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GIRLS' EDUCATION AND WOMEN'S EQUALITY

How to Get More out of the World's Most Promising Investment



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David K. Evans



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Foreword

There can be no sustained economic development without increased gender equality. Yet disproportionate care responsibilities and discrimination continue to limit women's access to labor markets around the world. In many places, women have less access to financial and other productive resources. Likewise, women face discriminatory laws and norms in many countries that hamper their ability to participate in society on equal footing with men. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities as schools around the world have closed and care responsibilities have often fallen on mothers and older sisters.

There are many tools with which to address gender inequality, but girls' education is one of the most valuable. It puts girls and young women on a path towards increased economic opportunity and fuller, richer lives. It consistently yields benefits for the next generation, with the children of more educated women faring better in life. However, despite increasing educational equality on some metrics—for example, most girls and boys now complete primary school and, in an increasing number of middle-income countries, young women can often boast more completed years of schooling than young men—gender inequality later in life persists.

With that challenge in mind, I'm glad to introduce this report on the link between girls' education and women's equality. With a combination of synthesis and original analysis, researchers from CGD's education team explore how to strengthen the link between education—an appropriately much-lauded investment—and the gender-equal life outcomes that just societies seek. Here is some of what I learned as I read this report:

- ▶ Almost every low- and middle-income country has seen significant progress in girls' education in the last half century, but girls' educational opportunity still falls short in many countries, with one in four girls not even completing lower secondary school.
- ▶ Advocates claim many impacts for girls' education. Many of these are backed up by good evidence (like the impact on various measures of child health in the next generation). Some (like the impact on agricultural productivity or lower CO₂ emissions) are not and may distract us from other solutions for crucial societal problems. There is no need to make at best tenuous claims of indirect benefits when the case for educating girls stands up so strongly on its own merits.
- ▶ There are proven interventions—demonstrated in multiple settings—to increase girls' access to education and to improve the quality of that education. Eliminating fees, providing meals, and providing targeted instruction to girls who have fallen behind all work in real world settings and should be scaled up.
- ▶ International organizations often talk about girls' education in their projects—and even report disaggregated data—but they are much less likely to address constraints specific to girls in their project activities.
- ▶ Education systems can do more to support gender equality by making sure schools are safe for girls, rooting out discrimination, and supporting girls in the school-to-work transition.

All of the above lessons apply to what happens in school, but the reality is that much of gender inequality later in life is explained by what happens after girls leave school. For girls to realize the returns that education promises, countries need policies that protect women from discrimination in the labor market and other markets, as well as policies that support women where they face disproportionate burdens, such as in providing childcare.

There is much more, and—as you’d expect—there is a call for more evidence. Many of the recommendations on how to improve girls’ education stem from a handful of well-studied countries, and some areas—such as how to keep girls safe in school—still have relatively little evidence to guide policy. But there is enough evidence to improve girls’ education and make sure it accomplishes more than it currently

does, even as countries and partners invest in growing our knowledge further.

Girls’ education is a powerful investment. It’s time to boost its power and to make sure countries and partners invest in the portfolio of complementary investments that will allow every girl to grow up in an environment in which women are empowered to contribute freely, safely, and fully to their own lives and those of others in their communities.



Masood Ahmed
President
Center for Global Development

Foreword

Globally, girls today enjoy much greater access to schooling than their mothers' generation did. And unlike in their mother's generation, girls' test scores today approach or surpass those of their male peers in most countries.

Once girls leave school, however, they still confront acute, deeply rooted gender inequality in the economic, political, and social spheres. They earn less, hold fewer elected offices, and control fewer family decisions than the boys they sat next to and sometimes outperformed in school.

This report from the Center for Global Development's education program asks how education can better address these entrenched gender inequalities in society. How can governments deliver schooling for girls that is high quality and safe *and* contributes to a better later life for women?

Investing in girls' schooling is a crowd pleaser in global development circles. Claims abound about its transformative effects, not without some justification. As the report shows, study after study has found that girls' education yields a wide range of benefits, for both the girls and their families. But not all claims have equal merit. One task of this report is to separate evidence from hype among the many claims about the instrumental value of educating girls. In some places, more equal access to schooling for girls is needed. In others, policymakers need to confront the fact that equal access is not generating equal benefits and pursue more nuanced and

sometimes difficult reform, both within schools and in complementary policy domains.

This report underscores the need to continue to work hard to make a good-quality, safe education *and* a better future life a reality for all girls. Each of the spotlights and chapters suggests actions that may improve girls' education. The volume as a whole is a call to the education sector and the wider development community to do more to generate the right knowledge and the right tools to make gender equality more than a pipedream.

We need better data and better strategies to reach the girls that are being left behind. And we need to push harder to change norms and promote the implementation of policies, within and outside of education systems, that will achieve gender equality beyond the school gates. We encourage education experts, donors, and policymakers to engage with this report and work together to make education work better for women and girls.



Susannah Hares and Justin Sandefur
Co-directors, CGD Education Program

Where Is the World on Girls' Education?

DAVID K. EVANS

- Status of girls' education
- Benefits of girls' education
- What works in girls' education
- Which girls are still left out
- Education and employment
- Education for equality
- Beyond education reforms
- Legal reform and political will

To hear talk of it, you might think educating girls is a silver bullet to solve all the world's ills. A large and still growing collection of research demonstrates the wide-ranging benefits of girls' education. Recent research has nuanced some of those findings, but the fundamental result stands: Educating girls is good for girls and good for the people around them.¹

GIRLS' EDUCATION IS A HIGH PRIORITY

Leaders in low- and middle-income countries champion the value of girls' education. Former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf wrote that "investing in girls' education is not only a moral imperative, it is a smart investment."² Nigeria's former minister of finance Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and the United Arab Emirates' former minister of state for tolerance Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi wrote that "educating a girl does far more than place a child behind a desk. It is the surest pathway to reducing infant mortality, mitigating high birth rates, slowing migratory pressures, and unlocking economic potential."³ President Ram Nath Kovind, of India, has spoken of the "empowerment-through-education of our daughters."⁴ Chile's former president Michelle Bachelet explained that "we focus on girls' education because it sets them on a

path to greater economic opportunities and participation in their societies."⁵

Advocates, politicians in donor countries, and international organizations have also voiced their support. In 2015, US President Barack Obama said that "the single best indicator of whether a nation will succeed is how it treats its women. When women have health care and women have education, families are stronger, communities are more prosperous, children do better in school, nations are more prosperous."⁶ In 2021, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that "it is his 'fervent belief' that improving girls' education in developing countries is the best way to 'lift communities out of poverty.'"⁷ International organizations agree. In early 2021, the Group of Seven (G7) stated that "nowhere is our resolve stronger than in addressing the global set-back in girls' education."⁸

Most of these statements focus on the instrumental value of girls' education: Educating a girl is good because it leads to a positive outcome beyond education, often beyond the life of the girl herself. But education is also simply a right. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, identified education as a human right.⁹ Scholars have cautioned against labeling too many things as rights, noting that "a right that is not feasible is a meaningless

normative injunction.”¹⁰ But girls’ education is feasible and so should be seen as a right that countries can deliver on. Countries all over the world made dramatic gains in girls’ education over the past half century, in many cases eliminating gaps between girls and boys (and in some cases, even reversing them).¹¹ Because girls’ education is a right, independent of boys’ education, this report focuses not only on gaps between girls and boys but (mainly) on how to achieve effective high-quality universal education for all girls.

DESPITE PROGRESS, THE WORLD’S EDUCATION SYSTEMS STILL FAIL TO REACH AND TEACH MANY GIRLS

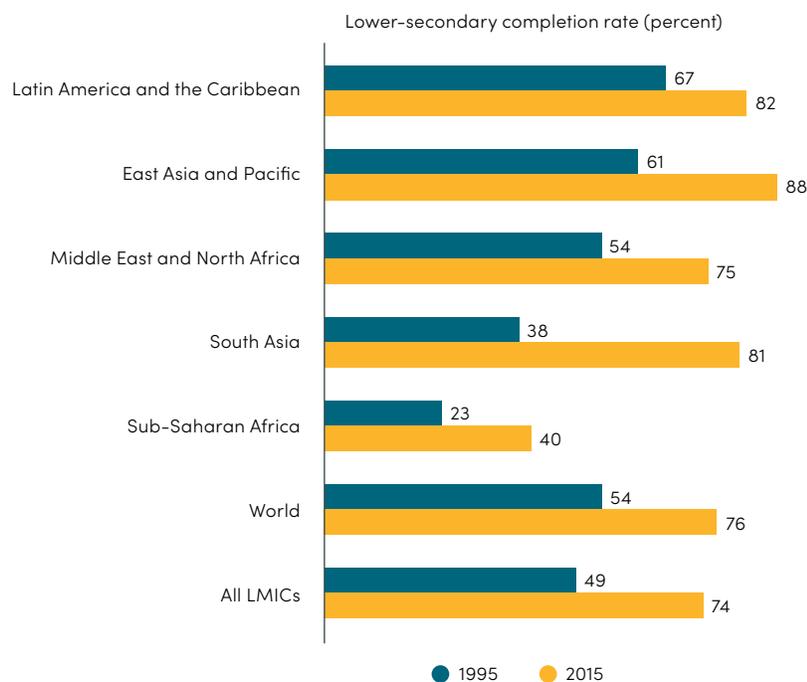
Two standard measures of success in educational investment are access (whether or not girls are in school) and learning (whether or not girls develop skills while at school). Access to education has expanded dramatically in recent decades (Figure 1.1), with gains for women in every low- and

middle-income country. For example, the proportion of girls completing lower-secondary school jumped from half to three-quarters between 1995 and 2020.

Despite these large gains and the shift in attention to secondary school, many girls around the world still lack even basic educational access. In some regions, almost all girls complete primary school. But 1 of every 3 girls in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1 of every 14 girls in South Asia, and 1 of every 12 girls in the Middle East and North Africa do not. Moreover, even small shares of girls not completing primary school can mask very large absolute numbers. At 96 percent, for example, India has a higher primary completion rate than the regional average, but its large population means that 4.6 million girls between the ages of 5 and 14 have not completed primary school.¹²

At higher levels of education, the challenge is even starker (Figure 1.2). Only half of girls complete upper-secondary school (or high school) in East Asia and the Pacific and in the Middle East and North Africa. The figure drops to 30

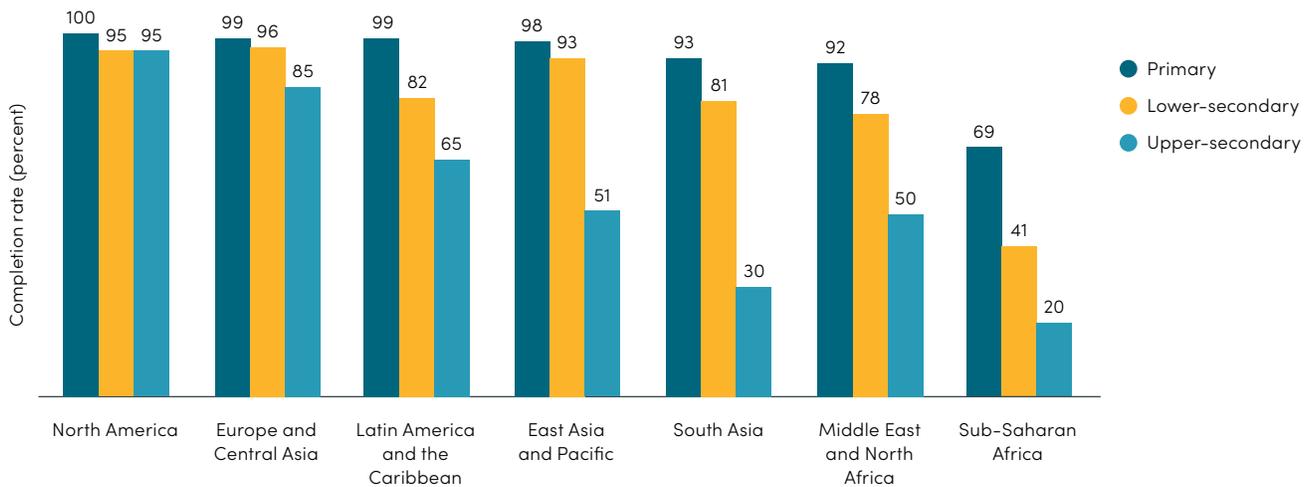
FIGURE 1.1 Access to education for women has expanded in every low- and middle-income country



Source: Authors’ construction based on lower-secondary completion rates from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators.¹²

Note: The World Development Indicators’ lower secondary completion rates are a proxy for completion, calculated as the number of enrollments in the last grade of lower secondary school divided by the total population of children who are the age appropriate for that grade.

FIGURE 1.2 Around the world, most girls complete primary school, but completion rates for higher levels of schooling are low



Source: Authors' construction based on 2020 primary and lower-secondary completion rates from the World Bank's World Development Indicators¹² and upper-secondary completion rates from UNESCO's UIS database.¹³

Note: The World Development Indicators' completion rates are a proxy for completion, calculated as the number of enrollments in the last grade of a given cycle of education divided by the total population of children who are the age appropriate for that grade.

percent in South Asia and 20 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Benin and Guinea Bissau, only 5 percent of girls complete upper-secondary school. Afghanistan, Haiti, and Papua New Guinea all come in under 20 percent.

Of course, completing school is not enough to reap all the benefits education can offer. Learning matters, too. But without getting girls into school and helping them through it, they cannot even begin to realize the gains. Furthermore, even when it doesn't improve the quality of learning (and it should), education can yield other benefits—delayed marriage or better nutrition through school meals, for example.¹⁴

The learning crisis that plagues education systems around the world affects all children, including girls. In Kenya, less than 50 percent of girls in third grade can do second grade class work in math, English, or Kiswahili.¹⁵ In Uganda, only 34 percent of girls in grades three to seven achieve competence in reading, and just 46 percent of girls achieve competence

in numeracy.¹⁶ In rural India, only 44 percent of girls 14–16 years old are able to solve a simple division problem, and far fewer can solve a word problem.¹⁷

Not all of these poor outcomes reflect gender inequality. In many contexts, boys and girls have similar access to schooling and learning outcomes, and girls outperform boys in some places. In Kenya, for example, third-grade girls outperform third-grade boys on average (although not consistently in poorer communities).¹⁸ Upper-secondary completion is more than 5 percentage points higher for girls than for boys both in Latin America and the Caribbean and in the Middle East and North Africa. These statistics do not suggest that policymakers and donors have already achieved their girls' education goals and can move on: For a variety of reasons, it may make sense to invest in girls' education even after equality in some educational outcomes (such as enrollment or completion) has been attained (Box 1.1).

BOX 1.1 SHOULD GIRLS' EDUCATION BE PRIORITIZED EVEN WHEN GIRLS OUTPERFORM BOYS?

In places where girls are behind, investing in girls' education is obviously necessary. But doing so can make sense even in places where girls are ahead, for several reasons.

First, given gender discrimination, women may need to have higher educational outcomes just to achieve equal labor market outcomes. Although the link between access to education and labor market participation is inconsistent (see Chapter 4), there are clear private and social returns to girls' spending more time in school and learning more while in school (see Chapter 2). Investments to make girls'

education more useful (see Chapter 5) and adopt complementary regulatory reforms (see Chapter 6) can strengthen the link between girls' education and women's economic equality.

Second, if girls' education yields more positive externalities than boys' education—as it appears to do—greater investments in girls' education may make social sense. For example, massive expansion of schooling in Indonesia increased education for both boys and girls, but when those children grew up, only the children of beneficiary women (not men) completed more years of schooling themselves.¹⁹

SCHOOLS MUST DO MORE THAN JUST ENROLL AND TEACH STUDENTS BASIC SKILLS

One of the primary objectives of schooling is to teach students measurable and useful skills. Parents want their children to learn to read and do math; in countries with many languages, they often want them to learn skills in the dominant language of business and government.

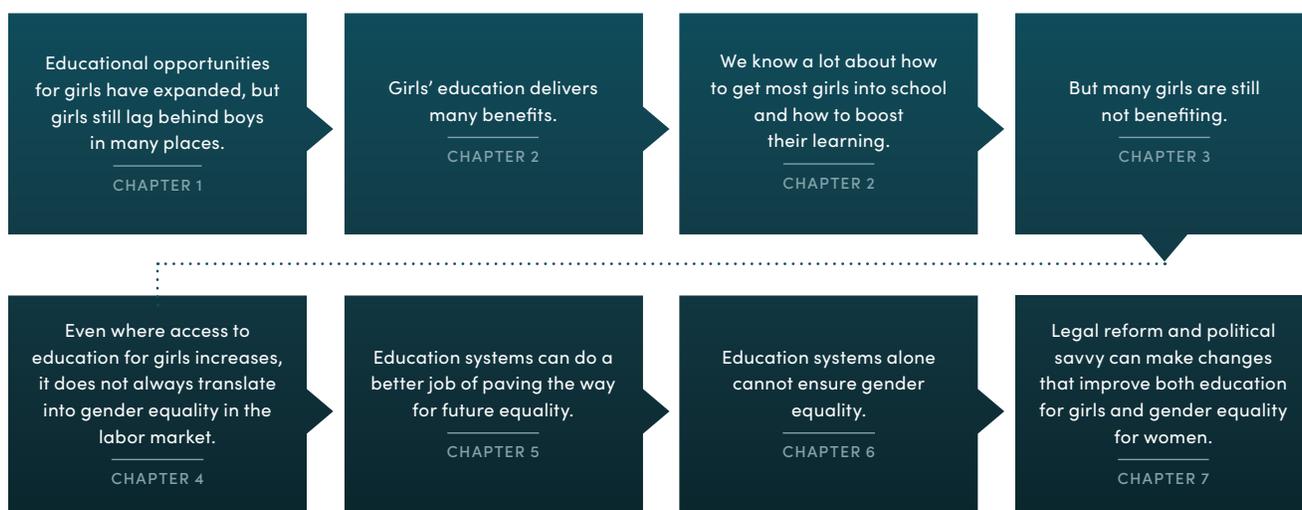
But schools need to do more than just teach basic skills. They need to make sure girls are safe at school—free from physical and sexual violence and gender-based bullying, including teasing about menstruation—so that they can focus on learning.²⁰ One in every eight girls in Senegal reports sexual harassment by a teacher or other staff member. Millions of adult women in India, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, and elsewhere report having been raped by a teacher when they were in school.¹⁴ If one adds in harassment and assault by peers in a school setting, even more women have been affected. This is not to say that schools are uniquely risky: girls enrolled in school are not more likely to experience physical or sexual violence than other girls.²¹ But

when girls come to school, they are in the care of the education system, which is responsible for keeping them safe.

Schools also often provide meals, ensuring at least some degree of food security. Girls routinely reap even greater benefits than boys from these meals.²² In various countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, not only did girls' enrollment rise with the offer of school meals, their enrollment increases were 27–40 percent higher than for boys.²³ A large-scale evaluation of a school meal program in Ghana found that girls' test scores benefited significantly more than boys' test scores.²⁴ Yet many children do not receive school meals. Across 60 countries, 73 million vulnerable children who are enrolled in school experience extreme poverty, high nutrition challenges, and inadequate school meal coverage, according to the World Food Programme.²⁵

Education systems can do much more than putting girls behind desks and delivering academic instruction to them. They can provide food security and safety, and they can do more to put girls on the path to gender equality, strengthening the link between girls' education and subsequent economic equality.⁹

FIGURE 1.3 This report has eight main messages



WHAT DOES THIS REPORT ADD?

There are many syntheses of “what works” to get girls into school and help them learn. From the 2004 report *What Works in Girls’ Education* to the 2022 systematic review *Policies and Interventions to Remove Gender-Related Barriers to Girls’ School Participation and Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, researchers have approached these questions from different angles.²⁶

This report goes beyond what works to get girls in school and learning—still very important questions—to probe how education can work together with other societal systems and structures to provide better lifetime opportunities for women. The analysis results in eight main messages (Figure 1.3); each chapter illuminates a different aspect of the issue.

This chapter lays out the current state of girls’ education in broad terms. It shows that although education has expanded, much more needs to be done. Chapter 2 examines the evidence behind the bold claims that are routinely made about the role of girls’ education. It shows that the evidence for some claims is strong but that other claims are less well supported. It reviews the evidence for how to get more girls into school and how to boost their learning while there.

Chapter 3 asks which girls are still not benefiting from educational investments. It steps back from the impressive expansions in access to girls’ education to look at which girls are still missing out. It shows that many of the girls who remain out of school face multiple vulnerabilities. Girls’ education is more sensitive to household income than boys’ education, so poor girls are particularly vulnerable to changes in income. On average, girls in rural areas are poorer than girls in urban areas, and fewer schools and other educational resources are available to them. Reaching poor, rural girls therefore requires additional resources.

Chapter 4 asks how well girls’ education translates into gender equality. It lays out the evidence that education systems are not closing gender gaps in the labor force. The good news is that education delivers economic returns for women and that those gains are often larger than for men. The bad news is that education does not erase labor market inequalities.

Chapter 5 asks what education systems should do differently to contribute to gender equality beyond the classroom. It provides evidence on which reforms to education systems could help them empower girls and contribute more directly to gender equality, including by rooting out system-level gender bias in the physical environment and in curricular materials.

Chapter 6 asks what other legal, economic, and political supports need to be in place for women—and the societies around them—to reap the returns to education. It identifies a set of complementary policies—outside of education systems and labor markets—that would help girls reap more of the benefits of education and strengthen the connection between education and gender equality broadly. These policies can include setting leadership quotas, making discrimination illegal, and enforcing laws against gender-based violence.

Chapter 7 asks what it takes to get such reforms to take hold. It examines the role that politics plays in determining where, when, and how meaningful progress toward gender equity in education and beyond is possible. Through country examples, it shows that mere legal reforms are often insufficient. Girls' education is critical, but on its own, it will not lead to better lives for women. Shifting the focus from girls' education alone to a more expansive view of gender equality is crucial.

Interwoven between the chapters are a series of spotlights, which examine areas that cut across chapters and feed into the overarching objectives of the report. Spotlight A explores the funding of education projects by international agencies. Spotlight B identifies where data on girls' education are available and where they are missing. Spotlight C discusses the role of violence in limiting girls' education and women's equal opportunity. Spotlight D explores the interplay between education and migration, one of the choices that girls sometimes make both to expand their education and reap the benefits of education. Spotlight E explores how education can narrow the gender digital divide that persists in many countries.



Much remains to be accomplished on the girls' education agenda, which is the focus of this report. For many countries, boys' education is also a topic of increasing concern.²⁷ While that absolutely merits action as well, it does not eliminate the many challenges in improving life outcomes for girls in developing settings.

This report is a call to action. Each of its chapters lends itself to constructive action to improve girls' education (Table 1.1). As education systems and their international partners take effective action, all girls can enjoy a high quality, safe education that improves the rest of their lives.

TABLE 1.1 Recommended actions for improving later life for all girls

CHAPTER	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
2: What Do We Know about Girls' Education (and What Don't We Know)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for girls' education based on rights and claims that are backed by strong evidence. • Invest in programs that have proved to work at scale (such as eliminating school fees, improving pedagogy, and feeding students). • Build evidence on improving girls' education, especially for interventions that can be implemented at scale.
3: Which Girls Are Still Being Left Behind?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate resources to reach girls with multiple vulnerabilities. • Design multifaceted solutions for girls facing multiple challenges. • Collect data on multiple vulnerabilities and on which girls are not receiving a good-quality education.
4: Does Girls' Education Deliver Gender Equality Later in Life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push for laws and policies that protect women's rights and promote equity, but don't stop there. • Support school-to-work transitions. • Strengthen cross-sector collaboration between school and work for women. • Reflect gender norms in policies and interventions. • Increase the number of women who work in both the public and private sectors.
5: How Can Education Systems Contribute More Effectively to Equality?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make school environments safe and accessible for all students. • Recognize and combat gender bias in schools. • Identify and eliminate sources of gender bias in education systems. • Ensure that education systems are intentional and specific about how they are working to strengthen empowerment for girls.
6: What Complementary Policies Are Needed to Improve Outcomes for Girls?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make discrimination illegal. • Subsidize childcare. • Use more quota systems. • Make politics more family friendly and domestic responsibilities more equal. • Leverage technology to reduce the burden of care work. • Implement policies that target men who commit violence.
7: What Political and Legal Conditions Will It Take to Reform Girls' Education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift policy objectives to prioritize gender equality rather than girls' education per se. • Build coalitions between government, civil society, and partners to achieve gender equity, using girls' education as one instrument for attaining it.

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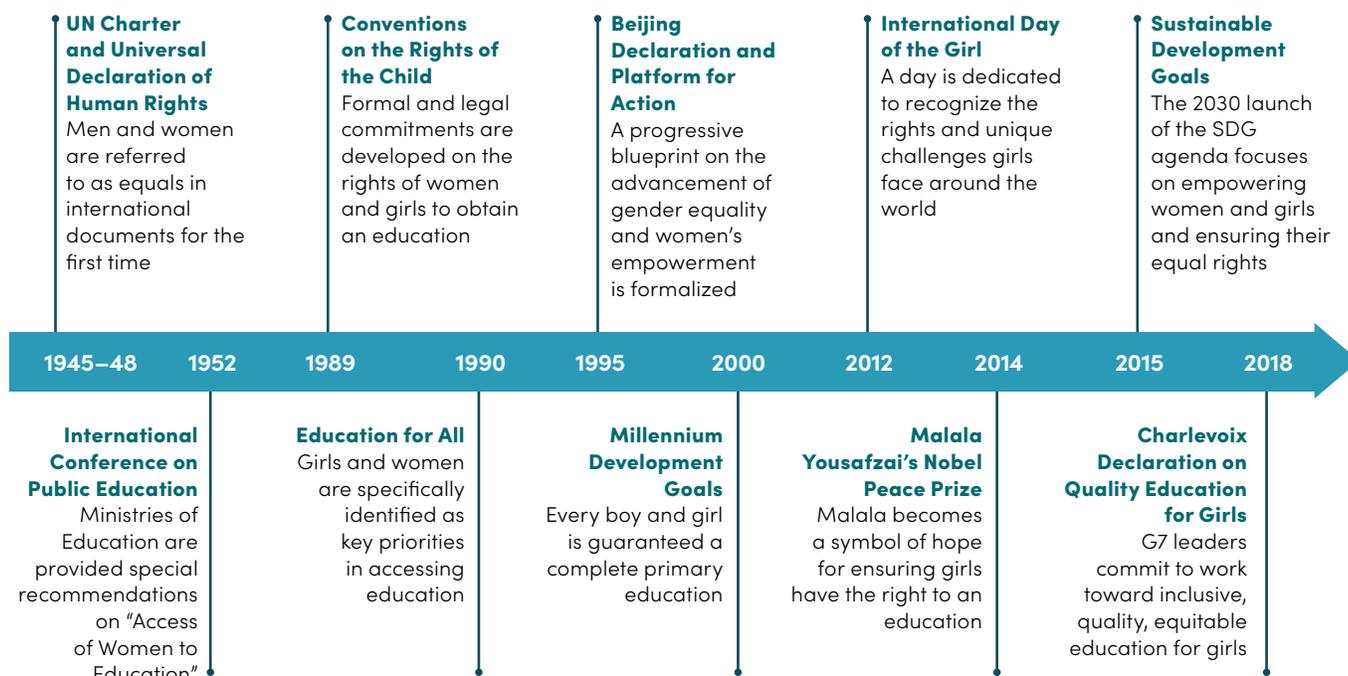
Is Girls' Education Really a Donor Priority?

SHELBY CARVALHO AND EMMA CAMERON*

Girls' education has featured prominently in global agendas and international education policy dialogues for several decades. The principle of educational equality for men and women was built into the constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the late 1940s, and women and girls' education continued to feature in early UN and World Bank development projects.¹ In 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All identified girls' and women's education as the most urgent

challenge; in 2000, gender equity in education was well established as a priority of the global education agenda (Figure A.1).² At times, girls' education has even been touted as one of the *most* important investments a country can make. The United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), for example, has made girls' education its top priority for education aid, through its Girls' Education Challenge initiative.

FIGURE A.1 Girls' education has taken on more and more importance in the past 75 years



* The research for this spotlight was conducted in collaboration with an excellent research team at the Harvard Graduate School of Education that included Madeline Brancel, Hester Burn, Yeeva Cheng, Chane Corp, Maria Jose de Leon Mazriegos, Youngkwang Jeon, Varidzo Kativhu, Wambura Kimunyu, Muna Malin, Samantha Monroe, Ryan Pakebusch, Sarah Pemberton, Patricia Vazquez, and Eve Woogen.

What does it mean for girls' education to be a priority for international donors? To what extent have resources and action followed this broad and prolonged global interest in girls' education? As the answer was not immediately clear from data on education aid, we examined (a) the extent to which major international donors have provided financial resources that specifically support girls' education and (b) what donors invest in when they say they support girls' education. Our goal is to document whether and when girls were identified as a priority group and to examine how this support has been operationalized. Identifying these trends may help pinpoint roadblocks to progress in girls' education as well as potential mismatches between investments and effective policies.

The analysis focuses on the World Bank and FCDO (formerly the Department for International Development [DFID]),

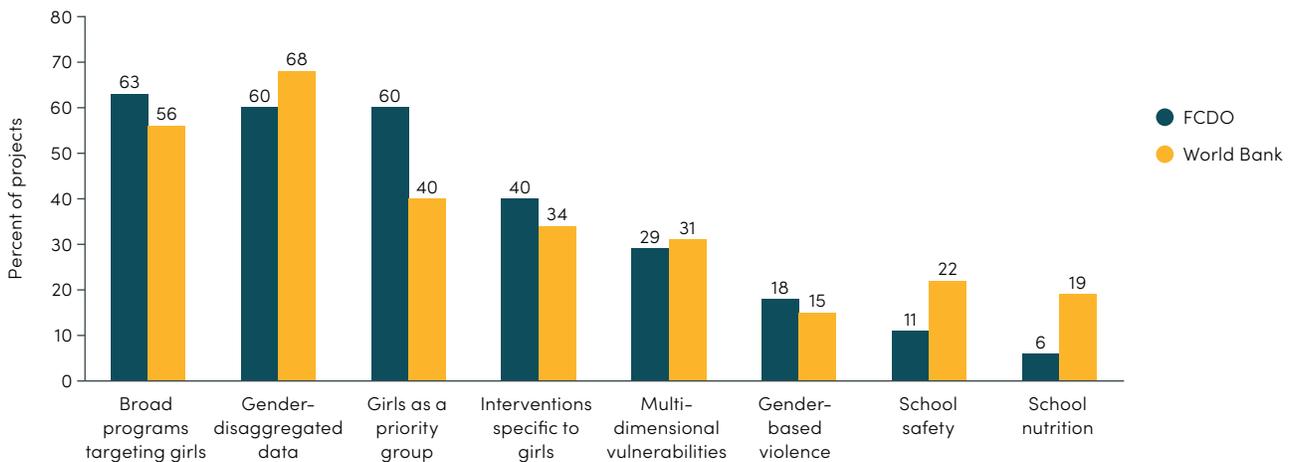
because they have been two of the largest funders to the education sector over the past two decades and girls' education has been a consistent priority at the headquarter level for both organizations. The two institutions also provide sufficient documentation of project plans and financing to conduct such an analysis (other agencies, including USAID and UNICEF, do not).

We reviewed more than 900 documents covering investments, programs, and projects implemented over the past 20 years by the World Bank and FCDO. We examined World Bank Project Appraisal Documents (PADs) and FCDO Log-Frames and Business Cases, the documents that represent the initial stage of project implementation by each institution. We coded documents to identify information related to education projects, girls' education, and financing (Table A.1).

TABLE A.1 Factors considered in coding donor projects for gender and girls' education

TYPE OF CODING	INFORMATION COLLECTED	
Project coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project title • Abstract • Website address of project document • Country • Years active • Level/focus of project (primary, secondary, multiple) • Project costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcription of all World Bank Project Development Objectives (PDOs)/results components; objectives; indicators; disbursement linked indicators; and funding information • Transcription of all FCDO impacts, impact indicators, outcome indicators, output, output indicators, and funding information
Coding for girls' education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are girls identified as a priority group in the program objective or strategy? • Are there specific programs or interventions targeting girls? • Do aspects of broad programs target girls? • Are targets or results data disaggregated by gender? • Does the project include activities to combat gender-based violence? • Does the project include activities or mentions of school safety? • Does the project include any activities that relate to nutrition or school feeding? • Does the project address any multidimensional factors related to gender? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of intervention (e.g., empowerment or access) • Targeted level of education • Are girls directly or indirectly targeted? • Are girls included in name only? • Is there a focus of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)? • Is there a STEM focus that emphasizes enrolling more girls? • Do technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs mention skill differentiating between genders?

FIGURE A.2 Between 2000 and 2020, education interventions by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the World Bank rarely targeted underlying constraints to girls' education



Source: Authors' construction based on data from World Bank and FCDO reports.

BRITAIN'S FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH & DEVELOPMENT OFFICE (FCDO) AND THE WORLD BANK FRAME THE RATIONALE FOR INVESTING IN GIRLS' EDUCATION IN SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT WAYS

The World Bank frames girls' education as a key to human capital and broader economic development. FCDO more often frames it in terms of equity rather than human capital accumulation, and FCDO documents are more likely to include a gender lens throughout the project document. These subtle differences in the framing of the rationale for investing in girls' education also shape what and how investments in girls' education are operationalized.

PROGRAM OVERVIEWS AND RATIONALES OFTEN CITE GENDER EQUITY AND GIRLS' EDUCATION—BUT INITIATIVES TARGETING GIRLS ARE INCLUDED IN PROJECT ACTIVITIES LESS THAN HALF THE TIME

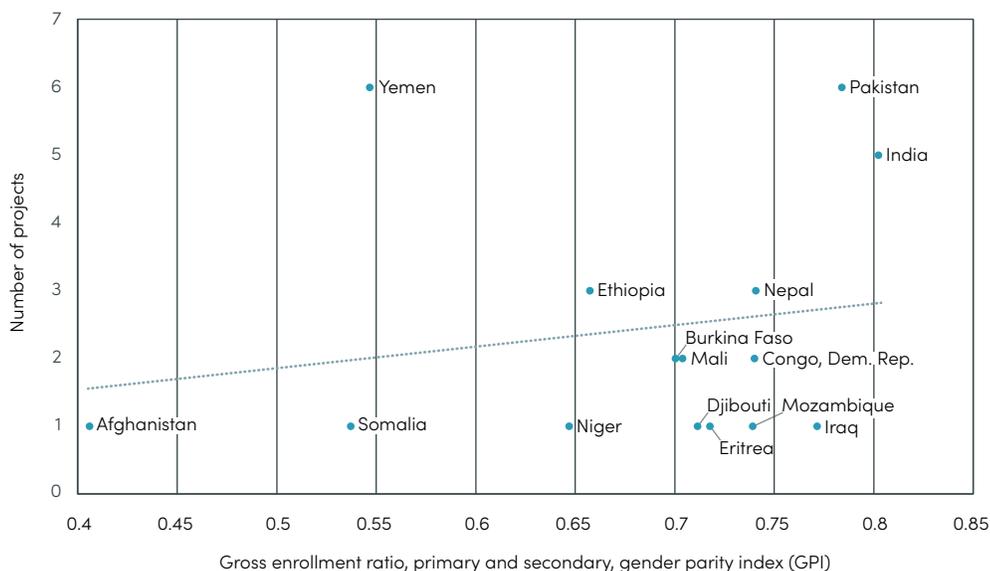
Girls' education may be included as one priority within a larger program. Girls and gender equity are often mentioned in background sections of project documents, but this focus is not always accompanied by related interventions or programs. Of the projects that note women and girls as a priority group in background descriptions, only about 40 percent of FCDO and 34 percent of World Bank programs include interventions or programs specifically targeting girls (Figure A.2). In one extreme example, a World Bank PAD in Nigeria includes the word "gender" 31 times, but none of the disbursement-linked indicators included the word and none of the outcomes are related specifically to girls.³ Twenty percent of World Bank PADs noted girls as a priority group without including a single intervention that would have targeted

girls. Although it may not always be necessary or wise to explicitly target girls for them to benefit from an education program or intervention,⁴ it is unclear in project documents whether broad programs are expected to specifically benefit girls or whether girls' education falls off as a priority at the intervention and outcome stage.

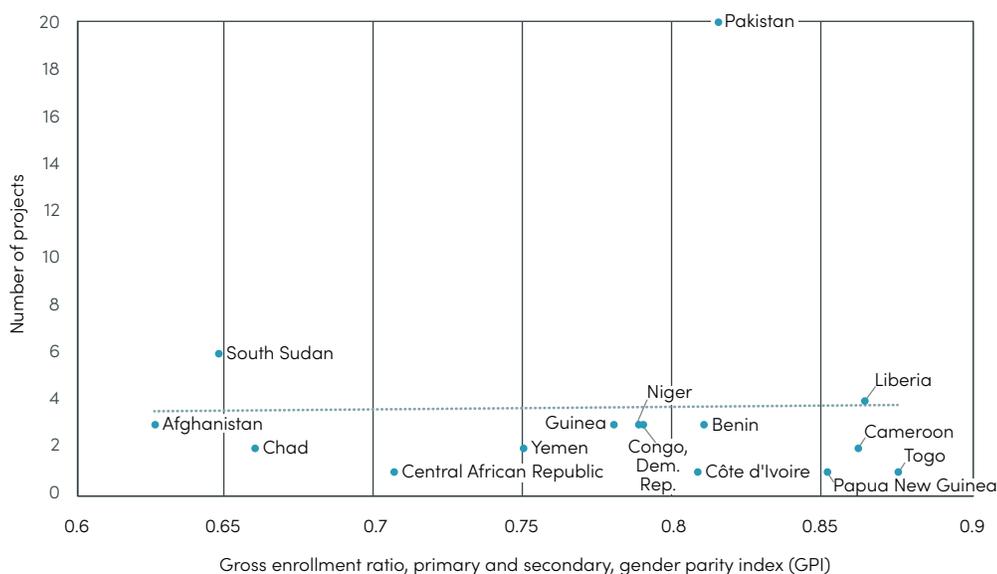
Donor investments in girls' education do not necessarily reflect the status of girls' education. Donors do not seem to be targeting girls' education and gender parity in countries where gender parity is low (Figure A.3). However, for some countries, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, this alignment improved over time.

FIGURE A.3 The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the World Bank did not finance more projects that prioritized girls in countries with lower gender parity

PANEL A. 2000–10



PANEL B. 2010–20



Source: Authors' construction based on data from World Bank and FCDO reports.

Note: The Primary-Secondary Gender Parity Index value was taken for the earliest available year for the top 15 countries with the lowest values on the gender parity index in each time period (2000–10 and 2010–20) where World Bank and FCDO funded projects were also implemented covering the same time period.

GENDER-DISAGGREGATED DATA HAVE BECOME MORE WIDELY AVAILABLE

Most World Bank documents disaggregate results and targets by gender, and the average share of projects with such data rose, from 28 percent in 2000–05 to 86 percent in 2015–20. In contrast, there was little improvement in gender-disaggregated data at the FCDO, with 50 percent of projects including such data in 2000–05 and 51 percent doing so in 2015–20.⁵ When FCDO does disaggregate results and targets by gender, it is more likely than the World Bank to do so through additional categories that may reflect multiple sources of disadvantage or vulnerability (e.g., girls with disabilities or rural girls). World Bank targets are rarely, if ever, disaggregated along multidimensional lines.

Although gender-disaggregated data and results are important, they can be a misleading measure of the extent to which girls are targeted as part of the project. Simply targeting X number of girls and Y number of boys does not necessarily mean that an intervention addresses gender-specific needs, vulnerable groups, or the constraints girls face.

FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS IN GIRLS' EDUCATION IMPROVED OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS

Tracking funds that target girls' education is challenging, but there is some evidence of a positive trend over the past two decades, most notably for the World Bank. Committed spending on projects that identified girls as a priority was \$17.6 billion at the World Bank and \$12.5 billion at FCDO across the 20-year time frame.⁶ Education spending outlined in project documents increased from an average of \$29 million in 2000–05 to \$1.65 billion in 2015–20 at the World Bank; at the FCDO, it rose from an average of \$69 million to \$481 million. World Bank funding for girls' education as a percentage of total education projects, also increased over the past two decades. In 2020, 92 percent of the FCDO's education financing and 77 percent of World Bank financing went to projects that included girls' education as a priority (Figure A.4). However, these figures did not necessarily translate into more targeted efforts to support girls.

FIGURE A.4 Between 2005 and 2020, World Bank funding of education projects that prioritize girls' education increased substantially while Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) remained relatively stable



Source: Authors' construction based on data from World Bank and FCDO reports.

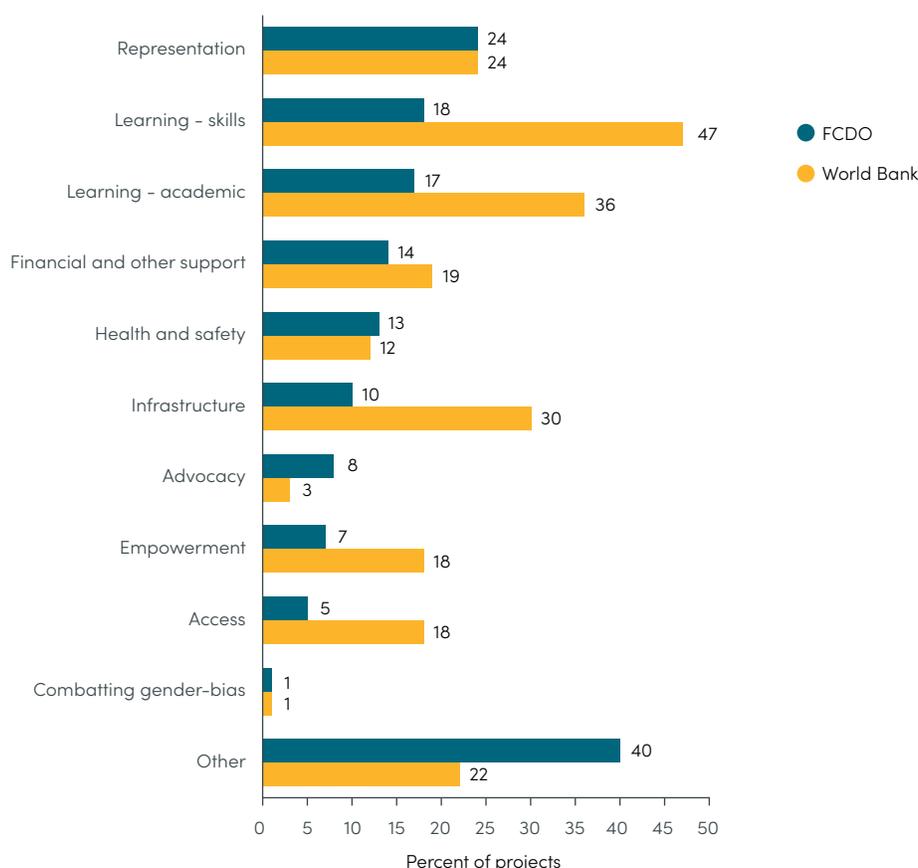
Note: Because of gaps in the data, all data before 2005 were excluded.

INTERVENTIONS FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION RARELY TARGETED THE UNDERLYING CONSTRAINTS GIRLS FACE

Most projects focused broadly on learning and skills; fewer than 5 percent focused on reducing gender bias in classrooms, and fewer than 20 percent focused on girls' empowerment, access, health and safety, or advocacy (Figure A.5). Very few World Bank documents addressed barriers specific to

girls, such as child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, or inadequate menstrual hygiene management. Although learning and skill development are sensible focus areas for education projects, they do not necessarily address the underlying root causes of gender disparities in education or issues, including gender bias and violence, that may also affect later life outcomes, including employment and broader gender equity. We do not advocate for less focus on learning or skill development but rather that additional and underlying constraints should not be neglected in the process.

FIGURE A.5 Between 2000 and 2020, interventions by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the World Bank focused primarily on learning and infrastructure



Source: Authors' construction based on data from World Bank and FCDO reports.

Note: Each project could have up to three intervention focuses. Example of project types in each category included the following; 1. Representation: Increasing the number of female teachers, head teachers, and staff and raising girls' enrollment; 2. Learning skills: Supporting ability-level grouping, remedial learning, STEM, and ICT; 3. Learning academic: Providing gender-sensitive curricula and materials and gender-responsive pedagogy/teacher training; 4. Financial and other support: Supporting scholarships, conditional cash transfers, nutrition, in-kind benefits, uniforms; 5. Health and safety: Reducing gender-based violence, Improving reproductive/menstrual health and discouraging child marriage, pregnancy, and female gender mutilation; 6. Infrastructure: Constructing buildings, latrines, water and sanitation activities, girls' rooms; 7. Advocacy: Targeting boys and men, communities, parent clubs or meetings, and parent-teacher associations; 8. Empowerment: Supporting mentors, clubs/groups, and leadership and financial literacy training; 9. Access: Reducing the distance to school, providing transportation, and building roads; 10. Combatting gender-bias: Supporting sports programs and classroom observations; 11. Other: Research or grant-related project.

Moving forward, international donors should increase their focus on the root causes of gender inequity in the education system and the specific constraints girls face. Donor support of girls' education increased over the past two decades, and funding included occasional innovations related to safe transportation, skills and labor market transitions, and gender bias in the classroom. These less common examples are encouraging indications of what's possible and should be prioritized more in the future.

Moving forward, we call on all international donor partners to do the following:

- 1. Make detailed project and financing plans publicly available.** This spotlight examines two major donor agencies; it does not reflect the universe of investment or innovation in support for girls' education. Making project, finance, and outcome data available across donors will be an important next step.
- 2. Ensure that all project plans, financing, and outcomes are disaggregated by gender,** at a minimum, and reflect additional categories (e.g., disability, ethnicity) where appropriate.
- 3. Align disbursement-linked indicators with goals and challenges.**
- 4. Strengthen collaboration and knowledge-sharing** between the education and gender sectors (as a start), in order to critically discuss some of the underlying gender disparities that affect more than one sector.



- 5. Strengthen efforts to identify and target the root causes of systemic gender inequities** within education systems, including through innovative interventions.

Whether or not programs explicitly target girls (and doing so may not always be necessary), it is critical that all program implementations be both gender sensitive and gender informed, so that programs do not inadvertently disadvantage or harm girls. International donors need to be clear about what they are doing to reach girls, which girls they aim to support, and how they intend to support them, and they need to ensure that financing and programs clearly align with their objectives.

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- 6 We examined a smaller subsample of World Bank Implementation Completion and Results (ICR) reports to compare disbursements with committed amounts. Although there was some rearrangement between components or disbursement-linked indicators and slightly higher overall spending, the overall amount did not increase dramatically. For FCDO, the disbursed amounts are linked to project pages on the Devtracker website so we were able to compare the disbursed to committed amounts. FCDO disbursed USD \$15.4 billion between 2000 and 2020.

What Do We Know about Girls' Education (and What Don't We Know)?

DAVID K. EVANS with contributions from Amina Mendez Acosta and Laura Moscoviz



In the early 20th century, Ghanaian educator James Aggrey popularized the saying, “If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family.”¹ Girls' education is regularly highlighted as a tool akin to a “silver bullet” that will solve many of the world's ills.² Taking stock of what evidence tells us about what girls' education accomplishes (and does not accomplish) and reviewing the latest evidence on how to expand and improve girls' education is critical to improving policy and generating new evidence in areas where it is missing.

Girls' education is a human right and an inherently valuable investment. Strong evidence backs many of the claims about its benefits. But not all claims are equally well supported. Spurious claims about the benefits of girls' education run the risk of disillusioning people and organizations that base their support on them and diverting resources away from interventions that work.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF GIRLS' EDUCATION?

Individuals and organizations regularly make claims about what girls' education accomplishes not only for the girls

Spurious claims about the benefits of girls' education run the risk of disillusioning people and organizations that base their support on them and diverting resources away from interventions that work.

themselves but for their families, their communities, their countries, and even the world (Figure 2.1). In just the last two decades, proponents of girls' education have stressed numerous benefits including for the economy (improved health and incomes for women), families (higher rates of children's vaccinations and better other health outcomes), society (stability), and even the planet (reduced climate change). Which of these claims hold up under empirical scrutiny?

Evidence to support the many claims about the benefits of girls' education varies widely (Figure 2.2). Eighty-nine studies have examined the link between girls' education and the subsequent vaccination status of their children; the weight of the evidence points to a strong, positive association. At the other end of the spectrum, just three studies have examined the link between girls' education and agricultural productivity—and the evidence from those studies does not consistently support the link.

Eight claims have more support than others. Listed in order of evidentiary support, they include the following:

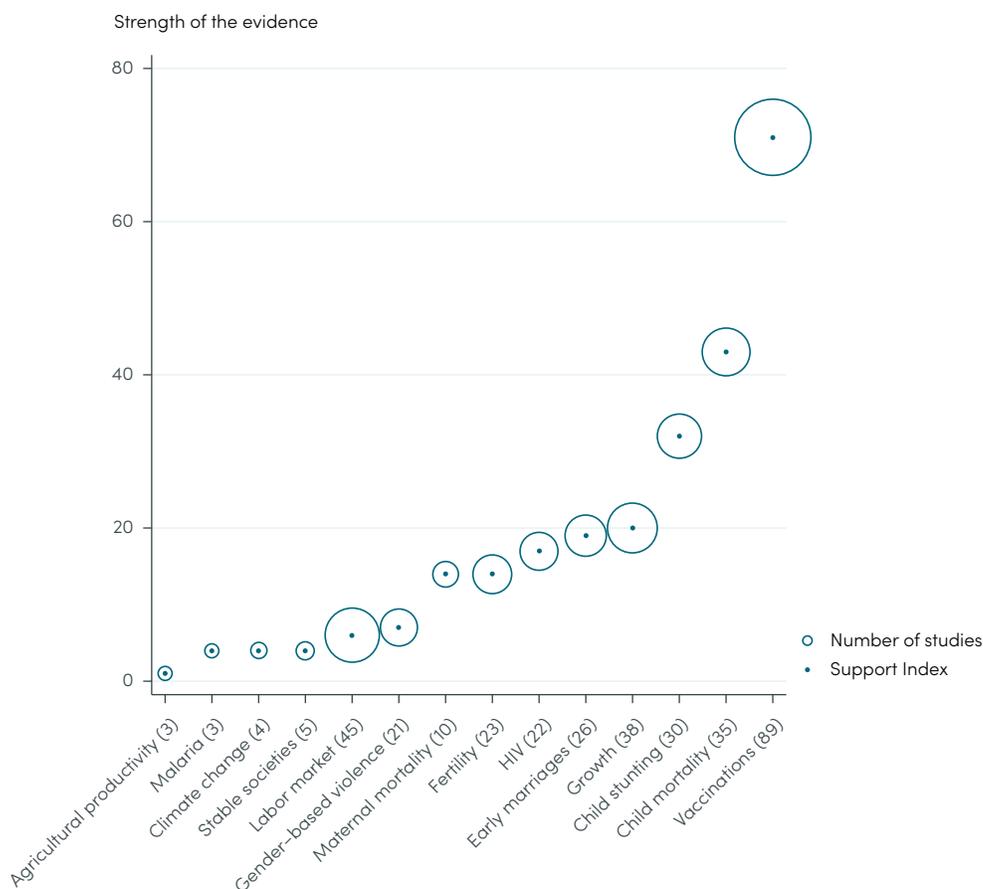
- ▶ Girls' education increases vaccination rates.
- ▶ Girls' education reduces child mortality.
- ▶ Girls' education reduces child stunting.

- ▶ Girls' education increases economic growth.
- ▶ Girls' education reduces early marriage.
- ▶ Girls' education reduces the risk of HIV.
- ▶ Girls' education reduces fertility.
- ▶ Girls' education reduces maternal mortality.

Claims with either less support or support that is more mixed include the following (in decreasing order of evidence):

- ▶ Girls' education reduces gender-based violence.
- ▶ Girls' education improves labor market outcomes.
- ▶ Girls' education increases societal stability.
- ▶ Girls' education reduces climate change.
- ▶ Girls' education reduces the risk of malaria.
- ▶ Girls' education increases agricultural productivity.

FIGURE 2.2 The strength of the evidence supporting claims about the impact of girls' education varies widely



Source: Carvalho et al. 2022³

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the number of studies that examined the claim. Studies were identified through a search of experimental, quasi-experimental, and descriptive studies (both quantitative and qualitative) in English from any geographic area and any time period. The strength of the evidence was calculated using the number of studies that support the claim or not, weighted by the quality of the studies.

The evidence on vaccinations and child mortality is strong

Of all the claims, the one that has been examined most thoroughly has been the link between girls' education and the vaccination rates of their children. Not all of the 89 studies are of equal quality: many are imperfectly suited for identifying a causal link, using simple regression strategies. But the vast majority of studies—both strong and weak—support the link between girls' education and subsequent children's vaccination.

Women's education boosts the survival of the next generation.

There is also a great deal of consistent evidence on the relationship between girls' education and child mortality, with 27 of the 35 studies examining the link supporting the claim. In Indonesia, for example, child mortality fell 0.5 percentage points following an education reform that led women to increase their years of schooling by three-quarters of a year.⁴ Schooling reforms that eliminated fees for primary school in Uganda and Malawi increased education for girls and translated into sizeable drops—17 percent and 10 percent, respectively—in child mortality.⁵ Other studies, from Denmark to Ghana to Pakistan, also support the relationship. Women's education boosts the survival of the next generation.

The evidence on labor market outcomes and gender-based violence is mixed

The relationship between girls' education and subsequent labor market outcomes has been heavily studied. But the evidence for it as a global claim is weak because the link varies so much from context to context (see chapter 4). For example, one study finds that wage earnings for women in Pakistan rise 13–18 percent with an additional year of education—a larger gain than observed for men.⁶ But a study in the United Arab Emirates finds that high education levels have

no association with women's employment.⁷ There are many such examples, with positive impacts in some contexts and no impacts in others, likely driven by characteristics of the labor market.

Beyond increases in income, education can have a protective effect for women. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, women in Barbados with more years of education were less likely to lose their job.⁸ Normally, one might worry that such a correlation is not causal, that more educated women might also have stronger family networks, for example. But in this case, researchers teased out the causal impacts by comparing women who just barely qualified for more selective schools and subsequently attained more education to almost identical women who barely missed the cut-off. Evidence from Europe and Central Asia backs up the findings from Barbados.⁹

More than 20 studies examine the effect of girls' schooling on gender-based violence. The evidence is mixed, however. In Kenya, girls who received scholarships that increased their secondary schooling were less likely to accept intimate partner violence.¹⁰ But in Turkey, a reform that boosted girls' schooling resulted in more self-reported psychological violence and unchanged attitudes about domestic violence among women.¹¹

For both job protection and gender-based violence, the evidence leans toward a positive association with girls' education. But there are enough cases on both sides, and the evidence on a causal link is weak enough, that caution is warranted.

The evidence on agricultural productivity and climate change is weak

Few studies have been conducted to support the claim that girls' education increases agricultural productivity. Unlike in most of the areas examined, this literature is also older, with most studies conducted before 2000. In Uganda, researchers found that education had no link with agricultural productivity once they adjusted for other differences across

communities.¹² A handful of other studies do suggest a positive association, but they generally do not control for other differences across women that could explain the association.

Even if girls' education does not accomplish everything that every advocate proposes, it has clear beneficial impacts on girls and the people around them.

In recent years, donors and others have highlighted a link between girls' education and the fight against climate change.¹³ The main channel through which girls' education is posited to affect climate change is through falling fertility rates. But education may also fuel faster growth and increased emissions.¹⁴ On net, the likely impact of falling fertility on climate change is likely to be minimal.¹⁵ (Simulations

also suggest that direct investments in family planning would be more likely to reduce fertility than girls' education.¹⁶) There are also moral challenges to asking lower-income countries to reduce fertility to solve a climate crisis created largely by higher-income countries.¹⁷

Some observers have proposed other mechanisms through which girls' education may affect climate change, such as fostering climate leadership among girls or building their skills to work in green industries. But none of these proposed mechanisms is backed by substantial evidence.¹⁸

In summary, there is reasonably strong evidence that girls' education has positive impacts on vaccination rates, as well as the survival and health of children in the next generation. There is also evidence that educating girls contributes to growth, reduces early marriage, and makes young women less likely to contract HIV. In some areas—like employment outcomes and the experience of gender-based violence—the impact of girls' education depends heavily on the context. Ultimately, even if girls' education does not accomplish everything that every advocate proposes, it has clear beneficial impacts on girls and the people around them.



WHAT KINDS OF INTERVENTIONS ARE KNOWN TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE GIRLS' EDUCATION?

Despite the clear benefits, many girls remain out of school, even at the primary level but especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. Given that girls' education has demonstrated benefits for many outcomes, one priority is to expand and improve girls' education. The amount of learning that takes place in schools is an important area where girls' education can be improved, but it is not the only area (Box 2.1).

The way to expand and improve girls' education depends on the obstacles inhibiting girls' access to education and learning. Girls face many obstacles to their education. One recent review proposed 18.¹⁸

1. lack of support for girls' education
2. child marriage and adolescent pregnancy
3. lack of information on the returns to education for women
4. school-related gender-based violence
5. gender-insensitive school environment
6. lack of safe spaces and social connections

BOX 2.1: SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS CAN BENEFIT GIRLS EVEN IF THEY DO NOT INCREASE ACCESS OR LEARNING

Two summary indicators of girls' education are whether girls attend and go on to complete school (access) and the skills they gain while in school (learning). After making strides in access (despite still having a long way to go), many countries as well as the international community have sharpened their focus on learning outcomes in recent years.

Some interventions that may not affect learning may still improve other important outcomes for girls. For example, the evidence on the impact of providing menstrual health materials in schools on basic access outcomes (much less learning) is inconsistent. In Kenya, providing pads reduced absenteeism in one area but not in another; in Nepal, providing a new menstrual health technology (menstrual cups) did not.¹⁹ But beyond absenteeism, menstrual

health materials reduce period stigma and period teasing. Improving young women's mental and emotional health is a worthy end in itself. Likewise, an intervention to reduce violence against girls at school may or may not affect access or learning, but reducing violence is a crucial objective. Many programs for girls in upper-primary or secondary school focus on making sure those girls can advocate for themselves as they transition to the next phase of their lives. These post-schooling outcomes are at least as important as access and learning outcomes. Although there is great value in staying focused on crucial goals, like access and learning, education leaders must remember that reaching other goals can also improve the lives of girls and young women.²⁰

7. lack of teaching materials and supplies
8. insufficient academic support
9. inadequate sports programs for girls
10. inadequate health and childcare services
11. inadequate life skills
12. inadequate menstrual hygiene management
13. lack of water and sanitation
14. inadequate school access
15. poor policy/legal environment
16. inability to afford tuition and fees
17. inability to afford school materials
18. lack of adequate food.

Which obstacles matter most will depend on the context. In some places, changing social norms to increase support for girls' education may be the most important way to increase girls' school participation, especially in secondary school. In others, families may simply lack the money to send their girls to school. These differences mean that there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for increasing and improving girls' education.

Education systems and partners will have to diagnose the challenges and experiment with solutions.

There is still considerable evidence on how to overcome some of these obstacles, particularly an inability to pay education expenses, insufficient food, and insufficient academic support (i.e., helping students to navigate school successfully).¹⁸ For example, reducing expenses by eliminating school fees can have dramatic positive impacts on girls' access to education.²¹ Cash transfers can also have a large impact. To manage the fiscal impact of eliminating fees, some education systems have eliminated school fees only for girls (as was the case with secondary school in The Gambia²²) or provided scholarships targeted specifically to girls (as with a program in rural Kenya²³). The most straightforward way to overcome the obstacle of insufficient food is through school feeding programs, which have been successful across many contexts (Box 2.2). School feeding programs can both reduce malnutrition and provide an incentive for parents to send girls to school.

Improving the quality of education for girls—making sure they have adequate academic support—is another key objective. Across a wide range of educational interventions, programs that improved the quality of teaching also improved learning outcomes for girls more than any other programs.²⁴ These interventions help overcome the obstacle of insufficient academic support.

Examples of these interventions include a government-implemented program that provided teachers' aides to classrooms in Ghana who focused their attention on students who had fallen behind. The intervention improved learning outcomes, with gains that were twice as large for girls as for boys. In another model within the same program, government teachers implemented the targeted instruction; in this case, only girls experienced learning gains.²⁵ Another remedial education program, this one delivered by para-teachers after school in The Gambia, had major impacts for both girls and boys.²⁶

Another way of providing academic support that has proven successful is by offering a concentrated reading course for ten to twenty days during school holidays, targeted to students who were behind the grade-appropriate reading level. In India, this yielded substantial impacts for girls and boys.²⁷ Programs that provided multifaceted academic support—coaching for teachers, teacher guides, and improved textbooks for students—delivered large gains for both girls and boys.²⁸ These programs also incorporated instruction in a language that students already speak at home.²⁹

Although those are the three obstacles with the most established evidence, there is at least some evidence to support interventions for overcoming other barriers, such as lack of water and sanitation at school and inadequate access to schools.¹⁸ For example, building school latrines in India boosted girls' enrollment. For adolescent girls, the latrines had to be gender-specific to have an impact; for younger students, any latrine yielded a benefit.³⁰ Building schools boosted girls' enrollment in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Indonesia.³¹

Many interventions are multifaceted: they may provide both teacher coaching and new textbooks, or sanitary pads coupled with better latrines. Yet, multifaceted interventions

Programs that improved the quality of pedagogy also improved learning outcomes for girls more than any other programs.

pose challenges for both researchers and policymakers. When an effective program includes several different activities, researchers and policymakers cannot easily tease out which activities are responsible for access or learning gains. Multifaceted programs may also have higher costs (because they involve more activities) and be harder to implement (because they involve supervision of and expertise in multiple activities, rather than just one). But when girls face multiple obstacles, multifaceted interventions—or a collection of single-faceted interventions—may be essential, as discussed in Chapter 3. In Tanzania, a program that covered the costs of schooling, learning materials, life skills education, mentoring, and teacher training for secondary school girls in rural areas had positive impacts on test scores and reduced dropout rates, with test score spillovers for boys.³² When girls face multiple obstacles, multifaceted programs may be the best (and in some cases, the only) way to help.

WHERE DO EVIDENCE GAPS LIE?

There are two types of gaps in what we know about what works to expand and improve girls' access to education. The first involves interventions on which evidence is lacking. The second gap involves the lack of evidence from certain countries (Spotlight B).

Many obstacles seem to prevent girls from accessing school and from learning once they are there. But high-quality evidence on how to overcome these obstacles is lacking for more than half of them. There is not nearly enough evidence, for example, on how to reduce school-related gender-based

violence, inadequate life skills, insufficient menstrual hygiene management, and a more general lack of societal support for girls' education.¹⁸ Furthermore, many studies on general, non-targeted interventions fail to report outcomes on girls' education separately, hampering an understanding of how helpful some interventions may be.²⁴

Evidence on large-scale programs is scarcer, partly because policies with broad reach can be more difficult to evaluate convincingly (with no one to compare beneficiaries to) and partly because programs are more difficult to implement at scale. Many evaluations of programs to boost girls' education therefore come from relatively small pilots, often implemented by nongovernment entities. These evaluations are informative about whether an intervention can function under ideal conditions in a certain setting. But they do not indicate whether it is possible to reach large numbers of children and youth with the program or whether a program can be implemented through government systems. Indeed, many programs have smaller impacts when implemented at scale.³³ Sometimes the diluted effect reflects political

pressures to change the design of at-scale programs. At other times, it reflects differences in management and incentives of government workers versus those in the nonprofit sector.

Some interventions have been proven to work in multiple settings and with large samples of students. Interventions that have increased access to education or learning with at least 10,000 girls include the following:

- ▶ eliminating school fees and providing vouchers (Colombia and Ghana)
- ▶ providing school meals (Ghana, India, and Pakistan [Box 2.2])
- ▶ making schools more accessible (Brazil and Indonesia)
- ▶ improving the quality of pedagogy in schools (Kenya and Pakistan).²¹

As countries continue to innovate with large-scale programs, it will be worth investing in research to determine what programs work effectively at scale.

BOX 2.2 SCHOOL FEEDING INTERVENTIONS WORK AND SCALE WELL

School feeding is a promising way to boost student learning and school participation, especially in food-insecure contexts and particularly for girls.²⁴ Most school feeding programs target the primary school level, but there are also efforts to reach older students.³⁴

Providing school meals in rural Senegal improved both student enrollment and test scores.³⁵ Providing take-home rations in Burkina Faso increased school attendance for both boys and girls, and it increased enrollment particularly for girls.³⁶ These results make intuitive sense: Providing free and nutritious school meals contributes to healthy children who are ready to learn, and take-home rations may reduce the

opportunity cost of sending children to school. Girls' enrollment is often the most sensitive to household income (see Chapter 3).

There is also evidence that school feeding interventions scale well.²¹ A program in Pakistan that reached hundreds of thousands of girls boosted school enrollment by 40 percent.³⁷ A program in Ghana that is now part of the government's national education strategy improved student test scores, especially among girls and poor children.³⁸ A World Food Programme intervention in 32 countries in Africa increased enrollment rates for children, with gains 27 percent higher for girls than for boys.³⁹

HOW CAN POLICYMAKERS AND PARTNERS BUILD ON EVIDENCE ABOUT GIRLS' EDUCATION?

The body of evidence on what girls' education does and does not accomplish is large and growing. So is the evidence on how to increase girls' access to school and what they get out of their schooling experience. Policymakers can act on the evidence that exists while commissioning analysis that builds the evidence base in actionable ways.

Recommendation 1: Advocate for girls' education based on rights and claims that are backed by strong evidence

Girls' education is not the answer to all the world's ills. But it improves girls' lives and—later—the lives of their children. It may have spillover benefits on other members of society, although the evidence of a strong, consistent link is mixed. Partners can advocate for girls' education based on areas that have clear evidence so that girls' education will deliver on its promise. That way, in other areas—where the link with girls' education is weaker—policymakers can use other tools to solve those problems most effectively.

Recommendation 2: Invest in programs that have proved to work at scale (such as eliminating school fees, improving pedagogy, and feeding students)

There is strong evidence on how to increase and improve girls' education, including cutting educational expenses for girls and their families, making sure girls have adequate nourishment, and providing academic support by improving pedagogy. Many other interventions also have at least some evidence, such as improving school sanitation and building schools closer to girls' homes. Many of these efforts can be scaled effectively. Governments and partners can draw on the existing evidence to invest in programs that work to help girls.



Recommendation 3: Build evidence on improving girls' education, especially for interventions that can be implemented at scale

The fact that there is evidence for the effectiveness of some interventions does not diminish the value of innovation. Much more needs to be learned about how to support girls in school, including how to make sure girls are safe in school and how to shift societal norms to strengthen support for girls' education, especially at the secondary level. Policymakers can partner with researchers to generate more evidence on programs and policies to support girls' education at scale.

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SPOTLIGHT B

What Data Are Needed to Identify Challenges and Solutions in Girls' Education?

DAVID K. EVANS with contributions from Amina Mendez Acosta



Data can play a crucial role in directing investment in girls' education and other social goals:

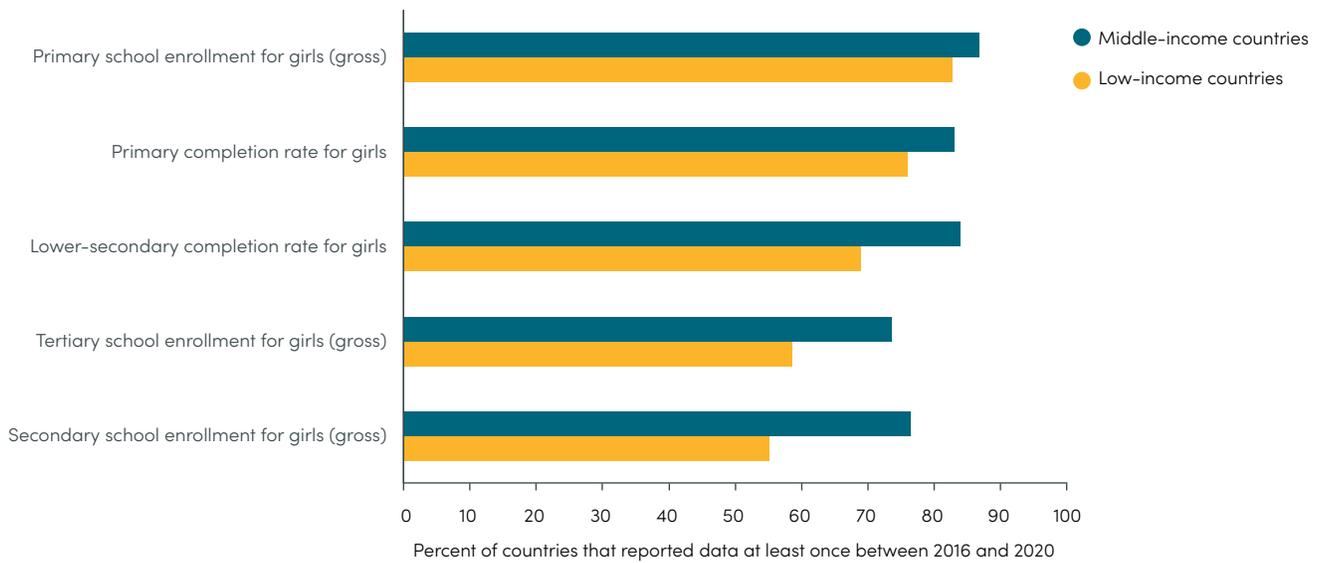
- ▶ Data can help characterize a problem: How many girls are out of school? How many are receiving a low-quality education?
- ▶ Data can help policymakers understand why girls are out of school: Is it because of fees, poor quality of education, the threat of violence, or some other factor?
- ▶ Data can help researchers evaluate the effectiveness of potential solutions: Did this policy or program lead to more girls receiving a good education?
- ▶ Data can catalyze social pressure to improve girls' education: Do citizens realize how poorly their community is performing on girls' education?
- ▶ Data can help education systems and partners measure progress: How many more girls are receiving a quality education this year than in years past?

In the absence of data and analysis, education systems cannot know how serious the challenges of girls' education are or what solutions will be effective at overcoming them.

MANY COUNTRIES LACK DATA ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

The first step in working to increase and expand girls' education is knowing how much education girls are getting and of what quality it is. Many countries lack even this information. Low-income countries are much more likely to be missing basic data about girls' enrollment and completion than middle-income countries (Figure B.1). Countries that lack data on basic statistics are unlikely to have more advanced data on the reasons behind absenteeism or dropout. (Spotlight C discusses the lack of data on violence in schools.)

FIGURE B.1 Middle-income countries report more data on girls' education than do low-income countries



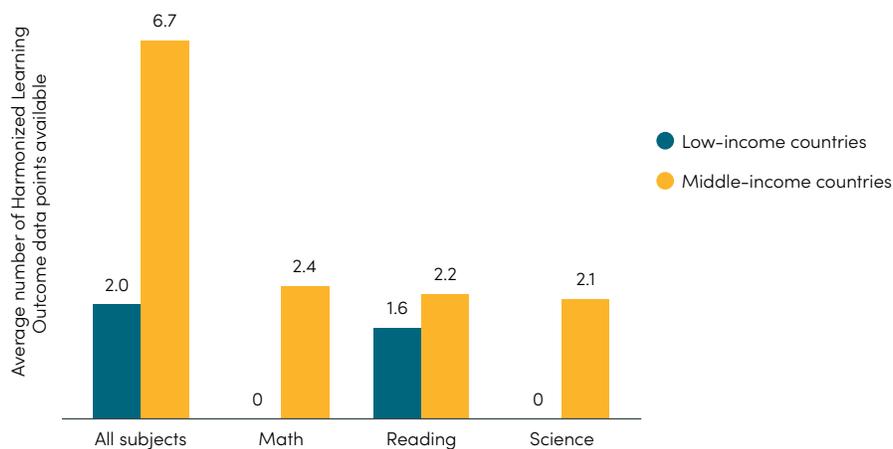
Source: Author's construction based on data from World Development Indicators.¹

Note: The World Development Indicators education data comes from UNESCO's Institute for Statistics. Some countries record education statistics but do not report it to UNESCO.

Less than 70 percent of countries have systematic learning measures at the primary level, and even fewer have such measures at the lower-secondary level.² Low-income countries have fewer data points than middle-income countries

(Figure B.2). Without regularly measuring learning outcomes in a systematic way, it is impossible to know whether countries are improving the quality of girls' education (or education overall).

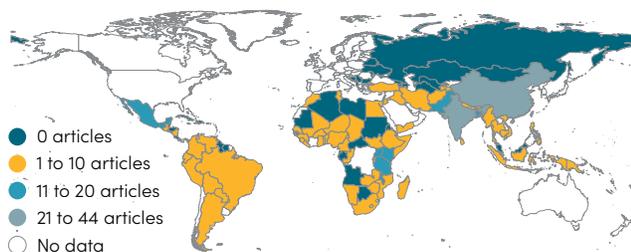
FIGURE B.2 More evidence on learning in math, reading, and science is available for middle-income countries than low-income countries—but more data are needed on both types of countries



Source: Author's construction based on data from World Development Indicators.¹

FIGURE B.3 Research on girls' education tends to focus on countries with large populations

PANEL A. Number of articles by country



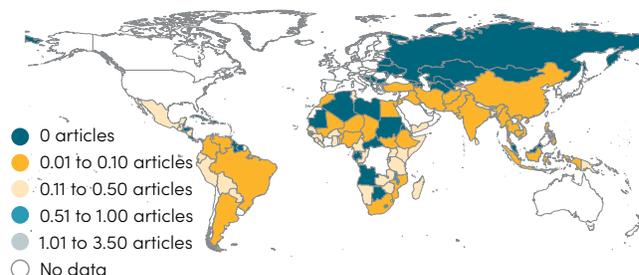
Source: Mata et al., 2022³

Statistics on the quality of education also matter. Statistics that are representative of the whole population can shine a light on groups that are dropping out or falling behind. Nationally representative assessments can guide national policy; local assessments can help teachers and schools make continuous improvements. None of these assessments needs to be high stakes for students to be effective. The objective is to use high-quality assessments to serve every student better.

MANY COUNTRIES LACK ANALYSIS ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

There has been a great deal of study on girls' education in recent years, but certain countries have remained largely excluded from the evidence base—and a recent review of girls' education research conducted over the last 20 years notes that gaps in the evidence are systematic.³ Little or no research has been conducted on many low- and lower-middle-income countries with large gaps between girls' and boys' education to understand why the gaps persist or the impact of policies and interventions seeking to close those gaps. Many small countries lack any analysis of girls' education; little or no research had been conducted in the countries with the smallest populations, which represent more than 40 percent of low- and middle-income countries

PANEL B. Number of articles by country (per million population)

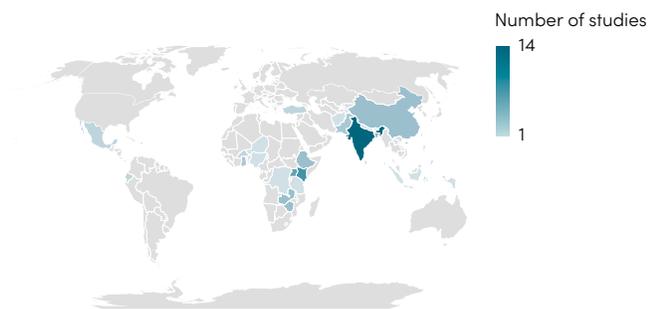


(Figure B.3). Few studies examine girls' education in fragile or post-conflict countries. Unsurprisingly, countries that lack data on girls' educational outcomes in international datasets are more likely to lack analysis, but gaps appear even in countries with plenty of data.

The same pattern appears in systematic reviews focused entirely on interventions to improve girls' education. Two recent systematic reviews of such research indicate that studies are concentrated in a handful of countries (Figure B.4).^{4,5} These are often not the countries with the worst educational outcomes for girls.⁶ What this means is that policy recommendations from international researchers and organizations are drawn principally from a relatively small, nonrepresentative collection of countries. This bias is problematic because interventions that are effective in large middle-income countries may be different from interventions that would be effective in small low-income countries. On the one hand, low-income countries are likely to have less local capacity for implementing new programs. On the other hand, small countries may be able to implement programs that would be difficult to put in place in a larger country. Larger countries may also be more likely to decentralize the implementation of education programs. Findings may therefore not translate from the countries where evaluations have been conducted to countries where they have not.

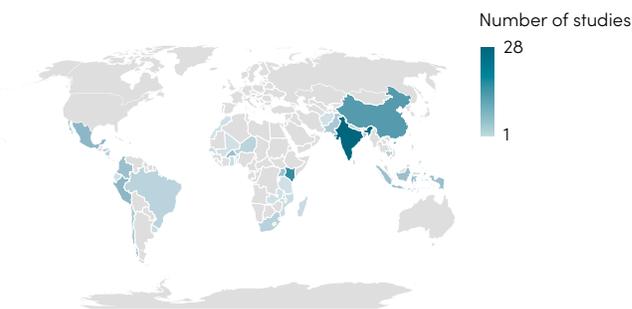
FIGURE B.4 Reviews of “what works” in girls’ education often draw on evaluations conducted in only a handful of countries

PANEL A.



Source: Author’s construction based on Psaki et al. 2022.⁴

PANEL B.



Source: Author’s construction based on Evans and Yuan, 2021.⁵

Continuing to improve the effectiveness of investments in girls’ education—especially in the most vulnerable parts of the world—will require more data and analysis, of both the

obstacles girls face and the solutions that prove the most effective at overcoming them.

Notes

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Which Girls Are Still Being Left Behind?

DAVID K. EVANS, SHELBY CARVALHO, AND AMINA MENDEZ ACOSTA



Girls still lag behind boys in educational access in many countries. In others, girls have caught up to or even passed boys on average. But what about girls who are not average?

Many girls face multiple vulnerabilities. Girls from poor families, girls in rural areas, girls with disabilities, girls who have been displaced from their homes—all of these groups can face dramatically higher educational exclusion rates than appear in national averages. These national averages can be low to begin with. Primary school completion—a measure of access that is often ignored in international education discussions because it seems as if it should already be universal—still averages only 63 percent for girls (and 66 percent for boys) in low-income countries. Even in lower-middle-income countries, the figure is 90 percent, leaving 1 in 10 girls out. In 30 countries, fewer than three out of four girls complete primary school (Figure 3.1).

This chapter shows that many girls remain out of school or are struggling to get the most out of school. It lays out what we know and what we don't know about how to help these girls achieve educational success.

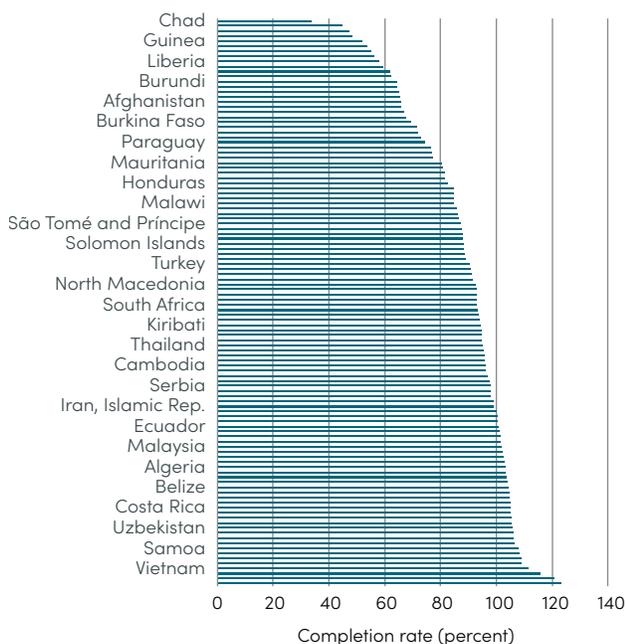
GIRLS OFTEN FACE MULTIPLE VULNERABILITIES

Girls in low- and middle-income countries often face educational discrimination. Parents, school leaders, and other community members may value girls' education less than that of boys. In Ethiopia, for example, parents have lower educational aspirations for their girls than for their boys.² This educational discrimination could be based purely on gender prejudice or even on economic investment (under the usually false assumption that returns to education may be lower for girls or the belief that returns will not accrue to the parents' household).³

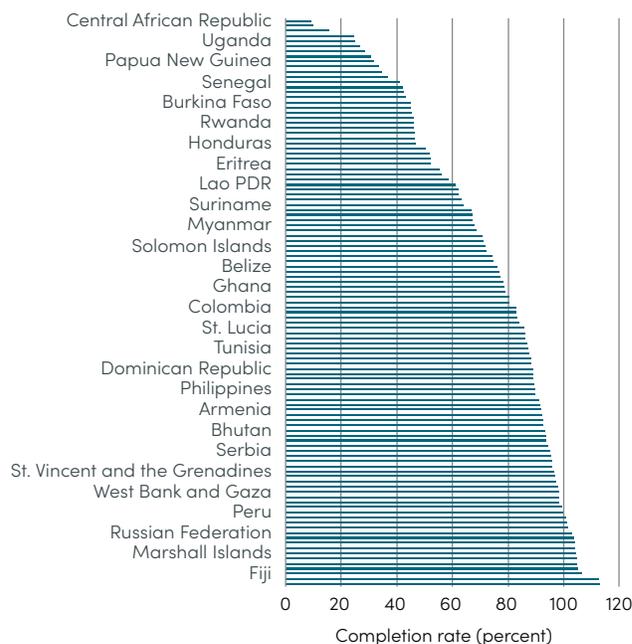
Girls may also face a range of other vulnerabilities that are not unique to them. Girls and boys alike face challenges such as poverty and displacement from their homes. However, the intersection of gender discrimination and poverty, displacement, and a wide range of other factors can make achieving an education—and getting the most out of it—particularly challenging for girls. In places where girls and refugees face educational challenges, girl refugees can be particularly vulnerable. In some cases, the combined impact

FIGURE 3.1 In some low- and middle-income countries, 25 percent of girls do not complete primary school

PANEL A. Primary completion rates



PANEL B. Lower-secondary completion rates



Source: Authors' construction based on most recent data from World Development Indicators.¹

Note: Completion rates are calculated as the number of children who complete primary school divided by the number of children of completing age. With grade repetition or late school entry, the numerator may exceed the denominator. Figures include all low- and middle-income countries for which data are available in the last five years, but only select countries are labeled by name, for reference.

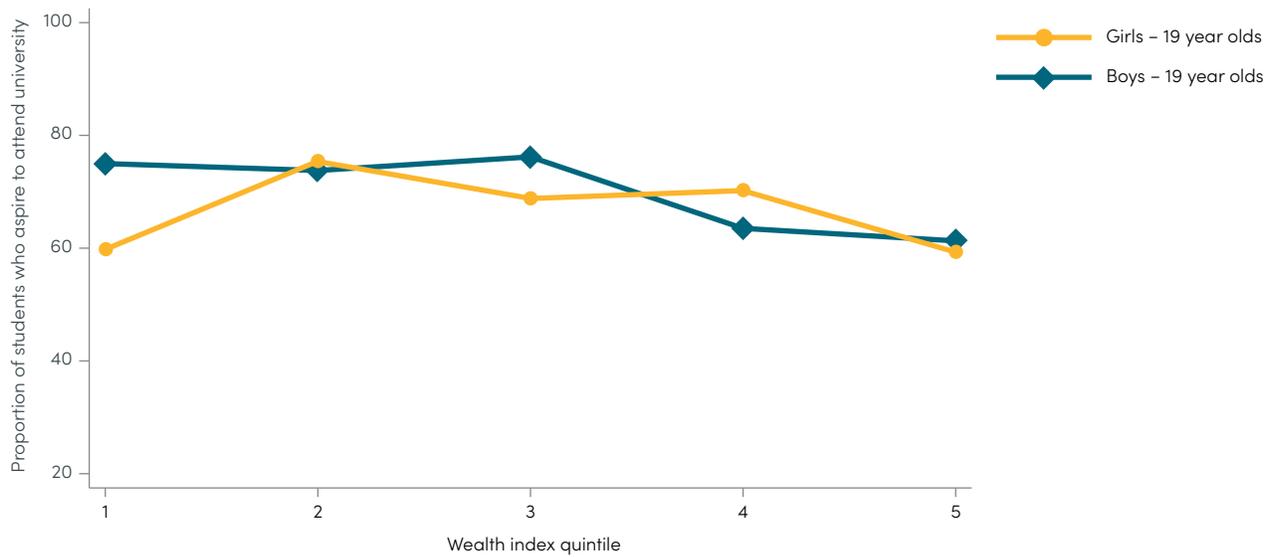
of the two obstacles may be even greater than the sum of each individual barrier.⁴ But even where the combined effect does not exceed the sum of the individual challenges, multiple vulnerabilities can make getting an education daunting for girls. It can also make solutions harder to find. Other vulnerabilities with which gender discrimination intersect include poverty, disability, displacement, ethnic minority status, rurality, and others.

Poverty

In countries with high rates of poverty, the intersection of poverty and gender can create particular challenges for

educational attainment— what is often referred to as the “double exclusion” of gender and poverty.⁵ The poorest families face the starkest trade-offs, in terms of both out-of-pocket costs for school (as even “free education” is never really free) and the opportunity costs of not working. In Peru, boys' and girls' aspirations about going to university are similar among wealthier students; among children in the second-highest quintile, girls' aspirations exceed those of boys. In contrast, the poorest boys are 15 percentage points more likely to aspire to higher education than the poorest girls (Figure 3.2).

FIGURE 3.2 In Peru, poor girls are much less likely than both poor boys and wealthier girls to aspire to higher education

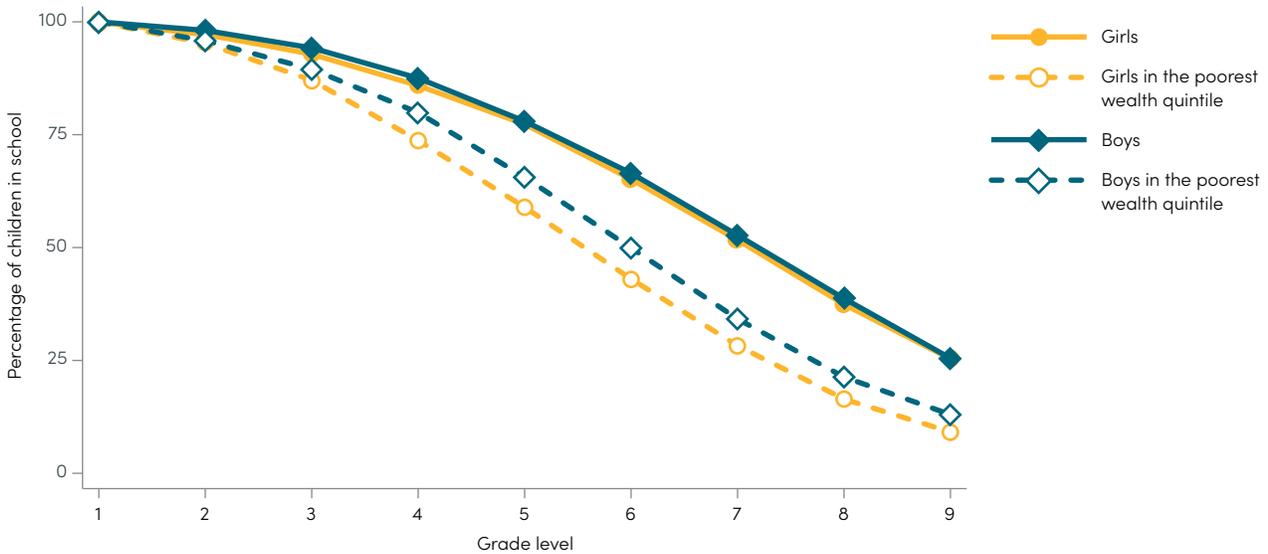


Source: Authors' construction based on Young Lives data.⁶

Poverty is a significant negative indicator of educational outcomes in most countries. But in low-income countries in particular, poor girls perform worse than poor boys, with enrollment gaps appearing as early as primary school (Figure 3.3). Girls and boys on average do not have different enrollment outcomes; only in the poorest income groups

do the gaps appear. In middle-income countries, even poor boys and girls are closer together, with—if anything—slightly higher enrollment rates for girls. The challenge is getting the poorest girls in the poorest countries into school. Both ironically and unsurprisingly, there is less education research and less girls' education research on the poorest countries.⁷

FIGURE 3.3 Among the poorest children in low-income countries, school enrollment is lower among girls than boys

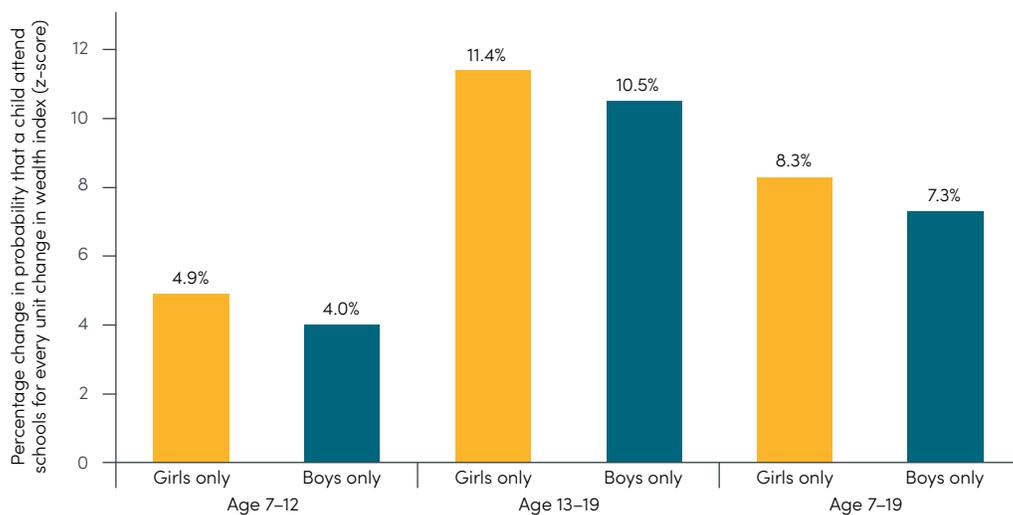


Source: Authors' construction based on data from the latest Demographic and Health Surveys on 30 countries, including the 10 most populous countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for which data are available, all 8 countries for which data are available in Latin America and the Caribbean, all 6 countries for which data are available in South Asia, and all 6 countries for which data are available in East Asia.⁸

Every country has its own pattern. In Pakistan, on average there is no gap in school participation between boys and girls, and there is little difference between the poorest boys and the poorest girls until sixth grade. At that point, however, a large gap opens, with the poorest girls facing significant disadvantage. In contrast, in Mozambique, the gap between the poorest girls and the poorest boys opens up much earlier, in second or third grade. And in some countries, the pattern is reversed: In the Philippines, by the time they reach the upper grades of primary school, the poorest boys are much less likely to be enrolled than the poorest girls.

On average, school attendance is more sensitive to income changes for girls than for boys across all regions of the developing world except East Asia and the Pacific (Figure 3.4). The most marked difference between the responsiveness of girls' and boys' education to income gains is in South Asia. Girls' education is more likely to be negatively affected by shocks in places in which girls' participation is already sensitive to income, such as Uganda.⁹ These relationships suggest that in the face of shocks—both general shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic and the corresponding economic slowdowns that many countries experienced and specific shocks, like a parent losing a job or falling ill—the risk to education is higher for girls than for boys in most countries.

FIGURE 3.4 Increases in household income have a greater effect on school attendance of girls than boys



Source: Authors' construction based on data from the latest Demographic and Health Surveys on 30 countries, including the 10 most populous countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for which data are available, all 8 countries for which data are available in Latin America and the Caribbean, all 6 countries for which data are available in South Asia, and all 6 countries for which data are available in East Asia.⁸

The gender-poverty double exclusion extends beyond primary and secondary school to higher education as well. While participation in higher education remains low overall in many low-income countries, an initial expansion of access tends to favor wealthier young men. In 24 of 30 African countries in which at least some of the poorest people were enrolled in higher education, young women represented the smallest share.¹⁰

Disability

Students with disabilities often face additional educational challenges. (Many countries still lack consistent data on education for such students.¹¹) In Punjab, Pakistan, for example, both children with physical disabilities and children with learning disabilities were less likely to be in school and less likely to be able to do subtraction than children with neither challenge.¹² An analysis across 13 countries finds a consistent

adverse impact of disability in Asia and Africa, with little difference between girls and boys.¹³ But even if disability does not have a differential effect on girls and boys, girls with disabilities may face a double exclusion. In South Africa, women have fewer years of education than men, and people with disabilities have less education than people without them. Women with disabilities receive the least education of all.¹⁴

Rurality

Children in rural areas receive fewer educational inputs and have worse educational outcomes than children in other areas.¹⁵ Just as the poorest girls in low-income countries have lower educational enrollment rates than the poorest boys, girls in rural areas in low-income countries have worse outcomes than rural boys.

Because rural areas also tend to be poorer areas, disentangling the impact of poverty and rurality can be tricky. But in some cases, households in rural areas may have more traditional views that are detrimental to investments in girls' education. In Bangladesh, for example, child marriage is concentrated in rural areas.¹⁶ Children in rural areas may also have to travel farther to attend school, and families may be more concerned about girls' safety. Female teachers are also more reluctant to teach in rural or remote schools, providing girls with fewer role models.¹⁷ Children may lack safe transportation options, which can disproportionately limit girls' participation if travel to school is perceived to be unsafe. Transportation becomes more challenging at the secondary level in many places, because students often have to travel longer distances to reach them.

Ethnic minority status

In many countries, young people from minority ethnic groups face particular educational disadvantages. Teachers and other students may discriminate against them, ethnic minorities may be concentrated in rural or remote areas, and/or students from ethnic or linguistic minorities may not be fluent in the language of instruction. Many countries and international organizations are shifting toward a general policy of instructing children in a language they already speak fluently (a local African language rather than English

or French, for example).¹⁸ But minority groups that speak a different language in the same school present operational complications to this push, especially if schools want to avoid segregating classes by ethnicity.

In Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru, literacy rates and secondary school completion rates for girls from minority ethnic groups are significantly lower than rates for girls from majority groups and rates for boys from minority ethnic groups. This combined effect is not evident in Sierra Leone.¹⁹ Evidence from Guatemala shows a large gap between indigenous girls and boys and little to no gap between nonindigenous girls and boys.²⁰

Ethnic minority status is not always correlated with adverse educational outcomes, however. In some cases, ethnic minorities are financially better off than average and are therefore able to invest more in education. The relationship between ethnicity and education is heavily dependent on culture and context.

Conflict and displacement

Conflict and forced displacement can have differential impacts on girls' education because of heightened concerns about safety, gender-based violence, and increased opportunity costs for families. In Ethiopia and Kenya, for example, refugee girls are only 40 percent as likely to enroll in secondary school as refugee boys.²¹ Girls in refugee households in Ethiopia had less access to secondary school than girls in host households in the same communities, largely because of parental concerns about safety in the community and the domestic responsibilities of girls.²² Concerns about safety are not unique to humanitarian settings, but risks are often higher in those settings.

Displaced households and households affected by conflict have often experienced downturns in income. In addition, greater uncertainty about the future may make investments in education seem less worthwhile: Students in a refugee camp in Kenya scored higher on literacy tests if they had more certainty that they would be returning home within a few years (regardless of gender), perhaps because they and

their households had more confidence in how educational investments would be put to use. Among these students, girls performed worse than boys on most literacy measures.²³

The setting affects the relative importance of different sources of vulnerability

Poverty, rurality, disability, ethnic minority status, and conflict and displacement are not the only factors that can interact with gender to increase the risks to girls' education. Other vulnerabilities, such as orphan and foster care status, can also put girls at risk.

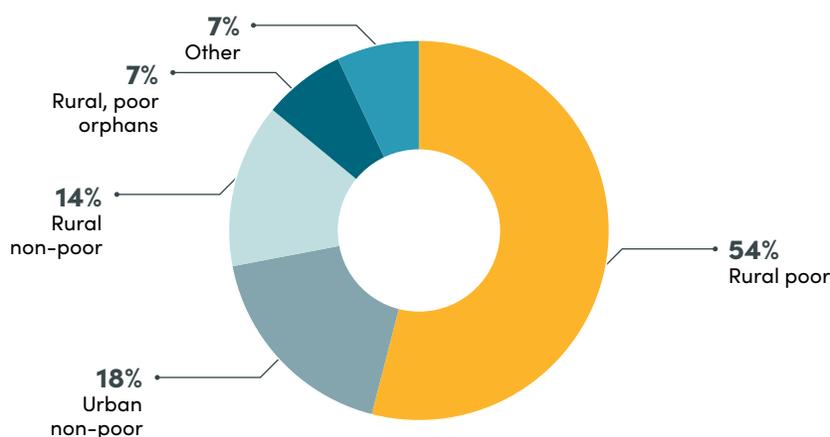
Different risk factors play different roles across settings, and not all have the same effects. For example, a cross-country analysis of orphans and schooling found both that girl orphans were not markedly worse off than boy orphans and that the gap between orphans and nonorphans was much smaller than the gap between rich and poor, suggesting that poverty may be a more important risk factor for educational attainment than orphanhood in many settings.²⁴ At the time that work was published, many country governments and international donors were focused on orphanhood as a major risk factor, even though the data suggested otherwise.

Evidence from francophone African countries suggests that conflict does not differentially affect girls' learning outcomes relative to boys.²⁵ The point here is not to minimize the impact of losing a parent or of being affected by conflict but rather to recognize that countries' social safety net systems and educational systems need to prioritize based on local needs rather than global trends. Doing so effectively requires making decisions based on analysis of data rather than a few anecdotes.

POOR, RURAL GIRLS ARE THE LARGEST GROUP OF GIRLS WHO ARE OUT OF SCHOOL

Millions of girls remain out of school. Across low- and middle-income countries, girls from poor households in rural areas make up the majority of girls who are out of school (Figure 3.5). In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than half of out-of-school girls fall into this category. This number will vary greatly across countries. For many vulnerabilities, a lack of data makes it impossible to map the share of girls who experience them.

FIGURE 3.5 In the 10 most populous countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, more than half of out-of-school girls are poor and live in rural areas



Source: Authors' construction based on data from the latest Demographic Health Surveys for the 10 most populous countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for which data are available (Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda).⁶

ACHIEVING EQUITY—BY REACHING ALL GIRLS—SOMETIMES REQUIRES INTERVENTIONS THAT ARE NOT THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE

Education budgets around the world are squeezed, pushing countries to look for the most cost-effective interventions. International donors publish lists of interventions that yield the greatest average learning gains for the fewest amount of dollars, but they often fail to reflect or plan for the needs of girls facing multiple vulnerabilities (Spotlight A).²⁶ Reaching all girls with a high-quality education will not be cheap. Some interventions to do so may be cost-effective if interventions deliver large gains, but others will not be.²⁷ Even where they are not, reaching every girl is crucial for a just society.

Reaching all girls with a high-quality education will not be cheap.

Many of the most cost-effective investments in education involve improvements in pedagogy, which are designed to reach children who are already in school. Some of these investments may keep more vulnerable girls in school, others may not. Building schools and providing cash transfers are generally not considered cost-effective investments.¹⁵ Yet building schools in the most remote communities may be an essential investment to reach the poor rural girls who make up the majority of out-of-school girls in low- and middle-income countries. In some contexts, cash transfers may be exactly what are needed to get girls facing the highest opportunity costs into school so that they can learn.

Because rural and otherwise disadvantaged schools have consistent trouble recruiting and retaining teachers, many countries offer costly monetary or in-kind incentives to boost access to teachers, even though student-teacher

ratios are usually lower in rural areas.^{28,12} Children with disabilities require teachers with the training to teach them effectively, together with appropriate learning materials. Some students with special needs require additional support for transport to reach schools with specialized facilities, especially in rural environments with low concentrations of children (Box 3.1). Ethnic minorities may require the development of pedagogical materials in their own language to improve reading. Displaced girls may require additional financial, academic, and socio-emotional support to access and thrive in unfamiliar academic environments. None of these investments is likely to be deemed cost-effective through the calculus of boosting average learning outcomes across the overall education system. But from an equity perspective, they may be essential investments.

WHAT WORKS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION FOR GIRLS FACING MULTIPLE VULNERABILITIES?

Formulating policy recommendations for educating girls facing multiple exclusions is difficult, because the exclusions are so varied. However, several principles apply across many situations and vulnerabilities.

Recommendation 1: Adopt a multifaceted solution

For some challenges in education, a single activity can help overcome a single challenge. Providing detailed lesson plans for teachers can be highly effective at addressing the challenge of children who are not learning to read.³¹ Feeding children in school has repeatedly proven effective in boosting participation and learning by children who are poor and hungry.³²

Tackling multiple vulnerabilities is more complicated and requires more or different facets. An intervention that targeted the most marginalized girls in secondary schools in rural Tanzania included a range of components, including financial support and community and parent support groups. It resulted in better test scores for beneficiary girls.¹⁶ A multifaceted intervention in Sierra Leone sponsored clubs

BOX 3.1: PROVIDING EDUCATION FOR POOR RURAL GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES CAN BE EXPENSIVE

Educating rural children and children with disabilities costs more than educating other children, as an example from a rural village in Pakistan illustrates. A mother in a qualitative study discussed her daughter, born deaf and mute. The woman “had very few options in terms of schools but she wanted her daughter to learn necessary skills. The only school that catered to [her daughter’s] needs was located in an adjacent village. Even though [the woman] was financially stable, she could not afford to pay for transport and a male family member to chaperone her daughter to school every day.”²⁹ Rurality usually means that students have to travel further distances for schooling regardless, and students with disabilities may require additional services which may not be available in every community. Parents

may be particularly reluctant to have their daughters travel these longer distances so that to reach all girls, services may need to be offered closer to home. Parents of children with disabilities face significantly larger costs of raising their children overall: one study in Bangladesh suggested triple the cost.³⁰ In those cases, the opportunity cost of girls’ education may be particularly high: parents may feel they are trading off educational opportunities or other investment opportunities for their other children. Education systems with scarce resources must balance the need for cost-effectiveness and the desire to provide the best education for the most children on the one hand with equity for children who are often left behind on the other.

where girls could safely gather and socialize away from boys, listen to educational radio programming, and receive in-person mentoring on reproductive health topics. After the Ebola crisis in 2014 and 2015 closed schools, girls in villages without these clubs were twice as likely to drop out of school.³³

Multifaceted programs are likely more costly and more complicated to implement than single-facet programs. They are also not guaranteed to work—like other types of programs, some have failed—and require careful evaluation. But it is unlikely that a single activity will overcome a wide range of vulnerabilities.³⁴

Recommendation 2: Be prepared to spend

Reaching the most vulnerable students will require substantial resources. It may also require increased coordination across sectors, including education, health, social protection, and even transportation. In some cases, the gains may be large, such that the programs will be cost-effective.¹⁶ In other cases, the desire for equity and justice may drive investments. Countries have to make difficult choices with limited resources, but reaching all girls and all children will

not happen without concerted effort, consistent leadership, and a willingness to invest.

Recommendation 3: Collect data on multiple vulnerabilities and on who is not receiving a good-quality education

The number of studies evaluating the impact of educational interventions is growing, but most of them focus on the average youth or student. A recent analysis of more than 300 evaluations finds that only three out of five studies reported outcomes separately for girls and boys, much less reporting on subgroups facing multiple vulnerabilities.³⁵ Most studies also fail to explicitly report whether the intervention targets the poor.³⁶ Even among studies of interventions that target girls, few break down the samples to examine results separately for the poorest girls.

There are reasons why researchers may not study girls facing multiple vulnerabilities. Studies that are not designed to analyze outcomes for subgroups of girls may have small samples of each group and so may not offer representative views of impacts for poor, rural girls (for example). But

whatever the reason, the result is insufficient knowledge: a systematic review of interventions to support the empowerment of adolescent girls in humanitarian settings that began with nearly 6,000 potentially relevant studies found just 3 that were relevant.³⁷

Without designing studies that target and measure impacts for these girls, it is impossible to learn how to help them

succeed. Beyond intervention studies, regularly monitoring data on the inclusion of students facing multiple vulnerabilities—including difficult-to-reach refugee populations and oft-overlooked disabled students—are essential to identify progress (or the lack thereof) in providing education for all girls and all children.³⁸

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SPOTLIGHT C

How Does Gender-Based Violence Affect Girls' Education and Life Outcomes for Women?

SUSANNAH HARES

Until girls and women are safe from violence, gender equality will be a pipedream. Gender-based violence is pervasive. It harms both girls' education and women's opportunities in the labor market. If it is not addressed in schools, communities, and workplaces, it will continue to disproportionately harm the life outcomes and well-being of women and girls regardless of how strong the education system is.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IS WIDESPREAD

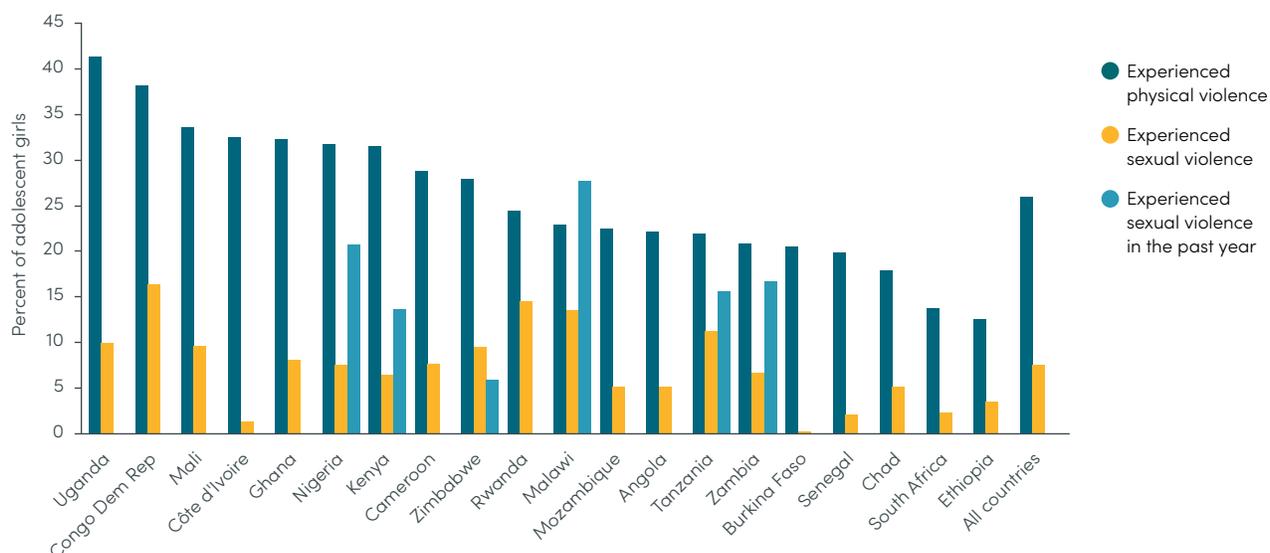
Globally, one in three women is estimated to experience physical or sexual violence, with even higher rates in Africa, South Asia, and East Asia.¹ Women exposed to intimate partner violence are more likely to experience depression, suffer from alcohol abuse, have a low-birth weight baby, or acquire HIV.²

This violence begins in childhood and adolescence, including at school. In Latin America and Asia, many girls experience violence during their school-age years.³ Surveys from the 20 most populous African countries—representing the vast majority of 15- to 19-year-old girls on the continent—suggest that more than a quarter of girls report having experienced physical or sexual violence, with figures ranging from 15 percent in Ethiopia to 46 percent in Uganda (Figure C.1). Even in just the year before the interview (which took place at different times in different countries), one in every six girls reported having experienced physical or sexual violence.⁴



The risk of violence follows women out of the school system and into the workplace. In Latin America, 30–50 percent of women workers report having suffered some form of sexual harassment at work.⁵ In Malaysia, the Philippines, and South Korea, 30–40 percent of women report having experienced workplace sexual harassment.⁶ In South Africa, 77 percent of women report having experienced sexual harassment at some point during their working lives.⁷ And in Nepal, more than 53 percent of women employees report facing sexual harassment at work.⁸

FIGURE C.1 Adolescent girls experience high rates of violence



Source: Evans et al. 2021.⁵

Note: Figures on physical and sexual violence are from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). Figures on sexual violence in the past year are from the Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS).

SCHOOLS ARE OFTEN NOT SAFE PLACES FOR GIRLS

Schools are meant to be places of safety, nurture, and learning. But too often they fail at their core task of keeping children safe, with a large proportion of children exposed to physical and sexual violence from their purported “care-givers.” Indeed, during COVID-19 school closures in Sierra Leone, some children preferred being at home because their teachers could not beat them.⁹ Keeping children safe needs to be elevated as a core foundational mission of the global education community—one every bit as important as improving learning outcomes.

Girls and boys are exposed to violence in schools. The education community needs to do much more to keep both safe from harm. Girls may experience higher rates of sexual

Keeping children safe needs to be elevated as a core foundational mission of the global education community—one every bit as important as improving learning outcomes.

violence (although boys are also subjected to high levels of such violence in some settings), but boys are more likely to suffer physical abuse. The perpetrators and locations of violence may be different for girls and boys (Box C.1).

BOX C.1: WHAT IS SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

Gender-based violence at schools is different from other types of school violence, such as corporal punishment or physical violence. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) defines school-related gender-based violence as follows:

acts or threats of physical, sexual, or psychological violence or abuse that are based on gendered stereotypes or that target students on the basis of their sex, sexuality, or gender identities. School-related gender-based violence reinforces gender roles and perpetuates gender inequalities. It includes rape, unwanted sexual touching,

unwanted sexual comments, corporal punishment, bullying, and other forms of non-sexual intimidation or abuse, such as verbal harassment or exploitative labor in schools. Unequal power relations between adults and children and males and females contribute to this violence, which can take place in formal and nonformal schools, on school grounds, going to and from school, in school dormitories, in cyberspace, or through cell phone technology. School-related gender-based violence may be perpetrated by teachers, students, or community members. Both girls and boys can be victims, as well as perpetrators.¹⁰

Global efforts to get girls into school will be worth little if girls are not safe when they get there. While data suggest that more girls experience violence outside of school than in school, more than 1 in 20 girls in Uganda reported sexual abuse in school in the previous 12 months.¹¹ In the 11 countries included in the Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS), 14 percent of girls reported at least one incident of sexual violence in the past year, with an average of 12 percent of those incidents taking place at school.⁴ Although being enrolled in school does not seem to increase the risk of violence for girls, schools have a particular responsibility to keep their students safe and able to focus on gaining the skills they need for adulthood.⁴

TEACHERS ARE OFTEN PERPETRATORS OF SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Girls suffer widespread sexual harassment and assault by teachers. In Ecuador, teachers are reportedly the main aggressors in the more than 1,000 sexual assaults in school settings each year.¹² In India, more than 8 million adult women report having been raped by a teacher while in school.¹¹ A set of education assessments focused on developing countries

asked students whether they had experienced unwanted or inappropriate language or touching by their teachers. The results from the two African countries that participated are stunning, for both boys and girls, with one in eight boys and girls in Senegal and Zambia reported having been sexually harassed by a teacher or staff member within just the last four weeks.⁹ Research from Liberia reveals that 25 percent of primary school students report sexual abuse by a teacher.¹³ Qualitative research in Ghana, Malawi, and Zimbabwe finds that teachers' sexual relationships with students are common and linked to gender inequality.¹⁴ Peers are also major perpetrators of gender-based violence in schools. Teachers should be people who can help protect students from violence perpetrated by peers, not people who perpetrate violence themselves.

GIRLS ARE AT RISK ON THEIR WAY TO SCHOOL

A significant proportion of girls are assaulted on the road, particularly on their way to school. Twenty percent of girls in Zimbabwe experienced their first incident of sexual violence while travelling to or from school.¹⁵ Rapid expansion of secondary schooling may increase violence against girls for several reasons, including the need to travel farther to reach the school, the practice of exchanging sex for grades

or out-of-pocket costs, attendance at boarding school, and the larger share of male teachers in secondary schools.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS A BARRIER TO GIRLS' EDUCATION AND BEYOND

Being safe in school is an end in and of itself. Gender-based violence also poses a challenge to aspirations for girls' schooling in at least two ways.

School-related gender-based violence is a barrier to enrollment

Violence is a barrier to enrollment, particularly as countries push toward universal secondary schooling and more and more adolescent girls seek to pursue education beyond menarche. As distance to school increases, so do the costs of transportation and the risks of encountering harm along the way. Parents frequently list distance as the single most important consideration in enrollment decisions and school choice.¹⁶ It appears to be a differentially important factor in the school attendance of girls, suggesting that concerns about distance may be a proxy for safety concerns rather than a simple travel inconvenience.¹⁷ In programs shown to raise girls' enrollment by addressing travel challenges, respondents report safety as a key mechanism.¹⁸

Gender-based violence suppresses girls' aspirations and contributes to gender inequality among women

Relatively little is known about the role of violence in discouraging grade attainment or learning outcomes by girls. The limited evidence that exists, however, suggests that violence in schools affects absenteeism, retention, and achievement.¹⁹

Evidence from Malawi using longitudinal data suggests that exposure to sexual violence reduce both attendance and attainment.²⁰ One report finds an association between gender violence in the form of sexual intimidation, verbal abuse, and physical assault and irregular attendance and

underachievement of girls in Botswana and Ghana, though the report does not establish direct causal links.²¹ Statistics from Benin and Senegal point to an association between the prevalence of school-based violence and dropping out at the primary and secondary level.¹⁹ A study among LGBT youth in the United States finds a negative impact of school-based violence on academic and socio-emotional outcomes.²²

The evidence on the associations between violence and poor educational outcomes, grade attainment, and school completion is limited. More research is needed, especially well-identified studies in low- and middle-income countries.

Beyond education, gender-based violence is a major barrier through adulthood that may put women at risk in the labor market or keep them out of work. At least 140 countries have laws on sexual harassment in the workplace. Even when laws exist, however, they may not be compliant with international standards and recommendations or implemented and enforced.²³ Enforcement of legislation aimed at protecting women from domestic violence and sexual harassment is associated with a reduction in gender inequality and discrimination in the labor market.²⁴ Studies show that sexual harassment not only reduces employees' productivity, leading to a higher employee turnover and increased absenteeism, but is also associated with a decrease in companies' profitability.²⁵ However, 50 countries still lack legislation granting protections to women from sexual harassment in employment.

EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS CAN MAKE SCHOOLS SAFER PLACES FOR GIRLS AND CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS ABOUT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Schools can help reduce gender-based violence through two channels. First, schools can play a direct role by protecting children while they are at school. Second, schools can change social norms and attitudes that can have long-lasting benefits and reduce gender-based violence later in life.

Direct interventions can protect girls from gender-based violence in school.²⁶ One common intervention is to raise teachers' awareness about violence and train them to spot cases and take appropriate actions. Approaches include working with all actors of the school, especially school leaders, to improve the school ethos and school management, raise awareness of the issue among school staff, and institute a referral system for students who experience violence. Whole school approaches are often embedded in broader educational support programs or in programs against all types of violence in school.²⁷ One review, of high-income countries, finds that school-based interventions to prevent sexual abuse significantly improved protective behavior and knowledge on the part of children.²⁸ There is also promising evidence in low- and middle-income countries on school- or community-based programs that promote women's agency and encourage changes in norms for women and men to prevent violence against women and girls.²⁹

Some programs that have been rigorously evaluated have shown some success. In Afghanistan, a school-based program of lessons delivered by teachers aimed at reducing aggressive behavior and promoting peaceful conflict resolution led to a decrease in corporal punishment and peer violence and improvement in attitudes toward gender, mental health, and girls' attendance.³⁰ Results from a randomized trial in Pakistan show that a play-based life skills program targeting students in grades 6–8 had similar impacts.³¹ In contrast, a large randomized controlled trial of a school-based intervention in Kenya that taught self-defense to girls and boys in grade 6 who were living in informal settlements showed no positive impact.³²

Limited evidence is available on the impact of sanctions on teachers who perpetrate violence. The government of Zambia reported that 23 teachers were dismissed between 2014 and 2016 for sexually abusing students. Given that 1–2 percent of Zambian 14- and 15-year old girls—about 8,000 girls—reported some form of sexual abuse by a teacher, this figure suggests that few teachers were held accountable for abuse.³³ In Kenya, where about 3 million women report ever having been raped by a teacher, an average of just 57 teachers

a year were deregistered for any reason in the decade from 2010 to 2019.³⁴

Some countries are responding to the child abuse crisis by introducing national violence prevention policies. Child protection strategies are a first step, but enforcement is crucial. There is no simple association between the existence of national violence prevention policies and levels of violence,⁴ however, and measures to hold teachers accountable are clearly not in place. Indeed, a recent survey of teachers' unions found that in 19 of 47 countries, there was no code of conduct for teachers, which would typically include prescriptions against sexual abuse or harassment of students.³⁵

MORE DATA, MORE RESEARCH, AND MORE ACTION ARE NEEDED TO ELIMINATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Tackling violence against girls in school, and giving them equal education opportunities with boys, require more data, more research, and more action. First, much better data and evidence are needed to demonstrate the urgency of addressing violence in schools as a global welfare issue.³⁶ Survey evidence and anecdotal reports suggest that gender-based violence at school is a common form of violence against children, but there is a big question mark over the credibility of the numbers, because of the lack of systematic data collection and methodological issues related to measurement. Many countries do not gather any systematic data on violence against children and youth, and fewer still gather data on violence in schools.³⁷

More methodological work is needed to examine the best way to allow respondents to safely disclose violence in surveys. Different studies and surveys use different types of instruments, recall periods, and sampling strategies, and it is hard to compare rates across countries or over time. There are also methodological issues when it comes to measuring gender-based violence in program evaluations, as the raised awareness as a result of these programs could potentially

increase reporting, making research on school-related gender-based violence difficult.

Second, actionable strategies and recommendations are needed to reduce the prevalence of violence. There is a glaring gap in evidence about which interventions are effective in tackling school violence in low- and middle-income countries. Even if good data on the prevalence of school violence were available, there are few proven models to address it. But there are exceptions. For example, the Good School Toolkit was designed and implemented by Ugandan NGO Raising Voices. This 18-month whole-school approach to violence prevention was found to reduce physical violence by school staff in primary schools in Uganda by 42 percent.³⁸ It is being adapted for use in secondary schools and being scaled up to national level. The fact that interventions like the Good Schools Toolkit exist is encouraging, but it is not nearly

enough. A host of research questions need answers if violence in schools is to be eliminated.

Third, school violence needs far higher prominence as a core issue within the global education community. Better evidence alone will not solve the school violence crisis—the evidence must be packaged and presented in a way that compels action by national governments and education aid donors. The Coalition for Good Schools, a group of practitioners from across the global South, is one example of a group working across regions—Latin America, Africa, and Asia—to make schools safer. International partners can follow its lead.³⁹

Violence against girls in school does not receive sufficient political attention or financial resources from domestic governments and the global education community. That must change.

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Does Girls' Education Deliver Gender Equality Later in Life?

SHELBY CARVALHO with contributions from Laura Moscoviz



One of the core purposes of education is to prepare young people for the labor market. Girls' education has long been heralded as the key to women's economic inclusion and to more equal societies. Although tremendous progress has been made in education for both boys and girls in recent decades, gains in education have yet to equalize employment or broader economic outcomes. This chapter explores the relationship between girls' education and women's labor force participation.

On average, higher rates of girls' participation in school have not resulted in greater labor force participation, and when women do work, gaps in pay, position, and promotion often endure.¹ Even in places where girls outperform boys in both primary and secondary school, as they do in South Africa, women remain disadvantaged in the labor market.² These gaps often emerge early, as girls are forming aspirations related to their futures and transition from school to the labor market.

What drives these persistent gaps remains an open and difficult policy question. The expansive body of work on the topic suggests many potential reasons for persistent gender gaps in labor force participation. This chapter focuses on issues related to laws and policies, norms, and labor market structures.

IS GIRLS' EDUCATION THE GREAT EQUALIZER?

Sometimes education leads to better economic outcomes for women—but sometimes it does not. The inconsistent relationship is well documented in the literature, beginning with Claudia Goldin's path-breaking work on gender gaps in the US labor market in 1990.³

Globally, little has changed over the past 30 years.⁴ In India, women's labor force participation has been stagnant since the 1980s or even decreasing, despite substantial improvements in gender parity in education.⁵ In Latin America, women's labor force participation is decelerating, despite continued improvements in educational attainment.⁶ And the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women's economic participation.⁷ In some instances, inequities in education drive persistent gender differences in employment; in others, gaps appear or widen only as girls transition out of school. These trends raise questions about the relationship between girls' education and women's economic empowerment and force us to consider what more is needed to ensure that education functions as the great equalizer we believe it can be.

The good news: Returns to education are positive for women

Although the link is not straightforward or simple, increased opportunities in education have improved women's labor market outcomes. Education has been linked to improving the quality of work available to men and women across contexts.⁸ Women's labor force participation has increased in many low-income countries thanks in part to a combination of improved schooling outcomes and growth in the service sector.⁹ And several studies find higher returns to education for women than men.¹⁰

The bad news: Returns to education are inconsistent and often unequal

Although education increases women's earning power and labor force participation, returns are inconsistent and often unequal. An analysis of 126 countries finds little evidence of an association between education and more equal economic opportunities for women.¹ In Asia, improvements in girls' education had little impact on labor market equity in high-income countries, like South Korea, although primary and intermediate education have had a positive effect on women's labor market outcomes in lower-income countries in the region.¹¹ Causal evidence from Kenya shows that at the margin, an additional year of education makes both men and women more likely to be in skilled jobs.¹² But similar evidence from Ethiopia,¹³ Malawi,¹⁴ Pakistan,¹⁵ and Uganda¹³ finds no impact on women's employment. In Indonesia, a school construction program led to positive education outcomes for both boys and girls, but it translated into better job opportunities only for boys over the long term, with men more likely to transition out of agriculture and into the formal labor market.¹⁶ In Turkey, increases in girls' education translated into higher labor force participation, but they were also associated with increases in gender-based violence.¹⁷ Changes in women's economic position may thus have unintended consequences if they occur in the absence of broader societal support or if they threaten existing power

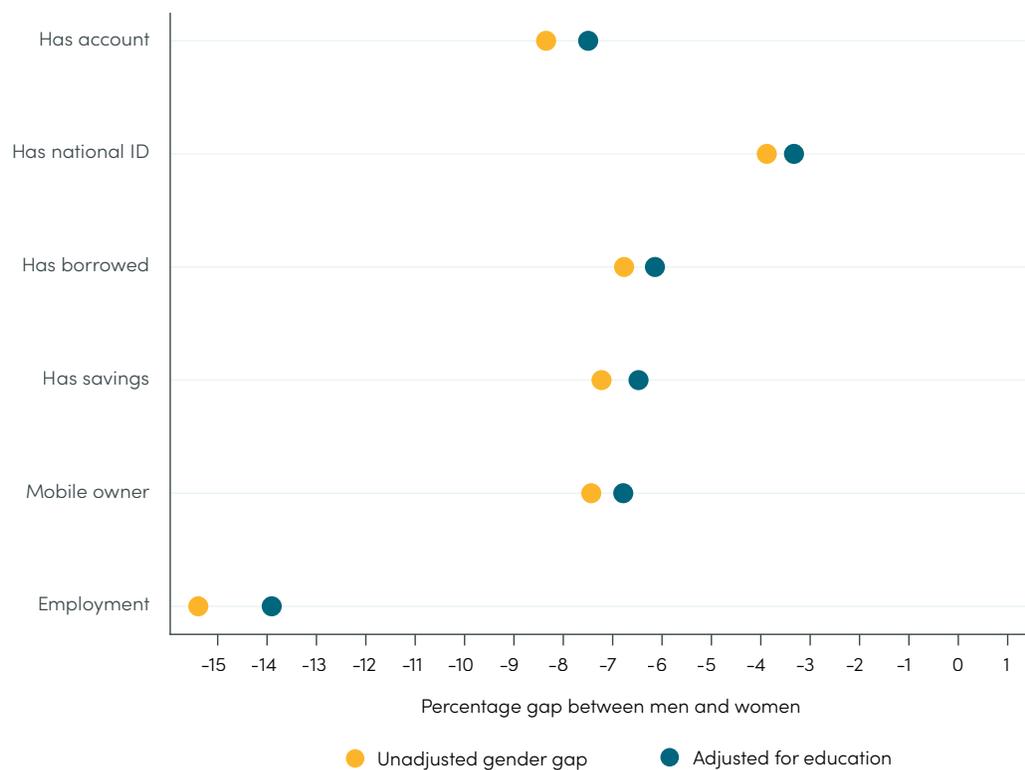
Increased opportunities in education have improved women's labor market outcomes, but returns are inconsistent and often unequal.

structures. Figure 4.1 shows that across countries, adjusting for differences in education between men and women reduces gaps in employment, financial access, and other measures by only about 1 percentage point. This finding suggests that gender gaps persist even as men and women complete more equal years of schooling.

Formal laws and policies are often insufficient for achieving more equal outcomes, but they are a necessary and helpful first step to protecting women's rights and changing norms related to gender equity. A recent synthesis of 160 interventions to improve women's agency in low- and middle-income countries finds that women's agency improved in places where laws mandate gender equality (by, for example, protecting property rights or removing labor restrictions).¹⁹ As of 2020, approximately half the world's countries still did not have legislation guaranteeing equal pay for equal value work for men and women, including large economies like the United States, India, and China.²⁰

Gaps in labor force participation emerge as young women transition from school to the labor market (Box 4.1). School participation may drive these gaps, but other factors—including uneven job search support, differences in access to networks, the availability of jobs considered appropriate for women, and care responsibilities that limit women's ability to balance both home and work obligations—also shape them.

FIGURE 4.1 Gender gaps persist even after adjusting for education



Source: Authors' construction based on data from the Global Financial Inclusion Survey for 144 countries.¹⁸

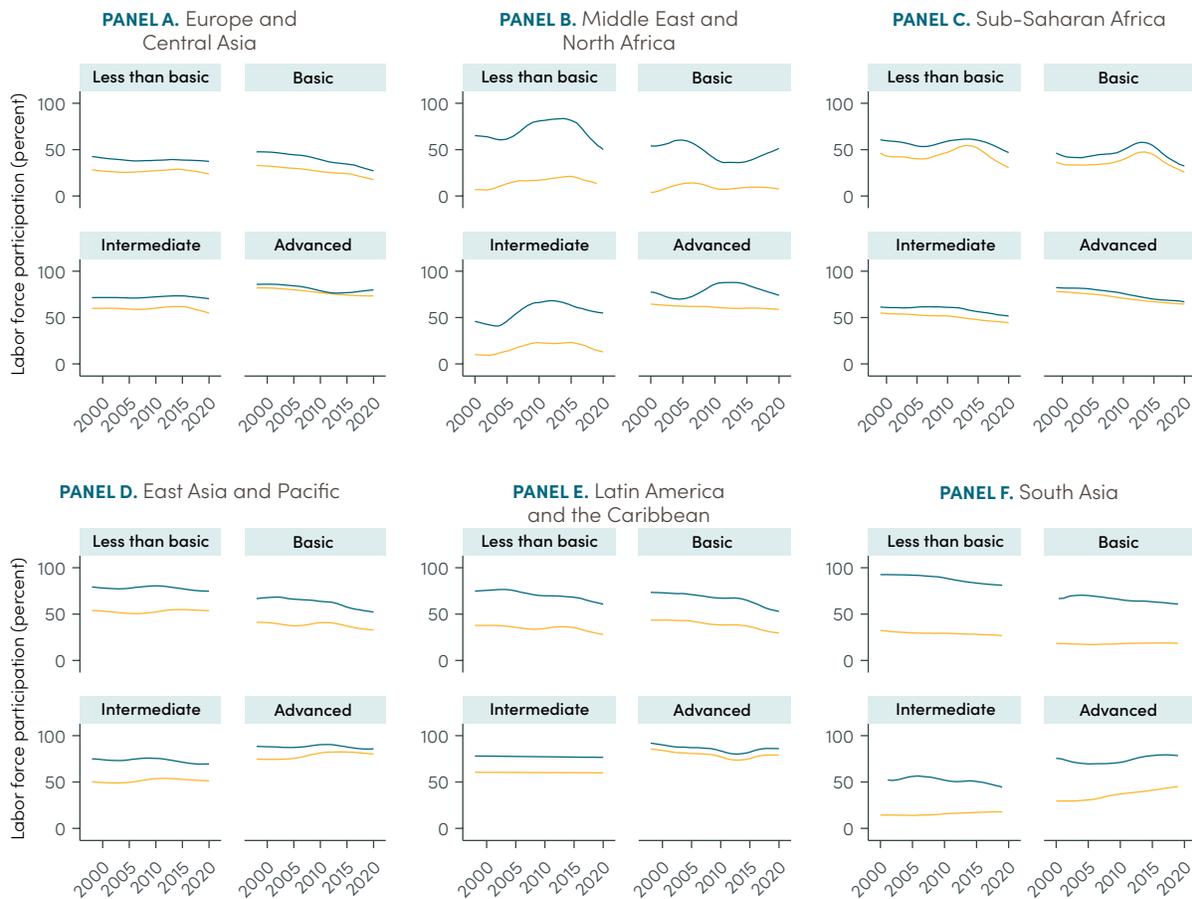
Note: Figure plots the coefficient on a bivariate linear regression on gender, followed by the coefficient on gender in a multivariate regression controlling for education which allows us to compare gender gaps adjusted for education levels. All regressions include country fixed effects.

BOX 4.1: GENDER GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT START EARLY

Gender gaps in employment emerge early, as young people enter the labor market. Globally, a majority of unemployed youth (age 15–24) are women, and women are twice as likely not to be in employment or education.²¹ Young women are half as likely as men to transition from school to work, and women are disproportionately likely to work in informal and vulnerable forms of employment when they are employed.²² These gaps are largest in the

Middle East and North Africa;¹⁵ the lowest levels of employment equality are in the fossil fuel-rich countries in North Africa.²³ In the Middle East and North Africa and in South Asia, gender gaps in youth employment persist across levels of education; in East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Sub-Saharan Africa, they narrow at higher levels of education (Figure 4.2).

FIGURE 4.2 Higher education narrows the gender employment gap in some but not all regions



Source: Authors' construction based on estimates from the International Labor Organization on labor force participation rates by people 15–29.

BOX 4.1: GENDER GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT START EARLY (CONTINUED)

Gender and age can function as additive disadvantages.²⁴ Young women face disproportionate obstacles to entering the labor market stemming from differential skills, access to networks and capital, time and family obligations, limited occupational choices, and concerns over safety.²⁰ An original analysis of 13 countries using the International Labor Organization's School-To-Work Transition Survey (STWTS) finds that being a woman is a significant negative predictor of school-to-work transitions in several countries (including Brazil, Egypt, El Salvador, Jordan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Liberia) but that in others (including Bangladesh, Benin, Madagascar, Malawi, Montenegro, Peru, and Zambia) there is no detectable difference in transition rates between men and women.

We find a particularly striking example of this disadvantage women face in Jordan. Although women are more likely to complete advanced education than men, women's transition time from education to the labor market is significantly longer, and women are significantly less likely to be employed, with a gender gap of 38 percent in favor of men. Although official unemployment figures are not different for men and women, inactivity (not in employment and not looking for work) is higher among women (41 percent) than for men

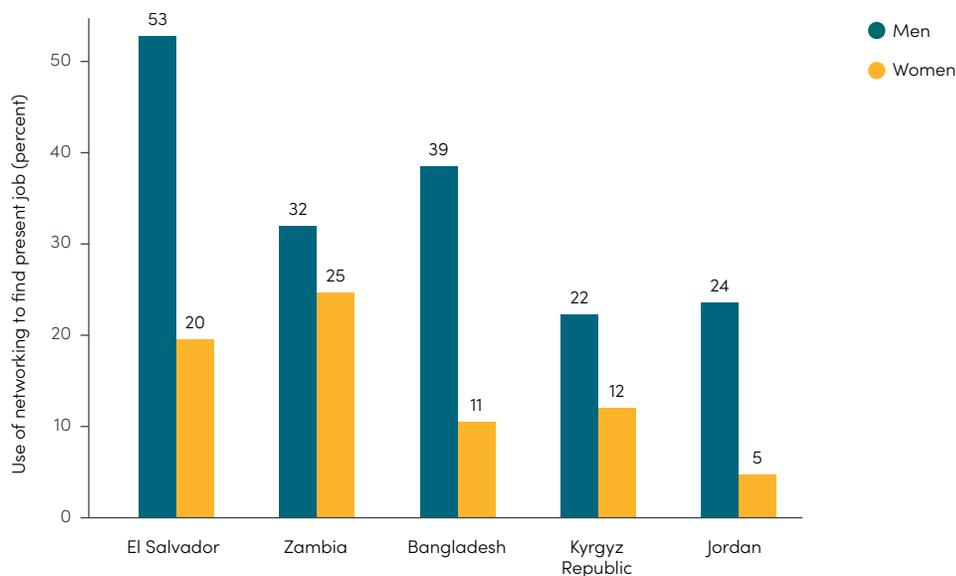
(31 percent). Women living in rural areas are least likely to be in the labor force. In countries like Jordan, women face substantial barriers to entering the labor market, and for those who do become employed, there is a significant gender wage gap in favor of men. (Chapter 7 explores the politics of this mismatch between education and labor force participation in Jordan in more detail.)

In many countries, women report having greater difficulty in the job search process, including not knowing where to look for jobs and lacking access to supportive networks. Young women are also more likely to leave the labor market than men soon after they find a job, often citing childcare, other family responsibilities, or workplace safety concerns as the reason for doing so.

Networks and job search support are particularly important for young jobseekers, who have not yet gained professional experience. Networks are limited for all youth, but boys report having better access to them than girls (Figure 4.3). Evidence from a randomized control trial in Malawi finds that men are systematically less likely to refer women for jobs, despite the availability of qualified women in their networks.²⁵ As professional and social networks move online, the gender divide on digital access and use may exacerbate this gap (Spotlight E).

BOX 4.1: GENDER GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT START EARLY (CONTINUED)

FIGURE 4.3 Young women have less access to employment networking opportunities than young men



Source: Authors' construction based on data from ILO School-to-Work Transition Surveys.

These gaps are not set in stone, however; supportive interventions can narrow them. In South Africa, interventions aiming to support jobseekers with limited professional networks have had large positive effects for women.²⁶ Future research could explore opportunities to help girls access job-relevant networks and strengthen connections between schools and employers to help close the gap in job readiness and search processes.

School-to-work transitions and early labor market experiences are important because they shape future employment and income trajectories. Helping girls join and thrive in the labor market early on is critical to improving longer-term outcomes and opportunities.

Even when labor force participation is more equal, gaps in pay, public sector jobs, promotions and leadership roles exist. Globally, women earn 23 percent less than men.²⁷ In low-income countries, women comprise only 27 percent of jobs in the public sector—where most formal sector jobs are located in many low-income countries—and occupy only 12 percent of senior positions in the public sector.²⁸

Women are also underrepresented in the top ranks of the education sector. Even when they make up a majority of the teacher labor force, they are less likely to be promoted

to school leadership positions.²⁹ In Bulgaria, for example, only 5 of 96 education ministers have been women over the past 140 years, despite the fact that women comprise more than 85 percent of the teacher labor force.³⁰ These pervasive and sometimes severe gender gaps in employment, leadership, and pay could have harmful downstream effects by presenting fewer role models and so limiting the aspirations for young girls. Breaking the cycle in which the underrepresentation of women in the labor market shapes young girls' beliefs about what is possible for them is critical (Box 4.2).

BOX 4.2: WHAT ROLE DO ASPIRATIONS PLAY IN SHAPING GIRLS' FUTURES?

Aspirations have increasingly been discussed as a piece of the education, empowerment, and employment puzzle for women and girls. Much of the research to date has focused on older children in Western, high-income countries or on raising parents' aspirational levels on behalf of their children.³¹ The limited evidence suggests that school ambitions and high occupational aspirations are linked and that youth aspirations are correlated with later life outcomes.³²

Evidence from low- and middle-income countries is limited and mixed. A literature review on girls' education finds an intergenerational aspect of gender inequality in developing countries.³³ Lower parental aspirations—particularly of girls and younger children—can lead these children to have lower aspirations for themselves.

In some countries, financial barriers prevent families from making accurate predictions about educational capacity and access. A study in India finds that parents ranked education access as fairly low in terms of the problems they faced. Parents' lack of aspirations or willingness to invest influences gender biases against girls in education.³⁴ An aspiration

intervention in Ethiopia which showed inspirational documentaries to parents finds that parents had higher aspirations for boys than girls at baseline and that while the documentaries raised aspirations, they did nothing to close gender gaps in aspirations.³¹ Additional evidence from Ethiopia suggests that aspirations are correlated with years of schooling, with a slightly stronger correlation for boys than girls perhaps because of the differential aspirations of parents.³⁵

Poverty, policy contexts, and location have been identified as factors shaping changes in aspirations for children as they get older.³⁶ In the slums of Nairobi, for example, younger children have higher aspirations than children and youth in older cohorts.³⁷

A growing body of evidence also suggests that norms and aspirations are not fixed, particularly for young children. The literature on education, role models, and aspirations is a ripe and growing area for research that may provide additional insight into the relationship between school and later life outcomes for women and girls.

Source: Carvalho and Cameron, 2022.³⁸

WHAT DRIVES PERSISTENT GAPS IN LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES?

For decades, policymakers and scholars have been interested in the question of why gender gaps persist, in part because these gaps run counter to what traditional labor market theories would predict. Human capital theory posits that individuals participate in school to build capital, measured by knowledge and skill accumulation, that will be valued by employers.³⁹ The time and resources spent on education are expected to pay off by leading to productive opportunities.⁴⁰ In fact, although there are positive returns to education for women, as measured by labor market participation and other economic outcomes, the relationship is not consistent—or equal—across countries, sectors, communities, or organizations. And girls' education has not closed gender gaps in economic opportunity.

The inconsistency of the relationship between girls' educational attainment and women's labor force participation is perplexing and raises questions about the barriers to more equal labor market participation. Substantial variation across regions suggests that women's labor force participation depends on many factors outside of the education sector.⁴ These factors include historical differences in economic structures, macro-level shocks, households' economic conditions, variation in household income effects, social norms affecting the ability of women to work, the nature of growth, and the types of opportunities available to women. The availability of decent job opportunities for young women as they finish school may also be a crucial piece of the puzzle. This section explores some of the factors that may influence the relationship between education and employment for women, including the structure of the labor market, the availability of jobs considered appropriate for women, societal gender norms, and challenges that shape women's ability to stay in employment over the long run.



The quality of job opportunities and the size of the service sector shape decisions to work

Improving girls' education increases the supply of skilled workers. An increase in the labor supply, however, does not guarantee that appropriate jobs exist or that available jobs will align with what women want to do. This misalignment between skills, aspirations, and jobs can be a barrier to women's employment.

The early literature identified a U-shaped relationship between economic growth and women's labor force participation, in which women in low- and middle-income countries participate in the labor market in smaller numbers as their economies move out of certain types of agriculture and then do not increase participation again until more white collar jobs become available.⁴¹ Over the years, the U-shaped hypothesis has been reexamined, to try to understand this chicken-and-egg problem of improving educational attainment and ensuring that appropriate and desirable jobs are available.

Initial levels of girls' schooling and women's labor force participation predict future growth patterns differently across countries based on initial levels of physical and human capital. They can cause the U-shaped curve of women's labor force participation to disappear over time as countries invest more in girls' education and employment.⁴² Sectoral shifts in the labor market, including from agriculture to service-oriented industries, also have the potential to increase the returns to girls' education.⁸

Substantial variation exists in the types of jobs considered safe and appropriate for women. Transitions from "brawn-based" industries to a more robust service sector have been associated with growth in women's labor force participation.⁸ But in some countries, the lack of sufficient formal sector jobs considered appropriate for women severely limits the returns to girls' education. For example, in more than 60 low- and middle-income countries, growth has been concentrated in extractive industries, including oil, gas, and mining.⁴³ Women are routinely left out of job opportunities in these sectors and can even be harmed by disproportionate growth in them.⁴⁴ Ongoing work by the World Bank and others examines how growth in extractive industries can be more gender inclusive and less harmful to women.⁴⁵ Similarly, initiatives like the establishment of Women in Mining organizations aim to address challenges women face in entering and staying employed in specific industries as well as help build support networks.⁴⁶ Solving this challenge may require closer collaboration between labor and education sectors to identify skills gaps, opportunities, and potential pathways for women.

Gender norms vary across sectors and shape women's participation

Gender norms are uneven across disciplines and sectors. Although growth in the service sector is correlated with greater women's employment, it does not translate into gender parity in the occupational structure of the labor market, as gender segregation remains prevalent in both the education system and the labor market.⁴⁷ Evidence from high-income countries shows that women are less likely to graduate from advanced tertiary education institutions and that they are underrepresented in science and engineering and overrepresented in other fields, including education and health.⁴⁸ These gender imbalances in fields of study carry over into labor market participation and are ultimately reflected in gaps in earnings.⁴⁹

Disaggregating the service sector or examining options for work may be an important step toward better understanding women's labor market opportunities and choices in connection with education. For example, in South Africa, 84 percent of women's employment is concentrated in the service sector, which includes low-paying subsectors such as retail, hospitality, and domestic work. Women are more likely than men to remain in low-skilled employment and, on average, earn less than men.⁴⁹

Evidence increasingly suggests that norms and values play a critical role in shaping whether, where, and how women work.^{4,8} In some instances, norms and values appear to be even more important than educational attainment and formal laws and policies (Box 4.3).

BOX 4.3: ARE GENDER NORMS AND VALUES A MISSING PIECE OF THE HUMAN CAPITAL PUZZLE?

Scholars have begun to hypothesize that norms and values—in addition to skills and opportunities—matter in shaping the impact that changes in education have on later life outcomes for women and girls. For example, cross-cultural differences related to gender norms have deep historical roots and can mediate the relationship between education and employment.⁵⁰

Using panel data from 1990 to 2020, a recent study examines the relationship between school enrollment and completion, laws, and values related to gender equity, and labor force participation.⁵¹ The authors find that progress in secondary education shifts women out of vulnerable and into salaried employment but that primary education and literacy are not significant predictors of such shifts. Differences in girls' education are also correlated with sectoral differences in employment across countries. This finding suggests that although increased education does not result in an overall increase in women's employment, it is associated with transitions to less vulnerable work and greater participation in the formal sector, in particular a move out of agriculture and into the service and industrial sectors.

The study also examines whether rights variables have an independent effect in countries with similar levels of girls' education.⁵² They find weak relationships between laws protecting equal education, employment, and political association for women and labor force participation. Their finding does not suggest that laws and policies that seek to protect the rights of women and promote equality are unimportant but rather that laws and policies alone are unlikely to change outcomes.

Many policies have limited or no effects on women's employment. But child marriage bans are associated with very large (15–20 percentage points) increases in participation for women. Delaying marriage may increase secondary school participation and allow girls who may be vulnerable to early marriage

to have the opportunity to pursue other options at a critical time in their lives. Implementing child marriage bans may be more feasible in settings with less rigid gender norms. The relationship between child marriage and women's later life outcomes is a fruitful area for future research.

Broader norms and majority opinions may also have an independent effect in shaping women's labor market trajectories. Expressed support for girls' education, women's employment, political equality, and divorce rights are all associated with higher labor force participation, suggesting that differences in values do more to explain variation in levels of participation for women than differences in legal rights, except for child marriage bans. Although there is likely overlap between the effectiveness of laws and the presence of norms that support women's participation in the labor market, this analysis suggests that social and cultural gender norms are likely to operate as important intervening factors. Without addressing persistent social and cultural barriers, formal rights and laws are unlikely to facilitate a stronger link between girls' education and more equal outcomes later in life for women.

A growing body of evidence suggests that norms and aspirations are not necessarily fixed and can evolve. A study on India finds that interventions that engaged boys and girls in conversations about gender equity led all students to update their beliefs to be more gender-equal.⁵² A study on Saudi Arabia finds that men often overestimate the negative beliefs of their peer groups about women in the workforce and update their beliefs when provided with new information.⁵³ These are just two of the many examples of promising interventions that may support progress toward more inclusive norms for women in education and employment. Both highlight the need to include men and boys in efforts to shift norms and aspirations. (Chapter 5 explores the role of norms and aspirations within education systems in more detail.)

Source: Carvalho and Lincove, 2022.⁵²

Uneven care responsibilities make it more difficult for women to stay in the labor force

Children and family are a key source of divergence in men and women's outcomes, almost regardless of education, because of care responsibilities. Globally, childbirth reduces women's labor force participation by two years on average.⁵⁴ Women (but not men) also experience a sharp drop in earnings after childbirth.⁵⁵ In Puerto Rico, for example, gender gaps in returns to education are greater for women who have dependent children.⁵⁶ Differences in care responsibilities range from 30 percent more for women in Cambodia to 10 times more in Iraq.⁵⁷ Perhaps not surprisingly, analysis across many countries shows that women are more likely to participate in the labor market when care burdens are reduced through paid maternity leave schemes and when enrollment in preprimary education is higher.⁵⁸

HOW CAN EDUCATION BETTER SUPPORT MORE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT AND LATER LIFE OUTCOMES?

The relationship between education, employment, and gender equity is not consistent or linear; many factors shape it. Key areas policymakers can focus on to strengthen the potential for education to support gender equity in the labor market include (a) crafting reforms focused on laws and policies promoting equity (recommendation 1), (b) supporting school to work transitions (recommendation 2), (c) hiring more women (recommendation 3), (d) strengthening cross-sector collaboration (recommendation 4), (e) making gender norms more equal (recommendation 5), and (f) expecting more from the education system (recommendation 6).

Recommendation 1: Push for laws and policies protecting women's rights and promoting equity—but don't stop there

Laws and policies establishing formal protection of women's rights, outlawing discrimination, and promoting equality are important for establishing institutional frameworks in which men and women are recognized as equal under the law. In some cases, such as child marriage bans, laws and policies can have important impacts on girls' education and women's ability to enter and stay in the workforce and can provide necessary mechanisms for accountability. Other areas of law and policy, such as equal pay legislation, demonstrate weaker relationships with education and labor but may nonetheless be important preconditions for additional efforts and establish guidelines for what is appropriate or accepted in a given context. Efforts should be made to ensure that sufficient laws and policies are in place to promote equity and prevent discrimination and other practices that may limit women's opportunities to be part of the labor force, but additional efforts should be made to ensure that women can realize the rights and opportunities outlined in formal documents. (Chapter 6 explores specific areas of law and policy that may support broader gender equity.)

Recommendation 2: Support women in school-to-work transitions

School-to-work transitions can be daunting for all youth but particularly challenging for young women (see Box 4.1). Interventions that provide young women and their families with information about jobs, help connect them to networks, and develop job search strategies may help facilitate their initial transition into the labor market. Also potentially effective are activities that help young women shape their aspirations, plan their job search, and access training during their early years in the labor force, in order to develop skills to progress out of entry-level positions and be able to stay in the labor force over the long term. These types of interventions may be strong candidates for public-private partnerships between social sectors and firms looking to strengthen gender equity in employment.

Recommendation 3: Hire more women in both the public and private sectors

The availability of jobs considered appropriate for women matters.⁵⁹ Governments can do more to ensure better gender equity in the public sector, including by hiring and training more women across levels. The gender wage gap is already smaller in the public sector than the private sector.²⁸ Even temporary jobs provided as part of a social protection scheme can help. India's National Rural Employment Guarantee program has disproportionately increased women's employment and reduced the gender pay-gap for casual workers.⁶⁰ Globally, women make up 50 percent of clerical occupations in the public sector but just 25 percent of senior positions.⁶¹ It is important that efforts to reduce the gender pay-gap not be limited to lower-level public sector jobs.

Governments and the private sector should work together to identify barriers to female labor force participation across sectors and design solutions to overcome these barriers. This area may be particularly fruitful for public-private partnerships that improve links between education systems and employment opportunities, provide more information for jobseekers, strengthen job search support, and improve training opportunities and working conditions for women.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen cross-sector collaboration to improve pathways between school and work for women

Ensuring that women are prepared to join the workforce and that the labor market is ready and able to include women

safely and equitably is an ongoing challenge in many places. Stronger and more intentional efforts to identify areas for growth in women's participation in labor markets coupled with efforts to prepare girls with appropriate skills for these jobs could help address the misalignment between girls' education and available jobs for women. (Spotlight D explores the potential role migration could play in addressing this challenge by linking women with jobs abroad, particularly when opportunities are limited domestically.)

Recommendation 5: Try to change gender norms

Societal norms and values play a critical role in shaping women's opportunities and the potential for broader equality. Interventions that seek to change societal beliefs about gender norms related to work, raise aspirations about what is possible for women, and make job search and employment experiences safer and more accessible to women are promising and should be expanded. It is critical that these efforts be cross-generational and include men and boys.

Recommendation 6: Expect more from the education sector, and make changes in other sectors that make it easier for women to work

Girls' education can substantially improve women's future opportunities, including in the labor market. To do so, however, the education sector needs to do a better job of preparing girls for the future (see Chapter 5). Changes are also needed in other sectors—labor, health, social protection—to enable education to deliver on its grand promise as the great equalizer (see Chapter 6).

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SPOTLIGHT D

The Complex and Promising Role of Migration

SHELBY CARVALHO, REVA RESSTACK, AND BINIAM BEDASSO



Migration can incentivize human capital investment and persistence in school and can increase returns to education. It can also increase household resources available for education, through remittances and income generation.

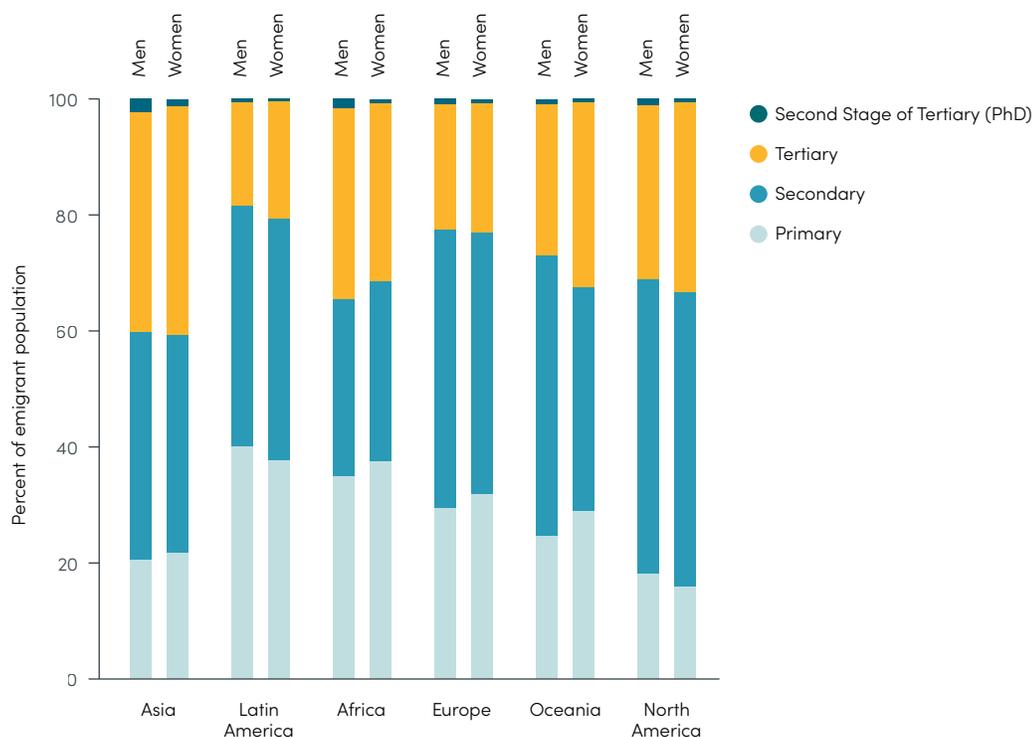
Migration is not universally good for women, gender equality, or children's education outcomes, however. When migration pathways are unsafe or limited to low-skilled positions, women who migrate may be at risk of exploitation and vulnerable to violence, and children who are left behind may suffer.

A record number of women are now migrating to seek work and better lives. For many, migration yields these benefits. But migration can also be dangerous – particularly if done without formal documentation. Migration policies and practices have been slow to recognize the nuances shaping risks and opportunities and to ensure that migration processes are safe for women.

MIGRATION CAN BROADEN WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

Migration can increase returns to education for women, although increased returns tend to be concentrated at higher levels of education. Variation in women's educational attainment shapes migrant women's labor opportunities (Figure D.1). Migrant women with lower levels of education tend to work in low-paying sectors that are often gendered in nature, such as caregiving, cleaning, and textile processing.¹ Migrant women with higher levels of education often work in higher-paid sectors that are also gendered, such as education and healthcare.

FIGURE D.1 Across regions, most migrants have completed secondary school



Source: Database on Immigrants in OECD countries.²

The combination of education and migration opportunities can affect women’s labor force participation. One global study finds that gendered differences in high-skilled migration, which show high-skilled women are more likely to emigrate than high-skilled men, are incorrect; this gap disappears after accounting for interdependencies between the migration decisions of men and women, such as family reunification programs or joint decisions to migrate.³ Women are also more sensitive than men to networks in international migration, suggesting that women are less likely to migrate in the absence of established network or connections.⁴ In Tajikistan, for example, strengthening women’s access to higher education, coupled with increased opportunities for international migration for men, improved women’s labor force participation locally and reduced the gender gap in employment.⁵

MIGRATION CAN STRENGTHEN EDUCATION OUTCOMES AND INCREASE INVESTMENTS IN HUMAN CAPITAL

Migration can increase opportunities for high-quality education, particularly domestically. The great bulk of population movement around the world occurs in the form of migration within national borders.⁶ Internal migration can take place in the form of individual or family migration. In the case of family migration, relocating from rural or less developed regions to urban or more prosperous areas can afford children better opportunities for schooling. In Indonesia, both boys and girls who migrated to urban centers with their families completed three more years of schooling than those who stayed behind.⁷

Another mechanism through which migration can affect education in countries of origin is by providing further incentives to invest in human capital in anticipation of potential future migration. Theoretically, girls' education could benefit from the availability of migration prospects if the potential returns to schooling in destination countries are higher than those of their home country. Investing in education in the hope of migrating and then failing to do so could leave non-migrants with more education than they would have acquired otherwise.

Empirically, the effect of the prospect of one's own migration on educational attainment is mixed and likely conditional on the characteristics of the origin and destination labor markets. In Cape Verde, the possibility of migration through family links increases the probability of completing intermediate secondary school, for both boys and girls.⁸ In Nigeria, the presence of a migrant family member is positively correlated with the probability of completing secondary school.⁹ There is suggestive evidence that the relationship reflects the fact that children of migrants are better able to imagine opportunities for their own future migration—and are therefore more likely to invest in their education. However, the magnitude and statistical significance of the correlation is lower for girls than for boys, potentially reflecting the gender bias in the selection of family members for migration.

Migration can also increase household resources, including for education. Remittances can reduce gender inequality by increasing respect for women who remit and providing more resources to women who receive remittances. Globally, women migrants send about the same amount of remittances as men, but they typically send a larger share of their income.¹⁰

NOT ALL MIGRATION IS GOOD FOR WOMEN OR GENDER EQUALITY

Much of the evidence on the positive impacts of migration on women's labor force participation reflects the experience of

more highly educated and skilled women. Analyses that fail to account for the educational level of migrants might reach misleading conclusions regarding the relationship between gender, education, and migration. Safe, regulated migration pathways can facilitate opportunities for women. But risky, irregular migration—often more common when formal employment opportunities are limited—present risks, including of human trafficking and exploitation.

Migration can have consequences for those left behind

When parents migrate, they often send remittances home. These resources can shape education and employment decisions for family members and often have gendered impacts. Studies on migrant-heavy areas of Albania,¹¹ China,¹² Egypt,¹³ Mexico,¹⁴ and Nepal¹⁵ find that women reduce work hours, are less likely to work outside the home, and take on more unpaid care work when men emigrate.

Temporary individual migration, which usually results in children being left behind with one parent or other guardians, often hurts children's education—with the negative impact of parental absence usually strong enough to offset the positive effects of remittances and increased financial stability. In some instances, impacts on children are more severe when mothers emigrate. In the Philippines, children are more likely to lag in school if their mothers migrate than if their fathers migrate, even after controlling for remittances. Moreover, the detrimental impact of maternal migration is greater for boys than girls.¹⁶ The results may be driven primarily by parental time inputs, which are lower with maternal emigration. In El Salvador, the migration of women does not increase children's schooling, and there is some evidence that it even reduces the likelihood of school attendance for younger children.¹⁷ In rural Mexico, women's migration reduces households' school expenditures in the country of origin.¹⁸ And households in Ghana that receive remittances from wives devote a smaller budget share to educational expenditures than do households in which the husband is the remitter.¹⁹ These findings are consistent with a model in which the husband is left in charge when the wife migrates,

and vice versa, resulting in a shift in intrahousehold resource allocation in different ways depending on which spouse migrates. A multi-country study finds that long-term parental absence affects all children's Peabody Picture and Vocabulary Test scores negatively in India and Vietnam; in contrast, in Peru, the effect is significant only for girls.²⁰

Girls don't always fare worse than boys when a parent migrates. In China, the negative impact of parental absence on Chinese and math scores holds only when both parents migrate, and that parental absence affects boys more than girls.²¹ These findings are consistent with the literature that suggests that "girls are better endowed than boys with the protective psychosocial qualities that enhance their resilience in the face of reduced parental input."¹¹

Prospects of migration can reduce investment in human capital

Some evidence cited earlier suggests that future migration opportunities can encourage persistence in school, but this is not always the case: hopes for future migration can also reduce investment in education. For example, individuals in Mexico with higher probabilities of migration to the United

States invest less in education, because the return to Mexican education in the United States is lower than in Mexico.²² As men are more likely to migrate from Mexico to the United States, the negative effect of migration on education is more pronounced in the case of secondary completion by boys.

Where the prospect of migration has a positive impact on educational attainment, there may be negative spillovers on girls' education if migration opportunities are concentrated among men. A policy shift in the recruitment of Nepalese men to the British army, for example, undermined the schooling of their sisters through intrahousehold resource allocation.²³

There is still a dearth of empirical studies looking directly into the effects of shifts in women's migration prospects on girls' education. We also lack sufficient evidence on the relative returns to schooling in prospective destinations that often attract more women. Further research could examine these questions and could illuminate the effects of female role models in the diaspora on the education of girls in origin countries.

Notes

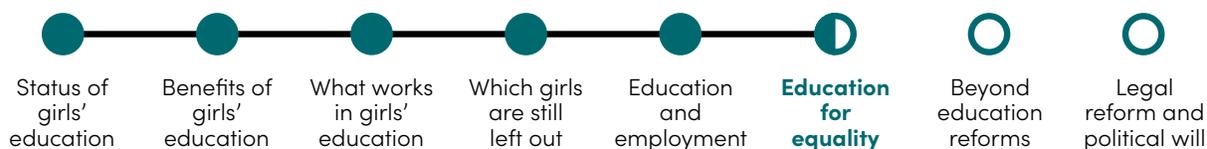
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How Can Education Systems Contribute More Effectively to Equality?

SHELBY CARVALHO AND EMMA CAMERON

with contributions from Laura Moscoviz and Alexis le Nestour



Progress in girls' education has been substantial, albeit uneven around the world. But in many places, girls' education is not consistently leading to more equal opportunities beyond school.

If girls are largely receiving the same education as boys, why is there a persistent divergence in learning and later life outcomes? Part of the answer may lie within the education sector itself. As schools are often a microcosm of society in which gender bias persists, it is not surprising that gender bias manifests itself in classrooms, through teachers, curricula, and peers. Gender bias and harmful stereotypes in schools can perpetuate learning inequities between boys and girls and negatively affect learning and aspirations. Indeed, cross-country evidence shows that cultures with weaker gender stereotypes have smaller gender gaps in math performance.^{1,2}

Schools, education systems, and communities can do more to combat internal sources of gender biases that differentially shape the education experiences of boys and girls. This

chapter looks within the education system to critically examine how teachers, curricula, school environments, and wider system structures can better support empowerment and facilitate education's role in building more equal societies.

HOW IMPORTANT IS "EMPOWERMENT"?

The notion that education fosters empowerment, particularly for girls, has become a stylized fact in global education. As a result, empowerment has become a buzzword that is often vaguely and inconsistently invoked in relation to setting goals, designing interventions, and measuring outcomes for girls. Here we adopt a broad definition of empowerment that refers to individuals' ability to exercise control over decisions and resources affecting their lives and the capacity to make effective choices.³ Common measures of empowerment include the existence and use of choice and sometimes assets, as well as beliefs about gender roles, equality, and gender-based violence.⁴

Empowerment is not an automatic outcome of going to school.

Schools and education systems have the potential to foster empowerment, but empowerment is not an automatic outcome of going to school. A study of more than 50 countries finds that learning, rather than just access to school, is associated with increased girls' empowerment.⁵ For schools and education systems to be empowering environments, particularly for girls, they must meet several preconditions: The learning environment must be physically, materially, and socio-culturally conducive to learning, including by prioritizing safety, and schools must foster dignity and equality for all students. These principles, outlined in the work of Murphy-Graham and Lloyd, provide a useful starting point for evaluating whether and how schools and education systems can better serve students to foster empowerment and gender equity.²

SCHOOLS MUST FOSTER EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUITY

Tackling gender bias in schools needs to begin by creating physical, material, and social conditions that are conducive to learning.⁶ Students need access to classrooms with enough desks, seats, and materials. They need access to working toilets and protected spaces. In places like Rwanda, creating "girls' rooms"—places where girls can go to safely access feminine hygiene products and perhaps other supportive resources—can help girls remain at school during menstruation. In 2020, Rwanda implemented national legislation requiring girls' rooms in all secondary schools.⁷



For toilets, girls' rooms, and protected spaces to benefit girls, however, they need to be regularly stocked with adequate supplies and not simultaneously used for other purposes, and school communities need to be aware of and encourage and respect usage of these spaces. Institutional environments and social behavior must also prioritize health and safety and facilitate the use of the resources intended to support girls. Programs that fail to educate all students and all teachers—including men and boys—in menstrual hygiene management in schools can blunt the positive impacts of these spaces.⁸ In countries in which menstrual hygiene is stigmatized, menstruation can be an obstacle to girls' participation in school. In Tanzanian schools, 80 percent of girls reported fear of teasing by boys over menstruation.⁸ Girls reported participating less and having difficulty concentrating while menstruating because of embarrassment, and nearly 40 percent reported leaving school during their periods. Whole school approaches to fostering respect for health and safety practices may be worthwhile in places in which institutional and social barriers limit the full use of available supportive resources, such as girls' rooms. Some schools also incorporate life skills' curricula, often targeted to girls, in order to foster empowerment and well-being (Box 5.1).

BOX 5.1: LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION PROGRAMS ARE WIDELY USED DESPITE THE LACK OF STRAIGHTFORWARD EVIDENCE

The term “life skills” is used to describe the knowledge, skills, and mindsets that individuals need to navigate challenges, exercise their rights, and thrive. Life skills – decision making, negotiation or communication skills, and agency – are widely used in education programs to help improve girls’ health, education, economic, and other outcomes. However, the specific contents used in life skills curricula are not well documented, nor whether or how they have an impact on such diverse outcomes. To analyze the effect of life skills programs, a recent study examined 112 life skills programs from the Evidence for Gender and Education Resource (EGER) out of the Population Council and 15 evaluations of life skills programs (including 9 examples of curricula).

Results from the study found that all curricula covered social (including gender) analysis and empowerment, skills (life or socio-emotional), and citizenship. And the majority covered relationships and violence, sexual and reproductive health and HIV, as well as general health. Half of the 112 life skills programs covered at least two of these domains

and only 10 reported none. While it was difficult to assess the effectiveness of these programs due to the non-representative sample of curricula, as well as the fact that most of the programs were multi-component, comparing the results of the evaluations next to curricular content highlighted patterns and several gaps in the evidence. These included similar effects found across multiple sectors, too few studies that measured the direct effects of life skills education, and a tendency to not measure the skills and mindsets themselves.

More research is needed on the effects of life skills programs on education outcomes. In the context of low- and middle-income countries where systemic barriers to learning – such as poor pedagogy, poverty, and large class sizes – can be steep, life skills education, if it contributes to learning outcomes, may need to be coupled with program components that teach literacy and numeracy.

Source: Haberland et al., 2021⁹

School environments must also be safe (Spotlight C). Violence and bullying in and around schools can have gendered impacts on performance and persistence in school. Girls are twice as likely as boys to experience sexual abuse in school.¹⁰ Across 10 low- and middle-income countries, 400,000 girls reported sexual abuse at school in a single year.¹¹ Girls need to feel comfortable coming to school without fear of sexual harassment, bullying, corporal punishment, or shaming.¹²

Teachers play a critical role in shaping school environments and perceptions of gender bias

Gendered norms and discrimination are communicated to students through curricula, social interactions, assignment of roles, and the language used at school. Creating empowering environments at school requires being aware of and addressing the ways in which gender bias is manifested

within schools and education systems. In many ways, addressing these challenges is more difficult than improving physical conditions, because these forms of gender bias are often subtle, unintentional, and embedded in broader community social norms.

Teachers play a critical role in shaping school environments and perceptions of gender bias. A rich body of literature suggests that gendered stereotypes communicated by teachers can help shape self-perceptions and aspirations—and that they often start as early as the pre-primary years.^{13,14} Several studies find that boys in the pre-primary years demand and receive more attention, and therefore more instructive and specialized feedback, than girls, which can result in lower levels of self-esteem and achievement beginning at a young age.^{12,15} Stereotype trends continue as children get older. A randomized control trial in the United States finds negative

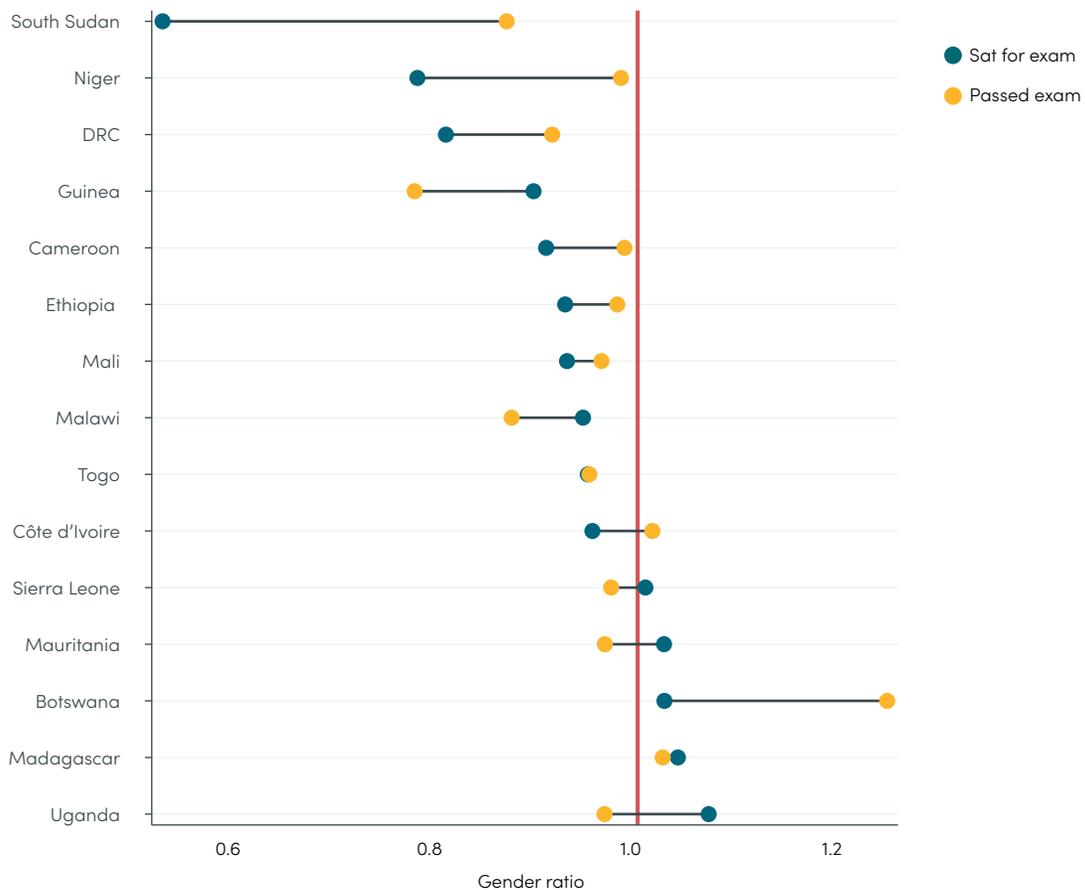
bias in teacher perceptions of the mathematical ability of girls as well as of Black and Hispanic students.¹⁶

Teacher bias can affect gender gaps in student achievement.¹⁷ An experimental study in Italy finds that teacher stereotyping induces girls to underperform in math and self-select into less demanding high schools. According to the study, stereotypes negatively affect the test performance of girls.¹³ These results are consistent with evidence from Turkey that shows boys consistently outperforming girls on standardized tests despite having lower grade point averages

in high school.¹⁸ These differences can result in gender gaps in college admissions.¹⁷

Figure 5.1 shows primary exam pass rates in 15 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that use exams to determine promotion to secondary school. In most cases, girls are less likely to sit for exams and pass them at lower rates than boys. Gaps in learning outcomes—at least as measured by high stakes exams—persist even for girls who stay in school the same number of years and receive the same types of schooling as boys.

FIGURE 5.1 In some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, girls are less likely than boys to sit for exams and achieve lower pass rates when they do



Source: Authors' construction based on online government and media sources.

Note: The gender ratio is the number of girls who sat/passed an exam divided by the number of boys who did so. A ratio greater than 1 is in favor of girls.

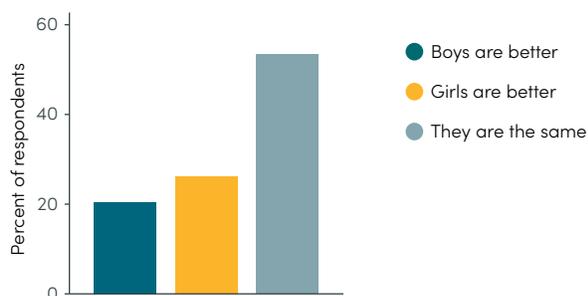
These differences may be linked to teacher bias and perceptions of student ability based on gender. Analysis of data from the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) from 10 countries in francophone West Africa finds that 42 percent of teachers report that boys perform better than girls in mathematics; more than 50 percent report that boys and girls perform similarly in reading.¹⁹ Teachers were also asked what they felt drove these differences. For math, teachers most often indicated that boys perform better because they are smarter. These preconceptions can harm boys' and girls' education if teachers perceive subject ability differently based on gender and adjust teaching

practices accordingly, even if such adjustments are not made intentionally.

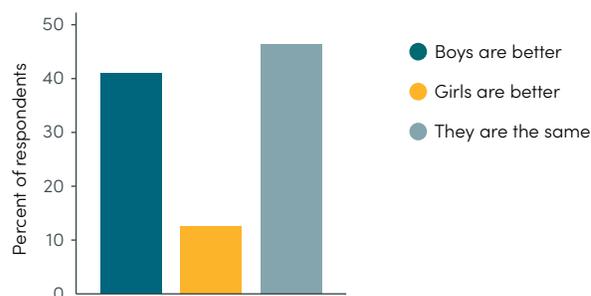
Classroom responsibilities assigned to student class leaders may also reflect gender bias. Boys are more likely to be assigned tasks to maintain discipline, and girls are more likely to be assigned cleaning responsibilities (Figure 5.2). These differences have the potential to communicate gendered norms to both boys and girls about what types of roles are appropriate for them. Teachers need to be supported to teach and manage their classrooms in ways that reduce the risks of perpetuating harmful gender norms.

FIGURE 5.2 Teachers have gendered perceptions of students' ability and assign classroom responsibilities based on stereotypical gender perceptions

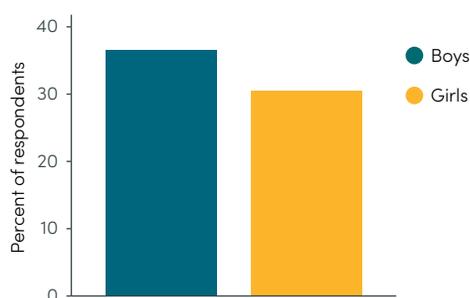
PANEL A. Are there differences in reading skills according to the teacher?



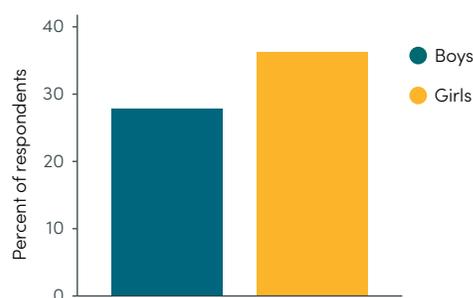
PANEL B. Are there differences in math skills according to the teacher?



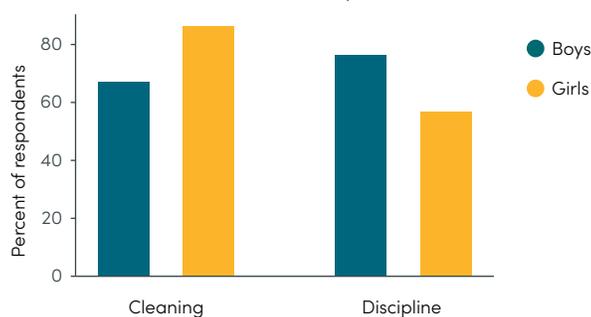
PANEL C. Percent of teachers saying that students score better in reading because they are smarter



PANEL D. Percent of teachers saying that students score better in math because they are smarter



PANEL E. What are class leaders responsible for?



Source: Authors' construction based on data from PASEC (2014).¹⁸

Female teachers need to be protected and empowered, too

Teachers often communicate gender bias in schools. But they can also experience it themselves. Women face gender-related obstacles and discrimination at all levels of the teaching profession, from entry to promotion. In some places, communities object to women working outside the home as teachers because of social norms and safety-related concerns. Recruiting female teachers is therefore challenging in many low- and middle-income countries, especially in rural areas.²⁰ In India, an intervention that targeted family perceptions of the teaching profession for women had no impact, suggesting that sector-wide efforts—rather than individual household interventions—may be needed to change norms and perceptions related to the safety of women in the teaching profession in order to increase and strengthen applicant pools.²¹

Once in the teaching profession, women also report experiencing gendered harassment in school, from both students and colleagues.²² In some instances, teachers don't feel empowered to protect students from harassment. A small study of teachers in Canada finds that women report not intervening in gendered harassment of students because of inconsistent institutional support, a fear of backlash, and inadequate training.

Gender bias in teaching evaluations is widely reported across contexts in student evaluations and in formal performance evaluations by peers and school leaders.²³ It can result in gender gaps in promotions and career advancement for women, even when they make up a majority of the teaching profession. Ensuring that teachers are protected from and properly equipped to respond to gender bias and harassment is a critical first step to helping them recognize and combat gender bias in their schools. In order for teachers to be able to create safer and more empowering environments for students, they need to be empowered as well.

SYSTEM-LEVEL GENDER BIAS HURTS GIRLS

Features of the wider education system can also shape gender bias. They include implicit or explicit gender bias in curricula and textbooks, school-related costs and fees, implementation of laws and policies intended to protect girls, the availability of role models, and academic tracking.

Curricula and textbook bias may hurt girls

Curricula are a source of persistent gender bias in education systems. White males are consistently overrepresented in US children's books.²⁴ In Ethiopia, eighth grade English textbooks significantly overrepresent men as role models and achievers and depict unequal power relationships between men and women.²⁵ Gender bias in textbooks has been documented in Bangladesh,²⁶ Hong Kong,²⁷ Japan,²⁸ Pakistan,²⁹ and elsewhere. In 2017, Peru scrapped a new curriculum within a few months of implementation following criticisms that it perpetuated harmful gendered ideologies.³⁰ In Brazil, math curricula and teaching practices reinforce traditional gender norms and have been associated with disproportionate classroom participation by boys in math.³¹ These discrepancies continue through higher education. Reading lists in the international relations program at the London School of Economics routinely exclude female authors.³² The effects of textbook and curriculum gender bias remain understudied and are a fruitful area for future research.

School and exam fees may disproportionately hurt girls

The cost of going to school can be high for the lowest-income households, particularly for girls within them. Primary education is technically free in most countries, and at least 154 countries offer three to four years of free secondary schooling.³³ But going to school can still require substantial financial resources from families to cover uniforms, school supplies, transportation, and exam fees. A 2017 study on

secondary school dropout in Rwanda finds that 70 percent of children from the poorest households who did not make the transition to secondary school cited costs as a main reason, even though there are no formal school fees in Rwanda.³⁴ For many families, these complementary costs can be prohibitive—and they often disproportionately affect the poorest girls, particularly in places with wide pay gender gaps.

In some countries, students must pay fees to sit for exams. In Malawi, for example, students have to pay fees per subject as well as fees for entry, administration, and identification to take primary and secondary leaving exams. Not being able to afford end of year exams can prevent a child from transitioning to secondary school.³⁵ High-stake exams therefore place an additional financial burden on families and limit access to education for the most vulnerable children. If families expect higher returns for boys and are forced to make tradeoffs in education spending accordingly, these supplementary costs may unintentionally increase gender gaps.

Opportunity costs may also disadvantage girls

In households facing tight budget constraints, the opportunity costs of going to school instead of contributing to household chores or income can also be prohibitive and grow as children get older.³⁶ Although the opportunity costs of sending children to school is not always higher for girls (they are higher for adolescent boys in some regions), they can be more difficult to overcome in places where the perceived benefits of going to school do not outweigh the immediate needs of households, whether because of the direct costs of schooling, a lack of clear economic opportunities following school completion, or norms placing lower value on girls' education and work outside the household.³⁷ Helping households overcome the monetary and nonmonetary opportunity costs of girls' schooling has been one of the major rationales behind cash transfers and scholarship

programs targeting girls. Bursaries, stipends, and needs-based scholarships, which can be designed to target specific marginalized groups, are also effective means of increasing enrollment and improving learning outcomes. A study in Ghana finds that students who were awarded scholarships were more likely to complete secondary school and scored higher in reading and math tests.³⁸

Pregnant girls and young mothers must not lose out on education

Adolescent pregnancy, which is common across much of Sub-Saharan Africa, reduces upper-primary and secondary school participation by girls.³⁹ The risk of not returning to school following pregnancy stems not only from the time and resource constraints that come with being a new mother but also from discrimination and laws preventing girls from returning to school once they have a child. In many places, the ways in which education systems view and respond to adolescent pregnancy creates additional barriers for girls and young women to continue their education following motherhood.

A growing number of countries in the African Union have adopted laws and policies protecting adolescent girls' right to continue their education following pregnancy. But many countries still lack formal laws or re-entry policies to protect re-enrollment and maintain informal discriminatory practices that prevent girls from returning to school following pregnancy and childbirth.³⁶ Despite occasional discourse to the contrary, allowing girls who become pregnant to attend school does not lead to rising adolescent pregnancy rates.⁴⁰

Informal obstacles still prevent many pregnant and parenting adolescents from returning to school. In Zambia, for example, girls are often discouraged from re-entering because of the stigma associated with adolescent pregnancy (Box 5.2).

BOX 5.2: HAVING AN IMPACT REQUIRES CHANGING ATTITUDES ABOUT PREGNANT GIRLS AND YOUNG MOTHERS IN SCHOOL, NOT JUST ADOPTING A RE-ENTRY POLICY

Zambian girls are not disadvantaged compared with boys in terms of primary enrollment, but by senior secondary school, the gender parity index falls to 0.8, partly because of pregnancy.³² Almost one in three Zambian girls, and nearly half of those in the lowest socioeconomic quintile, are pregnant by age 19.⁴¹

Zambia passed its school re-entry policy in 1997, following global resolutions at the 1995 Beijing Conference that advocated for re-admission of girls who dropped out of school because of pregnancy. Zambia's policy resonated with global goals and national enrollment priorities and was seen as a step toward bridging the gender gap in educational participation. However, in 2016, just 38 percent of girls who were enrolled in primary school and 65 percent who had been in secondary school at the time of their pregnancy returned after their child was born.

Qualitative research reveals that school staff are conflicted in their support for the policy, about which they have only general awareness. In interviews, many people who endorse the idea that adolescent mothers should be allowed to return to school express reservations about whether the policy affects the risk of adolescent pregnancy. Pregnant students

are not described as children in need of protection but as “naughty” examples to others. Implementing the re-enrollment policy, which requires multiple family signatures, is difficult, particularly where adult fathers would be subject to prosecution. Inequities in school resourcing add barriers to policy implementation, particularly in rural areas, by limiting the resources schools have to support student parents.

In principle, Zambia's school re-entry policy should protect new mothers, by preventing their exclusion from school. But social norms affect the degree to which the people tasked with implementation—from the ministry to community—do so.

Focusing on the role of young women as part of Zambia's future may help build support. A presidential endorsement of the rights of girls to return to school might help move policy implementation in the right direction, by underlining the importance of the re-entry policy in helping girls reach their full potential. Failure to re-enroll young mothers is likely to feed into an ongoing cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Source: Zuilkowski and Matafwali, 2022.⁴²

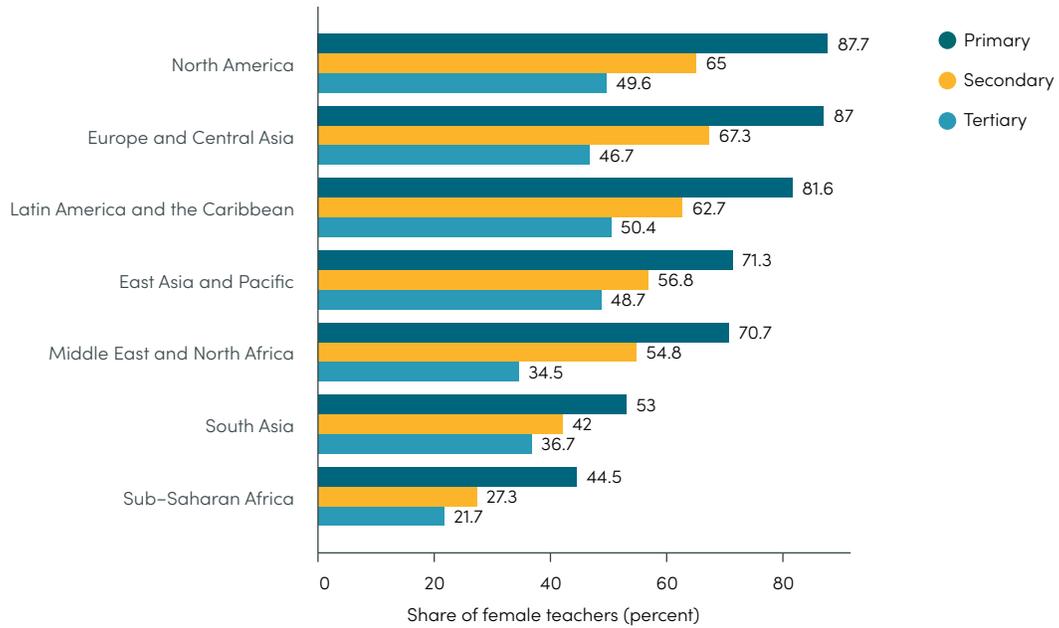
Lack of female teachers may deprive girls of role models in some regions

Although more than half of the teachers in the world are women and the share of female teachers is increasing in all regions of the world, many countries still face gender gaps in the teaching profession.⁴³ Gaps are widest at the secondary and tertiary levels, where requirements for teaching qualifications are more stringent. Women make up only 14 percent of secondary school teachers in Sierra Leone, for example, and just 6 percent in Liberia.³² In the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, gaps

are substantial at the tertiary level. They are significant at the secondary level in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

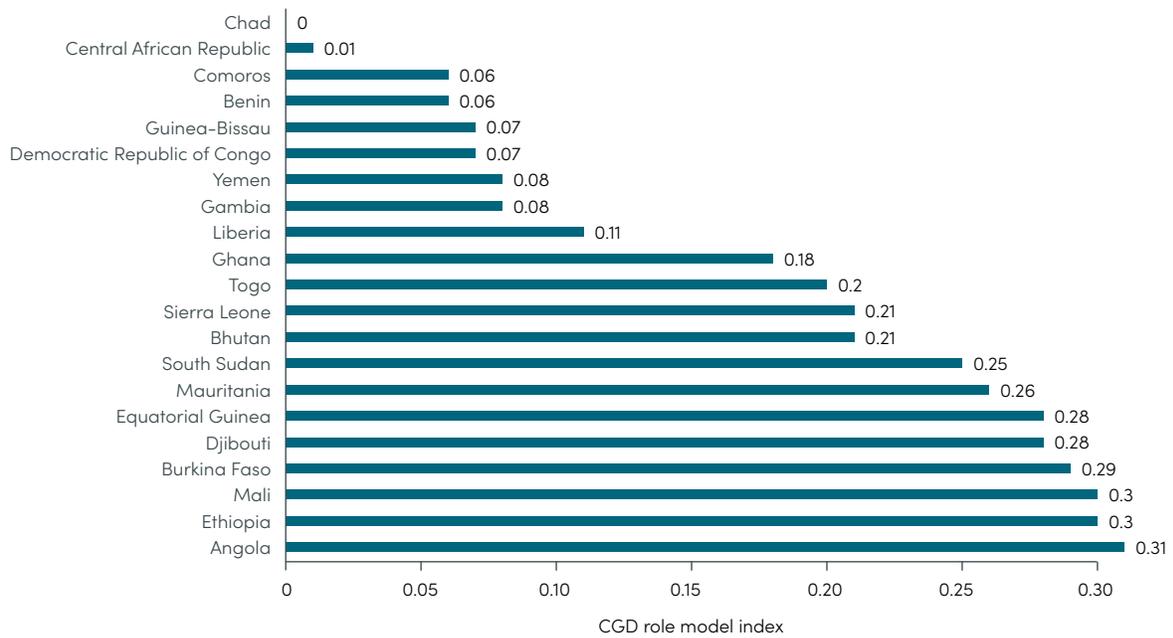
Women are underrepresented in the education workforce in some regions (Figure 5.3). Where they are, students may be missing important female role models. One component of the CGD Girls' Education Policy Index is a role model score made up of the share of women primary teachers, secondary teachers, and public sector workers and whether the country has quotas for women parliamentarians.⁴⁴ Almost all of the 21 countries with the lowest role model scores are in Sub-Saharan Africa (the exception is Yemen) (Figure 5.4).

FIGURE 5.3 Women’s representation in the teaching profession is uneven across regions and levels of education



Source: Authors’ construction based on the World Development Indicators data.⁴⁵

FIGURE 5.4 Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa lack female role models for girls



Source: Authors’ construction based on the CGD Girls’ Education Policy Index.⁴³

Note: The role model index is a composite of the percent of female primary teachers, secondary teachers, public sector workers, and quotas for female parliamentarians. A low score means a small share both across and within the four indicators.

Evidence on the effects of female teachers and other role models on learning and other academic outcomes is mixed.⁴⁶ In India, a role model program in which female leaders acted as mentors for adolescent girls increased educational attainment but had no impact on longer-term labor market participation.⁴⁷ It is unlikely that feminizing the education workforce or introducing role models alone will be the definitive magic bullets for improving education and empowerment outcomes for girls. However, working toward more equal teacher labor markets and ensuring that girls are exposed to strong female role models within both their schools and communities is something that the education sector can do that could help foster more equal aspirations and post-school trajectories.

Early tracking can perpetuate gender bias

Tracking students into different academic programs or classes—a common practice at the secondary level in middle- and high-income countries—can perpetuate gender bias if sorting is uneven across genders. Some education systems track students into classes, programs, or types of schools, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) or academic programs based on ability or interest. If teachers hold gendered perceptions of ability or students have internalized gendered roles, such tracking can lead to gender segregation. If certain tracks are associated with better labor market opportunities, gender imbalances in tracking will also likely contribute to wider gender gaps in employment and other later life outcomes.

The age at which tracking occurs may matter even more than the tracking itself. Evidence indicates that early tracking has a direct effect on the gender test score gap and may increase educational inequality,⁴⁸ whereas later tracking for girls has a positive correlation with test scores, particularly in reading scores.⁴⁹ Gender wage gaps may also shrink as the age of tracking increases, with later sorting by subject and ability possibly improving women's labor market outcomes.⁵⁰ Girls are less likely to end up in women-typical fields in systems with later tracking, in part because early gendered career aspirations are less likely to be translated into final

educational and occupational decisions if girls and young women have more time to formulate career preferences before tracking.⁵¹ The differential impact of tracking across age may be caused in part by the variation in how gender norms are internalized over time. Evidence from the United States shows that girls' perceived math ability and career aspirations do not vary between the start and end of high school; they are more likely to vary when girls are younger.⁵² Tracking by ability or subject can thus both alter skills and shape aspirations by signaling what a child is suited for.

FOUR SETS OF ACTIONS CAN REDUCE GENDER BIAS

Gender bias has proven difficult to eliminate partly because of the many and often subtle ways in which it manifests itself. Combatting gender bias requires efforts extending far outside the sector. Within the sector, some recommendations could make education more inclusive for all students and help girls realize their full potential.

Recommendation area 1: Make school environments safe and accessible for all students

Education cannot empower girls and strengthen societies if school environments are not safe and accessible for all students. It can and should do more to ensure that violence has no place in schools. Three sets of actions are critical:

- ▶ Ensure that students have access to safe transportation routes and that schools and the areas around them are free of physical violence. Doing so will likely require engaging communities and parents and implementing reporting mechanisms to help identify and reduce potential sources of violence in and around schools.
- ▶ Ensure that girls feel comfortable coming to school without fear of sexual harassment, bullying, corporal punishment, or shaming in school, as discussed in Spotlight C.³⁹ Strengthen data collection on these issues, and identify interventions that can help make school environments safer and more welcoming for all students.

- ▶ Equip schools with basic infrastructure, including sufficient space for students and appropriate restrooms. Creating a safe and accessible school infrastructure means not only providing toilets appropriate for girls but also ensuring that restrooms and girls' rooms are stocked with adequate health supplies, including menstrual products, and that all female teachers and students are aware of and encouraged to use these spaces without fear of harm or stigmatization.

Recommendation area 2: Recognize and combat gender bias in schools

Schools and communities must recognize and combat the many forms of gender bias present in and around schools. They must work toward achieving a more equal gender balance in the education workforce across all levels of schooling and supporting teachers, particularly female teachers, to feel empowered within their schools to create more welcoming and empowering environments for all students. Efforts are also needed to help teachers and other education professionals recognize and combat their own biases in the classroom. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has developed a gender-responsive school model that trains teachers to be more gender aware and supports teaching practices that prioritize equal treatment and participation of girls and boys in the classroom and in the wider school community. Programs like FAWE's provide promising avenues for future research.⁵³

Recommendation area 3: Identify and eliminate sources of gender bias in education systems

Gender bias is often systemic and originates from laws, policies, rules, and norms governing learning. Six sets of actions can help identify and eliminate it:

- ▶ Review the content of textbooks and curricula to identify sources of gender bias.
- ▶ Review the ways in which practices such as administering high-stakes exams and charging fees to take them may perpetuate gender inequities in subsequent levels of schooling.

- ▶ Collect more data on the complementary costs of schooling (such as the cost of uniforms, transportation, and materials), and identify groups most likely to be excluded by financial barriers. Progressive cash transfers (conditional or unconditional) and scholarships can help students stay in school.⁵⁴ Targeting girls can lower their drop-out rates. Funds for these instruments can be provided by public or private entities. Future research could focus on ways to leverage public-private partnerships to increase resources to reduce the complementary costs of schooling.
- ▶ Ensure that laws and policies are in place and implemented to re-enroll pregnant girls and young mothers in school. Doing so may require sensitizing teachers, training them to follow through on policy implementation, and/or introducing additional accountability mechanisms to encourage policy adoption and compliance.
- ▶ Hire more female teachers and school leaders in areas where they are underrepresented—including upper grades and STEM subjects in many countries—and give girls access to strong role models. Reviewing recruitment, hiring, training, promotion, and teacher support may be needed to ensure that girls have access to female role models both in and outside of schools.
- ▶ Make policymakers aware of the ways in which system-level practices like tracking may have gendered impacts, and limit tracking to older ages when necessary.

Recommendation area 4: Make empowerment a central—not an additional—goal of schooling

Empowerment should be viewed as part of the academic and learning process rather than an after-school add-on. Programs should define how their activities foster empowerment and complement other activities, as well as be explicit about how activities link to the attitudes, skills, networks, and experiences needed to foster empowerment later in life.

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SPOTLIGHT E

Girls' Education and the Digital Divide

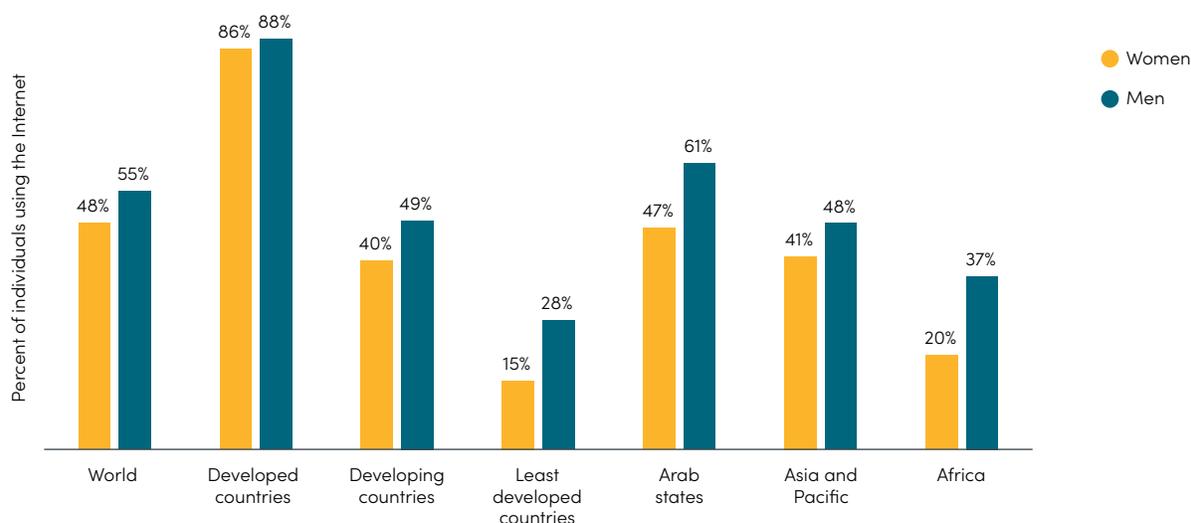
AMINA MENDEZ ACOSTA AND DAVID K. EVANS

Digital technology has transformed business, education, public service, and employment in the past few decades. But the returns to digitalization have been unequal, with gaps along income, location, and gender lines.¹ How can women, especially girls, make the most of the opportunities that digitalization offers? What is the role of education in propagating and overcoming gender divides in digital literacy?

HOW WIDE IS THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE?

Women are less likely to have access to digital resources such as computers, mobile phones, and the Internet, especially in lower-income countries (Figure E.1).² Globally, women are 13 percent less likely than men to access the Internet— a gap of about 250 million women.³ In countries categorized as least developed, the gender gap is even wider, with men almost twice as likely to have access to the Internet than women (28 percent against 15 percent). In low- and middle-income countries, 165 million fewer women than men own mobile phones.⁴

FIGURE E.1 In the least developed countries, women are much less likely than men to use the Internet



Source: Authors construction based on data from UTI, 2019.³



A sharp digital divide also exists by income level and location. People living in developed countries are twice as likely to have access to the Internet as people living in developing countries, and the global share of households using the Internet is twice as high in urban areas as rural areas.³

Even conditional on access, women are more limited in how they use digital resources. Girls report lower confidence in using computers (with similar—likely related—differences in self-efficacy in STEM subjects).⁵ When they own mobile phones, women use a smaller range of services and are less likely to pay for mobile services.⁴ With accelerating mobile banking initiatives and financial inclusion over digital platforms, limited use of mobile phones can hinder economic opportunities for women. In Kenya, for example, men are almost twice as likely to use a mobile microfinance and banking platform called M-Pesa daily than women.⁶ Using M-Pesa increases the likelihood of having access to a formal bank account and improves per capita consumption, especially for women-headed households. Narrowing the gender difference in usage could therefore improve economic development.⁷

Limited usage and low confidence may also lead to underdeveloped digital skills. The gender gap widens as the required competence increases, as evidenced in some high-income countries. Women in a group of high-income countries that includes Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands are 25 percent less likely than men to use basic computer technology such as spreadsheets. In many high-income countries, men are

four times more likely to have advanced computer skills. Globally, women hold just 2 percent of ICT patents.⁸ The gap is evident even among computer science undergraduates in China, India, Russia, and the United States, where men score consistently better than women (albeit only moderately so).⁹ Poverty, age, and educational access interact with gender, with the gap in digital skills wider for older, less educated, and poorer women.¹⁰

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Digital technology offers opportunities to grow businesses, improve job search, connect people with better economic opportunities, and support governments in delivering public services to citizens. These benefits are particularly useful for developing countries and marginalized groups.¹

Reducing the cost of information can improve profit margins, especially in the informal sector. In Niger, for example, farmers reduced the cost of finding good market prices for their crops by half using mobile phones instead of traveling to markets.¹¹ In Peru, access to mobile phones increased household consumption and reduced the incidence of poverty.¹² As women form the bulk of informal workers in most of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, they stand to benefit from lower search costs in finding better opportunities.¹³

Digital skills can also increase wages. In India, the salaries of employees with digital skills are about 10 percent higher

than those without them.¹⁴ In OECD countries, ICT skills yield the highest labor market returns for women.¹⁵ With automation set to change employment opportunities in many areas, workers in developing economies—especially those in labor-intensive industries—will benefit from upgrading their skills.¹⁶

Digital skills may pay off even during schooling. In Italy, Internet skills are positively correlated with academic achievement, especially for children lagging behind and children from poorer backgrounds.¹⁷ In OECD countries, a skill domain called “problem solving in technology-rich

environments” is positively correlated with literacy and numeracy.¹⁸ Whichever way the causality runs, these skills may move together.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS AFFECT THE DIGITAL DIVIDE?

Schools and education systems can propagate gender norms in digital access and ability—or they can help reverse these norms (Table E.1).

TABLE E.1 Potential effects of schools on the gender digital divide

HOW SCHOOLS CAN HURT	HOW SCHOOLS CAN HELP
Teachers can have low expectations of girls.	Effective technology aids in schools can increase girls’ confidence through familiarity and early interaction.
Schools can have few female role models in computer classes or STEM subjects that employ computers.	Gaining access to and benefitting from digital education can support girls in overcoming gender-related barriers.
Gender discrimination can reduce girls’ access to school and, in turn, exposure to technologies	Schools can make access and use of digital resources safer for girls (and all children) at home and at school by providing resources to avoid cyberbullying or exploitation.

Digital illiteracy arises partly from gender discrimination in digital education, which often begins early in school and at home.¹⁹ Gender-biased norms and practices continue to constrain girls from making the most out of education opportunities. Girls face numerous barriers, including biased pedagogical practices (teachers’ low expectations of girls, especially in STEM subjects); gender-based violence; and the limited presence of female role models.⁷ These barriers are particularly steep in developing countries and more conservative environments, such as rural areas—the very areas where Internet connectivity and access to other digital resources is limited. Limited information on returns to education—especially returns to STEM-related education and digital skills—for girls can drive down parents’ already low expectations for girls’ schooling.

SEVERAL ACTIONS CAN HELP NARROW THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE

Recommendation 1: Deploy technology in schools to increase confidence through familiarity and early interaction

Even where they start off with the same (or even a slightly better) level of technology-related ability as boys, girls report lower levels of confidence in their skills, with the difference growing as they enter and progress through secondary school.²⁰ Girls are also more likely to report computer anxiety and low self-worth.²¹

A gender-sensitive school environment that provides ample opportunity and encourages both boys and girls to engage in digital resources can improve their competence and confidence by repeated exposure; it can also improve learning outcomes more generally. Some digital learning programs—including a technology-aided after-school instruction program in India²² and a computer-aided learning platform in Uruguay²³—have improved learning outcomes for both girls and boys.

Recommendation 2: Support girls in overcoming gender-related barriers to digital education

Just getting girls to school and providing access to digital resources is not enough to bridge the gap in skills. In several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, attending school is associated with improved ICT skills, but less so for girls than for boys. In fact, the gender gap in ICT skills is wider among adolescents attending school than among out-of-school adolescents.²⁴ Girls' (and women's) limited financial resources and autonomy can hinder the purchase of digital equipment, such as smartphones and computers. Internet access can be prohibitively expensive in developing regions, especially in rural areas, and investments in girls' education may not be household priorities.²⁵ Girls may also have less free time than boys, because of childcare and domestic responsibilities, further restricting opportunities to tinker and interact with digital resources.

Adolescents with computers at home have higher ICT skills, but just having such equipment is not enough to close the gender gap, as girls benefit less from it—because of

gender norms, parental restrictions, gender gaps in household investments, and/or gender stereotypes.²⁶ Beyond improving access, addressing these barriers is crucial to achieving equity in digital skills.

Recommendation 3: Make access to and use of digital resources safer for girls (and all children) at home and in school

Concerns for girls' safety can limit their engagement online. Girls may be less likely to be allowed to travel longer distances or on unsafe roads to access public facilities, such as computer shops and digital cafes. Threat of online harassment, cyberbullying, and exploitation can also create distrust among adult caregivers, leading them to further limit their access. Even when girls go online, social norms or algorithms may limit or control their digital access by censoring content or promoting websites that focus on women's appearance or domestic roles as mothers and wives. Schools can make sure girls have access to websites that focus on their achievements or their potential as professionals.²⁷

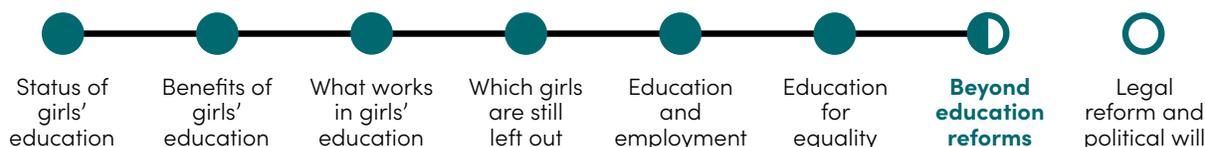
Ensuring children's safety in all environments, including digital ones, can help relax some of the concerns about providing girls with access to digital resources. There is limited experimental evidence on what works to improve safety online and reduce abuse, but resources are becoming available to ensure a safe online learning environment.²⁸ For example, organizations have released child-friendly guidelines for managing risks as they go online and corresponding strategies for parents, industry actors, and policy makers.²⁹

Notes

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What Complementary Policies Are Needed to Improve Outcomes for Girls?

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Educating girls alone is not enough to achieve gender equality in society. Even when men and women have similar levels of education, large gaps remain in wages, employment, unpaid household labor, the experience of violence, and ultimately in well-being.¹

Girls' education has been referred to as a Swiss army knife, because it is a tool for achieving multiple goals.² But achieving many of the promises made of girls' education requires additional reforms or cross-sectoral efforts. Policymakers can focus too much on forward causal inference (does X cause Y?) and too little on reverse causal questions (what are the causes of Y?) or mechanisms (what is the channel through which X causes Y?).³ Education can help achieve gender equality. But just educating girls does not lead to equal opportunities in the labor market, end discrimination at work, or solve issues of gender inequality in society. Changes are also necessary outside the education sector. This section highlights a few of the complementary actions that could help girls' education deliver on its promise of broader gender equity beyond the labor market.

JUST EDUCATING GIRLS WON'T ENSURE EQUAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES OR EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN

Girls' education is not consistently resulting in more equal labor force participation, as Chapter 4 shows. Pay is unequal for many reasons, not all of which are amenable to policy intervention. Many of the factors that shape women's labor force participation are country specific.⁴ Some of these factors are historical (for example, whether or not the plough, which required men's physical upper body strength, was used, affected the roles of men and women in agricultural societies).⁵ But other constraints, including some low-hanging policy fruit, can help narrow gender pay gaps.

Making discrimination illegal can reduce gender gaps in wages

There is substantial variation in policy and legislation supporting equal rights and protections of women.⁶ For example, when it comes to work, just 75 of 187 countries (40 percent) have a policy in place mandating equal remuneration for work of equal value. When laws protect women from

discrimination, pay premiums for education are higher, suggesting that laws and policies protecting women from discrimination may be a necessary condition for education to strengthen gender equity (Figure 6.1).⁷ Many countries also place restrictions on women’s ability to work the same hours or in the same industries as men. Though laws are often far from perfectly implemented, they can still have an effect

in expressing what is considered acceptable.⁸ In most low-income countries the majority of workers are self-employed so equal pay laws would in any case have limited bite. Access to credit though is important for self-employed workers who want to try and grow a business. But 115 countries (62 percent) have no legislation banning discrimination in the allocation of credit (Table 6.1).

TABLE 6.1 Laws restricting women’s access to institutions, property, jobs, courts, and work incentives

ITEM	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	PERCENT OF COUNTRIES
At least one legal restriction on women’s access to institutions, property, jobs, courts, and work incentives.	155	90
No legislation protects against discrimination in access to credit.	115	62
Policy mandates equal remuneration for work of equal value.	75	40
Restrictions on women working in the same industries as men.	72	39
Restrictions on women working in hazardous or “morally inappropriate” industries.	58	31
Law does not mandate nondiscrimination in employment.	41	24
Restrictions on women working the same night hours as men.	28	15

FIGURE 6.1 The pay premium for education is higher in countries with better laws protecting women



Source: Authors’ construction based on data from the Women, Business, and the Law Index, which measures how laws and regulations affect women’s economic opportunity.⁷

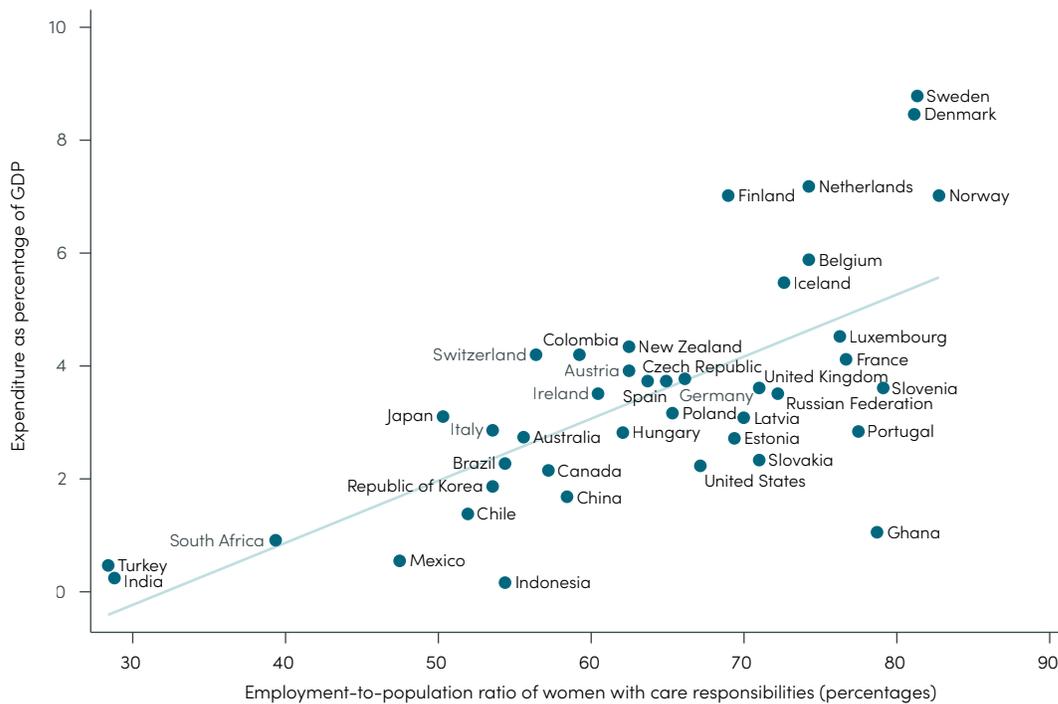
Note: The gap in the education pay premium is the percentage point difference in the labor market return to education for men and women. Scores are calculated by taking the average score of each of the eight areas in the Women, Business, and the Law Index (Going Places, Starting a Job, Getting Paid, Getting Married, Having Children, Running a Business, Managing Assets, and Getting a Pension). The index ranges from 0 to 100.

Subsidizing childcare makes it easier for women to work

Lack of access to childcare has been linked to longer absences from work for women and shifts into lower-paid occupations.⁹ In Indonesia, an additional public preschool per 1,000 children increased women's employment by 9 percentage points.¹⁰ A systematic review found four (quasi-

experimental studies (on Brazil, Ecuador, Kenya, and Nicaragua) that show positive effects of daycare provision on the employment of children's primary caregivers.¹¹ Mothers in South Africa who received child support grants in their 20s were more likely to be employed later on.¹² Across countries, there is a strong correlation between public spending on childcare and women's employment (Figure 6.2).

FIGURE 6.2 The availability of childcare correlates with mothers' employment in middle- and high-income countries



Source: Authors' construction based on household survey data from 41 countries from the International Labor Organization.¹³

Note: Figure shows correlation between employment-to-population share of women with care responsibilities and public expenditure on selected care policies (pre-primary education services; maternity, disability, sickness and employment injury benefits; and long-term care services and benefits).

JUST EDUCATING GIRLS WILL NOT ACHIEVE EQUALITY IN LEADERSHIP

When women are in power, more money gets spent on women's priorities, more women go to work, and more children finish school.¹⁴ Education increases the supply of qualified candidates, but it does not do away with sexist discrimination by voters.¹⁵ Because women often face higher standards than men for entering politics, female politicians are on average better educated than male politicians. Among national leaders globally, women are 6 percentage points more likely to have a postgraduate degree.¹⁶ In Brazil, half of mayors who are women have a college degree, compared with only 33 percent of those who are men.¹⁷ In Italy, half of mayors who are women have a college degree, compared with only 41 percent of men.¹⁸ In Finland, at both the national and municipal levels, female politicians are more likely than male to have higher education.

Gender discrimination plays an important role in keeping women out of leadership positions. A survey across 34 African countries found that only 71 percent of people agree that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.¹⁹ More education can help: The share of people supporting equal chances for women in political office is 11 percentage points higher among people with secondary education than among those who did not complete primary school. But on its own, education will not eliminate gender discrimination.

Using more quotas can bring more women into politics

Minimum quotas for women in politics work (although they should perhaps be reframed as maximum quotas for men). In Italy, they led to better-educated women replacing less-educated men.²⁰ Quotas also led to an increase in educated female candidates in Sweden.²¹ Extensive evidence

Minimum quotas for women in politics work.

from India shows that quotas for women increase women's political engagement,²² change public investment,²³ increase women's reporting of crime,²⁴ and raise girls' aspirations.²⁵ All of these changes are complementary to and mutually reinforcing with investments in girls' education.

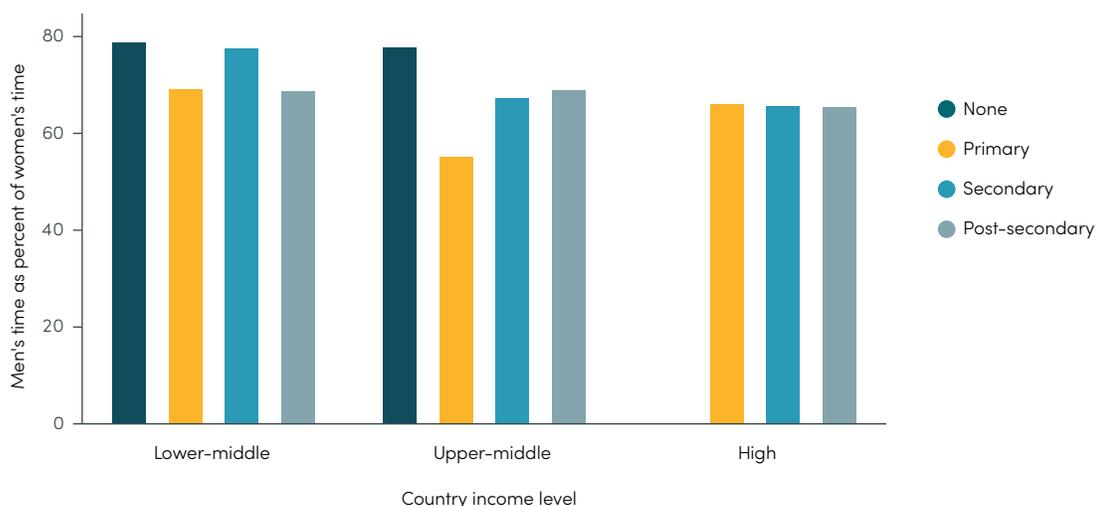
Making political life more family friendly can too

A major constraint to women playing a greater role in politics is unequal domestic responsibilities. Long and anti-social working hours combine with gender norms around unpaid care work to make life in politics more difficult for women.²⁶ Women in Japan are reluctant to stand for office because the long hours required are incompatible with their socially mandated domestic responsibilities.²⁷ Overcoming these challenges requires systemic and normative changes in the distribution of care responsibilities, as well as direct efforts to make politics more family friendly for both men and women to allow for more equal responsibility sharing.

JUST EDUCATING GIRLS WON'T ACHIEVE EQUALITY IN THE HOME

Globally, women spend three times longer than men on unpaid care work (Figure 6.3). This ranges from twice as long in OECD countries to five times longer in low-income countries.²⁸ Women in India spend an average of five hours per day on housework, compared with 90 minutes for men (this also includes the time spent on chores by girls and boys as well as adults).²⁹

FIGURE 6.3 Gender gaps in household work are evident in countries at all income levels and among people at all levels of education



Source: Authors' construction based on data from the 2012 International Social Survey.³⁰

Note: Figure includes times spent on housework and family care. Lower-middle-income countries are India and Philippines. Upper-middle-income countries are Argentina, Bulgaria, China, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Turkey, and Venezuela. High-income countries include 29 countries.

These gaps persist even with more education. In lower-middle income countries, men who completed primary school perform the same share of housework as men who completed tertiary education.

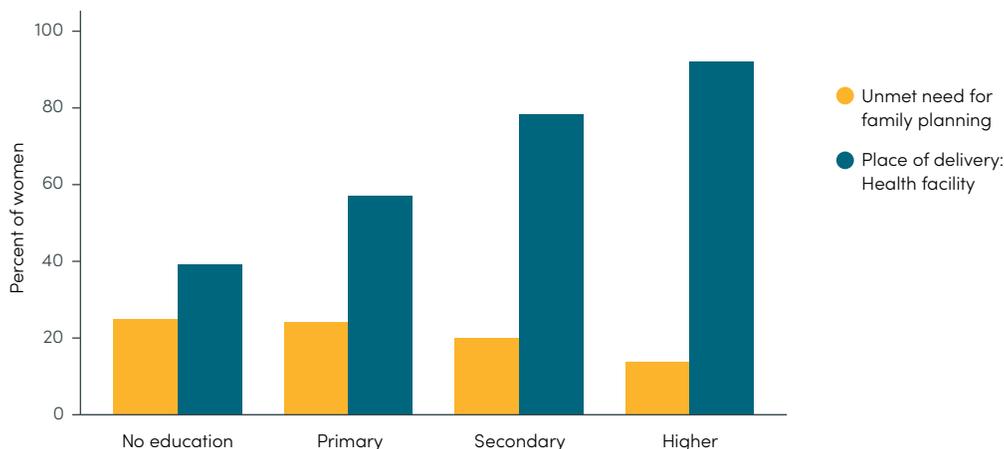
Women with young children are less likely to be working in the labor market, even after adjusting for education.³¹ Policy can help reduce care responsibilities of women, through two broad categories of policy solutions. First, the overall care load can be reduced, through technological advancement, better public services, and support for family planning. Second, the sharing of responsibilities within the household can be reallocated, through changes in gender norms that prescribe who within the household is responsible for earning income outside the home and performing unpaid care activities.

Technology can reduce the overall burden of care work

Women's domestic responsibilities can be eased by improving public services, such as piped water. Better health services can help men and women plan their family size and reduce domestic loads. Effective family planning relies more on demand than supply, however.³² Making contraception available is not enough; norms need to shift, so that men and women choose to use it.

Education can play an important role in increasing demand for reproductive healthcare services (Figure 6.4). Women with more schooling are less likely to have an unmet need for family planning, and more likely to deliver in a health facility.

FIGURE 6.4 Education increases access to reproductive health services



Source: Authors' construction based on data from Demographic and Health Surveys for 87 countries.³³

More equitable sharing of care responsibilities will require changes to norms

Changing social norms around household work is challenging. One way to make a difference is giving girls better role models. When village council positions are reserved for women in India, for example, teenage girls raise their aspirations and spend less time on household chores.²⁵ Another way would be to increase the involvement of boys and men in household work. In India, an intervention that trained adolescents about gender equality increased boys' reporting that they did household chores, although it did not reduce girls' household work.³⁴

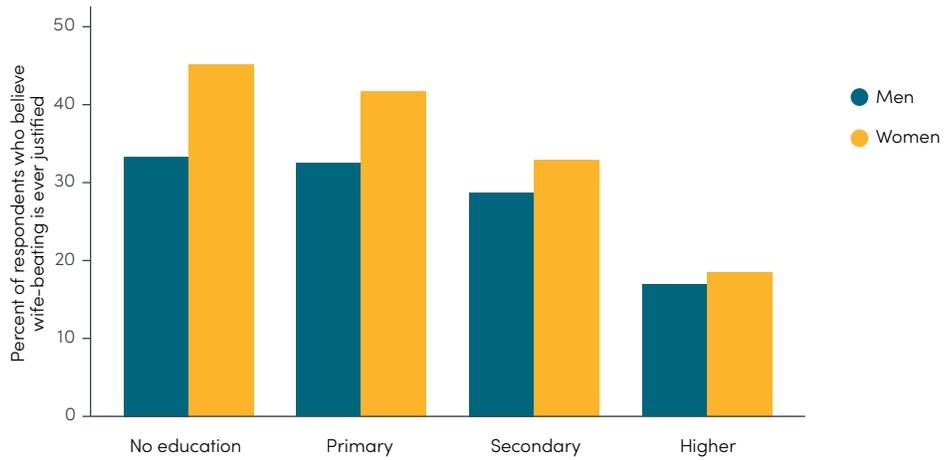
JUST EDUCATING GIRLS WILL NOT END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Sexual assault and harassment are rife in rich and poor countries alike

Girls who attend school face sexual abuse at similar rates as girls who are out of school.³⁵ A quarter of women in developing countries who have completed secondary school have experienced domestic violence—barely less than the 31 percent of women without secondary school.³⁶

Men and women with more education tend to be less accepting of domestic violence. There is a 20 percentage point gap between support for domestic violence between women with no education and women with higher education. But even amongst those with higher education, over 15 percent of both men and women think wife-beating can be justified in some circumstances (Figure 6.5).

FIGURE 6.5 Education reduces support for wife-beating—but even among men and women with higher education, more than 15 percent find it acceptable

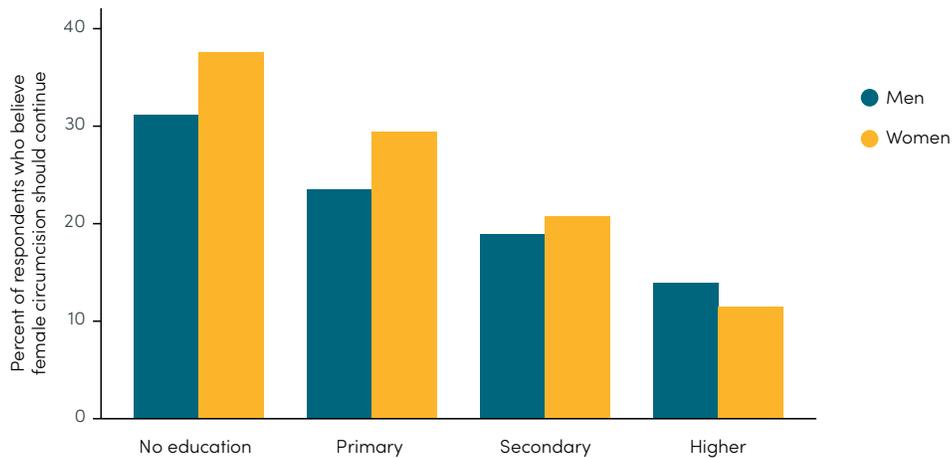


Source: Authors' construction based on data from Demographic and Health Studies for 71 countries.³³

Causal estimates suggest that schooling reduces the chance that women experience physical violence by their partner in Peru, but only by 3 percentage points per year of education, from an average across all women of 39 percent.³⁷ In Sierra Leone, expanded education changed women's attitudes but had no effect on men's attitudes about domestic violence.³⁸

Women and men with more education are less likely to support female genital mutilation, but still 10 percent of both with higher education support it (Figure 6.6), and the causal effect of education is unclear. Evidence from Nigeria indicates that an exogenous (though marginal) increase in education did not reduce support for female genital cutting.³⁹

FIGURE 6.6 Education greatly reduces support for female genital mutilation—but it does not eliminate it



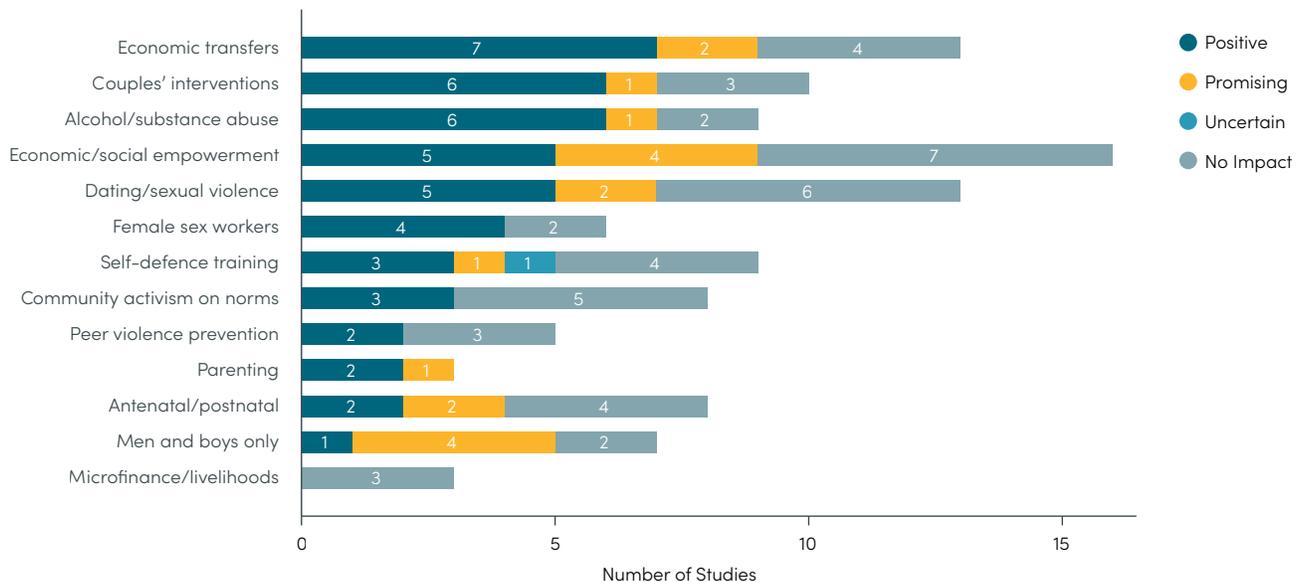
Source: Authors' construction based on data from Demographic and Health Surveys on 24 countries.³³

Policy should target men who commit violence

A recent systematic review of “what works” to reduce violence finds few consistently effective approaches (that have been tested with experimental and quasi-experimental studies).⁴⁰ Economic interventions are particularly promising

(Figure 6.7). Interventions that focus on alcohol and substance abuse, also seem to reduce violence against women. In India, minimum drinking ages are not perfectly enforced, but they are still correlated with reductions in drinking and violence against women.⁴¹ Taxing rather than banning alcohol did not have the same effect on reducing violence.⁴²

FIGURE 6.7 There is no magic bullet for reducing violence against women



Source: Authors' construction based on data from Kerr-Wilson et al. (2020).⁴⁰

There is very little evidence on how to reduce harassment on public transport, a problem that exists almost everywhere.⁴³ Ninety percent of passengers on matatus (mini-buses) in Nairobi have witnessed sexual harassment.⁴⁴ Many countries provide women's-only spaces on public transport—including Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Russia, South Korea, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates.⁴⁵ In Rio de Janeiro, women-only cars reduced harassment in those spaces, but they also increased stigma for women who traveled in the mixed-gender cars.⁴⁶

Even when laws are not perfectly enforced, they can have an “expressive effect”—influencing attitudes, norms, and behavior by “sending a message about society's values.” Female genital mutilation is still legal in 41 countries.⁴⁷

Banning it reduced the practice in Burkina Faso.⁴⁸ Simply telling people about a new law on child marriage reduced it in Bangladesh.⁴⁹

ACTIONS IN FOUR SECTORS CAN HELP GIRLS' EDUCATION DELIVER ON ITS PROMISE

While girls' education holds promise in achieving greater gender equality in society, it alone cannot reduce the gaps that exist in other areas such as employment, wages, unpaid household responsibilities, and experiencing violence. In order for girls' education to deliver on its promise of broader gender equity, policymakers can focus on complementary policies and actions in a variety of sectors.

Recommendation area 1: Implement laws that protect and support women in the labor market

In the labor market, implementing laws that protect women and make discrimination illegal can reduce gender gaps in wages and help increase better access to job opportunities. Countries can also increase women's labor force participation by providing subsidized childcare, allowing women to return to work more quickly after having a child. (See chapter 4 for more recommendations on supporting women in the labor market.)

Recommendation area 2: Make politics more accessible to women

In politics, using quotas has shown to improve the number of female candidates and increase women's political engagement. This increase of women in power may help to shift gender discrimination, though education also plays a role in increasing the share of people who support having women in political office.

Recommendation area 3: Reduce the gap in the time men and women spend on unpaid care work

In order for women to have the time to engage more in the labor market or become involved with politics, the gap between the time men and women spend on unpaid household responsibilities needs to shrink. Using technology to improve public services and improve family planning is one way policymakers can reduce domestic responsibilities for women. However, changing social norms around household and care work will prove to be more difficult, yet important.

Recommendation area 4: End violence against women

Finally, reducing violence against women remains an area where education alone is not enough. Policymakers can work to change the experience of violence that women face by passing laws that target the men who commit violence or using interventions aimed at reducing these experiences.

Notes

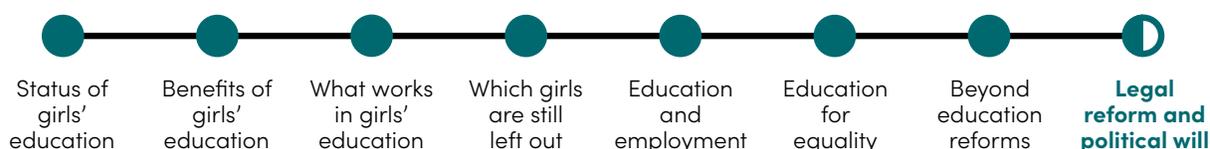
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What Political and Legal Conditions Will It Take to Reform Girls' Education?

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Enacting reform is not simply a matter of grafting solutions onto education systems. Great progress has been made in identifying the policies and programs that have improved girls' schooling. There is now substantial empirical evidence on what works and what needs to be done to roll out successful policies. But politics will shape progress on girls' schooling and gender equality.

Future improvements will hinge on understanding the political contexts in which reforms succeed—and in which they fail. A shift has occurred in the norms around gender-specific rights to education and many countries have enacted legal reforms conducive to greater gender equality. However, politics plays a crucial role in both determining where and when these laws get on the books and whether they translate into meaningful improvements for girls and women. The challenge is in teasing out the conditions that enable or limit the success and reach of reforms.

This section examines the factors that influence whether and how education reform happens. They include the nature of competition between political groups and the role of collaborations between external actors, civil society, and domestic political elites. Together, these conditions create incentives and constraints on the ability to deliver girls' schooling reforms.

If what really matters is gender equality, a narrow conception of girls' schooling is unlikely to be strategic or effective. In most cases, the politics of girls' schooling is the politics of inclusion. It carries a fairly narrow mandate of increasing the number of years in school and improving academic outcomes, not achieving gender equality. Investments geared toward achieving gender equality through education may require very different policies—and sometimes distributing resources unequally to obtain equal results. If the world is to move the needle on girls' later life outcomes, achieving gender equality—not just improving girls' schooling—has to be the goal.

ENORMOUS IMPROVEMENTS IN LEGAL ACCESS HAVE NOT ALWAYS TRANSLATED INTO IMPROVEMENTS FOR GIRLS

Laws are being introduced or amended to improve gender rights in all parts of life

Eliminating gender inequality will require continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake.¹ One form of action

can be to grant legal rights to women, to correct discriminatory laws and constitutions that threaten women's safety, rights, or economic security.

The World Bank's Women, Business and the Law data describe the status of gender equality in laws and regulations globally.² Few laws target education directly, but several categories of laws are linked to factors that have been shown to affect girls' education (Table 7.1). They include the following:

TABLE 7.1 The status of gender equality laws and regulations around the world

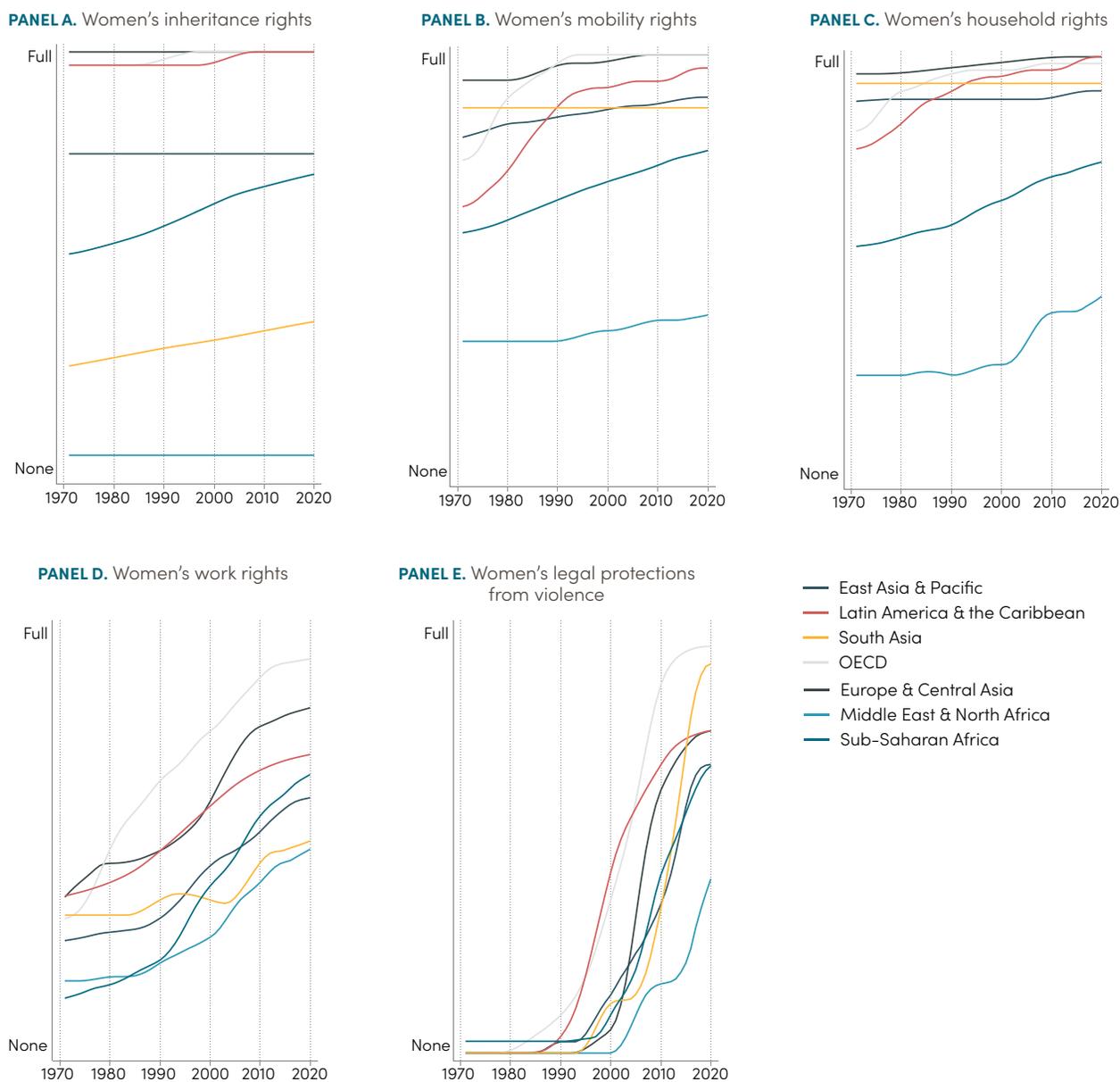
TYPE OF LAW	CHANNELS AFFECTING EDUCATION INCLUDE:
Inheritance	Intergenerational wealth transfers, parental investments, and aspirations for children ³
Mobility	Autonomy, informal networks and support, parental time use ⁴
Decision-making power	Parental roles and parental investments for children ^{5,6}
Employment	Direct incentives to increase educational attainment and economic returns ⁷
Harassment and violence	Increased risk of pursuing education or employment and constrained mobility ⁸

There are four takeaways from the legal landscape presented in the Women, Business and the Law data. First, legal protections of women are by no means universal. Across 13 indicators, women have 77 percent of the legal rights afforded to men. These figures range from 47 percent in the Middle East and North Africa to 84 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean.²

Second, there are large differences across indicator types. Women have more equal rights in household choices and

decision-making power, an area that has been extensively researched, because it directly influences women's well-being and is a means of improving children's outcomes.² But more needs to be done on laws on inheritance (Panel A of Figure 7.1) and work rights (Panel D of Figure 7.1), which may affect parental aspirations and choices for children and the incentives for girls to invest in acquiring higher levels of education.

FIGURE 7.1 Gender-equal legal protections in various domains increased between 1970 and 2020



Source: Authors' construction based on data from the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law database.²

Third, most laws in most regions have become more gender equal, particularly since the early 1990s, with substantial differences in the rate of change across law types and regions. Protections against violence increased the most, rising rapidly since 1990, reflecting growing international recognition that culminated in the Beijing Platform for Action.⁹ Progress has been slower or stagnant in closing gaps in mobility rights, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa.

Fourth, regional differences persist. The Middle East and North Africa ranks as the lowest region in the world for women's rights and employment. Even in places where laws and policies are in place in this region, such as Jordan, implementation remains challenging (Box 7.1). Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia rank low in some but not all dimensions. Latin America and the Caribbean is a consistently high performer and has shown the fastest progress in most domains since 1970.

BOX 7.1: EQUAL EDUCATION IN JORDAN HAS NOT LED TO GENDER EQUALITY

Jordan has made strides in achieving parity for girls. By 2020, girls' primary enrollment was nearly equal to boys, and it exceeded boys' enrollment at both the secondary and tertiary levels. And these patterns are not new. A 1999 OECD learning assessment highlighted a "reverse gender achievement gap" in favor of girls in Jordan.

Despite 20 years of gender parity in education, Jordan ranked 138th out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap report, and just 15 percent of women (compared with 54 percent of men) were active in the labor force in 2020. Why, despite progress in girls' educational participation and attainment, is Jordan unable to narrow the overall gender gap?

Over the past two decades, Jordan has undertaken a series of legislative reforms in an attempt to address the gap. It updated its social security law, labor law, and civil service system in an effort to mitigate some of the barriers women face, and it made employment more economically viable for women.

But the gap between policy and implementation remains wide. Although decision-makers in Jordan nominally support reform efforts, political elites and weak accountability mechanisms mean that these policies are often not enforced.

A class of political elites actively hinders reform efforts. The persistence of their power reflects

the use of *wasta* (loosely, nepotism), vote-buying by candidates, and the doling out of favors and exceptions to laws to supporters by politicians. Connected business owners can bypass legal requirements such as childcare provision, and jobs are awarded outside civil service processes. Political elites may also resist women's representation, in a cultural context that has been described as institutionalized patriarchy.

Local civil society organizations, such as the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD), and gender-based labor coalitions, such as Tahalof Haqq, play key roles in advocating for gender equity. But the Arab Spring influx of refugees from Syria and the COVID-19 pandemic have diverted government resources and attention. Elites have capitalized on these crises to position themselves as proponents of stability, cautioning citizens and international partners that Jordan's position of relative calm could easily be threatened by overly ambitious reforms.

Jordan's case illustrates that, without broader efforts to confront gender-based labor market barriers and consideration of political factors, measures aimed at improving girls' education will remain insufficient.

Source: Dhingra et al., 2022.¹⁰

Constitutions reflect a shift in the global norm on gender-specific rights to education

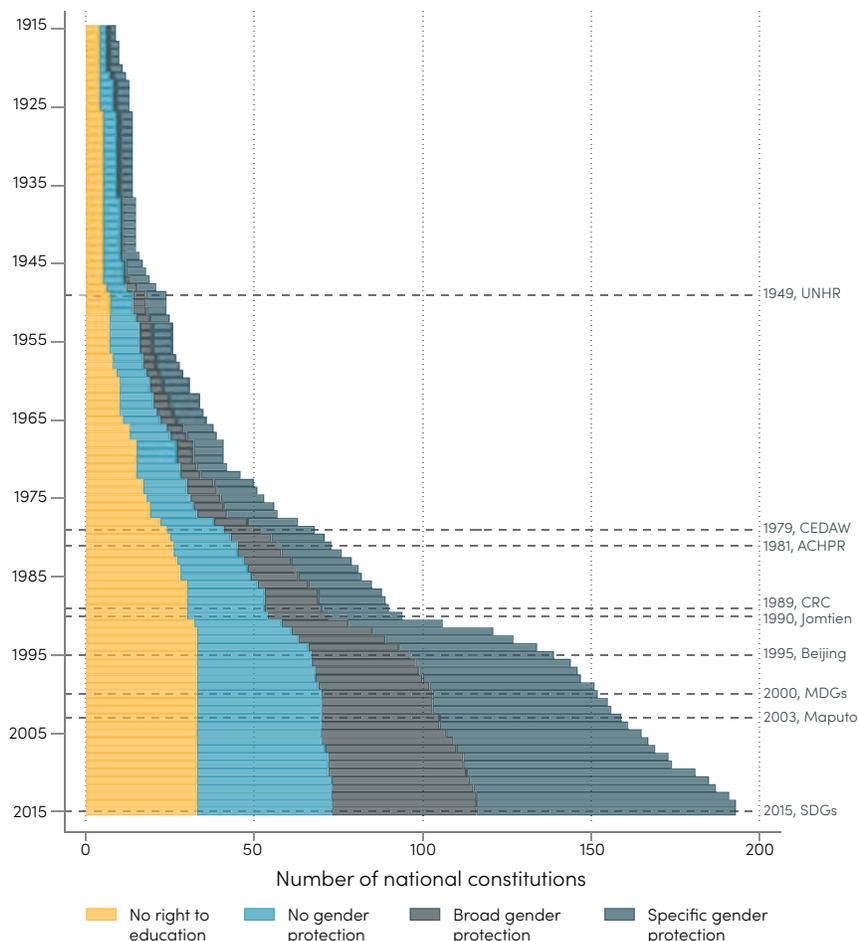
Alongside laws, constitutional arrangements institutionalize the rights and privileges of citizens, including those guaranteed to women. The forces shaping constitutional rules—the experience of other democracies, international laws,¹ and academic thinking—have shifted over time.¹¹ These changes affect domestic policymaking via standards for domestic legislation and the mobilization of civil society around shared expectations of behavior.¹²

In the timing and content of constitutions, we can see a global shift in norms on gender-specific rights to education (Figure 7.2). There was rapid growth in the passing of constitutions in the 1990s and 2000s, a period in which a wave of international agreements sought to protect girls' and women's rights, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Among today's high-income countries, 44 of 61 had a constitution before 1990. In contrast, 24 of 29 low-income countries ratified a constitution after 1990. Constitutions drawn up more recently are much more likely to guarantee children's rights to education regardless of gender. Of

1 The UN Treaty Body Database shows how countries are held to account as signatories of conventions and how global priorities have advanced over time.

the 99 constitutions drawn up since 1990, 80 include equal gender protections for education—twice the proportion that included such protections up to 1990.

FIGURE 7.2 The number and share of national constitutions that protect the right to education regardless of gender has increased



Source: Authors' construction based on data from the World Policy Analysis Center.

Note: UNHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights; CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; ACHPR: African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights; CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child; Beijing: Beijing Platform for Action; MDGs: Millennium Development Goals; Maputo: Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals.

National education plans reflect norms on girls' education and gender roles

Education plans provide a sector-specific snapshot of the way governments conceptualize and communicate their objectives for girls' education. In recent years, governments have been under increasing pressure to provide credible and relevant policies that align with international goals.

The picture emerging from national education plans aligns with the international push through the 1990s and coordination around global norms on girls' schooling and gender equality. Plans emphasize girls' education through the use of women's gender nouns and terms associated with girls' education and gender equality. Terms that relate to gender equality in adulthood, social norms, and labor market participation also appear frequently. Kenya's plans show a marked increase in women's gender nouns and terms that relate to longer-term economic and social outcomes over

the past decade. The increase may reflect growing interest in the longer-term impacts of education, particularly gender equality in adulthood. For instance, the National Education Sector Strategy Plan (2018–22) discusses “equity and inclusion in science technology and innovation” training as a basis for supporting equal labor market outcomes for men and women.

Legal protections and progressive policies often fail to translate into better outcomes for women and girls

Laws typically affirm what is already considered acceptable (or unacceptable) within a society. But new laws can also change outcomes. Evidence suggests that laws can incentivize specific behaviors and improve gender equality.¹³ Attitudes may also change in response to a law, because of respect for laws or because changed behavior leads to changed attitudes.¹⁴ For instance, legal reforms in Ethiopia gave stronger property rights to women, positively affecting schooling investments for girls.¹⁵ In another example, reform of the Hindu Succession Act in India, which expanded daughters’ inheritance rights, significantly increased the likelihood of daughters inheriting land.¹⁶

The passage of law does not ensure equal opportunity, however. Where laws and policies deviate from norms, enforcement may be weak and implementation may suffer. On paper, for example, most countries provide women with some degree of legal protection against violence, but violence remains pervasive and enforcement of laws is weak.¹³ Constitutional protections appear to make little difference, with no evidence that the inclusion of social rights in political constitutions affects social performance.¹⁷

POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS OFTEN SHAPE THE WAY POLICIES AFFECT OUTCOMES

One reason for the disconnect between laws and constitutions on the one hand and gender equality on the other is the fact that political and institutional conditions shape the way

laws and policies are implemented and enforced. The way decisions around girls’ education are made in Guatemala will be very different from the ways the same types of decisions are made in Ghana. As a result, cross-country analyses that look at political conditions alongside education policies or outcomes tend not to find universal links.^{18,19} Examining the political context provides a key to understanding why similar types of girls’ education or gender equality reforms can lead to quite different outcomes across countries.²⁰

A natural starting point is to consider the nature of country’s political regime. Loosely, this is where a country sits on the scale from autocracy to democracy, which will influence the level of political competition and the potential for citizens to hold the state to account for service delivery.²¹ But knowledge of the regime goes only so far. A more complete picture of how the state functions requires an understanding of the nature of institutions. Some institutions operate according to the rule of law, with strong monitoring and enforcement arrangements; others operate based on a more personalized logic.²² These differences affect the extent of openness, the flow of information, and the operation of civil society.

The interaction between these two characteristics—democracy/autocracy and rule of law versus more personalized arrangements—determines the incentives and constraints decision makers face, including which constituencies they respond to and how. They set the political boundaries on the kinds of gender-progressive reform that may be possible.²³ Understanding these characteristics can inform the reform strategies governments follow, how they are implemented, the planning horizon, and so on.

Three snapshots of inclusive and gender-specific reform episodes illustrate the importance of the political context. In the first, the broad influence of democracy versus autocracy on planning and policy implementation does not have a consistent relationship with the extent to which girls’ education and gender equity are prioritized. In the second, the interactions between external actors and the domestic political elite in negotiating reform can shape whether and how education reforms are developed and implemented. In

the third, differences in political conditions, incentives, and norms across sectors and levels of government may dictate and differentially shape reform possibilities.

Autocracies are not always worse than democracies at implementing reforms

Democracy does not guarantee better gender equity. In Botswana, a multiparty democracy, quota campaigns have

raised awareness, but women's parliamentary representation remains low.²⁴ In Rwanda, an authoritarian state, a constitutional gender quota has resulted in a majority female lower house of parliament—the only such parliament in the world (Box 7.2). Many such examples exist, suggesting that a democratic state is not necessarily more likely to adopt gender quotas or have more women in parliament than a less democratic state and that other factors are more important in determining both.

BOX 7.2: RWANDA'S "DOMINANT DEVELOPMENTAL" POLITICAL SETTLEMENT HAS PRIORITIZED GENDER EQUALITY

Broadly speaking, dominant party regimes maintain a high degree of control and impose top-down discipline.²⁵ The relative stability of such a regime can allow the state to engage in longer-term planning.

Although dominant frameworks offer some clear advantages to advancing policy agendas, they face some inherent challenges, too.²⁶ In particular, a ruling party like the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) can bypass the checks and balances found in more competitive states.

Top-down directives and initiatives have been a challenge in Rwanda's education sector. Several major initiatives and directives have been introduced outside of the country's strategic planning processes. The most prominent example is several sudden changes to the language of instruction used in primary schools from Kinyarwanda to English. Sudden changes in the language of instruction mandated from the top—that are not consistent with longer-term strategic plans—can create problems for the education sector, teachers, and students.

Dominant parties can also push pro-reform and equity-focused agendas with fewer barriers than more participatory states may face. Since the RPF took power, Rwanda's political settlement has aligned its decision-making around girls' education with broader national priorities concerning social and economic development. Education policies focused

on girls have benefitted from incentives that were at the core of the ruling party's ideology.

This top-level commitment to equity has paid off. Rwanda was one of the first countries in the world to meet its commitments for universal access and gender equity, as set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Rwanda's policies also align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Girls currently outnumber boys in primary and secondary school, and over the last several years, they have outperformed boys on their primary school leaving examinations.²⁷

These achievements underscore the pivotal influence of elite support in Rwanda's political settlement, the centrality of gender in social and economic development, and the gender focus across different ministries. Reform of girls' education involved multiple actors beyond the education sector, including key politicians, international organizations, and women-led civil society organizations that focused on the transformative power of gender equality.

Rwanda's rapid progress in improving access and achieving parity are instructive. But part of its success may be attributable to the government's focus on quantifying its development achievements, which may hide differences in quality or other manifestations of inequality.

Source: Williams, 2022.²⁸

External actors, civil society, and domestic political elites need to collaborate

The individuals and organizations that influence policy priorities vary across countries and political systems. In Jordan, limited democracy and constrained operating space for civil society ensure that political elites retain power (see Box 7.1). In this kind of context, political challenge is restricted, civil society is marginalized, and monitoring opportunities for citizens are limited. As a result, legal reforms in Jordan are often donor driven, even when local communities and organizations make the same demands. For example, the National Commission of Pay Equity—a group that works to achieve equal pay between women and men in Jordan—has been asking for changes to labor laws since 2014, with much resistance from the government. In 2019, donors began to jointly advocate for these changes, which were finally enacted, prompting the head of the commission to note that “there is no price for not hearing local communities demands—there is though, for not responding to the donor requests.”¹¹ However, although joint donor and civil society approaches can influence policy change, monitoring implementation will remain restricted without transparency and stronger civil society protections.¹¹

In contrast, in Ghana’s more democratic environment, strong domestic consensus emerged around the design of an inclusive social protection program, because it provided opportunities for patronage.²⁹ The domestic coalition, in turn, constrained donor influence. Despite donor preferences, the influence of clientelism was strong, with decisions about beneficiaries driven more by geography than extreme poverty. These examples highlight the complex ways in which the policy influence of actors varies across contexts.

Political incentives may differ across sectors and policy type

Incentives and constraints to action will also differ depending on the sector and nature of the proposed reform. A comparative analysis of gender-sensitive reforms in Uganda contrasts the implementation of a domestic violence law



with the focus on girls’ education under the universal primary education policy.³⁰ It argues that good progress on universal primary education—an “ameliorative” policy that seeks to improve female access to development—reflects its close alignment with dominant interests and the ideas of the ruling coalition. The convergence between the interests and ideas of the president, powerful donors, and the leading party’s core constituency of poor rural people meant that the policy had the strongest possible political backing.

In contrast, the eventual passage but weak implementation of a domestic violence law suggests that the dynamics of Uganda’s political settlement may facilitate short-term policy dividends but do so in ways that limit progress on gender equality in the long term. Successful advocacy efforts were led by the Uganda Women’s Network, which includes women’s civil society organizations and international organizations working to bring on board powerful religious and traditional actors. In the end, however, the overarching ideas that the bill became associated with were not concerned with women’s rights per se, but were reframed to be nonthreatening to men’s interests and based on the development benefits of tackling domestic violence.³¹

MOVING THE NEEDLE REQUIRES CHANGING THE FOCUS FROM GIRLS' SCHOOLING TO GENDER EQUALITY

The educational access-vs-learning debate is instructive when thinking about the political economy of girls' education and gender equality. Sometimes access-oriented reforms are perceived as easier to achieve than quality-oriented reforms. Strengthening access can gain political support from parents who get new schools and unions that gain new members.³² Expanding access is also quickly visible, increasing political incentives for these reforms, and policy options are supported by a large body of evidence.³³ But unless they lead to gains in learning, many will argue that these popular reforms don't represent much progress.³⁴

There is a useful parallel between access versus quality on the one hand and the goals of girls' education versus gender equality on the other. Girls had less access to education than boys; a strong inclusion agenda increased their access.

However, equalizing girls' schooling outcomes is very different from providing an educational experience that can drive gender equality in adulthood. Much like quality-oriented reforms, the goal of gender equity—a social goal more than an educational one—requires different policies, which are less visible, often more politically contentious, and about which much less is known.³⁵

The pursuit of gender equality places different demands on the policy negotiation and implementation process. Social outcomes are monitored outside the education sector, in government and society at large, and they often move very slowly. Education ministries are responsive to education concerns. But reaching education goals can mask persistent gender inequities in other areas and can limit further progress in the sector and beyond (Box 7.3). In Uganda and Zambia, for example, reforms aimed at protecting pregnant girls and women were designed and implemented with education and development priorities, rather than the rights and well-being of girls in mind. They ended up undermining the primary objective of protecting girls (see Chapter 5).

BOX 7.3: GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION OUTCOMES MASKS BROADER ISSUES OF GENDER INEQUALITY

A nation-building consensus may lead to basic education for all being prioritized, even at the expense of education quality, in order to integrate groups into the state.³⁶ Conversely, elites seeking long-term economic growth may focus on creating a cadre of well-educated scientists and engineers rather than on good-quality basic education for all. Political arrangements and educational choices in Thailand offer interesting insights on the latter approach.

The 1990 Jomtien conference put Thailand on the map as a country on the way to Education for All. Today, Thai girls and boys complete the same number of years of school, women's tertiary enrollment rates are higher than men's, and girls have better test scores than boys.³⁷

Education, gender, and class interact when one looks at the politics of representation in Thai society.

Girls' education was prioritized by royal classes from the beginning, even though it was confined to upper class families in Bangkok. Highly educated women in Thailand are visible in the public sphere and in conventionally male-dominated areas, such as medicine and engineering (although women represent only 30 percent of professionals in science and engineering).

Stellar education statistics and elite female representation obscure underlying discrimination that drives social exclusion and prevents gender equality. This includes sexual harassment in schools, weak implementation of the Teenage Pregnancy Act, and biases that pervade the curriculum.³⁸ In a study of gender representation in 538 textbooks, boys appear more often than girls and girls are often shown as belonging to a lower social class than boys. These norms adversely affect the self-esteem and

worldviews of girls who may eventually come to hold positions of leadership.³⁹

Another unintended consequence of educational progress is that girls or women's issues are relegated to the Department of Women's Affairs. The siloed culture in Thai bureaucracy disempowers, rather than empowers, women's issues, which end up circulating among a limited number of policymakers.

Cases of poor women, marginalized women, sexually harassed women, and pregnant teens are inconsistent with the picture that statistics on Thailand suggest. A more comprehensive and inclusive outlook is needed to analyze and understand girls' education in Thailand. A policy that embraces diversity and inclusion would take into account the girls and women who do not conform to the norms of the Thai state, society, and its culture.

Source: Lao, 2022.⁴⁰

Progress on gender equality may in fact require less of the same. In some instances education resources may need to be distributed unequally in order to obtain equal, non-educational, results. Progress toward gender equality may require, for example, the "oversupply" of girls' schooling relative to boys' or other forms of affirmative action.⁴¹ Changes to education services—such as overcoming biased teaching practices, which propagate social norms—may advance broader social goals even if they do not result in measurable changes to narrowly defined education outcomes. Investing in programs in which outcomes are difficult to measure may raise challenges for education spending. For example, when policymakers are faced with difficult tradeoffs, they may see it as inefficient to invest in activities that do not yield easily identified results within the sector.⁴²

If gender equality is the goal, narrow conceptions of girls' education are not likely to be strategic. Extensions of the girls' inclusion agenda contain calls for girls to receive at least 12 years of quality education.⁴³ But this approach fails to shift the emphasis from equal schooling to gender equality. Without a change in emphasis, education officials may lack the incentives to advance nothing other than easily

measurable educational access and learning goals.⁴⁴ In Ethiopia, for example, one in four education stakeholders has been described as holding narrow views on gender equality.⁴⁵ Officials in Addis Ababa are cited as describing "no problems related to gender disparity" given that "in the schools we have a greater number of girls than boys." From a gender equality viewpoint this is incomplete, but Addis Ababa does have considerably higher enrollment among girls than among boys. The problem, it seems, is not that girls' education is insufficiently prioritized, but that girls' education is an incomplete objective.

If gender equality does take priority in political and policy discourse and become the goal, education stakeholders can look past equal schooling attainment to the wider social objective. Doing so would open space for transformational reforms that they can contribute to. Cross-sectoral collaboration and information sharing are needed. They demand deeper knowledge and analysis of domestic political and institutional arrangements. Understanding how to navigate each political context will be increasingly important if gender equality is to reach the political agenda and translate into improvements for girls.

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