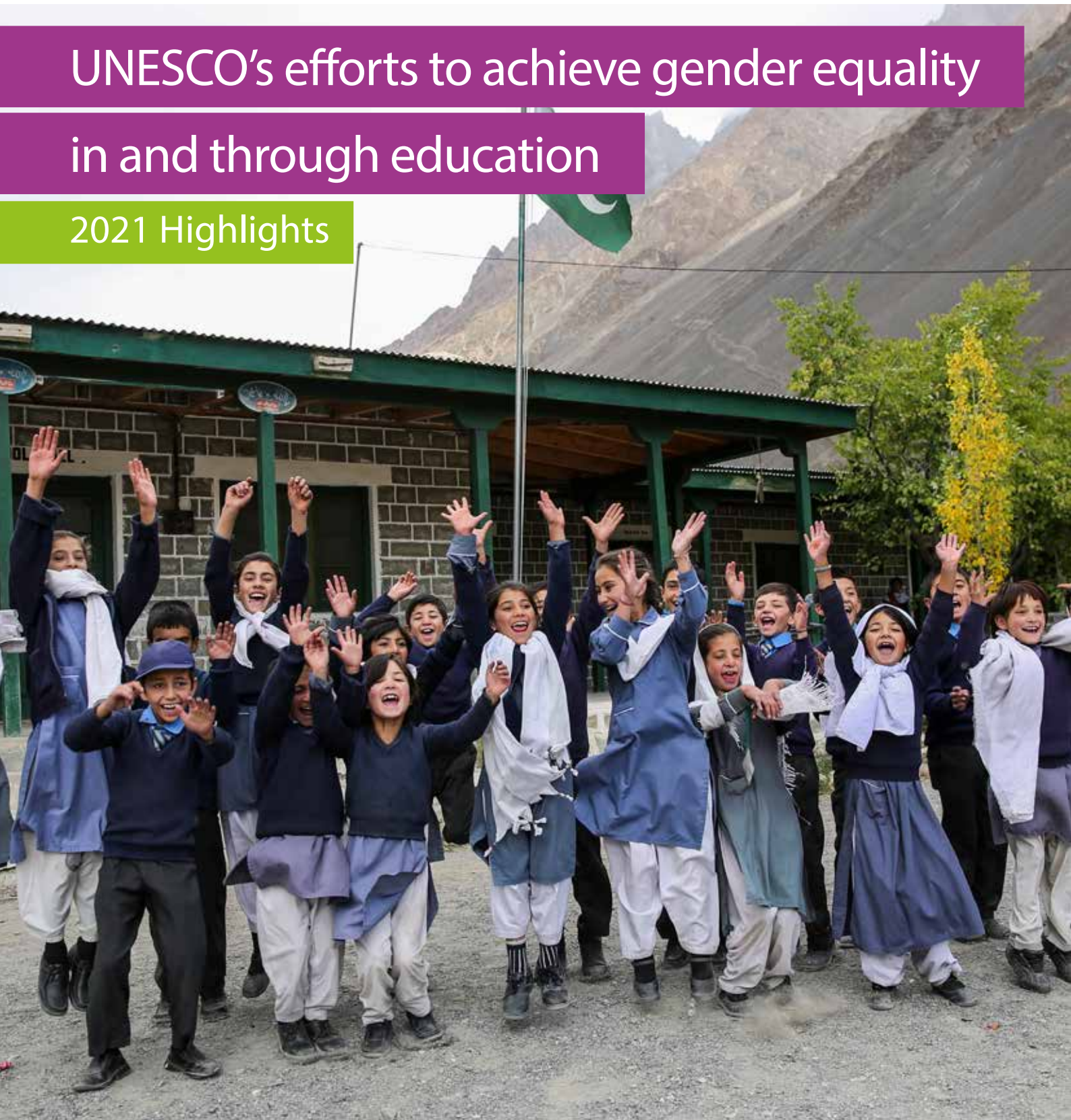


UNESCO's efforts to achieve gender equality in and through education

2021 Highlights



UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners and responding to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.



unesco

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The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to **"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."** The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



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This report presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2021 to advance gender equality in and through education. These achievements would not have been possible without the support of our partners, including governments, civil society organizations and the private sector. With this report, we wish to warmly thank our partners for their support to realizing the right to education for all, and gender equality in and through education.

Strategic context

Significant progress has been made in advancing gender equality and girls' and women's education.

UNESCO data shows that **girls' enrolment has improved dramatically over the past 25 years; 180 million more girls are enrolled in primary and secondary education.** Between 1995 and 2019, the primary school enrolment rate of girls increased from 79 to 90 percent, while the percentage of boys enrolled increased from 86 to 92. Completion rates also improved, with girls' primary school completion rate increasing by almost 20 percentage points to 87 percent during the period. The fastest progress was in Central and Southern Asia, where in 1995 just over half of girls completed primary school, but a generation later almost 90 percent of their daughters do so. And the pursuit of education continues; globally, 118 million women and 110 million men were participating in tertiary education in 2019.

But many challenges remain: In 2020, 260 million children and youth were out of school – just over half of whom were boys. Women still accounted for almost two-thirds of adults unable to read in 2019. Digital literacy gaps are widening. Among 10 low- and middle-income countries with data, women are less likely than men to have used a basic arithmetic formula in a spreadsheet in the 7 poorest countries, while parity exists in the 3 richest countries.

Gender segregation by field of study continues to constrain girls' career choices. In Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, only 14 percent of girls who were top performers in science or mathematics expected to work in science and engineering, compared with 26 percent of top-performing boys. Girls still face the worst forms of exclusion. In **Malawi, Nigeria and Sierra Leone**, early marriage and pregnancy keep about 10 percent of adolescents – mostly girls – out of education.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to cast a dark shadow in 2021, with far-reaching consequences as outlined in the

UNESCO 2021 report, *When schools shut: gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures*. Gender norms and expectations impacted on children's ability to participate in remote learning. In poorer contexts, girls' time to learn was constrained by increased household chores while boys' time was constrained by income-generating activities. Limited access to internet-enabled devices, a lack of digital skills and cultural norms also restricted girls' use of technological devices. School closures also increased the risks of early and unintended pregnancies and gender-based violence. Data on school return are still lacking but gender differences are already appearing in many contexts.

Beyond COVID-19, in 2021 the de facto authorities in Afghanistan effectively banned girls from accessing secondary education, undermining progress made over the previous decades and denying girls' right to education. Prior to this, the completion rate for girls in **Afghanistan** had increased from 6 percent in 1995 to 50 percent in 2018. Meanwhile, a ray of hope came from **Sierra Leone**. Following the removal in March 2020 of a ban on pregnant girls and adolescent mothers from attending school, the government adopted a 'radical inclusion' policy that reaffirms pregnant girls' and adolescent mothers' right to education in March 2021.

UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education is now more relevant than ever.



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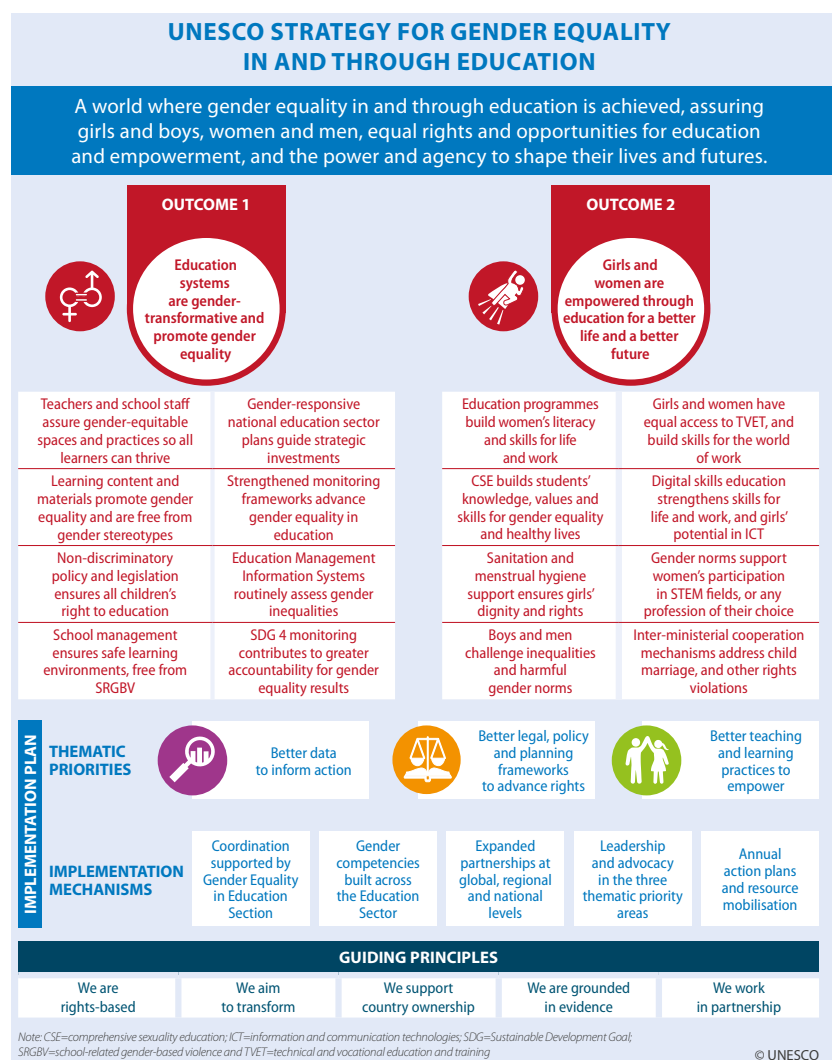
UNESCO's strategic approach

UNESCO's work on education and gender is guided by the *UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019–2025*. This strategy sets out the Organization's vision to contribute to achieving “a world where gender equality in and through education is achieved, assuring girls and boys, women and men, equal rights and opportunities for education and empowerment, and the power and agency to shape their lives and futures”.

Covering all levels and delivery modalities, it promotes gender equality in *access*, including the equal representation of boys

and girls, men and women; in the *learning experience* – through gender-transformative teaching and learning content, processes and environments; and in *education outcomes* – including broader social gains such as equality in participation in public life and decision-making, access to decent work and resources, and autonomy. The strategy is underpinned by a broad theory of change (see **Figure 1**), and supported by *Her education, Our future*, which was launched in parallel with the strategy to leverage political and financial commitments, cooperation and joint action for girls' and women's education.

Figure 1: Theory of change



Box 1: Building UNESCO capacity to mainstream gender in education programmes

UNESCO continued to mainstream gender equality in education in 2021. This included a gender analysis of over 350 Education Sector workplans, and guidance on the integration of gender considerations across all thematic areas of work.

Operational tools to advance gender equality in and through education were rolled out, responding to the recommendation of the 2020 *IOS Evaluation of the UNESCO Global Priority Gender Equality*. This toolkit aims to strengthen individual and institutional capacity to integrate gender equality into education programmes. It is designed to enable a better understanding of the principles, tools and data needed for gender-transformative education programmes.



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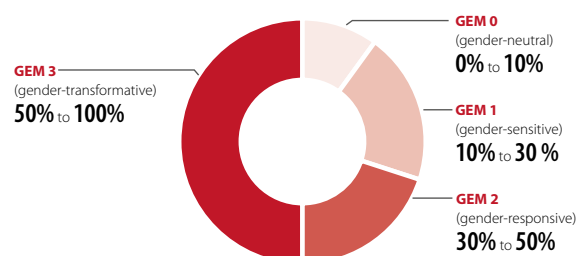
Source: UNESCO. 2019. *From access to empowerment: UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019–2025*. Paris, UNESCO, p. 9.

UNESCO continued to leverage partnerships for results. This includes the convening of the *Gender Flagship* within the *Global Education Coalition* to support countries to understand and address the gender dimensions of COVID-19 school closures. In 2021, the Gender Flagship – with over 70 members and supporters drawn from the private sector, civil society, development partners and international organizations – continued to champion collective actions for equality. UNESCO also supported the establishment of a *Global Partnership Forum on Comprehensive Sexuality Education* (CSE). By end-2021, over 60 member organizations had joined the Forum, making it the largest group supporting CSE worldwide. Through the *Gender at the Centre Initiative*, UNESCO worked with an alliance of partners to advance gender equality in the education systems of eight African countries. These global, regional and national partnerships are ensuring collaborative and catalytic actions to advance gender equality in and through education.

Funding highlights

UNESCO has adopted a mechanism – the Gender Equality Marker (GEM; see **Figure 2**) – for tracking the proportion of funds devoted to advancing gender equality. In 2021, contributions to Priority Gender Equality – at US\$51.5 million – made up 28 percent of the Education Sector's total expenditure, excluding regular programme staff costs. This represents three-fifths of the gender-related expenditure of the five UNESCO Major Programmes.

Figure 2: Gender Equality Marker budget range



Source: UNESCO. 2021. *From access to empowerment: Operational tools to advance gender equality in and through education*. Paris, UNESCO, p. 32.

While gender equality cuts across all expected results (ERs), one ER is entirely dedicated to gender equality in and through education: ER 7 – National capacities strengthened to address gender equality holistically in national education systems. The regular programme budget for this ER was US\$704,000 for the 2020-2021 biennium and voluntary contributions in hand totalled US\$20.6 million for the 2020-2021 programme and budget cycle – leaving a funding gap of US\$8.6 million. The funding gap designates the funds that still need to be mobilized to achieve the programmatic targets set over the biennium.

Extrabudgetary funding is critical to the implementation of UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education, as evidenced by the many donors supporting projects across a wide range of settings and programme areas. This includes the governments of Bulgaria, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, Sweden and Wallonie-Bruxelles International. CJ Group remained the primary funder to the multi-donor UNESCO Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education, which supports equal access to education for girls and women with a focus on the hardest-to-reach and those affected by conflict and disaster. Other companies supporting UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education in 2021 include Dior, HNA Group, Intel and Prada. UNESCO will continue to mobilize resources for gender equality in and through education to achieve the ambitions outlined in the *UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019–2025*.

**In 2021, UNESCO's Education Sector
invested US\$ 51.5 million to advance
Priority Gender Equality**

Highlights: Better data to inform action

The key ingredients for policymaking, planning and the delivery of strategic interventions to advance gender equality in and through education are high quality and timely data and evidence. This section presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2021 to ensure better data to inform action.

Monitoring SDG 4

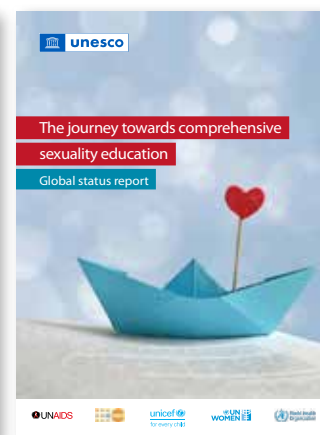
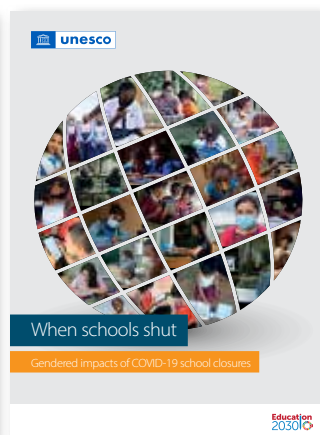
UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS) continued to lead the global monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), measuring progress towards gender parity and gender equality in and through education. In 2021, this included benchmarking exercises with countries, with the aim to accelerate progress towards fulfilling neglected commitments. This process allows each country to set its own targets, taking into account its specific context. It strengthens country ownership and accountability, helping to align national, regional and global education agendas. In 2021, UIS disseminated sex-disaggregated data for 28 SDG 4 indicators. Over 160 countries had sex-disaggregated data for at least one SDG 4 indicator.

The UIS data release includes 28 SDG 4 indicators disaggregated by sex across 160 countries

Strengthening national data capacity to understand and address gender inequality

UNESCO reinforced country capacities to collect, analyse and use indicators, statistical approaches and monitoring tools – including education management information systems (EMIS) – to better understand and address gender inequality in education.

Examples of UNESCO publications



For instance, UNESCO provided technical support and guidance to **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), India, Lesotho, Nepal and Zambia** to gather and report on sex-disaggregated statistical data.

Significant progress has been made in building the capacity of countries – such as the **DRC, Mali, Mozambique and Senegal** – to incorporate new indicators on gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV, and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) into their EMIS. For example, the UNESCO-UNFPA-UN Women Joint Programme on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education supported the Ministry of Education of **Mali** to integrate questions related to SRH and GBV in data collection questionnaires for schools and in EMIS. This system change will have lasting results nationwide for years to come.

Progress was also achieved in strengthening the organizational culture of ministries of education to support gender equality in education. For example, in 2021, UNESCO initiated a participatory gender audit of **Burkina Faso's** Ministry of Education; this included a desk review, an online survey of 336 staff, semi-structured interviews and data collection workshops. The audit considered staff knowledge and capacity on gender equality; gender mainstreaming in the Ministry's vision, policy and operations; and the Ministry's staffing and organizational culture. UNESCO's International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP-UNESCO) will use the findings to strengthen knowledge on gender norms and support institutional change to advance gender equality.

Building the evidence base on gender equality in and through education

Quantitative and qualitative research and analyses on gender equality in education produced by UNESCO are informing efforts worldwide. This includes the publication by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report of *An unfulfilled promise: 12 years of education for every girl*. It explores whether the promise of completing 12 years of education for girls by 2030 is on track, and documents the evolution of girls' and boys' completion rates in primary and secondary education since 1995. The GEM Report team also published a *policy paper* addressing the exclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students. The paper calls on governments to protect LGBTI learners' rights, improve monitoring of school-based bullying and violence, and create positive and supportive learning environments.

UNESCO also continued to expand evidence to advance girls' participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). This includes the publication of a *policy brief* on female science and mathematics teachers jointly with the International Association of the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The brief explores the relationship between teachers' gender and learners' mathematics and science achievement, discusses implications for teaching and suggests actions to address gender gaps. It is the first in a UNESCO-IEA series on this theme.

UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, and IIEP-UNESCO Buenos Aires also released many publications on the situation in the region. This includes reports on: *comparative analyses of gender in curricula*, *women in higher education* and

gender and education policy. The *2019 Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study* conducted in all Latin American countries by the Latin American Laboratory for the Quality of Education – a network coordinated by UNESCO – also offers further possibilities for gendered analysis in the region.

Advancing understanding of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures

UNESCO expanded global understanding of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures. In addition to ensuring sex-disaggregated monitoring of COVID-19 school closures, UNESCO published *When schools shut* – the first global study on the gendered impacts of school closures. The study drew on a review of published research, a large-scale survey of organizations working globally on gender equality in education, and in-depth data collection in **Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mali and Pakistan**. UNESCO also commissioned a systematic review of extended school closures, going beyond COVID-19 to review the evidence on the impact of previous extended school closures (to be published in 2022). A series of events were held to release and discuss the findings and policy implications. The reports, and other guidance by UNESCO, have been used for COVID-19 recovery planning in **Cambodia, Liberia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam**, among others.

UIS and partners also conducted studies in **Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Zambia** to examine proficiency levels and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon learning outcomes – including related gender inequalities. The UIS website on *COVID-19 education responses* was also established and provides detailed information on countries' efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 school closures.



Highlights: Better legal, policy and planning frameworks to advance rights

The right to education lies at the heart of UNESCO's mission. This section presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2021 to ensure better legal, policy and planning frameworks to advance rights.

Monitoring the right to education

UNESCO undertook a *thorough analysis* of country reporting in the framework of the 1960 *UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education*. Of the 81 countries who provided reports covering the period 2017–2020, 60 percent cited the existence of measures to ensure gender parity in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and STEM; 48 percent reported having taken action to eliminate barriers for pregnant girls or young mothers in education; and 67 percent reported having taken steps to combat stereotyping and stigmatization.

UNESCO also continued to analyse, map and monitor national legal frameworks for girls' right to education through *Her Atlas*. At the end of 2021, legal frameworks were analysed across 12 indicators for **196 countries**, and country profiles examining girls' and women's educational rights were available online for each of these countries.

196 country profiles on girls' and women's right to education available online

In 2021, largely through the roll-out of UNESCO's *Guidelines to strengthen the right to education in national frameworks*, UNESCO supported 12 West and Central African countries – namely **Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Mali and Sao Tome and Principe** – to document and review gaps in legal frameworks. National discussions identified areas for improvement, including legal reforms to advance girls' and women's right to education.

Extensive efforts were also carried out to encourage all Member States to sign onto and fulfil their legal commitments to gender equality in education. This includes supporting the ratification of UNESCO's *Convention against Discrimination in Education*; **Iceland** and **Turkmenistan** officially joined the list of States Parties in 2021.

'Hardwiring' gender in ministries and supporting women's leadership

UNESCO has also leveraged the *Gender in Education Network in Asia-Pacific (GENIA)* network for capacity development on gender analyses and gender-responsive education sector plans, training 30 Gender Focal Points and other Ministry of Education officials from 18 countries in Asia and the Pacific in 2021. The trainings, which were held over a six-week period, provided a platform for learning, knowledge and experience sharing, and further collaboration in the region.



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Box 2: Supporting women's capacities and leadership

In the **DRC's** Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education, opportunities for female staff to move into leadership roles are limited – with only one-third of decision-making positions held by women.

In this context, through UNESCO's Capacity for Development (CapED) programme, UNESCO has worked to build the capacity of female staff in data analysis and planning and supported the Women's Education Network. This network, established within the Ministry, builds leadership skills among female staff at the central level.

Already, more women are being hired into higher-level ministerial positions. One such example is Christine Bepa Nepa Kabala, who has been appointed interim Secretary-General of the Ministry. During an interview with UNESCO, she said: "The Women's Network aims to develop women's capacities and raise their representation in decision-making roles to promote gender so that they can contribute to the country's development. So far, the Network has led to a rise in the number of female heads of departments in the Ministry."

Promoting gender-responsive education sector planning

IIEP-UNESCO played a leading role in this effort, training 39 education officials (including 27 women) from 20 countries through the 2021 online course on gender-responsive educational planning and the establishment of a community of practice on gender and education. Through the G7-launched *Gender at the Centre initiative*, IIEP-UNESCO also strengthened country technical capacity to mainstream gender equality in education sector planning and management in eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa: **Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria** and **Sierra Leone**. This includes capacity-building efforts to help countries to integrate gender considerations into sector analysis, plans and budgets; undertake gender audits; and initiate transformational change within ministries.

IIEP-UNESCO also supported **Albania, Burundi, Costa Rica, Grenada, Iraq, Jordan, North Macedonia, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Viet Nam** to integrate gender equality into education sector analyses and plans. In **Nepal**, UNESCO's right to education report – which included a focus on girls' and women's right to education – informed discussions on the revision of the education sector plan.

Advancing national legislation and strategies for gender equality in and through education

UNESCO also assisted countries to advance national legislation and strategies for gender equality in and through education. In **Liberia**, UNESCO provided technical support to the development of the country's first National Strategy for Girls' Education. The Strategy drew on a situation analysis, policy and bottleneck analysis, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and stakeholder consultations. It was also used to inform the development of the country's Education Sector Plan, ensuring synergies and costed strategies to advance girls' education. It is expected to advance gender equality in and through education for over 795,000 learners.

UNESCO successfully supported national legal and policy reforms that universalize access to quality education for all without discrimination. For instance, UNESCO and partners intensively advocated for **the United Republic of Tanzania** to abolish its policy banning pregnant girls, teenage mothers, and married girls from continuing their education and to guarantee equal access

to education to all without discrimination. In November 2021, the Tanzanian Ministry of Education announced that the ban would be lifted. To guarantee the right to education for every girl without discrimination, UNESCO continues to advocate for these developments to be reflected in the legislation, and that remaining legal and policy restrictions be completely removed.

Leading international efforts to advance gender equality in and through education

UNESCO continued to lead efforts to integrate gender equality in education in high-level UN policy dialogues, in economic policy fora such as the G7 and G20, and in global, regional and national advocacy actions aiming to advance good practice.

One highlight was the Generation Equality Forum hosted in Paris (30 June to 2 July 2021), which aimed to strengthen and protect progress made on gender equality, and to commit concrete actions to advance girls' and women's rights. UNESCO worked hard with a consortium of partners for over a year to ensure that education was positioned as a cross-cutting theme throughout the *six action coalitions*. UNESCO also made a significant commitment (**Box 3**) to advance gender equality in and through education.



Box 3: UNESCO's commitments to advance gender equality in and through education

At the Generation Equality Forum, UNESCO announced a commitment of US\$30 million over five years to:



Reach 28 million learners in 80 countries with quality gender-transformative teaching and learning that promotes gender equality



Hold countries to account on their commitments to gender equality in and through education in its role as the officially recognized source for cross-nationally comparative data on SDG 4, and through annual in-depth analyses of trends and strategies to address gender disparities in education



Monitor the status of 195 countries' legal frameworks on girls' and women's education and support national legal and policy reforms and sector plans to ensure girls' and women's right to education



Lead global coordination to support girls' education in the wake of COVID-19 through UNESCO's Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship

Highlights: Better teaching and learning practices to empower

For education to empower people, it must challenge and change unequal power relations, and address practices, norms and expectations that prevent girls, boys, women and men from realizing their full potential. It must ensure that all learners achieve the competencies needed for today and tomorrow. This section presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2021 to ensure better teaching and learning practices to empower.

Leaving no one behind, including in emergencies and protracted crises

UNESCO continues to focus on leaving no one behind. In **Pakistan**, between 2015 and 2021, UNESCO supported the enrolment of over 50,000 marginalized girls, including 10,000 girls in 2021 alone. Around 2,400 female teachers and 11,000 school management committee members have been trained, and major attitudinal changes have occurred at the community-level on the importance of girls' education.

Since 2018 in **Iraq**, UNESCO has supported nearly 150,000 out-of-school children – including 70,000 girls – to enrol, accelerating progress towards universal primary education. A particular focus has been placed on the most vulnerable children, including children on the move (internally displaced persons and returnees) and children affected by the armed conflict. UNESCO also supported learning continuity during COVID-19, reaching nearly 60,500 students (including almost 28,100 girls). In parallel, to improve education quality, UNESCO strengthened the capacities of over 1,900 teachers – including 900 women.



Box 4: Girls' education in Afghanistan

In September 2021, the de facto authorities in **Afghanistan** announced the reopening of secondary schools for boys and their male teachers only – leaving girls and women behind.

UNESCO's Director-General, Audrey Azoulay, immediately condemned this decision and reiterated UNESCO's call for the immediate return of all girls to schools. A *UNESCO report* underscored that – beyond a violation of girls' and women's right to education – critical gains made in the country's development were at risk of being severely undermined by this decision.

UNESCO has taken steps to engage with all relevant Afghan actors and education partners to advocate for the right to education at all levels of education and to ensure that timely and quality education is provided during this acute humanitarian crisis. UNESCO is the leading United Nations agency in Afghanistan on youth and adult literacy and basic education, with a large focus on women and adolescent girls. The Organization condemns this denial of girls' right to education, and is mobilizing resources to address urgent needs – particularly for girls.

“Our commitment to Afghan children is unequivocal, and our collective responsibility is to ensure that the fundamental right to education for each and every one of them is fully realized.”

Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director-General



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UNESCO is also improving the learning and skills development of crisis-affected girls and boys. Alternative learning programmes reached 5,000 youth in the **Syrian Arab Republic** (including 3,095 girls and young women). In Cox's Bazar, **Bangladesh**, UNESCO supported the training of 872 (including 112 female) teachers/facilitators in Rohingya camps and 711 (including 402 female) teachers/facilitators in host communities to deliver parenting education and crisis-sensitive education planning, management and coordination. These educators conducted learning sessions reaching around 3,200 (60 percent female) parents/caregivers in camps and in host communities. In **Lebanon**, UNESCO's support has enabled the rehabilitation of over 40 schools, including support to safe water and sanitation facilities – a common obstacle to girls' continuity of education.

In **Viet Nam**, through the UNESCO Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education and with support from CJ Group, UNESCO is working with the government to ensure ethnic minority girls' inclusion in education. A nationwide campaign highlighting the importance of ethnic minority girls' access to education reached 300,000 people in 2021. Over 3,300 girls also received counselling service, and 10,000 students participated in school-wide communication events. In **Guatemala**, the Fund supported the establishment of UNESCO-Malala centres, reaching over 2,000 indigenous adolescent girls and young women from 2018-2021 with training programmes on health and well-being, economic autonomy, and sustainable development. In 2021, a new training programme engaged boys and men (see **Box 5**) and a digital high school scholarship programme was also established with Huawei and the Institute of Radio Education. This project enabled 50 young women to continue their studies through a virtual modality and 100 to receive ICT devices to support learning, and is being expanded in 2022.



Box 5: Engaging boys and men for gender equality in Guatemala

As boys and men have a key role to play in advancing gender equality in and through education, UNESCO initiated a programme on positive masculinities in **Guatemala**. The programme drew on research on gender relations and masculinities in indigenous contexts. It was delivered in UNESCO-Malala-Ministry of Education Centres established by UNESCO in Totonicapán that were designed to expand indigenous girls' and women access to education. In 2021, 40 adolescents and young men participated in the training, aiming to construct new, non-violent ways of thinking and exercising masculinities in their communities. UNESCO will continue to work here and elsewhere to engage boys and men to advance gender equality in and through education and change social norms to achieve gender equality.

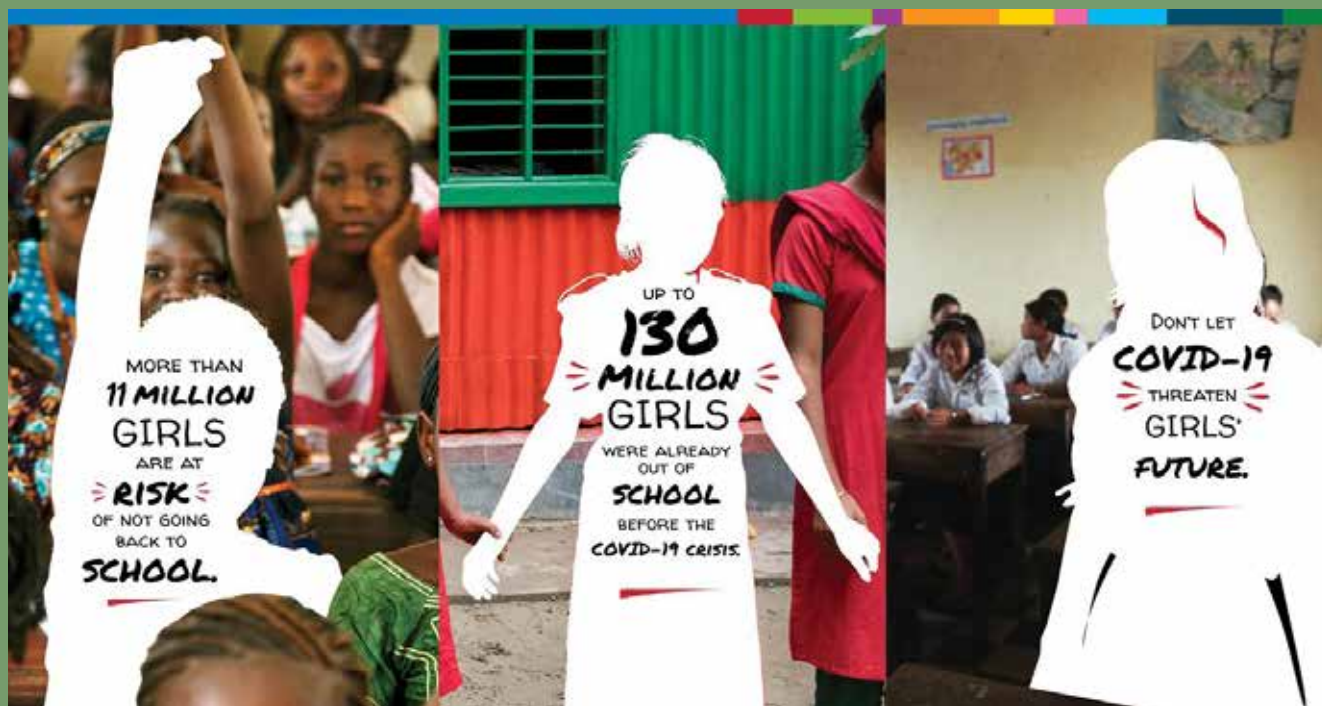
Advancing gender equality within the response to COVID-19



UNESCO continued to support countries to advance gender equality in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, UNESCO joined forces with ILO, UNICEF and UNV to support a joint UN response to COVID-19 aiming to address learning loss and prevent dropout – particularly for marginalized groups. Some 2,500 teachers (80 percent female) were trained to support distance education and address their own well-being; over 400 assistive technology devices were provided to girls and boys with disabilities, and over 200 ICT resources provided to students facing digital barriers; 150,000 primary and secondary students received hygiene kits; and other support was provided to address connectivity and employability, including a focus on girls' participation in STEM. This project, which far exceeded its objectives, has been cited as a model of cooperation and will serve as a reference for future follow-up projects. UNESCO also catalysed support through the Gender Flagship (see **Box 6**) to leverage action in a wide range of contexts.

Building teacher capacity for gender-transformative pedagogy

UNESCO is supporting countries to build teacher capacity to promote gender equality in the teaching and learning process. This work aims to empower teachers to examine their own gender biases, to encourage equal participation and involvement of boys and girls in the classroom and wider school community, and to take into account boys' and girls' specific interests and needs across lesson planning, instruction, classroom management and assessments.



Box 6: The Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship

UNESCO and partners in the Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship continued to address the gendered impact of COVID-19 school closures.

This includes support to the roll-out of the *Keeping Girls in the Picture* campaign launched in 2020 to support girls' return to school. Between 2020 and 2021, the campaign reached an estimated 400 million people globally. Campaign materials were adapted and translated into local languages to support the roll-out of the campaign in **Benin, Brazil, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal** and **Viet Nam**. Content was developed for community broadcasts, journalists and young people were trained, 'changemakers' were identified to support advocacy on social media, and caravans took advocacy messages to isolated communities. In **Nigeria**, over 16 million people were reached by the campaign through local radio broadcasting.

UNESCO and Gender Flagship partners also enhanced access to distance learning approaches and contributed to narrowing the gender digital divide through online learning opportunities, digital mentorship and access to female role models. In March 2021, Microsoft and UNESCO held a virtual hackathon supporting 80 secondary school girls and their teachers from 11 countries in Africa, the Arab States and Europe to design artificial intelligence solutions. The highlight of the event saw the girls designing the outline of a product that applies artificial intelligence to a sustainability problem and 'pitching' their idea to a group of 'investors.' Similarly, Technovation empowered girls and women to create technology-based solutions through Technovation Girls, a 12-week programme that supports girls to build digital skills, interest and confidence in technology, and provides them with access to mentors. Despite the pandemic, over 5,000 girls completed the programme, developing more than 1,500 mobile applications and business plans addressing a range of issues including COVID-19 recovery, domestic violence and climate change. UNESCO also did a follow-up to Technovation Girls in **Nigeria**; 75 girls aged 12 to 18 were trained, built six fully functional mobile applications that were relevant to them and to their communities, and developed entrepreneurial skills to market these digital solutions.

Another key partnership under the umbrella of the Global Education Coalition is the collaboration between Dior and UNESCO that has enabled some 180 talented young female students from **Afghanistan, Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, DRC, Fiji, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Viet Nam** and **Zimbabwe** to benefit from the *Women@Dior* mentorship programme. The year-long online programme provided courses on autonomy, inclusion, creativity and sustainability, and invited participants to create a project that supports the empowerment of young girls.

Many programmes supported teacher capacity development in gender-transformative STEM education (*see below*) – a particular priority for UNESCO to close gender gaps in STEM. In addition, UNESCO trained over 1,600 teachers on gender-responsive pedagogies through the CapED programme. An external evaluation on this work noted increased awareness among teachers on gender equality and gender-responsive pedagogy. In Central Asia, in **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan** and **Uzbekistan**, UNESCO trained 1,085 teachers on mainstreaming competencies for sustainable development with a gender equality component. Through partnerships with teacher training institutions, partners in the Global Education Coalition and cascade trainings with national partners, UNESCO is expanding teacher capacity effectively and sustainably.

Gender-transformative pedagogy also requires curriculum and teaching and learning materials free from gender bias and stereotypes that promotes gender equality. In 2021, UNESCO helped expand access to inspiring, engaging and motivating learning materials for young girls and boys in northern **Pakistan**. UNESCO provided co-curricular reading materials, including a storybook centred on a curious, courageous and independent female character, thereby questioning traditional gender-based representations and expectations. A total of 6,000 primary school-aged students were reached, in addition to 42,000 parents and community members who were more broadly involved. As the teaching materials provided to the initial target schools were subsequently borrowed by other schools, the project expanded its impact considerably.

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)

UNESCO leads global efforts to promote the scale-up of gender-transformative CSE. In 2021, UNESCO published, with partners, a *Global Status Report on CSE*, demonstrating how countries are advancing CSE through laws and policies, curricula and enabling environments.

Through the landmark Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future (O3) programme, over 30 million learners in 40 sub-Saharan countries were supported between 2018 and 2021 with life-skills based HIV and sexuality education, already exceeding the goal set for 2022. In 2021, a companion project, O3 Plus, was launched to scale up efforts to meet the unmet need for CSE and access to SRH services in higher education institutions in **Kenya**, the **United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**. A key element of UNESCO's support is the capacity-strengthening of teachers. In 2021, UNESCO supported the delivery of in-service teacher training in 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, reaching over 130,000 teachers. UNESCO also has revamped the CSE

online course in 2021 to be more interactive, responsive and engaging, and to support flexible learning for teachers across the continent.

UNESCO continues to be at the forefront of innovative digital and multimedia approaches to HIV and sexuality education. Nearly 1 million young people in Eastern Europe and Central Asia improved their knowledge on HIV and SRH through various digital platforms supported by the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education. UNESCO also contributed to establishing a Community of Practice for digital content creators. This will improve the availability of accurate, youth-led, evidence-based online information on CSE.



Source: LoveLogs: Relationship Diary app.

Another notable achievement was the renewed endorsement of the *Eastern and Southern African Ministerial Commitment* until 2030. The historic commitment was first endorsed by the Ministers of Education and Health of 20 African countries in 2013, and seeks to strengthen access to CSE and SRH services for adolescents and young people. Strong progress has been made towards realizing a similar commitment for West and Central Africa in 2022.

In the context of ongoing and new opposition to CSE in different contexts, UNESCO has developed several documents to understand how opposition groups operate globally, and how UNESCO and its partners have supported governments in periods of significant CSE pushback. This includes a draft strategic roadmap for action; the review of effective and not-so-effective responses to opposition; a communications strategy for some countries in the East and Southern Africa region, and a collection of case studies to capture lessons learnt from experiences of opposition.

Advocacy and awareness-raising activities aimed at improving understanding of CSE among key community influencers were also expanded. In **Cameroon** and **Nigeria**, for example, over 21,000 traditional chiefs and community and religious leaders were reached through information and mobilization sessions and equipped with first-hand, reliable information on adolescent SRH. To reach families, UNESCO rolled out training

for parents and adolescents using the 'Our Talks' parent-child communication manual, which supports healthy and positive communication between parents/guardians and adolescents and young people on SRH. By the end of 2021, over 1,700 parents were reached in **Botswana, Eswatini, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia** and the **United Republic of Tanzania**.

UNESCO is also a founding member of a new initiative aiming to empower adolescent girls and adolescent girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa: Education Plus. Champion countries that committed in 2021 to be part of the initiative include **Benin, Cameroon, Gabon, Lesotho** and **Sierra Leone**.

Ensuring safe, inclusive, healthy learning environments

UNESCO supports countries to ensure safe and inclusive learning environments free from GBV. The Organization continued to co-chair the Global Working Group on School-Related Gender-Based Violence with the UN Girls' Education Initiative. In 2021, the Working Group convened experts to prepare a framework for measuring GBV in schools. This framework will be used to further develop country guidance to monitor and address violence in schools in 2022.

UNESCO built teacher and student capacity to prevent and address school-related gender-based violence. In **Eswatini**, the **United Republic of Tanzania, Thailand** and **Zambia**, UNESCO piloted the *Connect with Respect* curriculum tool, while UN Women also piloted the tool in **Timor-Leste**. An analysis of the pilot revealed that the tool was instrumental in improving relationship skills among students, and improving attitudes towards violence. Ninety-one percent of students in the pilot believed that all schools should teach 'Connect with Respect'. In **Nigeria**, through the Spotlight Initiative, some 4,000 primary school students and 14,000 secondary school students received information on GBV as well as linkages and referral to services. UNESCO has also reviewed two teacher training modules to better assist teachers in **Senegal** and **Togo** to prevent and address gender-based violence.

In **Nepal**, the UNESCO-UNFPA-UN Women Joint Programme on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education provided Nepalese Judicial Committees, which are present throughout the country to support access to justice, with digital learning materials highlighting their role in fostering a safe and supportive environment for adolescent girls and young women. In **Mali**, the Joint Programme supported the establishment of 80 reporting and monitoring systems for GBV in schools, and deepened linkages between schools, relevant health and protection services, and the legal system. In **Peru**, through a comprehensive whole-school approach, UNESCO has facilitated

the creation of safe spaces for learners in rural secondary schools. In Ayacucho, 93 percent of teachers were accompanied to prevent risk factors leading to school drop-out; over 1,200 students from 11 schools were empowered with social-emotional skills and received information to protect them from all forms of violence.



Source: Soyons réglos. www.soyonsreglos.com



Box 7: Improving menstrual health education

Menstruation is a part of nearly every girl's life. But without access to menstrual hygiene education, products and sanitation facilities at school, many girls miss out on their education. UNESCO addresses this on many fronts.

UNESCO undertook advocacy to improve menstrual health and debunk myths and taboos about menstruation. In **India**, a campaign undertaken in partnership with feminine care brand Whisper reached over 55 million people and helped keep 9 million girls in school. Nearly 1 million people signed a petition to include a module on period and puberty education in school curricula. UNESCO is currently supporting the development of this module.

In West and Central Africa, UNESCO implemented the 'Let's talk, period' ('Soyons réglos') digital campaign with UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Health Organization, and the French Muskoka Fund. Over 16 million people were reached through TV, radio and social media with messages and information on menstrual health.

In **Mali**, the UNESCO-UNFPA-UN Women Joint Programme on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education, with the Women's Learning Centre (CAFé) in Bamako, supported the distribution of around 3,000 hygienic kits to female students to better manage menstruation in school. In addition, 70 female CAFé students were trained to make reusable sanitary pads – enabling further income generation with these new skills. The Joint Programme also supported 100 schools with improved water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in **Mali, Nepal** and the **United Republic of Tanzania**. In **Pakistan**, within the framework of the multi-donor, multi-year 'Girls' Right to Education Programme', more than 200 schools were provided with essential facilities such as drinking water points and hand-washing stations.

Addressing early and unintended pregnancy

UNESCO supports efforts to ensure that all adolescents are empowered and have the knowledge, information, agency and support to prevent early and unintended pregnancy. In **Zambia**, the 'Let's Talk' multimedia and social mobilization campaign reached over 4.6 million people, expanding community awareness of the re-entry policy and ensuring teenage mothers' return to school; similar results were found in **Malawi**. An evaluation found that the campaign was highly relevant, particularly in the context of increased pregnancies linked to COVID-19 school closures, and that it contributed to behavioural and social change. UNESCO is also engaging religious, traditional and community leaders. In 2021, 734 religious leaders from **Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe** who were trained with the *Religious Leaders handbook on adolescent sexual & reproductive health and rights* were serving as community educators and addressing their congregants on SRH issues, including early and unintended pregnancies, GBV and menstrual health.

Ensuring gender-transformative digital skills and STEM education

UNESCO continued to build girls' and women's digital skills and remove the barriers that hold girls and women back from STEM.

This includes building the evidence base to inform policy action. Building on earlier studies in Burkina Faso and Niger in 2020, UNESCO conducted studies in **Cabo Verde** and **Senegal** exploring gender disparities in access, retention, participation and achievement in STEM fields. The reports offer a set of recommendations to improve the situation, particularly through teacher professional development. In **Brazil**, UNESCO undertook a study of networks supporting girls' participation in STEM. Over 200 initiatives were identified; UNESCO will use these results to inform further work in 2022 to dismantle gender stereotypes and inspire more girls and women to take up STEM studies and careers.

Building on regional capacity-building programmes held in 2019 and 2020, UNESCO supported national efforts in **Rwanda** and the **United Republic of Tanzania** to enhance teacher professional development in gender-transformative STEM education. Through country-led in-service training, over 100 teachers, teacher trainers and school administrators built their capacities to identify and address gender bias and stereotypes in the teaching of STEM subjects, with an estimated reach to over 25,000 students each year.

Through UNESCO's CapED programme in **Niger**, 10,650 teachers have been trained since 2016 with skills in class practices that take gender into account and stimulate students – especially young girls – to take an interest in scientific disciplines. Similarly, in **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, some 1,000 lower secondary school STEM teachers across all provinces were equipped with gender-responsive pedagogy skills.

UNESCO also continued its efforts to expand girls' access to digital skills programmes and STEM mentors and role models, including through the Gender Flagship (see **Box 6**). The Organization's support to **Kenya** is particularly notable, with UNESCO having supported the government to move its STEM camps online during COVID-19. The digital STEM Mentorship Programme – featuring the voices of successful women in STEM – was broadcast twice a week by mainstream national stations and community radios, while an online 'Ask a STEM mentor' platform offered access to support. The programme continued to have a significant impact in 2021, reaching 10 million students between March and May in addition to the 12 million students already reached in 2020.

Boosting gender equality through technical and vocational education and training

One of UNESCO's priorities outlined in its *strategy for TVET* (2016–2021) is mainstreaming gender equality and promoting equity through TVET policies and programmes. UNESCO has empowered women through skills development programmes in different fields. In **Madagascar**, under the CapED programme and in partnership with the Chanel Foundation and the Government, UNESCO built women's skills in the tourism and handicraft sectors in the Tsingy de Bemaraha Reserve – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the 2021 final project evaluation, women who benefited from the training estimated that their income had increased by 20 percent. In **South Sudan**, a Mobile TVET pilot trained 266 people (including 128 women) in the agriculture and livestock sector, aiming to support their transition into the workforce.



In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO supported the development of a national TVET policy for **Grenada** that will help equip youth and adults, women and men with the skills required for employment, decent work, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning. UNESCO initiated a study on TVET teaching in **Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador** and **Venezuela** which has identified challenges with gender equality and will provide resulting recommendations. Partnerships, including with Girls in Tech, are helping to address identified gaps. Efforts have also been made to ensure a gender balance in TVET policy reviews, consultations and capacity strengthening. In **Mongolia**, for example, 79 percent of TVET teachers trained in online and distance teaching in 2021 were women.

UNESCO's support to capacity development is contributing to the increased participation of girls and women in TVET, noted in the evaluation of the European Union-funded Skills and Technical Education Programme in **Malawi**. Scholarships, teacher capacity building, and demand-driven and experiential models for entrepreneurship are believed to have contributed to more equitable and gender-balanced TVET.

Promoting gender equality in and through higher education

As well as promoting young women's representation in STEM fields in higher education, UNESCO supports other efforts to promote gender equality in and through higher education. In 2021, preparations continued for the Third World Conference on Higher Education, including analyses of access and inclusion in higher education. To advance evidenced-informed action, UNESCO also developed several relevant reports (*see above*) and in particular released an *analysis of women in higher education*. This report shows that female enrolment in higher education tripled globally between 1995 and 2008; however, in 2020 women comprised only 30 percent of university researchers and men still outnumber women in leadership positions.

"Such research provides important and timely evidence from which to develop targeted policies and programs to address the needs of women in higher education—and to implement reforms that are genuinely inclusive and gender-responsive."

**Stefania Giannini, UNESCO
Assistant Director-General for Education**

Supporting non-formal and lifelong learning

UNESCO supports non-formal education that provides flexible and diverse delivery modes and meets the context-specific learning needs of all age groups.

UNESCO continued to implement the 'Better Life for Out-of-School Girls to Fight Against Poverty and Injustice in the **Philippines**' project funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) in partnership with the Philippines' Department of Education (DepED) and the Asia Pacific College. In 2021, materials for alternative learning systems that provide equivalency to K-12 basic education were developed and endorsed by DepED, including a national curriculum, teacher guidebooks, student workbooks, and an accreditation and equivalency readiness test. One hundred educators have been trained to use the modules, with further trainings for educators and girl learners planned in 2022. UNESCO and its partners also kick-started the construction of a new Girls' Education Centre, which is expected to cater to about 1,900 girls from an area severely affected by a typhoon in 2013.



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In **Cambodia**, UNESCO is supporting the 'Factory Literacy Programme', providing tailored professional development courses for garment factory workers – the overwhelming majority of whom are women. Since 2018, this strategic partnership between UNESCO, the government, the garment industry and other UN organizations has trained 1,786 workers (97 percent women) across 25 factories. In 2021, the programme was expanded with a digital learning platform to facilitate self-learning. Thanks to the mobilization of additional resources, the programme will be scaled up through 2023.

UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning also published a *report* documenting good practice in integrating literacy, life skills and vocational skills in adult education, including programmes in **Algeria, Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, Kenya** and **South Africa** targeting women. As women continue to represent two-thirds of those lacking basic reading and writing skills, more efforts are needed to support women's literacy and skills development.

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Box 7: UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education

The UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education, funded by the Government of the People's Republic of China, rewards outstanding innovation and contributions made by individuals, institutions and organizations to advance girls' and women's education. The prize is conferred annually to two laureates, each of whom receive an award of US\$50,000.

In 2021, the Prize went to [reprograma] in **Brazil** for its work building the digital skills of under-represented and low-income women and girls to close the gender digital divide, and to Girl MOVE Academy in **Mozambique** for its efforts to promote equal access to education through mentorship, storytelling, sisterhood circles and a unique model of intergenerational support.

Challenges and opportunities

In 2021, UNESCO's work to advance gender equality in and through education continued to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Poorer countries reported the longest average duration of closures, widening the learning gaps between countries, disrupting education continuity, and increasing risks of drop-out and declines in enrolment. The gendered impacts of COVID-19 are yet to be well-understood due to limited sex-disaggregated data on the return to school and learning gaps, and incomplete broader data on early and unintended pregnancy, early marriage and GBV during school closures.

Armed conflict, refugee and internal displacement, natural hazards including climate-induced disasters and associated economic migration are other growing concerns. According to *UNHCR*, over 84 million were forced out of their homes in 2021 – a record. A quarter of the world's children now live in conflict- or disaster-stricken countries, with limited access to education and safe learning environments.

UNESCO has continued to position gender equality as key to countries' development, peace and security; it supported education system strengthening, resilience and transformation to realise SDG 4 and 5, and the broader sustainable development agenda. The Generation Equality Forum offered a key moment in 2021 to accelerate action for gender equality. The Forum brought together governments, civil society, philanthropy, private sector and youth activists, and launched a five-year action journey to drive progress towards gender equality, including as highlighted above, key commitments by UNESCO.

UNESCO is also facing a growing backlash against gender equality and women's rights in many contexts. To address misconceptions on gender equality and advance good practice, UNESCO has also taken steps to advance understanding of gender equality in *all* of its dimensions. Operational tools were developed to better define UNESCO's position on gender-transformative education, and to advance good practice across the policy and programme cycle. Other work to understand the opposition to CSE is helping UNESCO to plan strategically its support to countries. And ground-breaking work on boys' disengagement from education will help to understand how masculinities and societal gender norms interact with boys' (and girls') participation, progression and learning outcomes at school as well as gender equality in and beyond the classroom.

Lack of resources was a barrier for implementation of UNESCO's programmes. ER 7: 'National capacities strengthened to address gender equality holistically in national education systems' remained underfunded in 2021, with little improvements anticipated. Shifts in development aid have been made by many bilateral development agencies to respond to the immediate crisis, and reductions have been seen in education more broadly due to the economic shock of the pandemic and related recessions. The UNESCO strategy has helped UNESCO to define priorities; it remains highly relevant and must be fully funded.

Next steps for UNESCO's work

Building on consultations with its Member States, the 2021 UNESCO General Conference adopted a Programme and budget cycle for 2022–2025 (41 C/5). A separate results area is retained also in this Programme and budget for gender equality in education: Output 1.ED2: Gender-transformative education systems empower learners, ensure safe learning environments and address the educational barriers, particularly for girls and women, exacerbated by the learning crisis.

As outlined in this results area, UNESCO will continue to be guided by its *Strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019-2025*, and its two strategic objectives focusing on system-wide transformation to benefit all learners as well as targeted interventions to empower girls and women through education. The Organization will continue to promote an intersectional approach which recognizes that gender intersects with other characteristics such as age, ethnicity, wealth, ability, location and sexual orientation, and that transformational approaches are needed to support countries to build back equal, fostering resilience and addressing the barriers to girls' and women's education – particularly in Africa where the challenges are the most acute.

To address an increasing body of evidence on boys' disengagement from education, UNESCO has initiated and will publish in 2022 the first global report on this topic along with five country case studies for Fiji, Kuwait, Lesotho, Peru and the United Arab Emirates. This work aims to improve understanding of the factors influencing boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education. It will also analyse responses by governments and partners and make evidence-informed recommendations.

UNESCO will continue to support countries to address the gendered impact of COVID-19 school closures. This includes the publication of a systematic review of the gendered impacts of extended school closures; support to country-level campaigns supporting girls' return to school; scaled-up efforts to build digital skills; and other efforts through the Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship.

The capacity of UNESCO staff, gender focal points and partners on mainstreaming gender equality and programming gender equality in and through education will also be reinforced through the roll-out of the *Operational tools to advance gender equality in and through education*. Additional tools are also developed to support communication efforts on gender and education, including UNESCO's first communication strategy on this topic and a series of tools to promote better visibility of UNESCO's work and its outcomes.

UNESCO will continue to scale up good practice, monitor and leverage results, and support Member States to ensure transformative action to achieve gender equality in and through education. In 2022, UNESCO will leverage high-profile conferences to document good practice and catalyse results for gender equality. This includes world conferences to be hosted by UNESCO on early childhood care and education, higher education and adult education.

More financial and human resources for gender equality in and through education at UNESCO continue to be needed. In a context of dwindling international aid for education, UNESCO will also deepen partnerships to leverage pooled resources and cooperation with the aim for better, stronger collective results.

If you would like to support UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education or have any questions, please contact the Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality: gender.ed@unesco.org

UNESCO's efforts to achieve gender equality in and through education

2021 Highlights

This report presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2021 to advance gender equality in and through education.

UNESCO's work in this area is guided by the UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019–2025, and supported by Her Education, Our Future, which was launched in parallel with the strategy to leverage political and financial commitments, cooperation and joint action for girls' and women's education.

If you would like to know more about or further support UNESCO's work to achieve gender equality in and through education, please get in touch!

Stay in touch



gender.ed@unesco.org



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**Section of Education for Inclusion
and Gender Equality**
UNESCO
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris, France



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