They are more likely to participate in the formal labor market and earn higher incomes. Furthermore, schools empower all students, serving as incubators where students can learn about their own potential and rights in the world around them. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and countries out of poverty. The costs of not investing in girls' education are steep: a World Bank *study* estimates that limited educational opportunities for girls cost countries between US\$15 trillion¹ and \$30 trillion in lost lifetime productivity and earnings.

PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

The World Bank is strongly committed to addressing the barriers girls face in trying to obtain an education. More than 150 million girls and young women worldwide are benefiting from World Bank education projects and initiatives.

The World Bank's support for girls' education has grown significantly in recent years. Our work includes lending operations and grants, data collection and analytical work, as well as strategic partnerships with organizations and partners worldwide. The World Bank supports girls' and young women's education through the *Education Global Practice* and through projects that leverage education, health, social protection, water, and infrastructure interventions, among others.

Over the past few decades, there has been steady and significant improvement in education outcomes, including increasing access and improving learning, for girls and young women globally. In fact, over two-thirds of all countries have reached gender parity in primary school enrollment. Despite these improvements, progress is still lagging on some key indicators for girls' education, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and in contexts affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV).²

¹ All dollars are in US\$ unless otherwise indicated.

² *Gender and Education*. UNICEF. 2022.

CHALLENGES IN GIRLS' EDUCATION: THE NUMBERS TELL THE STORY

122 million

GIRLS OUT OF SCHOOL WORLDWIDE

34 million

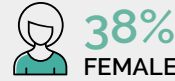
of primary-school age

87 million

secondary-school age

In South Asia, approximately **41 million** primary and secondary school-age girls are out of school. In Sub-Saharan Africa, that number is **51 million**.

While there are similar rates for primary school completion globally (92% male, 90% female), **lower secondary school completion for both males and females is much lower in low-income countries, with the discrepancy between girls and boys even sharper:**



Girls in FCV contexts:

2.5 times

more likely to be out of school

than girls in non-FCV settings

90%

more likely to be out of secondary school

than girls in non-FCV settings

It has been estimated that **two-thirds of the world's illiterate population are women.**

The literacy rate (above 15 years old)

84%

FEMALE

90%

MALE



There is a **large gender gap**

in labor force participation that is especially stark in South Asia, which has one of **the lowest female labor force participation rates at 26.3%**.

BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS ARE FACING A LEARNING CRISIS. Learning Poverty (LP) measures the share of children who are not able to read and understand a simple text by age 10. The average of LP in low- and middle-income countries is

females 50% | males 56%

Female students

represent **only 35% of all students enrolled in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)**-related fields of study at higher education level globally

The gap virtually disappears in low-income countries, **where LP averages a dismally high 93% for both boys and girls.**

The World Bank's approach to supporting girls' education recognizes that multiple factors lead to low enrollment rates, low educational attainment, and low levels of learning. Some of these constraints affect boys and girls alike, while others affect one gender more than the other. Constraints include:



Barriers to Getting and Keeping Girls in School

- Financial barriers
- Distance and lack of safety to and from school
- Lack of information about returns to girls' education
- Social and cultural perceptions/norms



A Lack of Safe & Inclusive Schools for Girls

- Lack of school infrastructure and materials for girl-specific needs
- Unsafe schools, gender-based violence (GBV) including sexual harassment (SH) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)



Low Quality of Education for Girls and Boys

- Low quality and relevance of education services
- Lack of gender-sensitive teaching and material



Limited Further Education and Employment Prospects for Young Women

- Lack of further education prospects
- Limited fields of study
- Limited employment prospects



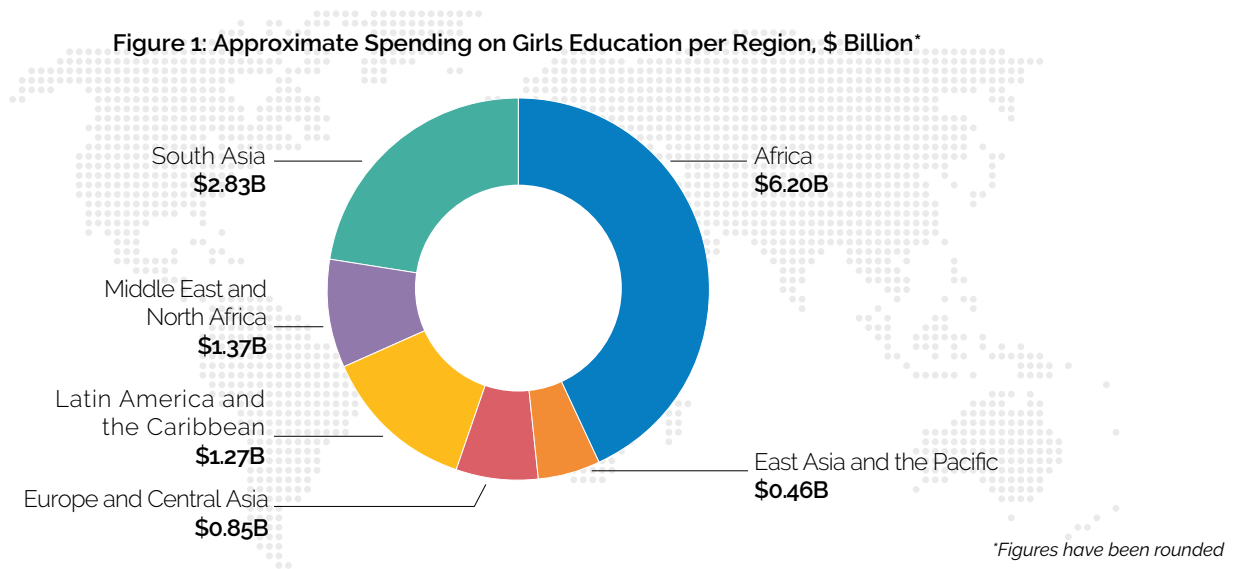
Creating Safe Schools for Girls

The ***Resilient, Inclusive, and Sustainable Learning Project*** is a \$125 million project, which aims to improve teaching practices, teachers' digital readiness, and schools' learning environments in the state of Mato Grosso, **Brazil**. The Project will support system-wide activities to tackle the recovery of the learning losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, create more conducive learning environments, and narrow the digital divide to foster inclusion. The Project will address gender-based violence in schools through school violence prevention programs/trainings. Activities related to this include the design and implementation of school-related gender-based violence prevention plans for each school, including during the travel to and from school. This includes appointing female guidance counselors, running awareness campaigns, creating support systems for survivors, establishing teacher codes of conducts, and signing school pledges.

The \$370 million ***Niger Learning Improvement for Results in Education Project*** has been designed to support transformative interventions for girls in Niger, including refugees. The project will create safe spaces for girls by providing scholarships, mentorship programs, life skills and reproductive health skills training, improve digital literacy and engage girls in arts, culture and sports activities. The project expects 4,500 girls would benefit from the safe learning spaces initiative, including boarding schools, and over 56,000 out-of-school adolescent girls would benefit from the project overall, supporting their learning.

AN OVERVIEW OF SUPPORT TO GIRLS' EDUCATION IN WORLD BANK EDUCATION OPERATIONS

There are **162 active projects across 88 countries** in the Education Global Practice portfolio (as of February 2024). The **total portfolio size is \$26 billion**, and the total approximate **spending on girls in these projects is \$12.47 billion—almost half of the total expenditure**. As our largest portfolios are in Africa and South Asia, the majority of this spending on girls' education is in the Africa and South Asia Regions. (Figure 1).



Supporting Girls in FCV Contexts

Approximately **\$6.91 billion** of the **\$26 billion** Education GP portfolio is in countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV). An estimated **\$3.46 billion** goes to girls in FCV countries.

For example, support for Displaced Rohingya People (DRP) was fostered in **Bangladesh** through the **Second Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC)**. The ROSC included:

- (a) the establishment of 1,000 new and makeshift learning centers to conduct informal learning activities in DRP camps;
- (b) supporting approximately 500 already-established learning centers through funding from other sources;
- (c) recruiting and training 2,000 teachers and learning instructors (at least 50 percent female) for the DRP learning centers; and
- (d) deploying a proportionate number of properly trained female teachers to address parents' safety concerns while ensuring retention of female learners.



Consequently, about 112,000 children and adolescents were enrolled in 1,331 (against a target of 1,500) learning centers. More than 48 percent of the enrolled students were girls with close to 100 percent retention rate in the first year. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the project supported the government's pandemic response: 93,229 children (50 percent girls) received packages supporting distance learning with caregiver support, and hygiene and sanitation supplies to help protect them from COVID-19. A total of 1,196 new teachers were recruited from the local community (86 percent female) and a total of 3,000 teachers were trained on the use of teachers' guides, student workbooks and supplementary subject learning materials to support education activities during the pandemic.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Girls' Education & Climate Change

Education is critical for achieving effective, sustained climate action. At the same time, the effects of climate change are adversely impacting education outcomes. As the largest financier of education and the largest multilateral funder of climate action in the developing world, the World Bank seeks to harness the power of education for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The effects of climate change run the risk of worsening inequalities that girls and young women already face. There are *estimates* that by 2025, climate change could prevent 12.5 million girls from completing their education. Engaging girls and young women is also key to sustainable climate action. *Girls' and young women's education and empowerment*, in conjunction with interventions like family planning, reproductive and sexual health and reduced child marriage, can aid the transition to low-carbon economies, help improve resource use, and assist in lowering environmental damage and land fragmentation, as well as increase resilience of economies.

The World Bank seeks to harness the power of education for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and works on addressing climate change in five key areas through the Education Global Practice:

- 1 Mainstreaming climate education for mindset and behavior change,
- 2 Fostering green skills for a transition to a more sustainable future,
- 3 Supporting research and innovation on climate change topics,
- 4 Investing in 'greening' education infrastructure, and
- 5 Strengthening community resilience to climate's impacts on education.

For example, our project in **Nigeria**, *Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE)*, is supporting school-based life skills training for girls that will cover issues on climate change. This includes raising awareness and teaching adaptation approaches and skills to respond to climate change. The project also encourages social and behavioral change by supporting student-led community activities to increase climate change awareness.

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SPOTLIGHT
ON

Investing in Early Childhood Education

In **Morocco**, access to pre-primary education is particularly limited for girls in rural areas. The *Improving Early Childhood Development Outcomes in Rural Morocco* project will address the gender gap. The \$450 million loan includes support to enhanced early childhood development (ECD) outcomes for girls through a Behavior Change Campaign for improved ECD practices. This includes parental education sessions focused on positive parenting and promotion of girls' enrollment and attendance of preschool. This will lead to a significant expansion of the supply of quality early childhood education services in rural areas, and allow for the enrollment of 100,000 additional rural children. It will also contribute to increase equitable access to quality pre-primary education, especially for girls. This investment is expected to bring about positive benefits in terms of women's labor force participation overall, by reducing the time women allocate to caregiving, and by creating job opportunities for women as preschool educators.

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Empowering Girls and Young Women

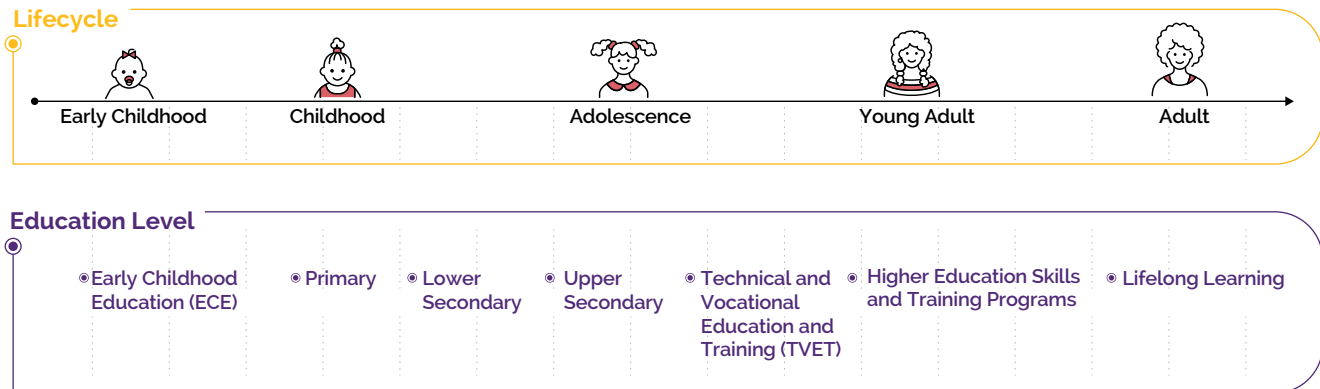
The *Girls Empowerment and Learning for All Project* in **Angola** is a \$250 million project, which includes improved access to sexual and reproductive health services, while strengthening the information and knowledge of girls, boys, parents, and community leaders to boost uptake of these services. For out-of-school youth, the project scales up second-chance education, incorporating life skills and adolescent health information. It introduces a scholarship program reaching 900,000 youth entering secondary school, with a registration bonus for girls. In addition, support will be provided to improve teaching and learning outcomes, and 3,000 new classrooms will be built.

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LIFECYCLE APPROACH: SUPPORT FROM BIRTH TO ADULTHOOD

The World Bank's work on girls' education takes a holistic approach—a lifecycle approach. Our project interventions focus on some of the biggest barriers to girls' education and are designed based on knowledge and evidence of successful interventions, and what works in local contexts. Many of our projects aim to address social and gender norm-related challenges that hinder gender equality.

LIFECYCLE APPROACH: Education Interventions that Support Girls and Young Women from Birth to Adulthood



Read more in our background policy note for the World Bank-wide Gender Strategy 2024-30, *Achieving Gender Equality in Education: Examining Progress and Constraints*

Our approach is guided by evidence on what works for girls' education and targets multiple areas including:

- 1 Removing barriers to schooling:** through scholarships, providing transport to and from school, and community advocacy campaigns
- 2 Promoting safe and inclusive schools:** by making schools safe, working to eliminate school-based gender-based violence, and supporting menstrual health and hygiene for adolescent girls
- 3 Improving the quality of education:** by improving learning for both boys and girls, promoting gender-sensitive teaching and curricula, and introducing extracurricular activities like girls' clubs
- 4 Developing skills and empowering girls for life and labor market success:** through supporting young women through the schools-to-jobs transition, promoting skills development programs for young women, and programs to encourage more women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields

Changing social Norms for Gender Equality — realizing the Promise of Education

Research has shown that social norms are one of the main determinants of unequal gender outcomes. In education, for example these informal rules about acceptable or appropriate behavior can affect a range of areas including girls' school attendance, safety, classroom performance, fields of study, and eventual labor market participation. Education further has the exceptional power to transform norms and promote gender equality far beyond school.

The World Bank is increasingly focused on ensuring that its programs are aware of and address norms that may keep girls and boys from achieving a quality education and succeeding in later life. Interventions can address these from many angles, such as shifting incentives through cash transfers to delay early marriage and keep girls in school, closing the gender gap for school principals, and sharing information to inform female university students' labor force participation. World Bank supported projects further recognize the transformative potential of education on norms, for example engaging fathers in ECD parenting programs, empowering adolescent girls, and shifting norms around and preventing GBV.

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Tackling Social Norms to Improve Learning Outcomes in Chad

In **Chad**, many barriers prevent girls from obtaining an education. For almost half of girls, social norms and domestic chores are the main reasons for dropping out. Girls in school do not have access to many female teachers, despite evidence of having a female teacher's positive associations with "higher test scores, lower dropout rates and higher aspirations for girls, as well as a lower likelihood of girls being subject to violence." And girls perform worse than boys on mathematics and language by the end of primary. The *Improving Learning Outcomes Project in Chad* aims to change this, by focusing on improving girls' education and learning in the classroom, including through tackling social norms that hinder girls' education.



The \$150 million grant will include providing reading materials that are sensitive to gender-representation (including positive role models for girls in school and avoiding gender biases). The project will also conduct community awareness campaigns to combat gender stereotypes, and emphasize the importance of girls' schooling, in a drive to increase girls' attendance and enrollment at school. Further seeking to improve the learning and school environments for girls, the project will create gender-separate toilets and WASH facilities in almost 500 schools. In addition, the project will incentivize the participation of women in the teaching force through the integration of female community teachers into the civil service, as it increases girls' school attendance.

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PARTNERSHIPS EQUAL GREATER IMPACT

Partnerships both within and outside of the World Bank are critical to the Education Global Practice's (GP) work on girls' education. The Education GP works with other global practices in the Bank to improve girls' education—for example, collaborating with the Water GP for access to sanitation and hygiene in schools, with Social Protection and Jobs GP for challenges related to labor market transition, or Energy GP to improve school safety.

The Education GP is also:

- o collaborating with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office FCDO (UK) about targets and high-level engagement with G7 donors, to support aid and financial commitment for girls' education;
- o signatory to the *Freetown Manifesto*, led by the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), to build momentum for gender equality in and through education;
- o collaborating with UNICEF, UNESCO, GPE, and other partners on furthering advocacy on girls' education;
- o working closely with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) as the implementing agency for 65 percent or \$5.5 billion of the total GPE grants since inception, that also support girls' education.

SPOTLIGHT
ON



Educational Quality and Support for Girls

In Haiti, the *Providing an Education of Quality in Haiti* project has promoted awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful stereotypes toward girls, and creation of safer spaces for girls to learn life skills and improve safety and security. Achievements include gender clubs implemented in 92 schools, gender-sensitive rehabilitation of bathroom facilities, and in-service training of school directors and teachers. These interventions lower the likelihood that girls miss school and increase their chance to successfully transition to secondary education. These efforts also built on the earlier Providing an Education for All Haiti (EFA) Phase II project, which benefited thousands of girls and boys to attend school through its Tuition Waiver Program.

Supporting Girls in STEM

The **Romania Secondary Education Project** is one of the largest projects in Europe and Central Asia (EUR 200 million). The project increased students' motivation and capacity for transition and retention in higher education by supporting at-risk high school and university students. Fifty-one percent of 632,000 female high school and university students are benefiting from the program. Moreover, 61 percent of high school girls attended summer bridge programs for academic support during school breaks. The same percentages apply to girls enrolled in STEM subjects either in high schools or universities, which helped Romania be on top of EU countries with 37 percent of females in total STEM students in 2022. Girls had the chance to interact with teachers, researchers, and company representatives to learn about real and virtual experiments, robotics, 3D modeling, or research and development. They also benefited from coaching, career guidance, and socio-emotional skills development.





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