

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

2024 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. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.



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 was prepared by Delphine Santini, under the guidance and review of Elspeth McOmish and Justine Sass. The gender analysis of programme implementation was conducted by Nian Wan, with the support of Rameen Iftikhar. We gratefully acknowledge Kelsey Schroder for her editing of the text and extend our sincere appreciation to colleagues worldwide for their valuable contributions.

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This report showcases key highlights of UNESCO's efforts in 2024 to promote gender equality in and through education. Many of these achievements were made possible thanks to the support of our partners, including governments, civil society organizations, research institutes and the private sector. Through this report, we warmly thank them for their commitment to advancing the right to education for all.

Strategic context

Thirty years after the Beijing Platform for Action mobilized the international community around the right to quality education for girls, progress towards gender equality in education stands at a critical crossroads – shaped by both hard-won gains and intensifying global challenges.

In 2024, the fragility of educational progress became increasingly clear as conflicts, climate-related disasters, and political instability disrupted education across different contexts – disproportionately affecting girls and learners from marginalized communities. In Sudan alone, more than 10,400 schools closed, impacting *19 million children*, while an ongoing war in Ukraine forced *1 million children* into remote learning.

Although gender parity in access to education has been achieved globally, *UNESCO data* shows a rise in the numbers of out-of-school children and youth – reaching 272 million, including 133 million girls and 139 million boys. Persistent inequalities remain, driven by gender-based violence (GBV) in and around schools, gendered academic and career pathways, widening digital divides, and the underrepresentation of women in education leadership. Global figures mask significant disparities between regions and by level of education. For example, *in sub-Saharan Africa*, for every 100 boys enrolled, there are only 96 girls in primary education, 91 in lower secondary and 87 in upper secondary education.

In parallel, 2024 witnessed growing resistance in some settings to gender equality and girls' and women's rights. Narratives opposing gender equality and promoting traditional conceptions of masculinity gained traction, often amplified through social media.

Despite these challenges, UNESCO continued to drive impactful change. With the Organization's support, 27 million learners accessed gender-transformative education, and 10 countries strengthened their national laws, policies and/or monitoring systems to advance gender equality in and through education. In addition, 26 countries enhanced their policies and programmes on safe learning environments free from all forms of school-related violence. UNESCO's groundbreaking report, *The price of inaction*, published with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Commonwealth Secretariat, drew international attention to the staggering costs of school dropouts and learning gaps and the acute need for investment in education.

In this complex context, this report reflects on the past year's developments and reaffirms an urgent call to action: to invest boldly in education systems that confront and dismantle entrenched inequalities and to drive sustained progress toward the full realization of gender equality in and through education – for every learner, without exception.



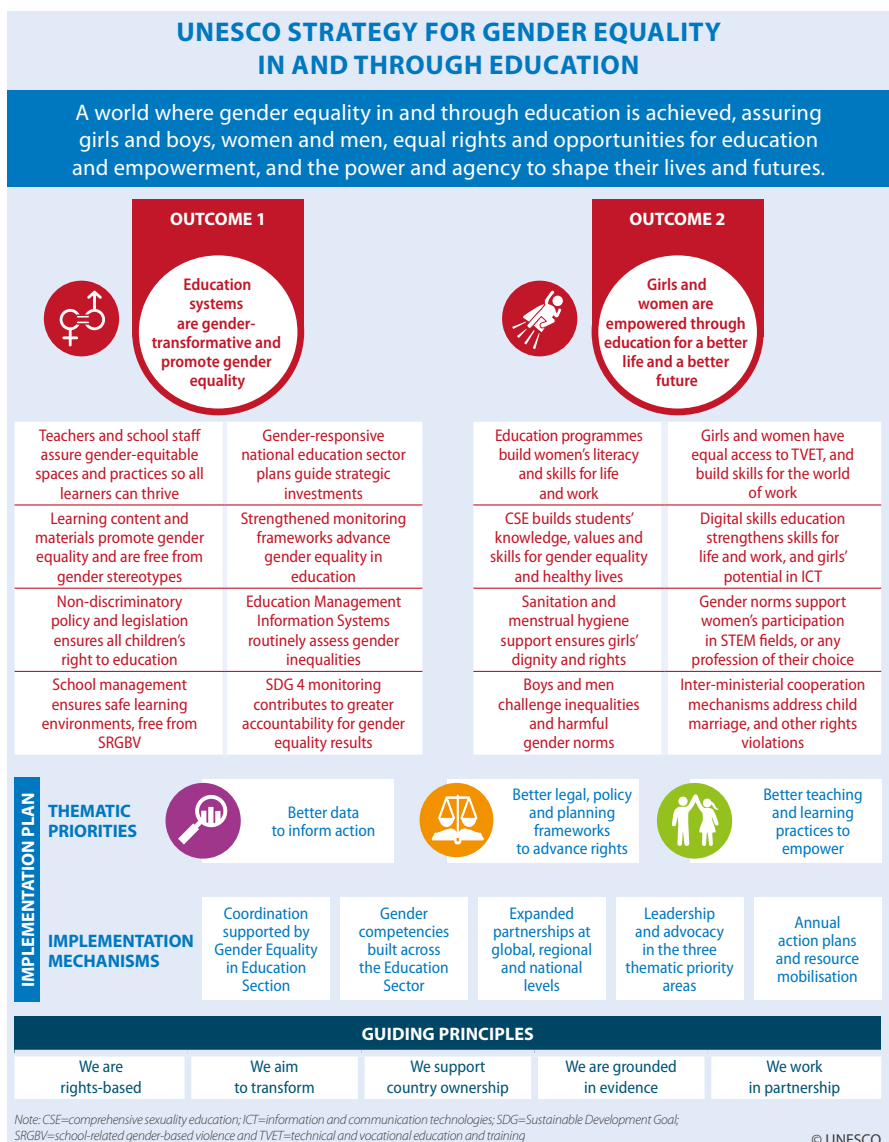
UNESCO's strategic approach

UNESCO's work is guided by the *UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019-2025*. The strategy aims to steer UNESCO's programmes and actions for "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".

The strategy reflects UNESCO's lifelong and life-wide approach to education, promoting the equal participation of boys and girls, men and women across all types and levels of education.

It prioritizes improving the quality of learning through gender-transformative content, teaching methods, environments, and supportive policies, plans and resources. In addition, the strategy focuses on educational outcomes, aiming to ensure that learning leads to broader societal gains such as participation in public life and decision-making, access to decent work and resources, and greater individual autonomy. The strategy is underpinned by a broad theory of change (see Figure 1) designed to mobilize political and financial commitments, foster cooperation and drive joint action.

Figure 1: Theory of change



Box 1: Mid-term review of the UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education

An external mid-term evaluation of the strategy conducted in 2023-2024 highlighted several key findings:

- The strategy aligns well with global education commitments and has promoted synergies and partnerships with internal and external UNESCO stakeholders.
- There are numerous signs of positive impact across the strategy's thematic priorities – particularly in areas such as monitoring, policy support, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and teacher training.
- Strengthened communication and capacity development, including at the country level, could further scale up impact and support the sustainability of results.
- Securing sustainable funding for this work remains a persistent challenge.



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

Throughout its efforts to advance gender equality in and through education, UNESCO adopts a multi-level, partnership-driven approach. Leveraging its convening power, technical expertise and normative mandate, UNESCO influences global, regional and national education agendas to promote systemic change.

At the global level, UNESCO co-leads platforms that drive policy dialogue and coordinated action, such as the *Global Platform for Gender Equality in and through Education*, the *Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV)* and the *Global Partnership Forum for Comprehensive Sexuality Education*.

Regionally, UNESCO provides technical leadership and fosters collaboration among governments and stakeholders. In sub-Saharan Africa, it co-leads the *Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI)*, supporting ministries of education in embedding gender equality into policy and planning. It also works with the African Union and partners to build a transformative STEM ecosystem, advancing girls' and women's participation in these fields through policy dialogue and the scaling up of gender-transformative STEM teaching practices.

Across all levels, UNESCO's approach is grounded in evidence-based advocacy, capacity development and partnerships that aim to remove gender-based barriers and make education systems more equitable and empowering for all learners.

Funding highlights

To better track how resources are used to promote gender equality, UNESCO uses a monitoring tool called the Gender Equality Marker. In 2024, one-quarter of the Education Sector's total spending – about US\$65.5 million – was dedicated to advancing gender equality. This accounted for nearly half of all gender-related spending across UNESCO's five Major Programmes.

Gender equality is a priority that runs through all of UNESCO's education work. However, one area in the Organization's biennial *Programme and Budget* – Output 1.ED2 – focuses entirely on this goal. It supports gender-transformative education systems that empower learners, ensure safe learning environments and address educational barriers, particularly for girls and women. The regular programme budget for this work during 2024-2025 is just over US\$8 million, representing an increase of approximately US\$2 million compared to the previous biennium. By the end of 2024, UNESCO had raised US\$8.6 million in voluntary contributions towards this Output, but an additional US\$18 million is still needed to fully meet the programmatic targets set.



Voluntary funding is essential to this work. In 2024, many governments – including Bulgaria, China, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Monaco, Norway, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Sweden and Wallonie-Bruxelles International – supported efforts. In particular, fully flexible funding from Norway and Sweden allowed for more strategic resource allocation, significantly enhancing adaptability and responsiveness. CJ Group remained the main contributor to the multi-donor UNESCO Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education, which focuses on reaching the most marginalized girls, including those affected by conflict and disasters. Other supporters of UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education in 2024 include the African Union's International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education (AU/CIEFFA), Beijing Normal University (BNU), Dior, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Huawei, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) – Canada, Mazarine, Plan International, Population Council, Porticus Foundation, Prada, UN Women, UNAIDS and UNFPA.

UNESCO will continue to mobilize resources to ensure that all learners – regardless of their gender – can access safe, inclusive and empowering education.

**Overall, UNESCO's Education Sector
invested US \$65.5 million in 2024
to advance Priority Gender Equality.**

Highlights: Better data to inform action

High quality, timely data and evidence are essential for policy-making, planning and the delivery of targeted interventions to advance gender equality in and through education. This section showcases how UNESCO's efforts in 2024 strengthened the evidence base to drive meaningful change.

Monitoring Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4

UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS) leads the global monitoring of progress towards SDG 4. In 2024, UIS expanded access to sex-disaggregated data, including on graduates by field of study, highlighting gender disparities across academic disciplines. This expansion also includes intersectional data considering gender alongside location, socio-economic status and other dimensions. The updated *UIS Data Browser* features an intuitive interface that enables users to easily filter and explore these and other indicators, with options to examine trends over time and across countries.

To advance the SDG 4 agenda, the 2024 Global Education Meeting (31 October-1 November, Fortaleza, Brazil) gathered 650 participants including over 50 Ministers to adopt the *Fortaleza Declaration*, a landmark milestone for education equity and financing. Gender equality was a cross-cutting theme, with a dedicated session identifying critical levers to accelerate transformative change by 2030 and beyond.

Recognizing that sustainable transformation requires accountability, UNESCO's *Dashboard of Country Commitments and Actions to Transform Education* monitors the national commitments made at the 2022 Transforming Education Summit. The accompanying *survey report* showcases good practices across key thematic areas, including gender equality. These efforts complement the Global Platform for Gender Equality in and through Education's *Accountability Dashboard* (see below).



Strengthening national data capacity to understand and address gender inequality

Recognizing that gender data gaps hinder the design of effective education policies and plans, UNESCO embedded gender into its global *Education Management and Information System (EMIS)-Progress Assessment Tool* and began developing a similar tool to assess national legal and policy frameworks.

To ensure country-level impact, UNESCO strengthened governments' capacities to collect, analyse and use sex-disaggregated data. In 2024, UNESCO provided technical support and guidance to **Bahrain, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay** and **Yemen**.

These efforts improve EMIS functionality to detect inequalities across education systems. For example, in **Cameroon**, EMIS was optimized to better monitor gender disparities in access, participation and completion. **Seychelles** enhanced its EMIS framework to better capture gender data. **Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Peru** and **Uruguay** piloted regional indicators and strengthened EMIS to track educational outcomes for migrant and refugee students, including sex-disaggregated data. Over 140 ministry and stakeholder staff (60% women) in **Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates** and **Yemen** were trained to use sex-disaggregated data for SDG 4 monitoring and planning. In the **Pacific**, similar capacity building efforts centred on using sex-disaggregated data to address boys' growing disengagement from post-primary education.

In parallel, UNESCO launched a three-year research collaboration with University College London, supported by GPE, to close gender data gaps in **Indonesia, Kenya** and **Malawi**, and enhance accountability for gender equality at local, national and global levels.

Building the evidence base on gender equality in and through education

In 2024, UNESCO reaffirmed its commitment to evidence-informed policymaking for gender equality in and through education through a series of high-impact publications and initiatives influencing policy decisions globally.

The landmark report *The price of inaction*, produced with the OECD and Commonwealth Secretariat, demonstrates the significant economic returns of investing in education and gender-transformative action – projecting up to \$10 trillion

in annual global gains by 2030. Complementary *Country profiles* detail the cost of early school leaving and less than basic skills across 20 countries, highlighting gender disparities that disproportionately affect either girls or boys.

Launched on International Women's Day, the 2024 edition of the *#HerEducationOurFuture* factsheet presents the latest facts and trends to position education as a catalyst for equitable and sustainable development. The *2024 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Gender Report* analyses how digital tools can both promote gender equality and perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Meanwhile, the new 2024/2025 GEM Report on *Leadership in education* reveals a striking paradox: women form the majority of teachers yet remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles.

UNESCO also prioritized the production and use of high-quality evidence to inform data-driven decision-making. As co-lead of the Global Platform for Gender Equality in and through Education, it spearheaded the *Global Accountability Dashboard*, hosted by the Population Council. The dashboard tracks progress in 193 countries against 11 indicators and showcases over 1,000 innovative programmes and 750 organizations. This evidence is supporting governments to operationalize the Transforming Education Summit's *Call to action* on gender equality.

UNESCO also advanced research and interventions on boys' disengagement from education. A *Compass brief* with IEA examined how gender norms affect boys' reading achievement. Regional analysis of 20 countries in the **Caribbean** documented patterns of boys' underachievement and dropout. The GPE-supported *Lifting Barriers: Educated Boys for Gender Equality* project piloted training workshops in **Malawi** and prepared interventions in **Cambodia** and **Lesotho** to promote positive, inclusive masculinities through education.

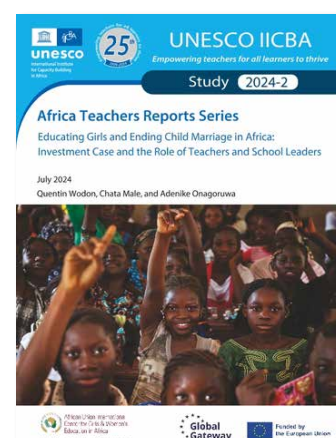
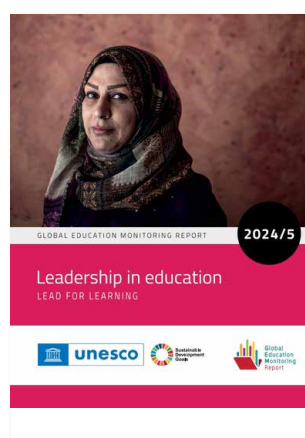
UNESCO also advanced the evidence base on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) through two multi-country studies on youth perspectives and healthy relationships, with findings expected in 2025. In parallel, it launched *Safe to learn and thrive* – a call to action for creating holistic, gender-transformative, safe and inclusive learning spaces.

In partnership with UNICEF, UNESCO launched the *Global report on early childhood care and education*, advocating the use of behavioural science approaches to challenge gender norms in parenting and promote equal engagement of fathers and mothers. Complementing this, the Inaugural *Global report on teachers* published new data emphasizing the urgency of gender-responsive teacher recruitment and retention, amid a global shortage of 44 million teachers.

The Women in Learning Leadership (WiLL) initiative, implemented by UNESCO's International Institute for Education Planning (UNESCO-IIEP) and UNICEF Innocenti with GPE support, advanced gender-equitable school leadership in **Benin, Ethiopia, Guinea and Madagascar**. In **Madagascar**, a *comprehensive study* identified barriers and enablers to women's leadership, linking increased representation to better teaching and learning conditions and student outcomes.

In the context of the AU Year of Education, UNESCO-IIEP and AU/CIEFFA developed the first continental report on the state of girls' and women's education in Africa. The findings were presented at the inaugural Pan-African Conference on Girls' and Women's Education, enhancing regional accountability. AU/CIEFFA and UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (UNESCO-IICBA) also co-authored the first *Africa teachers report*, underscoring the pivotal role of teachers and school leaders in dismantling harmful gender norms and stereotypes.

Examples of UNESCO resources



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

The right to education lies at the heart of UNESCO's mission. This section highlights how, in 2024, UNESCO supported the development of stronger legal, policy and planning frameworks to help turn that right into a reality for all.

Monitoring the right to education

UNESCO strengthened its monitoring of the right to education through platforms such as *HerAtlas*, which tracks national legal frameworks affecting girls' and women's access to education. *HerAtlas* documented a reduction in the number of countries with laws restricting pregnant girls' education rights from 4% in 2019 to 2% in 2024 – highlighting progress towards legal reform. UNESCO's webpage, [Key data on girls and women's right to education](#), leveraging key findings from *HerAtlas*, attracted nearly 30,000 views in 2024, raising public awareness and informing advocacy efforts.



Box 2: "Her Education, Our Future" documentary film



Released on 7 March for 2024 International Women's Day, *Her Education, Our Future* is a China Global Television Network (CGTN)-UNESCO documentary that follows the lives of Anee, Fabiana, Mkasi and Tainá – four young women across three continents striving to realise their right to education. It offers a spectacular dive into the transformative power of education and showcases how empowering girls and women through education improves not only their lives, but also those of their families, communities and indeed all of society.

In response to the continued education crisis in **Afghanistan**, UNESCO launched the development of a comprehensive report on the right to education under the de facto authorities since August 2021. Grounded in detailed legal and policy analysis and field data, the *report* examines the systemic denial of education to an estimated 1.4 million girls and women – making Afghanistan the only country in the world where girls are officially barred from secondary and higher education.

Fostering gender-responsive education sector planning (GRESF)

UNESCO strengthened country capacities to integrate gender equality into education sector analyses (ESAs), budgets and planning process across countries including **Afghanistan, Honduras, Jordan, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, the State of Palestine, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania** and **Yemen**.

In **Mauritania**, UNESCO led the Ministry of Education's first participatory gender diagnosis, systematically assessing the integration of gender across policies, programmes and administrative structures. This informed a comprehensive ESA that identified key gender gaps, and is now guiding the development of a gender-transformative national Education Sector Plan. In parallel, ministry officials in **Chad** and **Mauritania** completed intensive training on gender-responsive planning, supported by the establishment of a community of practice to sustain institutional learning. In addition, in **Chad**, the *Building back equal: Girls back to school guide* was adapted to local needs, resulting in targeted workshops and tools to mainstream gender across the education system. Meanwhile, in **Madagascar**, a UNESCO-IIEP review assessed how gender considerations are reflected in education planning, budgeting and monitoring, laying a foundation for more systemic gender-responsive practices.

In the **United Republic of Tanzania**, UNESCO-IIEP provided technical support to develop the new Education Sector Development Plan, which now includes a dedicated chapter on gender equality. Similarly, in **Kenya**, UNESCO supported the Ministry of Education in finalizing the National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2023-2027, launched in June 2024, which embeds equity and gender-responsive approaches across all policy areas.



Box 3: Building capacities on gender at decentralized levels

Recognising the pivotal role of sub-national education authorities, UNESCO expanded its capacity-building initiatives. In **Nigeria**, 51 education officials from six States were trained in gender-responsive planning, while the coordination role of gender desk officers was reinforced. In **Chad**, 90 ministry officials across seven regional directorates were trained to revise the national teacher manual with a gender lens. As part of **Jordan's** Gender Equality Action Plan 2023-2025, a set of training sessions enhanced the capacity of central and decentralized ministry staff to integrate gender equality into leadership practices. UNESCO also supported a gender focal point network comprising 73 supervisors (49% women) across all 42 field directorates – deepening gender equality throughout the system.

In the **State of Palestine**, UNESCO provided strategic support to integrate gender as a cross-cutting priority across major education policy documents. These policies aim to remove gender-related barriers and improve learning outcomes for all, particularly girls, through inclusive planning and mechanisms for tracking gender-specific targets. In **Afghanistan** and **Yemen**, UNESCO supported gender- and crisis-sensitive assessments to inform the development of the national education sector plans responsive to both humanitarian and gender-specific challenges.

To enhance sustainability, UNESCO promotes peer learning and knowledge sharing. The Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI)'s Community of Practice on Gender-Transformative Education expanded to 90 members from **26 African countries**, with expansion planned beyond the continent. Through the GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Africa Hub, UNESCO-IICBA also launched a regional community of practice, supporting collaboration and exchange on gender equality in education systems.

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

UNESCO, through the GCI, supported the Ministry of Education in **Mauritania** to leverage findings from the gender diagnosis and ESA to draft the first-ever education sector gender strategy. Scheduled for adoption in 2025, the strategy outlines targeted evidence-based interventions rooted in a gender-transformative approach, marking a significant shift towards institutionalizing gender equality within national education planning.

In **Kenya**, UNESCO provided technical support to the Ministry of Education to develop a comprehensive national gender policy in education, laying the ground for more inclusive and equitable planning and implementation. Meanwhile, in **Jordan**, efforts to advance the Gender Equality Action Plan 2023-2025 included workshops to support implementation at the local level and the creation of gender workplans for 42 field directorates. A new training programme, *Leading Change: Integrating Equity and Equality into Leadership Skills*, was also piloted for ministry staff, with the goal of institutionalizing gender-responsive leadership through dedicated training in 2025.

At the regional level, UNESCO played a key role in shaping the *Regional Teacher Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean 2024-2030*, which prioritizes gender equality in teacher preparation, professional development, working conditions, and the social recognition of the teaching profession. This regional commitment is anticipated to guide national-level reforms.

In **Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Uganda**, UNESCO supported the integration of gender equality into teacher education policies, embedding gender-responsive approaches into national teacher training systems. In **Uganda**, a comprehensive gender audit of teacher training institutions, universities and the Ministry of Education identified entry points for mainstreaming gender in policy and pedagogy. These findings will inform implementation plans in 2025, ensuring that future educators are equipped with gender-responsive knowledge and skills.

Highlights: Better teaching and learning practices to empower

For education to empower, it must challenge unequal power dynamics and confront the gendered norms and expectations that limit individual potential. This section explores how UNESCO advanced more inclusive and transformative teaching and learning approaches in 2024.

Building teacher capacity for gender-transformative education

UNESCO supported efforts to strengthen gender-responsive teaching and learning across 17 countries, equipping teachers and education stakeholders with the tools to challenge gender norms and promote inclusive classrooms. Countries included the **Bahamas, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guyana, Jamaica, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Uganda, Viet Nam and Zambia.**

In **Lao PDR**, UNESCO partnered with the Ministry of Education to train 50 teacher educators (70% women) from 16 teacher training institutions – spanning STEM and CSE specialists – in gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP). Post-training evaluations showed improved gender awareness and teaching approaches, prompting plans to expand the training to an additional 200 educators in 2025.

Promoting gender-responsive methodologies was also central to interventions in **Zambia**. Through UNESCO's Capacity Development for Education (CapED) Programme, 110 in-service teachers (43% women) were trained on inclusive teaching strategies to challenge harmful gender norms in classrooms. Similarly, in **Pakistan's** Balochistan region, UNESCO adapted and contextualized training materials and supported the training of 135 education officials (48% women) to apply a gender lens to education policy, curriculum, textbooks and pedagogy.

In **Chad**, a teacher training manual on integrating gender in classroom practice was developed with national authorities and will be rolled out in 2025 at decentralized levels, enabling scale-up through local capacity-development. In **Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger**, pre-service teacher training curricula were revised to integrate gender equality, and digital training modules were created to increase reach and accessibility. In enhancing teacher capacities in **Egypt**, UNESCO focused on reaching marginalized and remote communities, training 300 teachers (70% women) through online learning resources and establishing a virtual community of practice to promote inclusive teaching methods.

At the regional level, UNESCO-IICBA and AU/CIEFFA, supported by Japan, launched a **West Africa** teacher training initiative covering **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Nigeria** to address gendered barriers such as child marriage and early pregnancy, and build capacity for gender-responsive and inclusive teaching. The programme supports the delivery of safe, inclusive and quality education for girls. In parallel, UNESCO-IICBA organized regional capacity-enhancement training on GRP, ICT in education and school-related GBV, engaging 65 stakeholders from 10 countries across **Western, Central and Eastern Africa.**

In the **Caribbean**, UNESCO held a regional training workshop on gender-transformative education, covering key concepts such as gender equality in education, identifying and overcoming gender bias, and developing inclusive teaching strategies. Twenty-three teachers and curriculum specialists (78% women) from the **Bahamas, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Guyana, and Jamaica** were selected for their potential to drive systemic change.



UNESCO also integrated gender equality into 'greening education' initiatives across **Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the State of Palestine, Qatar, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates.** Teacher training guides now promote gender-responsive classroom strategies and leadership development as part of broader education for sustainable development (ESD) reforms. Similar efforts are underway in **Asia and the Pacific**, particularly in **Indonesia, Lao PDR and Tonga**, where gender is being mainstreamed into ESD.



Box 4: Fostering gender equality through guidance and counselling in Viet Nam



Since 2019, the *We Are ABLE* project, implemented in partnership with CJ Group, has made significant progress in advancing girls' right to education in **Viet Nam** – particularly among ethnic minority, migrant and refugee communities. The project aims to transform harmful social norms, promote gender equality, and empower girls to challenge stereotypes and pursue their education with confidence. To date, the project has directly reached over 8,000 students (49% girls) and their parents across 15 schools in three provinces. About half of participating students belong to ethnic minority groups, underscoring the project's commitment to communities in the most disadvantaged circumstances. In 2024, nearly 100 teachers, administrators, health staff and counsellors were trained on gender-responsive counselling, equipping them to better support students' well-being and rights. Over 300 students were also trained as 'change agents', leading peer education and youth initiatives to promote gender equality within their schools and communities. These student-led efforts have contributed to increased awareness of gender equality, improved attitudes towards girls' education, and fostered a growing culture of inclusion.

Advancing gender equality through curriculum and teaching, and learning materials

Integrating gender equality into educational content is critical for building students' skills to challenge stereotypes, reduce bias and promote equality. In 2024, UNESCO accelerated this

transformative effort in **Brazil, Guinea, Haiti, Kenya, Lao PDR, Mali, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tajikistan** and **Uzbekistan**, with concrete results across curricula, textbooks and teacher training.

Through its International Bureau of Education (UNESCO-IBE), UNESCO supported the development of gender-transformative curriculum frameworks in **Guinea** and **Haiti**, helping ministries to embed gender equality into education systems. Tailored capacity development for curriculum developers, teacher trainers and policymakers ensured that gender considerations were institutionalized in educational content.

In **Tajikistan**, under a European Union-supported curriculum reform, UNESCO reviewed 650 STEM lessons, systematically removing gender biases and incorporating female role models to increase girls' interest and aspirations in science and technology.

Across **West Africa**, UNESCO produced a photobank of 250 culturally-relevant, gender-balanced images, now hosted on the *Imaginecole* regional platform, to support the production of inclusive resources. A new teaching module based on UNESCO's *General History of Africa* was also promoted on Imaginecole, spotlighting women's contributions to **Africa's** history and development, helping to reshape narratives from a gender-equitable lens.

To strengthen institutional capacity in health and well-being, UNESCO trained 38 ministry officials from **15 Western and Central African** countries on pedagogical tools to integrate topics such as consent, female genital mutilation, early marriage, gender stereotypes and positive and inclusive masculinities into teacher training and curricula in practical, age-appropriate ways.

In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, UNESCO trained 150 teachers to enhance socio-emotional learning in classrooms, focusing on empathy, self-regulation and openness to diversity – skills shown to foster gender-equitable behaviours. In **Uzbekistan**, teacher training targeted unconscious bias, helping teachers to challenge traditional norms, and promote equitable learning opportunities for all.

UNESCO also reinforced the links between gender equality, global citizenship education (GCED) and human rights education. In **Brazil**, a GCED course underscored that building a culture of peace involves respect for life, rejection of violence and promotion of solidarity – all of which are intrinsically linked to gender equality. In **Kenya, Mauritius** and **Seychelles**, ethics education initiatives encouraged students to challenge discrimination, and demonstrate respect, empathy and solidarity.

Ensuring teaching and learning continue in crises and emergencies

In 2024, UNESCO reinforced its commitment to ensuring learning continuity in crisis and emergency settings, implementing targeted interventions in **Afghanistan, Cameroon, Chad, Cuba, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Lebanon, Mexico, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine** and **Yemen**. These efforts prioritized the most vulnerable learners – particularly girls and young women, who face the highest risks of educational exclusion – contributing to more resilient, inclusive and gender-responsive education systems.

In **Afghanistan**, UNESCO expanded alternative learning opportunities for learners unable to access formal schooling – with a focus on girls and women, particularly in remote and marginalised areas. Over 23,000 learners (76% female) across 13 provinces benefited from digital and skills-based literacy programmes. With support from Japan, UNESCO adapted its non-formal education (NFE) programming to reach, since 2023, an additional 6,480 learners (60% women) through 100 Village Literacy Committees in earthquake-affected communities, emphasizing disaster preparedness and resilience.

In **Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic** and **Yemen**, UNESCO worked to dismantle the barriers preventing girls' access to education during crises. Initiatives included school rehabilitation, the creation of safe and inclusive learning environments, and the development of strategic education response plans. In **Lebanon**, 2,500 teachers (60% women) working with vulnerable populations in crisis-affected areas received training on digital learning methods, enhancing their ability to deliver quality education in unstable contexts and having positive impacts on girls' learning access and outcomes. In **Chad**, UNESCO supported school feeding programmes to improve school attendance and retention for 17,396 girls in food-insecure communities, where hunger remains a key barrier to learning.

Through the *Rebuilding Hope* initiative in **Cuba**, implemented with the Ministry of Education, UNESCO supported 25 disaster-affected schools across eight municipalities. The programme provided socio-emotional, cultural and recreational support to over 5,600 students (60% girls) and 900 teachers (80% women), fostering recovery and well-being and promoting safe and inclusive learning environments. In **Mexico**, UNESCO developed gender- and interculturally-sensitive disaster risk reduction guidance for schools and communities, enhancing the education system's capacity to respond to emergencies in an inclusive manner.

The Organization intensified its efforts to address barriers to learning in protracted crises and emergencies. In **Ukraine**, UNESCO embedded gender equality within a larger project addressing mental health and psychosocial support, ensuring that teacher and caregiver training addressed the gender-specific impacts of conflict on mental health and education continuity. In **Cameroon**, a comprehensive response ensured continued access to education in crisis-affected regions. UNESCO reached 30,420 children (57% girls) with alternative learning opportunities, while over 720 education staff (64% women) were trained in inclusive education practices. In addition, 300 facilitators and supervisors received gender mainstreaming training tailored to alternative education delivery, reinforcing systemic inclusion.



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Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)

In 2024, UNESCO strengthened its global leadership in education for health and well-being, supporting 77 countries in implementing CSE policies and programmes. These efforts reached an estimated 27 million learners globally (50% women and girls) with gender-transformative, life skills-based HIV and sexuality education.

The flagship *Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Futures (O3)* programme continued to drive systemic change across **sub-Saharan Africa**, positioning CSE as a core element of quality education. In 2024, more than 50,000 pre-service and 41,000 in-service teachers (52% women) were trained on CSE and school violence prevention, equipping an estimated 23.4 million young learners in nearly 190,000 schools with the knowledge and skills to make informed, respectful and healthy life decisions.

Through O3 Plus, UNESCO enhanced safe and healthy learning environments in **Kenya, Namibia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**. The Safer Campuses campaign engaged over 3 million students in higher education institutions, promoting gender equality, preventing GBV, and fostering well-being.

UNESCO also leveraged technology and digital innovation to expand reach and relevance. In **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan**, over 170,000 young people accessed information on prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, GBV, and sexual and reproductive health through classroom learning and AI-based chatbots, offering confidential and youth-friendly support.

In **Latin America**, UNESCO led targeted research and programming to make CSE more inclusive: in **Argentina**, **Mexico** and **Uruguay**, a study identified the competencies educators need to deliver age-appropriate CSE for children and adolescents with disabilities, paving the way for inclusive teacher training reforms. In **Uruguay**, a joint initiative with UNFPA engaged 1,563 adolescents (54% girls) and 87 teachers to promote shared responsibility in sexuality, relationships and pregnancy prevention. Ninety per cent of adolescents reported finding the intervention useful and relevant; 85% reported challenging gender stereotypes, and 76% of boys committed to discussing contraception and consent with future partners.

In **Jordan**, UNESCO and the Ministry of Health advanced menstrual health awareness and school-based support, enhancing schools' ability to address girls' health needs with dignity and care. Meanwhile, in **Viet Nam**, a nation-wide study on integrating gender equality and CSE in teacher training institutions and schools engaged over 46,000 stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, students and parents. Findings informed the development of a national roadmap to strengthen gender equality and CSE, contributing to long-term system reform.

Ensuring safe, inclusive, healthy learning environments

In 2024, UNESCO supported 29 countries in strengthening policies for safe and inclusive learning environments, with 20 countries advancing to policy adoption or implementation – a clear shift from policy support to tangible systemic change.

In **Pakistan**, the *Girls' Lower Secondary Education Programme* led to measurable improvements in access, retention and learning outcomes for marginalized girls. The programme enhanced hygiene and safety through the construction of 122 WASH facilities, provided financial incentives that enabled 9,625 girls to remain in school, and offered transport allowances for 30 teachers – ensuring education delivery in remote locations. Community engagement and advocacy activities helped shift social norms and foster long-term support for girls' education.

In **Ghana**, targeted reintegration support enabled over 100 adolescent mothers to return safely to school after childbirth. Nationwide outreach engaged 124,000 parents, guardians and religious leaders to create more supportive learning

environments, while 24,500 out-of-school young people were reached with sexual and reproductive health rights information.

In **Peru**, a rural secondary education programme reached 11,400 students (50% girls and 40% from indigenous communities) along with over 900 teachers across 59 schools. Gender-responsive education, including CSE and socio-emotional support, helped reduce dropout risks – particularly those linked to early and unintended pregnancy.

To meet young people's growing demand for sexuality and health information online, UNESCO promoted safe and inclusive digital spaces. In **Eastern Europe and Central Asia**, over 4 million adolescents accessed information on HIV prevention, GBV and sexual and reproductive health through initiatives led by UNESCO's Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO-IITE). A joint UNAIDS-UNESCO social media campaign in **Armenia** further reached over 840,000 people with messages promoting positive and inclusive masculinities.



UNESCO also expanded efforts to foster inclusive education focused on sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics. In **Singapore** and **Thailand**, a youth-led initiative created safe learning environments for LGBTIQ+ students and reached more than 78,000 people through advocacy campaigns and psychosocial support.

In **Thailand's** Tak Province, UNESCO supported 17 migrant learning centres, benefiting over 14,300 children and youth (52% girls) by improving infrastructure to meet girls' needs and developing CSE content in local languages. These efforts helped ensure sustained access to quality education for migrant populations facing displacement and other barriers.



Box 5: Advocating for the removal of gendered barriers to learning

With support from Wallonie-Bruxelles International, UNESCO scaled up its *Keeping Girls in the Picture* campaign to three regions of **Senegal**, deepening its impact in promoting girls' education and addressing GBV, early marriage and unintended pregnancy, particularly in remote areas. The expanded campaign mobilized widespread community participation, directly engaging over 296,000 girls, 250,000 women, 240,000 students, 227,000 young people affiliated with associations, 8,000 heads of households, 2,000 community leaders and 540 *Bajenu gox* (female community health leaders). By combining mass media (radio and TV spots) and targeted social media outreach with on-the-ground advocacy caravans and community dialogues, the campaign reached over 2.6 million people nation-wide, contributing to positive shifts in social norms and reinforcing community support for girls' right to safe, quality education.



Ensuring gender-transformative digital skills and STEM education

UNESCO strengthened its global efforts to boost girls' participation in STEM education, supporting 17 Member States, including **Brazil, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Montenegro** and **Nepal** to deliver gender-transformative STEM education.

In **Brazil**, Phase 2 of the #EDUCASTEM2030 initiative trained 1,416 teachers (54% women) and 923 high-school students (72% girls) on gender-responsive STEM approaches. The country's first solar-powered travelling cinema, Cine Solar, reached over 1,300 people in remote communities, using film screening and community dialogues to inspire interest in science and elevate female role models in STEM.

In **Montenegro**, UNESCO strengthened digital education by training 150 primary and secondary teachers (50% women), empowering them as gender-responsive digital leaders and educators – particularly in underserved regions. In **Nepal**,

UNESCO supported curriculum reform and teacher training to integrate STEM with a gender lens, while mobilizing female role models and community outreach to increase girls' engagement in STEM subjects.

In **Kenya**, a multi-pronged strategy helped narrow the gender digital divide: 19 schools serving over 8,600 learners (50% girls) were digitally connected, three girls' schools – reaching some 2,700 students – gained access to both online and offline digital learning resources, and two ICT bootcamps equipped 440 girls with key STEM and digital skills.

In **Eswatini** and **Lesotho**, STEM and robotics bootcamps promoted hands-on learning for girls, reaching learners from rural areas and children with disabilities. These initiatives not only expanded access to quality STEM education, but also fostered more inclusive and equitable environments that empower girls to thrive in science and technology fields.

Boosting gender equality through technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

UNESCO advanced gender equality in TVET in line with its *2022-2029 TVET strategy*, supporting countries to embed equity into policies and programmes and drive inclusive skills development.

The *Better Education for Africa's Rise (BEAR)* project, supported by the Republic of Korea, challenged gender norms in the labour market in **Uganda** by sponsoring women in engineering and men in tailoring, accompanied by advocacy campaigns. This improved student engagement and academic success in traditionally gender-segregated fields. Similar efforts took place in **Côte d'Ivoire**, where UNESCO leveraged the *Olympiades des Métiers* (Skills Olympics) to spotlight young women's participation in male-dominated trades. The initiative boosted the visibility of female talent and contributed to reshaping gendered stereotypes in technical careers.



Expanding women's access to skills development and employment opportunities is an important element of UNESCO's work. In **Egypt** and **Sudan**, UNESCO delivered vocational training to 550 rural women, equipping them with practical skills in handicrafts, digital skills, financial literacy and entrepreneurship. Psychosocial support workshops also increased their resilience and readiness for the labour market. In **Morocco**, UNESCO delivered specialized training targeting young people and women in the textile and clothing sector – one of the country's key economic sectors. The programme enhanced employability, expanded access to decent jobs, and fostered greater financial autonomy for women.

In **Jordan** and **Peru**, UNESCO conducted comprehensive gender analyses of the TVET sectors, identifying systemic disparities in access and outcomes. These findings are now informing the development of gender-responsive policies and programmes designed to close gaps and promote inclusion in the labour market.

Promoting gender equality in and through higher education

UNESCO strengthened gender equality in higher education by setting standards, promoting inclusive policies, and expanding opportunities for women and girls in STEM and technical fields. A *regional study* across Southern Africa examined structural barriers to women's participation in higher education in **Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**. In addition, a large-scale study on GBV in higher education – involving over 12,000 students across **Cuba, Mexico, Zambia** and **Zimbabwe** – is underway to inform institutional reforms.

In **Chile**, UNESCO supported the development of pioneering national standards on gender equality in higher education institutions. These standards are enabling universities to implement systematic action plans targeting critical areas such as working conditions and sexual harassment. Building on this success, the model is now being adapted for adoption in other countries across the region.

With support from China, over 2,000 girls and women and 100 female academic staff – across **Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Senegal, Uganda** and the **United Republic of Tanzania** – benefited from national STEM campaigns, institutional training and entrepreneurship support, which collectively improved access to technical careers and leadership roles. In **Côte d'Ivoire** and **Senegal**, national STEM campaigns reached 1,590 secondary students and 145 schools, respectively, promoting STEM careers, celebrating high-achieving female students, addressing the root causes of school dropout and supporting inclusive higher technical education. In **Ethiopia**, capacity-building efforts on gender equality helped create a safer and

more supportive teaching and learning environment that benefited 1,000 women on campus.



Supporting non-formal education (NFE), lifelong learning and literacy

UNESCO strengthened NFE and lifelong learning systems to deliver flexible, inclusive and gender-transformative educational opportunities for learners of all ages, particularly women and marginalized groups.

Notable progress was made in reaching learners from remote and marginalised communities. With support from the Republic of Korea, the *Better Lives for Out-of-School Girls* project in the **Philippines** enabled 400 marginalized girls and young women to complete their basic education and acquire life skills through a non-formal alternative learning system. The initiative also trained 700 teachers, raising community awareness of gender equality, and improved education outcomes for vulnerable learners. In **Nepal**, UNESCO supported the integration of gender equality across the national NFE and lifelong learning framework and into curriculum. These reforms directly addressed barriers faced by women and marginalized learners, leading to more inclusive policies and educational content.

Targeting hard-to-reach learners was also central to efforts in **Pakistan**. Culturally sensitive radio programmes embedding gender equality, ESD and GCED themes reached thousands of students in remote areas. These programmes played a key role in expanding access to learning for girls with limited access to formal schooling. Meanwhile, in **Egypt**, 50 master trainers (60% women) were equipped with digital and literacy teaching skills to support adult learners, with a strong focus on women and people with disabilities in marginalized communities. The programme expanded lifelong learning pathways through inclusive, technology-driven approaches led by female educators.



Box 6: UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education

The *UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education*, funded by China, recognizes outstanding initiatives that improve the lives of girls and women through education. Awarded annually to two laureates, it confers US\$50,000 per recipient to scale up impactful work.

In 2024, the Prize was awarded to Promoting Equality in African Schools (PEAS) in **Uganda** for its success in creating safe, inclusive and gender-responsive learning environments that empower marginalized adolescent girls in rural areas. The second laureate, the *Campaign for Female Education* (CAMFED) in **Zambia**, was recognized for its holistic model that removes barriers to girls' education and supports their academic achievement, leadership development and well-being.

Targeted initiatives in **Cambodia**, **Chad** and **Mali** significantly promoted gender equality by empowering learners through education and vocational training. In **Cambodia**, two targeted NFE programmes expanded learning opportunities for women. The *Basic Education Equivalency Programme* reached 988 learners (38% women), while the *Factory Literacy Programme* empowered 472 garment workers (84% women) through workplace-based literacy classes. These outcomes were achieved through strong multi-sectoral partnerships with the government, private sector, business associations and local NGOs. In **Chad**, gender equality was mainstreamed in teacher training and literacy initiatives under the *Strengthening Education and Literacy* project. Basic literacy training reached 6,700 adolescents (46% girls), while 630 girls received vocational training to enhance employability. In addition, 2,200 newly literate women participated in skills development for income generation, supporting economic empowerment and paving the way for a national women's literacy strategy. Similarly, in **Mali**, 134 women were trained in entrepreneurship and income-generating activities, contributing to greater financial inclusion and economic resilience.

UNESCO also expanded its support for international mentoring initiatives through initiatives like *Women@Dior*, which enabled over 310 female mentees from nearly 60 countries to develop entrepreneurial and leadership skills across disciplines such as business, engineering, the arts, hospitality, social sciences and public policy.

Challenges and opportunities

In 2024, UNESCO operated in an increasingly complex global environment. A rise in humanitarian crises disrupted education systems and hindered programme delivery in several regions. These conditions demanded swift and adaptive responses. Close coordination among national stakeholders, local actors and international partners proved essential to overcoming obstacles, maintaining momentum, and ensuring that learning never stops.

The evolving global context also presented significant financial challenges. Budget reductions – expected to continue into 2025 and beyond – combined with uncertainty around future financial support, have heightened concerns across the international development sector. These pressures are particularly acute in areas already affected by structural funding gaps, such as gender equality, inclusion and education for health and well-being. The heavy reliance on earmarked contributions further limits UNESCO's ability to plan flexibly and respond strategically. In contrast, fully flexible funding – provided only by Norway and Sweden – has proven essential to enabling more balanced and effective resource allocation across programmes.

The political climate in some contexts has introduced additional complexities. Growing resistance to gender equality and human rights, often reflected in the politicization of education and the spread of mis- and disinformation, poses real obstacles to progress. These challenges require not only resilience but also renewed focus on generating and using credible evidence to counter false narratives and advance inclusive, rights-based education.

Yet within these challenges lie opportunities. Heightened awareness of global inequalities, increased demand for inclusive and resilient education systems, and strong commitments from key partners offer momentum for continued progress. There is a clear opportunity to strengthen alliances, diversify funding sources, and deepen engagement with countries ready to champion gender equality across education systems. By continuing to build on its credibility, partnerships and technical expertise, UNESCO is well-placed to turn these challenges into opportunities for sustainable, systemic change.

Next steps for UNESCO's work

The year 2025 will be pivotal for UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education. As the current strategy concludes, it presents an opportunity to update and reinforce the Organization's ongoing vision and priorities, guiding UNESCO's work in the lead up to 2030. Marking the end of the 2024-2025 biennium, the General Conference in November 2025 will adopt the programme and budget that will guide UNESCO's efforts over the next cycle – setting the strategic direction for the years ahead.

Building on the momentum of 2024, UNESCO will place increased emphasis on capacity strengthening at all levels. A new training programme for staff – both at Headquarters and in the field – will be rolled out to reinforce understanding and integration of gender equality and inclusion in and through education. A comprehensive online course, developed in partnership with global actors, will further support these efforts. At the country level, capacity building initiatives will intensify, especially for Ministry officials and local stakeholders, to ensure that gender-transformative approaches are embedded across systems and reach all parts of national education sectors.

UNESCO will also deepen its investment in data and evidence generation to inform action and sustain leadership in this space. The Global Platform for Gender Equality in and through Education will continue to serve as a hub for knowledge exchange and collective advocacy. Work will advance on developing indicators to assess curricula through a gender lens, alongside further research and engagement on topics such as masculinities, boys' education and accountability frameworks. In parallel, support for gender-transformative STEM education will be scaled up through targeted country-level interventions.

Crucially, UNESCO will continue to champion global commitments – such as those affirmed at the 2024 Global Education Meeting in Fortaleza – and translate them into tangible progress on the ground. Despite growing challenges, UNESCO remains steadfast in its dedication to driving meaningful, inclusive and lasting change. With the continued support of its partners, the Organization is well-positioned to take its work on gender equality in and through education to the next level – ensuring that every learner, everywhere, can thrive.

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

2024 Highlights

This report presents highlights of UNESCO's work in 2024 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 efforts to achieve gender equality in and through education, please get in touch!

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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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