

# GIRLS' EDUCATION: THE PATH TO PROGRESS



Female student completes worksheet assignment in class at Glenview n°2 Primary School in Zimbabwe.  
GPE/Carine Durand

Keeping girls in school is one of the best ways to prevent child marriage and ensure women participate equally in society. That is why girls' education and gender equality are at the center of the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) strategic plan.

## THE CHALLENGE

- Globally, **118.5 million girls are out of school**. Girls face multiple barriers to education tied to gender bias, disability and poverty, including **harmful gender norms** and **school-related gender-based violence**.
- In **countries affected by fragility and conflict**, girls are 2.5 times more likely than boys to be out of primary school and 90% more likely to be out of secondary school.
- Girls' school completion rates **depend on where they live**. One in three girls in sub-Saharan Africa, one in 14 girls in South Asia and one in 12 girls in the Middle East and North Africa do not complete primary school. Only half of girls complete upper-secondary in East Asia and the Pacific and in the Middle East and North Africa, and the rate drops to 30% in South Asia and 20% in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Even in regions that have achieved gender parity in school enrollment, **girls from rural and poorer households** are less likely to go to school.
- **Child marriage** is a main cause of girls dropping out of school. Roughly **640 million girls and women**

have been married in childhood, with 45% of child brides living in South Asia, 20% in sub-Saharan Africa, 15% in East Asia and the Pacific, and 9% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## GPE RESULTS



**91 MILLION**

**girls** reached through GPE grants since 2021, with 65 million living in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.



**84%**

**of girls finished primary school** and **55% completed lower secondary** in 2021 across partner countries compared with 70% and 46% respectively in 2013.



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**partner countries** have accessed the **Girls' Education Accelerator**—GPE'S dedicated financing window for girls' opportunities to attend school and learn.

## GPE APPROACH

All girls should be educated, healthy and safe. GPE has taken bold steps to realize this vision by:

- ▶ **Placing gender at the center of everything we do.** GPE supports partner countries to address gender inequalities so that every girl can get an education. GPE has published an [operational paper](#) identifying how gender equality can be included in education systems through a partnership approach.
- ▶ **Investing in girls.** GPE mobilizes financing and partnerships for partner countries to improve equity, gender equality and inclusion in education. GPE's Girls' Education Accelerator provides dedicated funding for girls' education in partner countries where it lags the furthest behind.
- ▶ **Putting girls at the heart of education systems.** GPE helps partner countries identify barriers to girls' education within education systems and ensures that strategies and policies are in place to address them.
- ▶ **Putting girls' education on the world stage.** GPE promotes girls' education as a priority issue in key global settings, advocating for gender equality in and through education.
- ▶ **Amplifying civil society voices.** Through Education Out Loud, GPE funding supports the increased participation of civil society organizations dedicated to girls' education and gender equality in national sector dialogue and international policy.

## WHY EDUCATING GIRLS MATTERS

Educating girls generates huge dividends for economic prosperity, gender equality, climate resilience, public health, and lasting peace and stability.

- ▶ If every girl received 12 years of schooling, child marriage would plunge by two-thirds and girls' higher lifetime earnings would grow economies by as much as US\$30 trillion.
- ▶ If every girl completed primary school, maternal deaths would decline by two-thirds.

- ▶ A child whose mother can read is 50% more likely to live past the age of 5 and to be immunized, and is twice as likely to go to school.
- ▶ With every additional year of schooling a girl receives, her country's resilience to climate disasters improves, as indicated by increased economic, governance and social readiness to cope with climate change events. Ensuring girls' access to quality education is also a key pathway for gender parity in climate leadership.

## PRIORITIZING GIRLS IN SCHOOL IN ZIMBABWE

A 2018 CAMFED study of Zimbabwe's education system revealed girls face significant levels of sexual abuse and violence in and on the way to school, including physical punishment by teachers, and sexual teasing and harassment by boys and teachers that has become normalized. Girls were also prone to dropping out from secondary school because of early marriage and pregnancy. From 2022–2026, Zimbabwe has prioritized improving equity in its education system by supporting the most disadvantaged children and addressing the specific needs of marginalized girls to improve their retention in school.

Financing from GPE's Girls' Education Accelerator is supporting Zimbabwe's education priorities and close to 194,000 girls through a systems approach. Interventions are focused on developing an early dropout warning system for girls most at risk, promoting safe learning environments, providing scholarships and developing a national life skills curriculum to provide girls with social support, study groups and life skills sessions to build self-esteem and confidence.