

## Recommendations on Girls' Education

### Generation Equality Forum

*The following recommendations have been developed through a consultative process with organisations including: Coalition Education, Education Cannot Wait, GCPEA, GCE, GPE, Malala Fund, ODI, Plan International, UNESCO, UNGEI, UNICEF, UNICEF France, Save The Children and over 100 organisations from around the world, including national and regional GCE coalitions, local partners, OING and OI*

**Girls' education is a critical pathway to achieving gender equality. And barriers to girls' education are also barriers to gender equality.**

The architects of the *Generation Equality Forum* have designated education as a cross-cutting lever critical to the achievement of the six Action Coalitions. Girls' education is a fundamental human right as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The rights of girls not only *to* education, but also *in* and *through* education are reaffirmed in the Education 2030 Framework for Action as well as in Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Girls' education is also an enabler of other rights, with powerful downstream effects for their own and their families' health, as well as a nation's economic prosperity, and civic engagement. Girls' education is linked with economic growth, climate change mitigation and resilience, promoting peace and bolstering health and education outcomes for children. Education also has the potential to transform men's and boys' attitudes towards women and girls – transforming the harmful social norms that hold girls and women back from exercising their agency and realizing their potential.

As the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic spreads across the world, economic systems and essential service delivery has screeched to a halt. The social, political and economic impacts are felt most acutely by the most vulnerable, including women and girls. School closures to contain the spread of COVID-19 have put, at its peak, nearly 1.6 billion children out of school, including 767 million girls. Social distancing and confinement can be dangerous for girls as they face a heightened risk of gender-based violence, menstruation management challenges, early and forced marriage, and early or unintended pregnancy. Women and girls, serving as primary caregivers in most countries, are more exposed to the virus and may be overburdened by unpaid care work. Millions of girls may drop out permanently and never return to school. COVID-19 reveals and reinforces existing gender inequalities, spelling most vehemently the need for the transformative effect of girls' education on their lives and our societies.

Before COVID-19, more than 130 million girls were still out of school and many of those in school were not learning. The multifaceted challenges that girls face in claiming their right to education, exacerbated by COVID-19, include poverty and school fees, distance to school, domestic responsibilities, early and forced marriage and early and unintended pregnancy, lack of safety and school-related gender-based violence, lack of sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities in schools, and gender stereotyping in curricula, textbooks and teaching processes. Situations of fragility and conflict increase vulnerability, with girls being 2.5 times more likely to be out of primary school in countries facing crises. These barriers are driven by discriminatory and harmful social norms that define women's roles in society and at home and account for critical gaps in gender equality.

More of the same approaches to education will just not do, especially as COVID-19 uncovers some of the most profound challenges for gender equality. We need deep structural change to tackle barriers to girls' education, ensure that education does not perpetuate unequal power structures, serve as a force to accelerate sustainable gender equality results at scale and achieve full inclusion. Strengthening and equipping systems to put girls' education rights and gender equality at the center of education reform is key to achieving gender equality in and through education for all children.

## **Overarching gender-transformative recommendations to achieve 12 years of safe, free, quality education for all girls**

### **Institutionalise gender-responsive education sector analysis, planning and finance.**

Strong political and grassroots leadership for institutionalizing gender-responsive education sector planning (GRESP), analysis and implementation can build education systems that transform gender relations and enable all learners to achieve their full potential. GRESP is a whole-system approach for putting gender at the heart of education and making education systems gender-responsive by design. It is an approach based on gender analysis of the education sector to inform gender-transformative plans, policies and budgets, with a focus on creating inclusive and gender-equal learning environments and reaching the most disadvantaged.<sup>1</sup>

### **Ensure that there are enough female teachers in the right places and across all levels of the education workforce and remove stereotypes and gender bias from pedagogy and learning materials.**

Female teachers make up 94% of the teaching workforce in pre-primary education, but only about half in upper-secondary education<sup>2</sup>. The presence of female teachers often makes parents more willing to send their daughters to school and keep them there. They also serve as role models for girls.<sup>3</sup> Promoting the status of the profession, and improving access to quality training for teachers to challenge their own unconscious gender bias and learn gender-sensitive teaching methods can have a catalytic impact on girls' attendance and learning. Gender-sensitive and inclusive education content - free from biases and stereotypes - can help learners embrace diversity and gender-transformative perspectives.

### **Improve access to nutrition, sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities in schools.**

Nutrition is critical for children to grow and learn, and the most vulnerable girls faced with poverty and marginalization often lack proper nutrition. School meals help to get children, especially girls, into school and keep them there<sup>4</sup> and to break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition.<sup>5</sup> Water and sanitation facilities, especially single-sex toilets and menstrual hygiene management facilities and sensitization, need to be available to girls in school to ensure a dignified, gender-equitable learning environment, reduce absenteeism and facilitate girls' retention in adolescence. Persistent stigma and taboo surrounding menstrual hygiene also serves to entrench the lower status of women and girls and

---

<sup>1</sup> UNGEI. (2019). [Gender-responsive education sector planning A pathway to gender equality in education](#). New York, UNGEI.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO. (2019). [UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Report 2019: Building bridges for gender equality](#). Paris, UNESCO.

<sup>3</sup> Haugen, C.S., Klees, S.J., Stromquist, N.P. et al. (2014). [Increasing the number of female primary school teachers in African countries: Effects, barriers and policies](#). *International Review of Education* 60: 753-776.

<sup>4</sup> WFP. (2011). [Feed minds, change lives: School feeding, the Millennium Development Goals and girls' empowerment](#). Rome, WFP.

<sup>5</sup> FAO. (2019). [Legislating for adequate food and nutrition in schools](#), Legal Brief for Parliamentarians in Africa. Rome, FAO.

June 2020

reinforce gendered social norms.<sup>6</sup> Addressing this stigma and taboo and normalizing menstruation and menstrual hygiene in schools can reduce barriers to girls' education and to gender equality, ensuring that girls enroll and remain in school.

### **Build demand for and strengthen country- and global-level capacities to collect, analyze, and use gender- and age-disaggregated data on education.**

While there is no shortage of policy commitments for girls' education and gender equality in education, much remains to be done to link these policy texts with appropriate indicators and monitoring mechanisms.<sup>7</sup> Many countries lack the capacity to collect and use data for education policy-making. Where data is available, it may not be gender- or age-disaggregated, or only focus on gender disparities in numbers and fail to reveal deeper manifestations of underlying gender disparities. Considering gender with other characteristics, such as disability, location, ethnicity and socio-economic status is also needed to fully understand and address the many barriers to equality. Filling the critical data gap in education, bringing girls and their issues into the light, is vital to eliminating gender equality.

### **Prevent and address school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV).**

Millions of children globally experience SRGBV every year and new research has found that attending school can increase students' risk of experiencing violence.<sup>8</sup> Preventing and responding to SRGBV requires a holistic approach that addresses the drivers and root causes of violence at both the school and the community levels.<sup>9</sup> This includes enforcing laws and multi-sectoral policies to ensure children's safety, implementing codes of conduct, supporting teachers, and enabling children and adolescents to lead efforts to prevent and respond to SRGBV as part of a whole-school approach. Reporting mechanisms should also be set up within schools and communities to enable children, especially girls, to report any form of violence they have been exposed to.

### **Promote comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to bolster girls' autonomy and agency.**

CSE increases all learners' self-esteem and knowledge levels, builds self-efficacy, and helps them challenge discriminatory attitudes, gender and social norms, as well as having a positive impact on safer sexual behaviours. CSE programmes for all learners that include gender transformative content and teaching methods, and address power relations, support them to question socio-cultural norms around gender and are vital for enabling girls to have autonomy and agency over their own bodies, fertility, sexuality, health and wellbeing.<sup>10</sup>

### **Improve skills and training for girls to help them meet the world of work with confidence.**

Female youth aged 15-29 are 3 times more likely than male youth to be outside the labour force and not participating in education.<sup>11</sup> When in the workforce, they are often trapped in vulnerable and/or low-quality employment. Ensuring 12 years of safe, free and quality education for girls, investing in skills training for girls, working with teachers to eliminate gender stereotypes, including about girls in science,

---

<sup>6</sup> Das, M.B. (2017). [The rising tide: A new look at water and gender](#). Washington, D.C., World Bank.

<sup>7</sup>GPE. (2019). [Achieving gender equality in and through education](#). A Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Discussion Paper. Washington, D.C., GPE.

<sup>8</sup> UNGEI, UNESCO, Plan International (2020). Learning with Violence and Inequality: the Prevalence, Experience and Impact of School-Related Gender-Based Violence. Global Working Group to End SRGBV (unpublished).

<sup>9</sup>UNGEI. (2018). [A whole school approach to prevent school-related gender-based violence \(SRGBV\): Minimum Standards And Monitoring Framework](#). New York, UNGEI.

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO. (2018) [International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach, Revised edition](#). Paris, UNESCO.

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF and ILO. (2018). [GirlForce: Skills, education and training for girls now](#), NY, UNICEF.

June 2020

technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, transforming gender norms that hold women back, and creating enabling environments can enable girls to successfully participate in the world of work and become economically empowered.

The overarching recommendations outline some of the fundamental policy shifts needed to transform girls' education. The Action Pillar Recommendations build upon the foundational recommendations to effect structural change for gender equality. And the core principles to deliver on these recommendations are listed in Annex 1.

## Leveraging Education - Action Pillar Recommendations

### Gender-based violence

**ACTION:** *End school-related gender-based violence by harnessing the transformative potential of education to shift harmful norms and investing in safe learning environments*

Millions of children and adolescents experience sexual, physical or psychological violence in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms, discrimination and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics. Recent estimates suggest that at least one in five adolescents (aged 11-17) have experienced school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), rising to one in three in some regions.

<sup>12</sup> Girls are more likely to experience psychological bullying, cyber-bullying, sexual violence and harassment while boys often face higher rates of physical violence including corporal punishment.<sup>13</sup>

As with all forms of violence, the most marginalized are the most likely to be affected. Socio-economically disadvantaged girls and those attending schools in poorly resourced areas, conflict zones, or refugee camps are considered most vulnerable to SRGBV.<sup>14</sup> In conflict settings around the world, female students and educators are specifically targeted by violence, including rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery. In 18 countries, girls and women were targeted because armed groups opposed their getting an education, with irreversible health, education and social outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

### Tactics

- **Ensure that SRGBV is addressed across all parts of the education system and budgets:** This includes curriculum-based approaches that include content on gender-based violence, rights and power dynamics and build the skills and resources to stay safe. Teachers and other educational staff need training to deliver the curriculum, use positive discipline methods, and further promote gender equality. Legal and policy frameworks offering protection from violence in and around schools must be established and enforced, including codes of conduct for teachers and school staff. Beyond prevention, confidential referral and response mechanisms are needed to protect the welfare and rights of those experiencing gender-based violence in and around schools. This requires multi- and cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination beyond the education sector.
- **Invest in more rigorous and comprehensive data to measure and monitor the nature and prevalence of SRGBV at country-level.**<sup>16</sup> Add questions on gender norms and different forms of

---

<sup>12</sup> UNGEI, UNESCO, Plan International (2020). Learning with violence and inequality: The prevalence, experience and impact of school-related gender-based violence. Global Working Group to End SRGBV (unpublished).

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO and UN Women. (2016). [Global guidance on addressing school-related gender-based violence](#). Paris, UNESCO and New York, UN Women.

<sup>14</sup> Leach, F. and Mitchell, C. (Eds., 2006). Combating gender violence in and around schools. Stoke on Trent, Trentham Books; Parkes (Ed.). (2015) Gender violence in poverty contexts: The educational challenge. London, UK: Routledge.

<sup>15</sup> Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA). 2019. ["It is very painful to talk about": The impact of attacks on education on women and girls](#). GCPEA.

<sup>16</sup> Global Working Group to End SRGBV and UNGEI. n/d. [School-related gender-based violence \(SRGBV\): A whole school approach to prevent school-related gender-based violence](#). New York, UNGEI.

SRGBV in school-based and household surveys, providing gender- and age-disaggregated data. Include schools as sites in multi-country qualitative studies on gender norms and violence in childhood and document the voices of adolescents. Support national education systems to improve monitoring of SRGBV over time, including targeted attacks on female educators and students in conflict settings, and to use the data to implement relevant policy and programme responses.<sup>17</sup>

- **Ensure safe and protective learning environments, including protection from attacks and specialised outreach to female survivors of attacks on education, in particular in fragile and conflict-affected settings.** This includes special attention for those who have suffered from recruitment to armed groups, abduction, trafficking, sexual violence, and other abuses.<sup>18</sup> Support, and where possible, expand the provision of medical and psychosocial assistance to survivors of attacks on education, taking into account the specific needs and experiences of women and girls.

## Economic Justice and Rights

**ACTION:** *Ensure basic education, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and lifelong learning opportunities to create an enabling environment for all girls to access their economic rights, and participate in and co-create just economic systems.*

Economic justice to ensure that economies work for all, including women and girls and other marginalized groups, constitutes guaranteeing and protecting economic rights for all women and girls, and building fairer and more just futures of work. Nearly all countries in the world grant economic rights to women, in principle. But conflict and crisis settings, gendered stereotypes and structural and institutional barriers keep women and girls behind. In addition to being subjected to vulnerable and dangerous work, women around the globe do between 2 to 10 times more unpaid care work than men.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Based on current trends, it would take 257 years to close the gender gap in economic opportunity.

Girls' education, the provision of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and an enabling and just economic environment for women is fundamental to ensuring economic justice and rights. Women with primary education earn only marginally more than those with no education, while women with secondary education could expect to make almost twice as much as those with no education, and women with tertiary education almost four times as much.<sup>21</sup> Girls' education is also linked with increased agency for women and girls, deeper understanding of their rights, and activism inherent to mobilizing social change and progress.

### Tactics

- **12 years of girls' education:** Incentivise and support all countries to adopt and implement legal provisions making 12 years of basic, quality education free and compulsory, and progressively achieve universal upper secondary education (including through non-formal education, and accelerated education for girls who have been unable to complete formal education). Ensure a gender-responsive education sector planning (GRESF) approach to education system

---

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO and UNGEI. (2015). [School-related gender-based violence is preventing the achievement of quality education for all](#). Paris, UNESCO.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (UNCEDAW). (2015). [Attacks against girls seeking to access education](#). [Background Paper]. Geneva, OHCHR.

<sup>19</sup> Ferrant, G., Pesando L.M. and Nowacka, K. (2014). [Unpaid care work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes](#), Paris, OECD, as cited in Oxfam. (2017). [An economy that works for women](#), Oxfam Briefing Paper. Oxford, Oxfam.

<sup>20</sup> UNDP. (2020) [Tackling social norms: A game changer for gender inequalities](#), Pg 1.

<sup>21</sup> World Bank. (2018). [Missed opportunities: The high cost of not educating girls](#), Washington, D.C., World Bank.

strengthening and response to adequately respond to needs of all learners. Fill budgetary and programmatic financing gaps in girls' education by supporting bilateral agencies and multilateral funds (including the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW)).

- **21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, STEM, and lifelong learning opportunities:** Strengthen and equip education systems and responses to provide girls and women with technical and vocational training and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (including critical thinking, effective communication, collaboration, solving complex problems, a global mindset and engaging with information and communications technologies) as part of upper secondary education curricula and deliver gender-responsive STEM education including through teacher training, educational content and pedagogy. Ensure access to quality and fully financed non-formal education focusing on numeracy, literacy, skills development for decent work and life-skills for secondary school-age girls.
- **Address harmful social norms and provide social protection to girls and women:** To propel the effects of girls' education towards gender equality, countries must create an enabling environment for girls by addressing harmful social norms, such as early or forced marriage, child labour, gender-based expectations around care work and employment, and providing social protection packages with a cash plus approach, including working in tandem with other interventions such as feeding programmes, to minimise the structural and financial barriers to accessing education, disproportionately experienced by girls.

## **Bodily Autonomy & Sexual and Reproductive Justice**

**ACTION:** *Ensure comprehensive sexuality education for all children both within and outside of school settings.*

A significant body of evidence shows that comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) enables children and young people to develop the confidence, knowledge, skills and autonomy they need to: make free and informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive lives; enjoy fulfilling and healthy relationships and to protect themselves and their partners against ill health, violence and unwanted pregnancy; and establish positive values, including respect for human rights and gender equality.<sup>22</sup> It improves sexual and reproductive health-related outcomes, particularly when there is a strong component on gender and power in relationships in the content and delivery.<sup>23</sup>

CSE addresses challenges to education that many adolescents face today including early and unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, early and forced marriage, and discrimination and violence linked to harmful gender norms. CSE intersects with the rights to education, health, participation and protection as it aims to transform gender norms and practices to overcome inequality, and eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination.

### Tactics

- **Accelerate the delivery of scientifically accurate, age- and developmentally-appropriate, inclusive, accessible, non-judgemental, non-discriminatory, rights-based and evidence-informed CSE in formal and non-formal settings.** Aligned with commitments made under SDG 4.7, ensure the resources and political leadership needed to: develop appropriate CSE curricula and teaching and learning materials; train and support teachers and school staff on

---

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO. (2018). [International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach, Revised edition](#). Paris, UNESCO.

<sup>23</sup> Haberland, N. (2015). [The case for addressing gender and power in sexuality and HIV education: A comprehensive review of evaluation studies](#), *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 41(1), 31–42.

CSE; effectively monitor and evaluate CSE programmes; support the creation of favourable and safe physical environments; and develop linkages with health services.<sup>24</sup> Involve young people in curriculum development to ensure that content is relevant and tailored to their needs, and invest in the delivery of peer-based non-formal CSE.<sup>25</sup>

- **Complement CSE with community-based approaches**, including condom distribution; engagement with community and parent associations to address potential opposition; training for health providers to deliver youth-friendly services; and engagement of parents and teachers.<sup>26</sup> Multicomponent programmes, especially those that link school-based sexuality education with non-school-based, youth-friendly health services, are particularly important for reaching the marginalized young people, including those who are not in school.<sup>27</sup> These needs may be greatest in humanitarian settings, where significant gaps exist in access to services.<sup>28</sup>
- **Address community and parental resistance to CSE**, along with other policies and programmes advancing gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights. Engage youth-focused groups and civil society organizations, religious leaders, the media, politicians and others who can serve as champions to enhance awareness and support for CSE.<sup>29</sup> Sensitize parents and provide them with accurate information on the benefits of CSE and offer spaces for dialogue.<sup>30</sup>

## Feminist Action for Climate Justice

**Action:** *Integrate gender-transformative education on climate change and education for sustainable development (ESD) into education systems and responses.*

Girls and women disproportionately bear the impacts of climate change<sup>31</sup>, including heightened social, economic and health pitfalls of climate disasters. Women experience higher mortality rates than men, are more likely to experience human rights abuses including human trafficking and sexual violence, disruptions in sexual and reproductive healthcare, interruptions to their income and reduced bargaining power in the household.<sup>32</sup> Adolescent girls are at additional risk of being pulled out of school to help alleviate extra domestic burdens, like fetching water, that are shouldered by women in households under climate-related stress.<sup>33</sup> Early marriages and early and unintended pregnancies increase during disasters and crises, perpetuating the vicious intergenerational cycle of poverty, vulnerability and marginalization.

---

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO. (2019). [Facing the facts: The case for comprehensive sexuality education](#). Paris, UNESCO.

<sup>25</sup> Kirby D. (2007). [Emerging answers 2007: Research findings on programs to reduce teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases](#). Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

<sup>26</sup> Chandra-Mouli, V., Lane, C. and Wong, S. (2015). [What does not work in adolescent sexual and reproductive health: A review of evidence on interventions commonly accepted as best practices](#). *Global Health: Science and Practice*, 3, 333-340.

<sup>27</sup> UNESCO. (2016). [Review of the evidence on sexuality education. Report to inform the update of the UNESCO international technical guidance on sexuality education](#). Paris, UNESCO.

<sup>28</sup> Women's Refugee Commission, Save the Children, UNHCR, UNFPA. (2012). [Adolescent sexual and reproductive health programs in humanitarian settings: An in-depth look at family planning services](#). New York, UNFPA.

<sup>29</sup> Panchaud, C, et al. (2018). [Towards comprehensive sexuality education: A comparative analysis of the policy environment surrounding school-based sexuality education in Ghana, Peru, Kenya and Guatemala](#). *Sex Education* 19:3, 277-296,.

<sup>30</sup> Chandra-Mouli V., Plesons A., Hadi S., Baig Q. and Lang I. (2018). [Building support for adolescent sexuality and reproductive health education and responding to resistance in conservative contexts: Case from Pakistan](#). *Global Health: Science and Practice* 6(1), 128-136.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). (2019). [Differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men](#). Synthesis report by the Secretariat. NY, UNFCCC.

<sup>32</sup> Kwauk C., Cooke J., Hara E. and Pegram J. (2019). [Girls' Education in Climate Strategies](#), Global Economy and Development Working Paper 133, Brookings, Plan Int and UNICEF, 3-4

<sup>33</sup> Kwauk C., Cooke J., Hara E. and Pegram J. (2019). [Girls' Education in Climate Strategies](#), Global Economy and Development Working Paper 133, Brookings, Plan Int and UNICEF, 4



Inclusive, quality and gender-transformative education is critical to achieving climate justice as we respond to climate change. Girls' education is key to a fundamental, and progressive shift in the social fabric and global political economy currently fueling the climate crisis.<sup>34</sup> It helps deconstruct harmful gender and social norms and enables girls and women to become leaders in climate action and participate in climate change decision-making. Enhancing girls' "green skills" through education builds resilience and adaptive capacities and enables them to engage with sustainable livelihoods, manage natural resources and reduce exposure to risks. This is also a critical component of SDG target 4.7, which commits governments to ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development.

### Tactics

- **Protect girls' right to education before, during and after climate-disasters.** National policies on climate change must recognize the importance of girls' education in climate resilience and strengthen education systems with gender-transformative curricula, green skills, STEM and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, including negotiation and decision-making. National climate change budgets, donor and multilateral funding should support education systems in addressing the needs of girls displaced or migrating as a result of climate change, including the provision of safe and continued education.
- **Ensure that Education for Sustainable Development is a fundamental part of education systems.** Education systems must integrate SDG 4.7 (Education for Sustainable Development) into the broader vision of education, including conceptualization, teaching and assessment (as opposed to being<sup>35</sup> complementary to education). And ESD must focus on climate justice, not just climate science,<sup>35</sup> ensuring an understanding of the gendered, inter-generational and intersectional impacts and solutions for climate change.
- **Address norms that dictate social roles and ensure women and girls are active partners in building resilience and environmental sustainability.** Create an enabling environment for climate justice – mitigate the gendered impacts of climate change and enable girls and women to be co-creators of climate solutions by addressing gender norms inside the classroom by empowering teachers, especially female teachers to address climate change through a gender-transformative lens. And outside the classroom by working with men and boys, breaking structural and institutional barriers to girls and women's control over resources, access to green jobs and providing meaningful safe participatory processes.

## Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality

**Action:** *Provide equal opportunities for girls and women to study and work in STEM and become social innovators.*

Many girls and women do not have the skills they need to close the gender digital divide, and they are often less likely to have access to technology, or more likely to be subject to cyber bullying and harassment. In many countries, women are 25% less likely than men to know how to leverage ICT for basic purposes, such as using simple arithmetic formulas in a spreadsheet. Further along the skills spectrum, the divides grow wider with men being four times more likely than women to have advanced

---

<sup>34</sup> Kwauk, C., Cooke, J., Hara, E., Pegram, J. (2019). [Girls' education in climate strategies: Opportunities for improved policy and enhanced action in nationally determined contributions](#). Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution.

<sup>35</sup> Kwauk, C. (2020). [Roadblocks to education in a time of climate change](#). Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution.

ICT skills, such as the ability to programme computers.<sup>36</sup> Digital skills gaps appear to be growing despite at least two decades of interventions to move closer to gender equality.<sup>37</sup>

Girls are significantly less likely to pursue technology-related studies than their male peers -- representing less than one-third of enrollees in higher education ICT studies globally.<sup>38</sup> They are also under-represented in other aspects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, and consequently in STEM careers, often referred to as jobs of the future, driving innovation, social wellbeing, inclusive growth and sustainable development. Women and girls are the great untapped population to advance technology and social innovation - we must invest in their talent.

### Tactics

- **Scale up gender-responsive ICT and STEM education** and promote learning environments that support girls to pursue ICT and STEM subjects by addressing harmful gender norms, stereotypes and discrimination among all learners, building teacher capacities, ensuring that ICT and STEM education is included in national curricula, and improving career guidance and orientation. Access to ICT must go hand in hand with information on online rights, online safety and how to mitigate risks online.<sup>39</sup> This includes formal, school-based interventions along with access to clubs, camps and other informal opportunities to complement and build on school-based approaches.<sup>40</sup>
- **Ensure access to role models and mentors, including women successful in these fields<sup>41</sup>** to: debunk stereotypes and myths about gendered abilities and careers; expand understanding of educational and career pathways in these fields; enrich skills, networks and social capital; and help girls transition into the STEM workforce.<sup>42</sup>
- **Bring parents on board:** Design and implement parental outreach programmes to dismantle harmful gendered stereotypes about intelligence, aptitude and 'appropriate' fields of study for women and raise awareness of the importance of digital skills for girls, including online rights and safety, and available safeguards and controls.<sup>43</sup> An overemphasis on safety is also often used as a justification for preventing women and girls from using technology and cultivating digital skills.<sup>44</sup> Enable parents to transform attitudes that result in reduced autonomy of girls, and instead focus on: enhancing girls' skills on online safety and encouraging all learners to respect diverse users of technology.

---

<sup>36</sup> UNESCO. (2017). [Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/8. Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments](#). Paris, UNESCO.

<sup>37</sup> EQUALS Research Group. (2018). [Taking stock: Data and evidence on gender equality in digital access, skills and leadership: Preliminary findings of a review by the EQUALS Research Group](#). Geneva, EQUALS Global Partnership.

<sup>38</sup> UNESCO. (2017). [Cracking the code: Girls' and women's education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics](#). Paris, UNESCO.

<sup>39</sup> Broadband Commission. (2019). [Child online safety: Minimizing the risk of violence, abuse and exploitation online](#).

<sup>40</sup> EQUALS Skills Coalition. (2019). [I'd blush if I could: Closing gender divides in digital skills through education](#). Paris, UNESCO and Geneva, ITU.

<sup>41</sup> Mariscal, J., Mayne, G., Aneja, U. and Sorgner, A. (2018). [Bridging the gender digital gap](#). Buenos Aires, CARI/CIPPEC.

<sup>42</sup> Stone M, Vogelstein R. (2019). [Investing in girls' STEM education](#). Council on Foreign Relations website.

<sup>43</sup> EQUALS Research Group. (2018). [Taking stock: Data and evidence on gender equality in digital access, skills and leadership: Preliminary findings of a review by the EQUALS Research Group](#). Geneva, EQUALS Global Partnership.

<sup>44</sup> Intel and Dalberg. (2013). [Women and the web: Bridging the internet gap and creating new global opportunities in low and middle-income countries](#). Santa Clara, California, Intel.

## Feminist Movements and Leadership

**Action:** *Embed gender-transformative education into the right to education to address and encourage girls' and women's social, political and economic leadership and participation.*

Across the globe, women's leadership and political participation are restricted, and women are underrepresented as voters and in leading positions.<sup>45</sup> While the numbers vary by region and level of governance, only 24.3 per cent of all national parliamentarians are women<sup>46</sup> and only 3 countries have 50 per cent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses. Moreover, feminist movements are increasingly facing backlash both nationally and transnationally,<sup>47</sup> threatening hard-won social, political and economic rights for women and girls.

Pathways to political empowerment and civic engagement start in childhood when children develop a sense for social justice and acquire foundational skills. Adolescence and early adulthood provide the window of opportunity for investing in girls' civic education and skills development and is key to making a difference in nurturing girls' leadership ambitions. Efforts to support girls and women's leadership, including capacity to engage in political and public affairs, must therefore begin in childhood by creating an enabling environment and increase and adapt as girls become young adults. The most critical effort in this cause is gender-transformative education, also reflected in SDG 4.7.

Tactics:

- **Ensure gender-transformative education in schools and non-formal education:** Gender-transformative education must be embedded into the right to education for every child. Governments and other education stakeholders should undertake a gender review of their curricula, textbooks, pedagogical and teacher training materials to ensure they are non-discriminatory, gender-responsive, inclusive and that they do not reinforce gender stereotyping around leadership roles and styles. Learning processes should ensure girls have the skills, knowledge and competencies needed to exercise their rights and empower them to be leaders and decision makers, and that all learners appreciate the need for and the importance of diverse leadership. A critical element of building women's and girls' leadership is to ensure participation in schools as a crucial component of their learning process, where children and young people, particularly girls and young women, learn to express themselves, develop their opinions and critical consciousness, listen to others, and build the necessary skills to become active citizens.
- **Create an enabling environment for girls and women:** Build direct partnerships with local communities, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and parents to discuss the importance of girls' education as a factor for peaceful societies, as this is crucial to build girls' confidence to become leaders. Include principles of feminist leadership in pre- and in-service teacher training to ensure that teachers know how to create a just and equitable environment in the classroom and use positive discipline. Recognize and advocate for the role of education and non-formal initiatives in the empowerment of children and young people as active citizens and gender equality champions and ensure all children and young people receive human rights and civic education at primary and secondary levels.

---

<sup>45</sup> UN Women. n.d. [Women's leadership and political participation](#). Thematic Brief. New York, UN Women.

<sup>46</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. [Women in national parliaments](#), as of 1 February 2019. IPU website.

<sup>47</sup> Roggeband, C. and Krizsan, A. (2019) [Democratic backsliding and backlash against women's rights: Understanding the current challenges for feminist politics](#), Background paper for CSW 64.

## Annex 1

### Core Principles of delivering on gender equality in and through gender-transformative education systems:

- Gender reform is an **act of political will for social change**, which challenges the power structures of the status quo and shifts gender norms. It needs strong leadership at all levels and meaningful involvement of communities, including men and boys to drive progress.
- A **holistic systems-approach** that lifts the focus from gender parity in numbers is critical to address the deep structure of gender inequality across the many layers of an education system and the society in which it operates.
- **Multi-sectoral approach**, which builds cross-sectoral collaboration (across gender, education, health and protection) within and outside of government to address the overlapping barriers and enhance opportunities for gender equality in and through education.
- **Responsiveness to varying local contexts** is critical. There is no one-size fits all solution and it is important to respond to the differentiated needs of girls in their context.
- **Attention to multiple intersecting inequalities to reach the most disadvantaged children.** Gender equality means the inclusion of all children, adolescents, young people and adults, attentive to the many layered and cross-cutting factors that shape experience, opportunity and outcomes.
- **Prioritize the most disadvantaged, and particularly girls in conflict-affected areas**, in order to leave no girls behind and build a solid foundation for inclusive educational, social, and economic advancement for all.