



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

From access to empowerment

UNESCO strategy for gender equality  
in and through education 2019-2025

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## UNESCO Education Sector

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education and the Education Sector provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with a special focus on gender equality and Africa.



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Education  
Sector

## The Global Education 2030 Agenda

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



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# Foreword

Education lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda and is crucial for its overall success. Not only is education first and foremost a fundamental right, it is a force for economic, social and political transformation. It has the power to create a more just, prosperous and inclusive world for us all.

It is only through education that people of all ages can acquire the knowledge and skills to adapt to the changes that are affecting all of our societies – demographic, climatic and technological, to name but a few. Girls' and women's education has the power to save lives, stimulating multiplier effects that reduce poverty, maternal and infant mortality, and early marriage.

Despite progress in recent decades to expand access to education, more is needed. We must change the scale and our level of ambition to achieve the promise of universal quality education that empowers learners for life, work and leadership.

UNESCO, the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is launching this strategy to articulate the transformative thinking and action we feel is needed to achieve gender equality in and through education, and our own

strategic investments towards 2025 to realise this transformation.

The challenges are clear. Gender bias still permeate the entire education system in some settings and is often perpetuated rather than questioned. This includes the absence of women as leaders in textbooks, to differential expectations of boys and girls by teachers, to school policies that put pregnant girls at the door rather than respecting, protecting and fulfilling their right to education.

This Strategy focuses on system-wide transformation to benefit all learners and targeted interventions to support girls' and women's empowerment. It offers three clear lines of action: better data to inform action for gender equality in and through education, better legal, policy and planning frameworks to advance rights, and better teaching and learning practices to empower.

The Strategy will guide UNESCO's programmes and actions to achieve our vision, with the translation of our goals into vital societal gains, enabling girls and women, men and boys, to realize their rights and potential in and through education.



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

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# Introduction

## **Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a sustainable, peaceful and prosperous world.**

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a standalone goal (Sustainable Development Goal 5 - SDG 5) and is inextricably linked to SDG 4 on ensuring the right to inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning.

The 2030 Agenda envisions a world 'of universal respect for human rights and human dignity... and of equal opportunity, permitting the full realization of human potential,'<sup>1</sup> a world where all countries adopt approaches that ensure that 'girls and boys, women and men, not only gain access to and complete education cycles, but are empowered equally in and through education.'<sup>2</sup>

Ensuring not only equal access, but equal empowerment in and through education, requires transformative thinking and action. This includes the essential first step of ensuring gender parity, or equal numbers and proportions of girls and boys, in enrolment and completion at different levels of education, but it is much more than that. It requires the unleashing of the full of power of education to tackle the unequal power relations, social norms, discriminatory practices and belief systems that underpin gender inequality and exclusion in society. It is an education that considers the needs, interests and lived experiences of all learners, and which tackles the intersecting and simultaneous disadvantages that may inhibit any child, youth or adult from fully exercising their right to participate in, complete, and benefit from education.

This Strategy has been developed to articulate UNESCO's contribution to realizing this transformative agenda.

It builds on our longstanding commitment to gender equality,<sup>3</sup> and lessons learned from decades of support to advance gender equality in, to and through education.<sup>4</sup> It capitalizes on

our added value and comparative advantages, including our:

- ▶ expertise in education at all levels (from early childhood through to adult education) and delivery modalities (including formal, non-formal and informal education);
- ▶ global convening power, including as the United Nations' (UN) specialized agency for education entrusted to lead, coordinate and monitor the SDG 4-Education 2030 agenda;
- ▶ ability to leverage and promote cooperation across disciplines and sectors, drawing on our major programmes in education, science, culture and communication and information;
- ▶ privileged relationships with ministries of education, as the only UN agency with a global network of national cooperating bodies in 193 countries;
- ▶ capacity to generate and share knowledge, including through the UNESCO Institute for Statistics' mandate as the official source of cross-nationally comparative data on education;
- ▶ ability to strengthen education ministries' institutional capacities to plan and manage their education systems.

The Strategy was drafted through wide consultation and is aligned with other UNESCO institutional programmatic frameworks,<sup>5</sup> and strategic documents focusing on education,<sup>6</sup> gender equality,<sup>7</sup> youth,<sup>8</sup> small island developing states<sup>9</sup>, and UNESCO's global priority Africa<sup>10</sup> as well as other UN requirements<sup>11</sup> and normative frameworks.<sup>12</sup> It will guide UNESCO's programmes, actions and allocation of resources needed to achieve its goals. It will also promote coherence and collective action and strengthened partnerships with those committed to ensuring gender equality in and through education by 2030.

# Strategy at a glance



## Rationale

### **Considerable progress has been made in expanding access to education in recent decades and particularly in school enrolment at primary level.**

Gender parity, or equal numbers and proportions of girls and boys, has been achieved globally, on average, in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. However, averages mask continuing disparities by education level and region. In some regions, only about two-thirds of countries have achieved gender parity in primary, half in lower secondary and a quarter in upper secondary education. In the poorest countries, girls make up a much larger share of those who will never go to school. In other countries, boys are at greater risk of failing to progress and complete their education.<sup>13</sup> Progress for the most marginalized is far too slow, and many never gain the basic skills to read and write (see Box 1).

There is a much longer road to achieving empowerment and gender equality in and through education. Gender bias and gender-based discrimination still permeate the entire education process in far too many settings, and education systems often perpetuate rather than challenge gender inequalities. This is embodied in the teaching and learning process, including differential engagement, expectations and interactions by teachers with their male and female students, as well as gender stereotypes in textbooks and learning materials. Inadequate resources and infrastructure to ensure safe and enabling learning environments, and insufficient policy, legal and planning frameworks, linked to enforcement measures, that respect, protect and fulfil the right to education, are too often the norm.

Education has enormous potential to challenge and transform unequal social and gender relations, norms and practices, and to foster the acceptance of gender equality as a fundamental value and human right. Safe, high-quality learning environments that actively engage girls and boys, women and men in the critical

examination of gender inequalities, and whole school approaches that address the wider school environment and its community, can help to promote sustainable change.<sup>14</sup>

As enrolment continues to increase globally, we must harness this transformative potential. This requires accelerated political will, innovations and strategic investments in approaches that address the structural barriers and root causes of gender inequalities, including discriminatory social norms, attitudes and practices. It calls for education systems that promote gender equality in all aspects of education delivery, from national policies and plans, to teacher recruitment and training, to curriculum, textbooks and learning materials, and the learning environment.

Efforts to promote gender equality must start early, as children begin to understand the concept of gender between the ages of three and seven,<sup>15</sup> and gendered stereotypes also influence children's self-perceptions and interests from this age.<sup>16</sup> Adolescence, and early adolescence in particular, presents another window of opportunity for education, as, at this age, there are strong social pressures for boys and girls, and those who do not fit into binary notions of gender, to conform to existing gender norms.<sup>17</sup> It is also a period often marked by an increase in restrictions placed on girls and greater independence afforded to boys, both of which can impact on participation in education.

In many parts of the world, progress towards gender equality also requires complementary and collective action beyond education to promote girls' and women's rights and empowerment due to the institutional, societal, political and legal barriers that have historically affected their ability to fully participate in, complete, and benefit from education. This includes special attention to women and girls

facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as those due to ethnicity, disability or migratory and indigenous status.

Girls' education has been found to yield not only individual but also broader societal benefits.<sup>18</sup> When girls are educated, their lives, the lives of their children, families, communities and countries improve. Health, education, social, economic and leadership prospects increase while vulnerability to poverty, disease, exploitation and violence decreases.<sup>19</sup> Improving educational outcomes for boys also supports their smooth transition to productive employment and active participation in social life and helps to build a more equal society.

It is with this in mind that UNESCO launches its two-pronged approach to accelerate action towards gender equality in and through education, focusing on system-wide transformation to benefit all learners, and targeted interventions to support girls' and women's empowerment.

**When girls are educated,  
their lives, the lives  
of their children, families,  
communities and countries  
improve.**



### Box 1 Snapshot of persistent gender inequalities in education

- ▶ 15 million girls and 10 million boys will never set foot in a classroom.<sup>20</sup>
- ▶ Refugee girls are half as likely as their male counterparts to be in secondary school.<sup>21</sup>
- ▶ Two-thirds of the 750 million illiterate adults are women, a proportion unchanged since 1976, the earliest date available for the world total.<sup>22</sup>
- ▶ 152 million children, mostly boys, are trapped in child labour, with significant impacts on education.<sup>23</sup>
- ▶ 650 million girls and women are married before age 18,<sup>24</sup> most often meaning an abrupt end to their education.<sup>25</sup>
- ▶ 246 million children are subjected to gender-based violence in and around schools every year.<sup>26</sup>
- ▶ 328 million boys and 290 million girls are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading at the end of lower secondary education.<sup>27</sup>
- ▶ Nearly 1 billion girls and women lack the skills to succeed in rapidly changing job markets.<sup>28</sup>
- ▶ Women make up only 35% of higher education students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).<sup>29</sup>

# UNESCO's vision

**UNESCO's vision is of a world where gender equality in and through education is achieved, assuring girls and boys, women and men equal rights and opportunities for empowerment, and the power and agency to shape their lives and futures.**

Guided by this vision and in line with UNESCO's mandate, the Strategy will drive action towards the attainment of the SDGs, and particularly SDG 4, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment. The Strategy considers the entire education process, at all levels and delivery modalities, with a view to ensure equality in:

- ▶ access, including equal representation of boys and girls, men and women, at all levels and in different aspects of education;
- ▶ the learning experience through gender-transformative teaching and learning content, processes and environments, and policies, plans and resources that support equality;
- ▶ educational outcomes, including the translation of education into broader societal gains, such as participation in public life and decision-making, access to decent work and resources, and autonomy.

## The Strategy has two objectives:



Strengthen education systems to be gender-transformative and promote gender equality



Empower girls and women through education for a better life and better future

## And three thematic priorities:



Better data to inform action



Better legal, policy and planning frameworks to advance rights



Better teaching and learning practices to empower

UNESCO recognizes that gender interacts with other characteristics such as age, ethnicity, wealth, status, ability, geographical location, and sexual orientation, and that there is diversity in gender identity and expression.

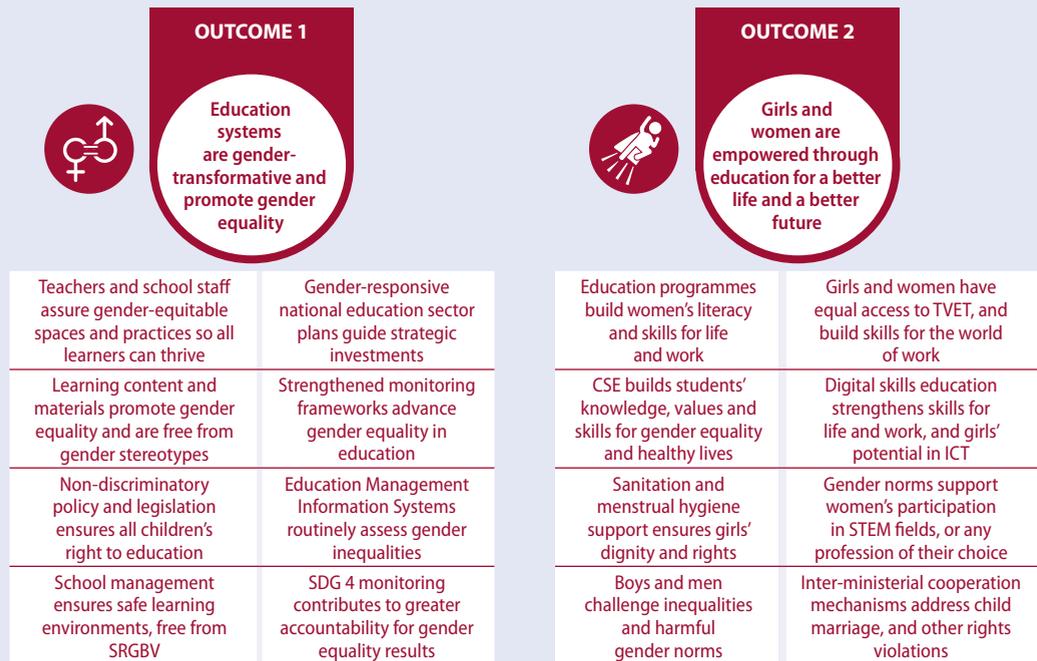
We are committed to ensuring that all people can realize their rights and potential in and through education.



# Theory of change

## UNESCO STRATEGY FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION

A world where gender equality in and through education is achieved, assuring girls and boys, women and men, equal rights and opportunities for education and empowerment, and the power and agency to shape their lives and futures.



Note: CSE=comprehensive sexuality education; ICT=information and communication technologies; SDG=Sustainable Development Goal; SRGBV=school-related gender-based violence and TVET=technical and vocational education and training

## Better data to inform action



**High quality timely data and evidence are key ingredients for policy-making, planning and the delivery of strategic interventions to advance gender equality in and through education.**

They can help countries to identify and analyse gendered patterns and trends, and better plan and target resources accordingly to address gender inequalities. They can also help to identify and inform interventions that influence participation, learning and empowerment, from early childhood to tertiary education and beyond.

The SDG 4 monitoring framework is a step forward from that established under the Millennium Development Goals. Under SDG 4, all 11 global indicators are to be disaggregated by sex, where possible, while indicator 4.5.1 sets out a requirement for a gender parity index for all indicators that can be sex-disaggregated. Moreover, countries are called on to assess the extent to which gender equality is mainstreamed in national education policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessments, and to monitor the presence of single-sex sanitation facilities.<sup>30</sup>

Despite this progress, the framework does not go far enough; a complete monitoring framework for gender equality in and through education would need to be much broader. This includes indicators that consider: social and gender norms, values and attitudes (many of which can be influenced by education); education laws and policies, as well legislation and policies outside of the education system; resource distribution; and teaching and learning practices and environments.<sup>13,31</sup> More efforts are also

needed to track disparities in informal and non-formal learning contexts with a lifelong learning approach, and to ensure that data are collected on the most excluded. As inequity in education can accumulate over time, measures must start in the early grades and consider the accumulating disadvantage throughout the education cycle.<sup>32,33</sup>

Many countries lack the resources and capacity to generate robust data,<sup>34</sup> and require access to financial and technical support to ensure effective data collection and monitoring and evaluation systems. Drawing on the strengths of our sector-wide mandate and expertise, and our specialized institutes, UNESCO will build national capacity and enhance the availability, quality, analysis, and the use of data, research and evidence to inform strategic action for gender equality in and through education.



#### UNESCO's actions:



- ▶ Lead the global monitoring of progress towards SDG 4 and support greater accountability for commitments to gender equality in and through education.
- ▶ Strengthen national capacities to collect, analyse and use indicators, statistical approaches and monitoring tools, including Education Management Information Systems, to understand and address gender inequality in education.
- ▶ Serve, through our Institute for Statistics, as the officially recognized source for cross-nationally comparable data monitoring progress toward SDG 4.
- ▶ Publish annual in-depth analyses of trends and strategies to address gender disparities in and through education, through UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report's Gender Reports.
- ▶ Document progress and practice to advance women's literacy, learning and participation in non-formal education through UNESCO's triennial Global Report on Adult Learning and Education.
- ▶ Undertake forward-looking quantitative and qualitative research to better understand current, and anticipate forthcoming, threats to gender equality in education.
- ▶ Act as a knowledge broker and laboratory of ideas, facilitating exchanges of good practice to advance gender equality in access, learning and educational outcomes.
- ▶ Support national partners to exploit the full potential of information and communication technologies, including artificial intelligence, to measure and address gender inequalities.

# Better legal, policy and planning frameworks to advance rights



## **The right to education lies at the heart of UNESCO's mission, and is enshrined in international law through numerous legally binding international treaties.<sup>35</sup>**

By ratifying these treaties, countries commit to respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to education without discrimination through the adoption of legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial and other measures.

Many countries, however, enter reservations to international treaties which allow them to be party to a treaty, while excluding particular provisions within the treaty.<sup>36</sup> These reservations signal countries' unwillingness to take action to achieve gender equality in education or to support measures to advance girls' and women's right to education. Moreover, countries that show high levels of commitment in treaty ratification do not always reflect this commitment in their national legislation, policies, plans and practices.

Comprehensive constitutional, legal, policy and planning frameworks are the scaffolding to ensure the right for all to quality early childhood care and education, 12 years of quality primary and secondary education, and equal opportunities for higher and adult education. They are essential to prohibit discriminatory practices and to dismantle barriers to education and lifelong learning, including child marriage, child labour and domestic work, and early and unintended pregnancy.

Governments need to adopt laws and policies that remove obstacles to learning and that foster the equal treatment of all learners in the teaching and learning process. Laws that condone early marriage or allow schools to expel pregnant girls are significant barriers to education and lifelong learning. In some

contexts, enabling national laws exist but they are not implemented or enforced through policy and regulatory frameworks, education sector plans and budget allocations.<sup>37</sup>

Costed, gender-responsive education sector plans offer insights into system changes to advance gender equality and the requisite allocation of resources. Integrating gender in the planning cycle requires a spotlight on gender issues throughout sector analysis and planning formulation, implementation and monitoring covering all educational levels.<sup>38</sup> Affirmative action, positive discrimination and other equity measures may be required in some settings, including affirmative funding allocation focusing on girls and women, or boys and men in some contexts. It must also address intersecting and mutually reinforcing disadvantage linked to gender, poverty, location, ethnicity, ability, and other measures.

Through its global network, UNESCO will support country-level education policy development, regional and global policy analyses, and national strategic planning processes that promote gender equality and that tackle key gender-related barriers preventing girls and boys, women and men, from quality education, learning and empowerment opportunities.



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#### UNESCO's actions:

- ▶ Work to ensure that all Member States sign onto and fulfil their legal commitments to gender equality in education, particularly the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- ▶ Analyse, map, monitor and serve as the global clearinghouse for internationally comparable data on legislation to advance gender equality in and through education.
- ▶ Provide technical assistance and capacity-development support to national partners to apply a gender lens to education sector policy analysis and reviews.
- ▶ Support national legal and policy reforms that universalize access to quality education for all without discrimination and which integrate social and gender equity measures to reach the most marginalised, including in crisis and conflict settings.
- ▶ Support national legal and policy reforms that facilitate the effective mainstreaming of gender equality issues in curricula, learning materials, teacher education and development.
- ▶ Provide technical assistance to national partners to formulate, implement and monitor gender-responsive education sector plans and budgets, ensuring broad stakeholder engagement from other ministries beyond education, civil society actors, parents and caregivers in school committees, the private sector, and others.
- ▶ Facilitate inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral policy dialogue and cooperation to enact and enforce laws, policies and procedures in areas of UNESCO's mandate, including health and comprehensive sexuality education, early and unintended pregnancy, and school-related gender-based violence.
- ▶ Lead efforts to integrate gender equality in education in high-level UN policy dialogues, in economic policy fora such as the G7, G20 and others, and in global, regional and national advocacy efforts aiming to advance good practice.

# Better teaching and learning practices to empower



**Education is a powerful driver for human capital, economic growth, social cohesion, cultural transformation, environmental sustainability and peaceful coexistence.**

It is the necessary foundation for learning throughout life in a complex and rapidly changing world. But for education to empower, it must challenge and change unequal power relations, and address practices, norms and expectations that prevent boys and girls, women and men, from realising their full potential. It must ensure that all learners achieve the competencies needed for today and tomorrow. This goes beyond literacy and numeracy and includes a range of cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural skills that promote agency, critical thinking, conflict management, acceptance of diversity, creativity, leadership, cooperation, adaptability and global citizenship.<sup>39</sup>

UNESCO will support continued efforts to ensure all children have the right to education and the accelerated scale up of better teaching and learning practices to empower. This includes attention to equality in access, in the learning experience, and in educational outcomes that translate learning into benefits for life, work and leadership.

This Strategy focuses on interlinked areas with demonstrated impact.

## **More qualified teachers, better content and improved learning processes**

Teachers, their qualifications, subject expertise and pedagogical competence, are considered to be among the most important factors determining educational quality.<sup>40</sup> Teachers are also socializing agents and sources of

learning about expectations, attitudes and behaviours typically associated with boys and girls. In countries with more rigid norms, female teachers can incentivise girls to join school and improve their learning outcomes.<sup>41</sup> Yet their presence is heavily unbalanced between levels of education. In many settings, the proportion of women teachers is much lower at higher levels of education, in certain subjects including science and mathematics, as well as in leadership positions.<sup>42</sup>

Teachers' pedagogical practice is partly shaped by their assumptions and stereotypes about gender (conscious or subconscious), which in turn affects students' beliefs and learning. Teachers may be unconscious validators of harmful gender stereotypes themselves. For example, they may use language that suggests boys and girls naturally have certain qualities or behaviour such as 'sensible, helpful girls' versus 'silly, naughty boys.' Teachers may give more attention to boys if their education is seen to be more important in that context.<sup>43</sup>

Gender bias can be reduced through good quality pre- and in-service training in which teachers have the opportunity to reconsider their own gendered assumptions, attitudes and expectations, and learn ways to engender equal treatment and participation in the classroom and the wider school community.<sup>44</sup> To be effective and sustainable, gender equality must be integrated into both the pre- and in-service training programmes of teacher training institutions. Gender-responsive pedagogy is more likely to be applied in the classroom if school management is committed to gender

equality. As such, school administrators, school inspectors, school management committees, and other stakeholders should also participate.

Together with teachers, learning content is a critical determinant of education quality and conveys not only specialized knowledge but also values, including explicit or implicit messages about gender. A UNESCO review of over 110 national curriculum frameworks in primary and secondary education in 78 countries found that many textbooks and learning materials include gender bias, with resulting impacts on lowered classroom engagement, and more limited expectations of education and life options.<sup>45</sup> Policy reform to eliminate gender bias in instructional materials, and capacity-building of curriculum specialists and developers, assessment experts, and teacher educators can enable learning content that is rights-based, relevant to learners' contexts and needs, and which promotes values, attitudes and behaviours for a just, equitable and sustainable world.

Curriculum, textbooks and learning materials can also promote positive messages about equality between women and men and promote gender-equitable norms. Skills-based and/or social and emotional learning opportunities (including comprehensive sexuality education) can equip children, young people and adults with age-appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; challenge harmful gender norms; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.<sup>46,47</sup>

Learning content must also ensure that all learners are equipped with the skills, networks and assets they need for the future of work, including the demands of increasingly technology-driven economies and societies. This includes digital skills<sup>48</sup> and enhanced opportunities for STEM studies and careers.<sup>22</sup> Targeted mentoring and support to school-to-work transitions can increase female talent in areas such as technology and engineering, where women are less represented

than men, as well as in technical and vocational education and training programmes.<sup>49</sup> Teaching and learning strategies that focus on transferable skills, foster active learning, or promote individual mentoring and target setting, have positive effects on both boys' and girls' educational outcomes.<sup>50</sup>



#### UNESCO's actions:

- ▶ Develop tools and build institutional capacity to remove gender stereotyping and bias from instructional and learning materials in formal and non-formal education and support national curriculum reform that integrates gender equality and rights.
- ▶ Strengthen national capacity to mainstream gender in teaching, learning and classroom practices through expanded resources, policy guidance and capacity development in pre- and in-service training programmes on gender-responsive pedagogy.
- ▶ Support national partners to address gender gaps in educational choice and achievement, particularly in technical and vocational education and training and STEM, and youth and adult literacy, through analytical work, policy advice, standard-setting and cross-country cooperation.
- ▶ Strengthen the evidence base on, and delivery of, life skills and social and emotional learning programmes that provide knowledge, attitudes, and skills essential for gender equality.
- ▶ Support the monitoring of international normative instruments concerning teachers and teaching, with particular attention to efforts made to ensure female teachers and educators are trained, motivated and supported.
- ▶ Support national partners to use traditional and social media to expand learning, to engage parents and communities, and to transform social and gender norms and practices that promote rights, empowerment and equality of opportunity.

## Safe, inclusive and healthy learning environments

The environment, physical and psychosocial, in which learning takes place is of paramount importance at all educational levels. However, the provision of 'child, disability and gender-sensitive' education facilities and 'safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all' (SDG 4, Target 4.a), remains a challenge in many countries.

In many parts of the world, school infrastructure is absent or fails to meet students' basic physical needs. Lack of separate sanitation facilities and supplies are a major barrier for female students, especially during menstruation. In Africa, about 1 in 10 girls do not attend school every month for this reason.<sup>10,51</sup>

About 246 million children are subject to some form of gender-based violence in and around schools every year.<sup>19</sup> Violence can occur on school grounds, in transit or in cyberspace. It can take many forms, such as bullying, corporal punishment, physical assault or even rape. It is often perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics. Students whose real or perceived sexuality or gender identity does not comply with the norm are also victims of bullying and abuse.<sup>52</sup> As a result of violence, many students feel unsafe in their schools and are more likely to miss class, drop out or have lower educational outcomes.

Education institutions themselves can be targets of violence and attacks, included targeted attacks on girls' schools in contexts where armed and violent extremist groups oppose girls' and women's education.<sup>53</sup> This results in girls being physically harmed, or removed from school for their safety. It is not only learners who are affected. It can be difficult to recruit and retain female teachers who fear for their own safety in these contexts.<sup>54</sup>

Every measure must be taken to ensure that both the physical and psychological environments of educational institutions are accessible, inclusive, safe, healthy, enabling and conducive

to learning and to equality. Education itself, including comprehensive sexuality education and global citizenship education, can promote the development of essential life skills that empower learners to question social and cultural norms that support unequal gender and power structures, and which often lead to violence. Opportunities to learn and hone these skills must also be ensured for out-of-school young people and children who are often those most vulnerable to misinformation, coercion and exploitation.

Teaching and learning occur in not only formal contexts, but through non-formal and informal



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programmes and initiatives that promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills across one's lifetime. Through its flexible and diverse organization and delivery modes, non-formal education can help meet the diverse and context-specific learning needs of all age groups, including the acquisition of literacy skills. UNESCO has been at the forefront of global literacy efforts since 1946, including efforts to close persistent literacy gaps among women. UNESCO recognizes that efforts to foster innovation and harness the potential of digital technology is part of the solution.



#### UNESCO's actions:

- ▶ Support Member States to enact legislation and implement national policies and plans of action on school-related gender-based violence, that ensure guidelines for schools, training for teachers, and redress mechanisms for those affected.
- ▶ Co-convene the Global Working Group to End School-related gender-based violence, to generate knowledge and standards, and undertake joint evidence-based advocacy.
- ▶ Lead advocacy efforts and support Member States to ensure healthy learning environments that facilitate the delivery of health and comprehensive sexuality education, including puberty education, and menstrual hygiene management, as well as links to external health services.
- ▶ Contribute to monitoring violations of the right to education, including attacks on education institutions, and document and share good practice regarding effective strategies for the prevention and response of attacks on formal and non-formal education institutions in emergencies and protected crises.
- ▶ Strengthen national capacity to deliver quality flexible, alternative and accelerated non-formal lifelong learning opportunities, second chance programmes, adult education, and online, blended and distance learning models which are recognized and accredited.
- ▶ Serve as a clearinghouse for cutting-edge research on literacy, including efforts to close literacy gaps among women and girls, and advise countries on good practice.



# Implementing the strategy

**The implementation of this Strategy will build on UNESCO's guiding principles and its longstanding work at global, regional and national levels to advance gender equality, and girls' and women's empowerment, in and through education.**

## Coordination across UNESCO

Coordination will be an essential dimension for delivering the Strategy. All efforts will be made to ensure coherence, complementarities and synergies within UNESCO's Education Sector and across UNESCO programme sectors, field offices and institutes, as well as with external partners.

This coordination will be led by the Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality within the Education Sector. UNESCO's vast network of gender focal points will provide a strong foundation for action, while the Division for Gender Equality in the Office of the Director-General and senior management will ensure strategic guidance and support.

The implementation of the Strategy will mobilize expertise across all of the Education Sector, including staff in UNESCO Headquarters, 53 Field Offices and eight specialized institutes.<sup>55</sup> It will also draw on the expertise of the UNESCO Chairs' network, Associated Schools and technical and vocational education and training centres. While the Strategy will guide UNESCO's work in all settings, UNESCO will prioritise investments in Africa, as the second institutional global priority along with gender.

Intersectoral approaches will be expanded to draw on UNESCO's interdisciplinary strengths to address particular gaps and challenges and help achieve results in areas of shared priority. This will build on, for example, ongoing collaboration with the Natural



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Sciences Sector on gender-responsive STEM education, with the Social and Human Sciences Sector on masculinities, with the Communication and Information Sector on digital skills for women and girls, and with the Culture Sector on social norms and harmful practices impacting on girls' and women's right to education.

UNESCO will also promote accelerated action to advance girls' and women's education through a new initiative (see Box 3, next page) which will rely on new modalities of work proposed through its strategic transformation process.



### Box 2 UNESCO's guiding principles<sup>55</sup>

- ▶ **Human rights** – UNESCO is guided by international human rights principles, conventions and standards. In all its actions it takes a human rights-based approach that emphasises equality, non-discrimination and respect for diversity, participation and accountability.
- ▶ **Gender equality** – UNESCO supports programming that challenges gender bias and discrimination and addresses gender roles, cultural norms and practices, and power structures that limit rights, freedoms and opportunities.
- ▶ **Country ownership** – UNESCO is committed to the principles of national ownership and harmonisation outlined in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action and will continue to align its actions with national priorities, plans and processes.
- ▶ **Evidence-based** – UNESCO supports approaches that are grounded in evidence and will support countries to implement evidence-informed education responses that advance gender equality.
- ▶ **Participation of young people** – UNESCO targets actions to meet the needs of children, adolescents and young people and promotes youth engagement in shaping the policies and programmes that affect their lives.

## Partnerships

Strengthening existing partnerships and building new ones will be key to the implementation of the Strategy. This includes, with priority, UNESCO's privileged partnerships with national authorities and ministries of education, including associated entities such as teacher training institutions, statistical bodies, and research centres. UNESCO will also continue to work closely with specialized gender units and focal points established in education ministries to advance gender equality.

While national education sectors have a key role to play in advancing gender equality in and through education, they cannot do so alone. Intersectoral cooperation is needed to address structural factors underlying gender disparities and inequalities in education, and to promote gender equality more broadly. UNESCO will support partnerships and collaborations between the education sector and other sectors including health, youth, child protection, water and sanitation.

Reflecting the Organization's commitment to stronger integration and harmonization within the UN system, partnerships with other UN agencies will be strengthened to take forward global, regional and national action and support collaboration between the national education sectors and other sectors at country-level. For example, UNESCO will build on ongoing cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) through the Joint Programme to Empower Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education; with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNFPA, The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women on the prevention of school-related gender-based violence; with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and other health partners on comprehensive sexuality education and pregnancy prevention; and with the International Telecommunications Union on digital skills for women and girls. UNESCO will also deepen its partnership with International



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Labour Organization (ILO) to support teacher development and welfare at all education levels through, for example, the joint monitoring of the implementation of ILO-UNESCO Recommendations concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) and the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997), to include gender equality perspectives.



### Box 3

#### Her education, our future: UNESCO fast-tracking girls' and women's education

UNESCO is launching in 2019 a new drive to accelerate action for girls' and women's education. While the Strategy will provide the operational guidance for investments and programming by UNESCO, including strategic areas of action to empower girls and women in and through education, the initiative will leverage political and financial commitments and leadership for women and girls. It will contribute to the Strategy's three pillars aiming for better data to inform action for gender equality in and through education; better legal, policy and planning frameworks to advance rights; and better teaching and learning practices to empower.

The initiative aims to:

- ▶ Generate and share data on progress and evidence on what works
- ▶ Facilitate cooperation and joint action
- ▶ Galvanise resources for girls' and women's education

Cross-sectoral agile teams are being created to catalyse action on the Strategy and through the initiative. The teams will support UNESCO to adapt, be nimble and deliver high quality products quickly and effectively, while also strengthening internal capacity. They will work across sectors, offices, and thematic areas to support the development of tools and knowledge products; document and monitor outcomes; and promote innovation in approaches and materials.

UNESCO contributes to the governance and operational modalities of the Global Partnership for Education and will complement GPE's strategic investments on gender equality through support beyond basic education. Finally, at country level, UNESCO will ensure attention to gender equality in and through education in Common Country Assessments, UN Development Assistance Frameworks, and other joint programming documents.

UNESCO will also continue to engage academic and research networks to support research, capacity-development and knowledge sharing. In particular, UNESCO Chairs and the University Twinning and Networking Programme will be leveraged to enhance institutional capacities, collaborative work, and South-South cooperation on key issues covered in the Strategy.

Civil society organizations play a key role in shaping policies and plans, monitoring progress, and holding governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality. UNESCO will expand its cooperation with international and national non-government organizations, including parents' associations, youth organizations, teachers' unions, as well as with international networks such as Education International and regional networks such as the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education.

UNESCO will also expand its partnerships with select private sector entities that have a shared vision and can contribute specialized expertise, resources and innovations to its efforts. Current partnerships with the private sector have enabled UNESCO to expand its reach through private sector contributions to financing, programme delivery, technical assistance and expertise, as well as advocacy and awareness-raising. In line with UNESCO's Operational Strategy on Youth, it will advocate and facilitate youth participation processes from the local to global level, to identify young people's solutions to issues that affect them.

UNESCO is a member (and co-chair in several cases) of a number of relevant initiatives aiming

for collective action with civil society, academia, bilateral and multilateral agencies and the private sector to advance gender equality in and through education. It will continue to support these mechanisms, including the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), the EQUALS Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age, the Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence. UNESCO will also leverage its contribution to other education groups such as the Teachers' Task Force, the Global Alliance on Literacy and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack to mainstream gender and ensure attention to equity and inclusion. UNESCO will in particular look for opportunities to undertake collective advocacy and coordinated action with UNGEI to ensure a collaborative approach to addressing and supporting girls' education.

## Leadership and advocacy

As the lead UN agency for education, UNESCO will play a key role in developing and critically evaluating new thinking and in driving and influencing global and regional debates and strategic actions on issues relating to gender equality in and through education. In our leadership of the coordination and monitoring of SDG 4, we will strengthen commitment to an inclusive, evidence-based and gender-transformative agenda that leaves no one behind.

UNESCO will leverage its convening power to catalyse Member States' commitments at global, regional and national levels, and mobilise not only political commitment but also domestic resources to advance gender equality in and through education. It will provide specialised policy advice, technical assistance, and normative guidance, and support system-wide and multi-sectoral approaches that aim not only to expand access but to ensure empowerment through education.

UNESCO will continue to play a leading role as the clearinghouse for cross-national comparative data on education. Through the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the World

Inequality Database on Education, UNESCO will advance understanding of the levels of inequality within and across countries, with the aim of informing policy design and public debate. Annual UNESCO GEM Gender Reports will provide further analysis of trends and strategies to address gender disparities, including statistical reporting against an expanded monitoring framework on gender equality in and through education. Moreover, UNESCO will facilitate learning through new analyses of legislative frameworks, enabling policy-makers, planners and practitioners to learn from other country experiences aiming to establish an enabling environment for gender equality in and through education.

UNESCO will continue to work with media and other partners to lead global, regional and national-level advocacy, awareness-raising and the delivery of high-impact and gender-transformative messages that aim to eliminate gender bias and discrimination not only in the classroom, but more broadly in society. We will convene and host high-profile events, campaigns and communication efforts that underscore the transformative power of education, and the actions needed to ensure that all girls and boys, women and men, are empowered equally in and through education. This includes special efforts in areas where UNESCO has demonstrated leadership, including gender-responsive STEM education, comprehensive sexuality education, school-related gender-based violence, and women's literacy.

UNESCO will undertake targeted efforts to promote girls' and women's rights, empowerment and equality of opportunity in and through education. In particular, UNESCO will host a yearly advocacy event on girls' and women's education which will review trends and progress, present new data and tools, showcase UNESCO programmes, and engage a new set of top-level Champions for Girls' and Women's Education who will serve as champions for gender equality in education. These men and women from around the world will, through their public engagement, advocacy and commitments, support UNESCO to catalyse investments and action in support of gender

equality in and through education. UNESCO will also continue to use the Prize for Girls' and Women's Education to recognize strong leadership and practice in addressing gender inequalities and leverage learning and action.

## Strengthened institutional capacity

While gender equality has been an institutional priority since 2008, and all parts of the Education Sector are called on to integrate a gender perspective in policy planning, programming implementation and evaluation activities in all areas of UNESCO's competence, there is a need to reinforce institutional capacity for the effective delivery of this Strategy.

This includes reinforcing the gender architecture of the Education Sector to ensure sufficient capacity for mainstreaming gender equality in UNESCO's assessment, planning and proposal development processes, as well as in monitoring, evaluation and documentation around gender equality in and through education. UNESCO will build on existing tools and resources by the Division for Gender Equality, including an e-learning programme and staff training, Guidelines on Gender-Neutral Language, and Guidelines for Publications, to establish targeted tools for the Education Sector, accompanied by a learning plan establishing the modalities for capacity-enhancement, measurement tools and feedback loops. UNESCO will aim to further strengthen its community of practice in the Education Sector and deepen access to knowledge and tools to advance equality.

UNESCO will also deepen its staff capacity with gender expertise. This includes strengthening recruitment procedures to call for core gender and functional capacities for staff and consultants, and the establishment of a core roster of long-term consultants with expertise in gender equality in and through education. UNESCO will also aim to ensure that performance reviews of the Education Sector include assessment of contributions to achieving gender equality results, and that gender focal

points have explicit recognition of this role in job descriptions and performance reviews.

Recognizing that no organization can reach its full potential where women are left behind or left out, UNESCO established a Gender Parity Action Plan 2017-2022. The Plan aims to achieve gender parity at all levels, including senior management; enhance women's professional development through dedicated training initiatives, create a gender equality-conscious workplace; and create a gender-friendly workplace contributing to professional growth. UNESCO will continue to monitor the implementation of the Plan, including achievements against the expected results and performance indicators in the Education Sector.

UNESCO will continue to use its gender equality marker, and track and report on allocations and expenditures for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment. The marker is a mandatory requirement for all agencies under the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan and asks project managers to rate projects against a three-point scale indicating the contribution toward the achievement of gender equality. The marker enables UNESCO to track and monitor financial allocation, and analyse trends by region, office, outcome and focus area. Further efforts will be made to understand and document changes to the gender marker following the adoption of the Strategy.

## Action planning, resource mobilisation and reporting

This Strategy will be supported by annual action plans which will present a costed and prioritized set of key activities and deliverables aligned with its three thematic priorities. An Annual Report on the Strategy will be produced and include a review of the planned activities and deliverables, an overview of progress, analysis of issues, challenges, and opportunities, recommendations, and key future priorities.

UNESCO's global, regional and country programmes will set aside resources to ensure that gender quality results are met. Field Offices, Headquarters and institutes should pursue dedicated funding opportunities with Member States and other donors, including other government and private sector partners, aligned with a resource mobilization strategy.

A mid-term and final evaluation will be undertaken to review the overall implementation of the Strategy and future efforts of the Sector to advance gender equality in and through education.

# Acronyms

<b>CSE</b>	Comprehensive sexuality education
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technology
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SRGBV</b>	School-related gender-based violence
<b>STEM</b>	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and vocational education and training
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNGEI</b>	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
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# From access to empowerment

## UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019-2025

From access to empowerment: *UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019-2025* builds on UNESCO's longstanding commitment to gender equality. Aligned with the 2030 Agenda, the Strategy will guide UNESCO's programmes, actions and resource allocation. It lays out our vision of a world where gender equality is achieved, assuring girls and boys, women and men, equal rights and opportunities for empowerment and the power and agency to shape their lives and futures.

