

#HerEducationOurFuture

For ALL women and girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment.

The latest facts on girls' and women's education

2025 is an important year, as it marks the 30th anniversary of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#). This blueprint was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, China, by no less than 189 governments. It is a milestone for women's and girls' rights worldwide – including the right to education.

The Declaration states: 'The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on the grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community' (UN Women, 2014, p. 19). The Declaration and Platform provide the most comprehensive global policy framework ever on gender equality in 12 key areas, including education (**Box 1**).



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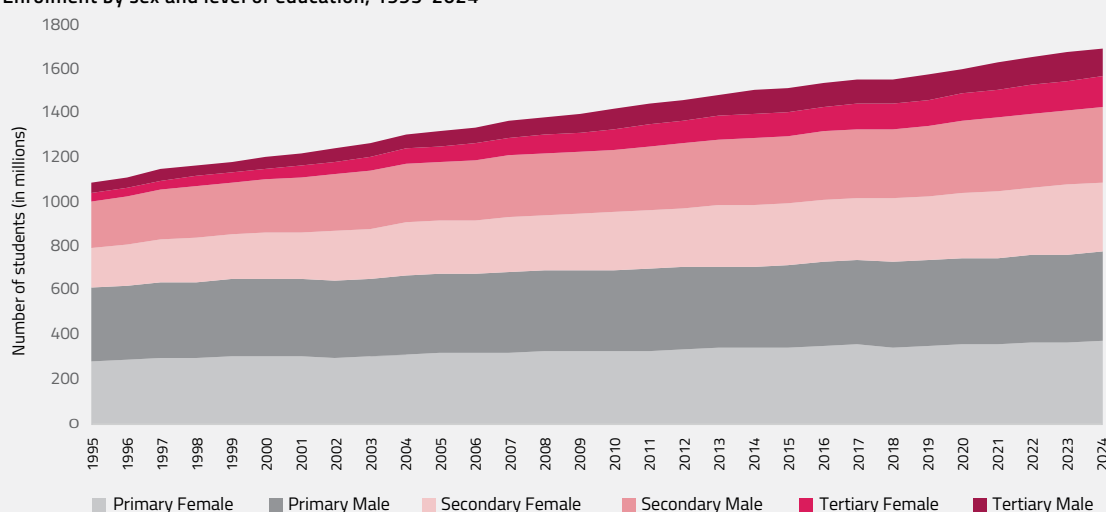
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Much progress has been made getting girls into school since 1995...

Significant progress has been made in expanding access to education for girls since the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Globally, gender parity in primary and lower secondary education enrolment was achieved in 2009 and in upper secondary education in 2013 (UNESCO, 2024). Nearly 91 million more girls were enrolled in primary education over the past 30 years and nearly 136 million in secondary education. In tertiary education, enrolment of young women increased from 41 million to 139 million over the same period (UNESCO-UIS, 2025). Yet, globally, a staggering 133 million girls remain out of school (GEM Report and UNESCO-UIS, 2025).

FIGURE 1:

Girls' and women's enrolment has improved significantly since 1995
Enrolment by sex and level of education, 1995-2024



Source: UNESCO-UIS, 2025.

BOX 1:

Girls' and women's education and training in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

In the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, education and training are built around six strategic objectives:

- Ensure equal access to education
- Eradicate illiteracy among women
- Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education
- Develop non-discriminatory education and training
- Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms
- Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women

Source: UN Women, 2014.

Education and health are mentioned in the following points:

- Promote people-centred sustainable development, including sustained economic growth, through the provision of basic education, lifelong education, literacy and training, and primary health care for girls and women
- Ensure equal access to and equal treatment of women and men in education and health care and enhance women's sexual and reproductive health as well as education

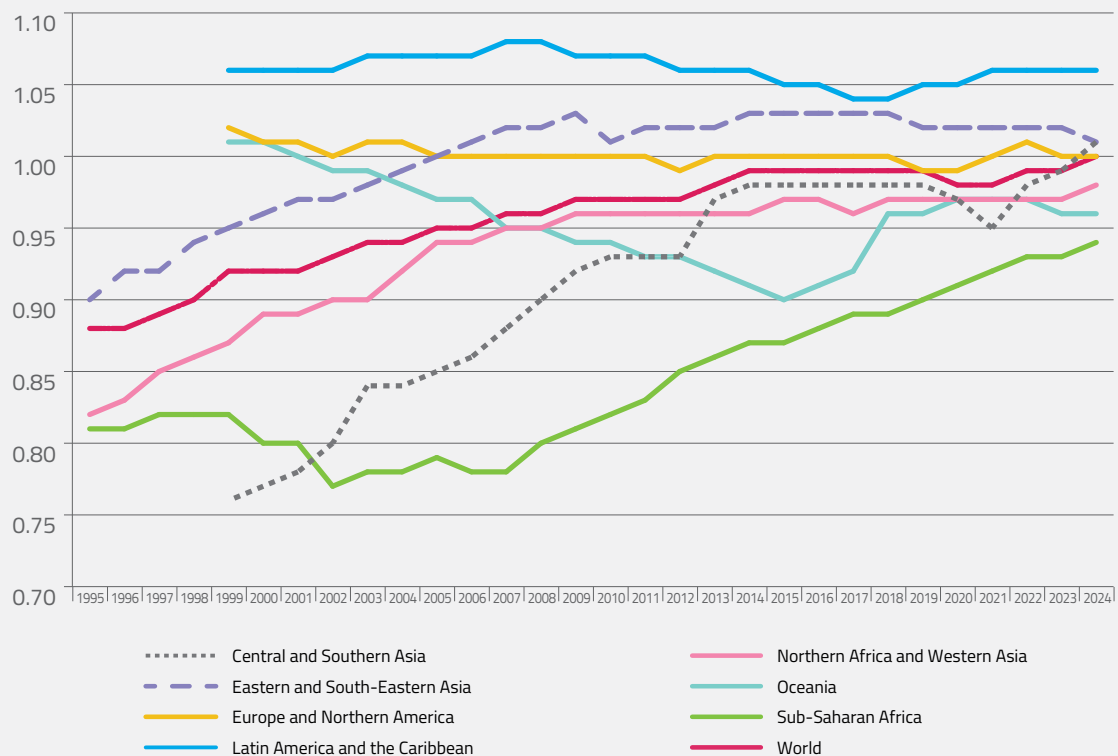
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... but geographical disparities and disparities at the secondary level persist

While gender parity in school attendance has been achieved globally as an average across countries, the situation varies from one region to another and by level of education. Central and Southern Asia made impressive improvements, achieving gender parity in enrolment in secondary education. While there was progress in sub-Saharan Africa, gender disparity at the expense of girls continues to persist in enrolment at the secondary level. In Oceania, a situation of gender parity in 1999 moved to gender disparity at the expense of girls in 2024, whereas gender disparity at the expense of boys continued to persist at the same level in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-UIS, 2025).

FIGURE 2:

Progress towards gender parity in secondary education has been positive but uneven across regions
Adjusted gender parity index for gross enrolment ratios in secondary education by region



Source: UNESCO-UIS, 2025.

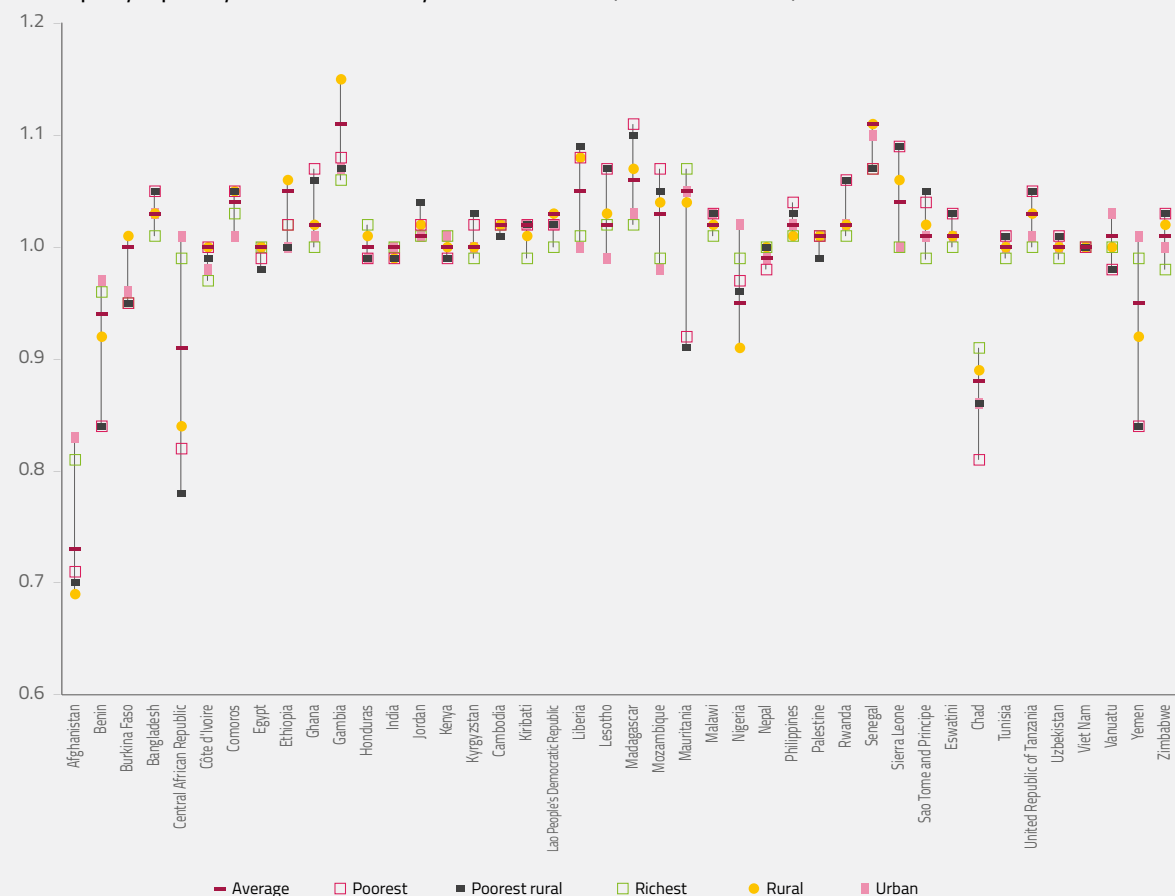
The interaction of gender with poverty or location worsens disparities

The interaction of gender with poverty and location worsens national disparities in countries where either girls or boys are at disadvantage. In the Central African Republic, where girls are at disadvantage, the average gender disparity for enrolment in primary education is 0.91 compared to 0.78 for poor and rural students. In Sierra Leone the average gender disparity —at boys' expense — is 1.04 compared to 1.09 for poor and rural students (UNESCO-UIS, 2025).

FIGURE 3:

Gender disparity in primary school attendance among poor and rural children in low- and middle-income countries is higher than average

Gender parity in primary school attendance by location and wealth, selected countries, 2019-2024



Source: UNESCO-UIS, 2025.

In Guinea and Mali, practically no poor young women are in school, putting them in the same situation as young women in Afghanistan, who are officially banned from attending school (UNESCO, 2024).

There has been progress in countries' commitment to girls' right to education...

In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action urged countries to eliminate gender discrimination in education. According to UNESCO's online monitoring tool, [HerAtlas](#), today 114 countries prohibit gender discrimination in their legal frameworks. Since the Beijing Platform for Action, the number of states that have ratified the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education has increased from 82 to 111. Moreover, by 1995, 150 states had ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which provides for equal rights between men and women. It has now been ratified by 189 states, but 27 countries ratified it with objections to particular articles on child marriage or discrimination policy.

... but more efforts are needed to implement it

Strategies on early pregnancy, school counselling, teaching and learning materials, women in teaching, management and leadership positions, and school-related gender-based violence were among the strategies agreed in Beijing. Country case studies conducted by UNESCO and the *Global Education Monitoring Report* Team in eight selected countries on the implementation of these strategies have revealed the following:¹

Strong political commitment has reduced early pregnancy rates and provided education for pregnant girls and young parents.

- Globally, in 2023, an estimated 13% of adolescent girls and young women had given birth before age 18 (UNICEF, 2024).
- The share of women aged 20 to 24 who married before age 18 — a factor contributing to early pregnancy — fell from 25% in 1995 to 19% in 2015–2023 (UNICEF, 2025).
- In Argentina, a holistic approach combining two laws, flexible learning programmes, nurseries in schools, re-entry programmes for vulnerable children and non-formal alternative secondary education programmes, has helped protect pregnant girls' and young parents' right to education.
- Activism and accountability mechanisms can help protect pregnant girls' right to go to school. In Sierra Leone, official policy in 2015 banned pregnant girls from school. In 2019, after several years of activism, the ban was ruled discriminatory by the Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States and was lifted.
- Multisectoral cooperation and ties between government departments help address the intersecting needs of many girls and young women of child-bearing age. In the United Kingdom, measures to address these needs included a protective legal framework, a teenage pregnancy unit and strategy, better childcare, awareness-raising programmes,

advocacy aimed at young men, and support from the non-government sector. These measures helped reduce the number of pregnancies from 42 to 18 per 1,000 young women aged 15–17 between 1995 and 2017.

The prevalence of early pregnancy can be linked to a lack of access to sexual and reproductive health education.

- Only 20% of countries have a law, and 39% have a national policy, that specifically addresses sexuality education. Among countries with laws and policies, sexuality education in primary education is compulsory in 68% of countries, and in secondary education in 76% of countries. Eight in 10 countries provide in-service training for teachers on sexuality education (UNESCO, 2023).
- Ambiguous language in laws, and weak accountability in enforcement, can enable schools to avoid teaching comprehensive sexuality education. Argentina made the subject compulsory in 2006, but only 16 out of 23 provinces adhered to the policy or passed their own legislation on the subject — likely because of opposition among religious schools.
- In Sierra Leone, the number of married and sexually active 15- to 19-year-old women using contraception doubled from 10% to 20% between 2008 and 2013, but dropped to just 14% in 2019, possibly due to a 2008 decision to end comprehensive sexuality education in schools.

¹ Source: UNESCO, 2020 if not indicated otherwise.

- Clear guidance on sexuality education can help. In the United Kingdom, relationship and sex education was made compulsory in all secondary schools from 2019. Guides were published to help schools inform and work with parents to overcome resistance.

Gender-responsive school counselling could improve gender balance in subject choices.

- Globally, women are considerably less likely to choose Please replace with: science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. In 2018–23, the share of STEM graduates who were female was 35% (UNESCO, 2024).
- Clear gender-responsive strategies are needed to redress the balance. Botswana has a comprehensive guidance and counselling programme and dedicated gender-focused committees, but lacks an overall framework on ways to help girls and women who wish to pursue technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and STEM subjects.
- A lack of gender-specific measures in counselling and career advice at the state level in Germany means the increase of the share of girls in STEM subjects between 1999 and 2017 is most likely related to the creation of an online information hub on STEM for girls and collaboration between ministries of women, youth, labour and social affairs.
- National strategies on TVET and STEM in the United Arab Emirates make no reference to gender or gender-responsive counselling practices, and women are still under-represented in these fields of study.

Countries still produce textbooks with gender-based stereotypes and limited references to women and girls.

- Partnerships and participatory processes in all phases of textbook development and delivery need to be in place for successful reform.

- In Comoros, lack of training or sensitization for textbook developers has been identified as one of the reasons why textbooks still contain gender stereotypes.
- Ethiopia has shown commitment to gender equality in education, including through textbook revision. Yet stereotypes remain, which can be attributed to women being excluded from textbook review and development, lack of training on processes, and insufficient commitment from authorities in challenging discriminatory norms.
- Nepal has made materials more gender-sensitive by introducing guidance for gender-responsive learning materials and a gender expert to review content, as well as gender audits and formal reviews of all materials every five years — although some of these measures have not been fully implemented.

Gender inequality exists in teacher recruitment and promotion to education leadership.

- Globally, women make up 93% of teachers in pre-primary, 69% of teachers in primary, 56% in secondary and 44% in tertiary education (UNESCO-UIS, 2025).
- There is a glass ceiling for women trying to attain leadership positions. Globally, women make up 45% of academic staff but only 30% of higher education leaders. Only about 27% of education and higher education ministers were women in 2010–2023 (UNESCO, 2025).
- In a case study of schools in Brasilia, Brazil, 75% had only male candidates for school leadership positions. For the past 40 years, all federal education ministers have been men. In Bulgaria, just 5 of 96 education ministers in 140 years have been women.
- School principal hiring decisions risk being gender-biased where selection panels are dominated by men. A global analysis of countries policies found that only 11% of countries promote gender parity in the selection of school leaders (UNESCO, 2025).

Investment in girls empowers them and has a huge societal impact

Greater agency and decision making

- Achieving universal secondary education could increase women's decision making in the household by one fifth and the likelihood that children are registered at birth by over one quarter (Wodon et al., 2024).

Better living standards

- Women with secondary and tertiary education report higher standards of living compared to those with no more than primary education (Wodon et al., 2024).

Intergenerational benefits for health and nutrition

- For children born to mothers with 12 years of education, under-5 mortality is 31% lower than of those born to a mother with no education (Balaj et al., 2021).
- In Nigeria, universal secondary education for mothers could reduce under-5 stunting by 10% (UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa, 2023).
- A systematic review of nutrition education on iron and folic acid supplementation during pregnancy in low- and middle-income countries found that mothers who received nutrition education during pregnancy were 2.8 times more likely to take the supplements (UNESCO and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, 2025).

End child marriage and early childbearing

- Universal secondary education could virtually end child marriage and reduce early childbearing by up to three fourths (Wodon et al., 2024).
- Girls leaving school early and girls with less than basic skills are associated globally with a 59% and 69% increase in early pregnancies in 2030, respectively. The effect is highest in sub-Saharan Africa (81% and 94%), South and West Asia (67% and 92%) and the Arab States (67% and 88%) (UNESCO et al., 2024).

- Universal secondary education could reduce the number of children women have over their lifetime by one third on average across 22 African countries (Wodon et al., 2024).

Increased access to decent work

- Lack of schooling and cognitive skills are more likely to keep girls inactive than boys. The prevalence of girls' not in employment, education or training (NEET) is 28% and 42%, respectively, compared to 24% and 34% for boys (UNESCO et al., 2024).
- One additional year of school can increase a woman's earnings by up to 20% (Wodon et al., 2018).
- Women with a secondary education are 9.6 percentage points more likely to work than those with a primary education or less. With tertiary education, they are 25 percentage points more likely to work than if they only have a primary education or less (Wodon et al., 2018).
- Women with secondary education can expect to make more than twice as much and women with tertiary education almost five times as much as those with no education (Wodon et al., 2018).
- Education increases women's access to the workplace, and wage-earning women have greater economic independence at home and in society (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2022).

Economic development

- If no action is taken, the global annual private costs (costs borne by the individual) of girls leaving school early and girls having less-than basic skills will be 5.4 % and 9.5 % of 2030 GDP, respectively (UNESCO et al., 2024).
- Afghanistan will lose 9.3% of its GDP annually by 2030 if the policy of excluding girls and women from secondary and tertiary education continues. 15.9% of GDP will be lost due to girls not attaining basic skills (UNESCO et al., 2024).

Recommendations

Governments and partners need to invest in the following critical areas to ensure that all girls complete a full cycle of basic education by 2030:

- **Collection, analysis and use of data on girls' education:** Strengthen country capacity to collect and use sex-disaggregated data as a solid basis for policymaking.
- **Gender-responsive education sector plans:** Institutionalize gender-responsive education sector planning, analysis and implementation for education systems that promote gender equality.
- **Gender-transformative teaching and learning materials:** Ensure equal representation of women and girls in curriculum and textbooks, with material free of biases and stereotypes.
- **Female education workforce:** Ensure that there are sufficient, well-trained female teachers in the right locations and at all levels of education, especially in leadership positions.
- **Affordability:** Reduce direct and indirect costs for families through cash and in-kind transfers, scholarships and stipends.
- **Nutrition, sanitation and hygiene:** Provide school meals and water and sanitation facilities in schools, especially single-sex toilets and menstrual hygiene management.
- **Prevention of school-related gender-based violence:** Adopt a holistic approach addressing the drivers and root causes of violence at both school and community levels.
- **Comprehensive sexuality education:** Implement programmes teaching girls and boys how to be safe and healthy, how to protect themselves and how to respect each other.
- **Participation:** Systematically and meaningfully integrate children and young people in consultations and decision-making aimed at advancing gender-transformative education, applying targeted measures to ensure participation of the poorest and most marginalized.

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