GLOBAL EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT

2019

GENDER REPORT

Building bridges for gender equality

UNESCO
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Global
Education Monitoring Report

UNGEI
United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
Foreword

Access to a sustainable and quality education is one of the greatest challenges facing the world today and tomorrow. By working to ensure that every child can go to school and also that we can all continue to learn throughout our lives, our goal must be to give everyone the necessary skills to contribute to the development of their societies.

Education is at the heart of the goals that the international community set itself to achieve by 2030. This is why UNESCO is prioritising gender equality in and through education. The stakes are twofold: The education of girls and women is, first, a fundamental human right and it is also an essential lever for sustainable development and peace.

For a long time, this issue has been seen through a single prism, that of, achieving parity in schools, which was considered the criteria to measure the success or failure of efforts to integrate girls and young women into education systems. From this point of view, the last twenty years have witnessed a remarkable evolution.

But reality remains more complex: Disparities persist between countries, of course, but the fact today is that, even though some may enjoy greater access to education in parts of the world, gender inequality persists in education. Girls and young women continue to be discriminated against, especially with regard to the opportunities they are offered upon leaving school.

This is why this global Report stresses the need for broader thinking and action to achieve more than just gender parity in education, because, if access to education remains an absolutely vital issue for sustainable development, and we must continue to work to promote it especially when it is not achieved, we must also consider more than just parity in numbers.

To fully achieve gender equality in and through education, we must ensure that girls, once they enter school, remain in school and benefit from opportunities similar to those of boys in their educational journey and at the end of school. This includes making schools a place where gender stereotypes are deconstructed and fought. This is the ambition of the programmes supported by UNESCO to ensure that girls in school not only complete their studies, but also have access to study areas - especially science and technology - where they are still largely a minority.

This Report invites readers to explore all the factors that perpetuate gender inequalities in schools. It provides tools to enable governments to analyse the situation in their own countries and to develop strategies for change. For the first time, this Report also provides a study of national education plans, focusing on countries with the greatest gender disparities in education.

UNESCO stands ready to support governments in developing education policies and plans that support this real inclusion, and to work with all development partners whose major contribution this report highlights, to achieve real equality in our societies, as a necessary condition for development and peace.

Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO
Key messages

- Despite progress, just two in three countries have achieved parity in primary, one in two in lower secondary, and one in four in upper secondary education enrolment. A quarter of countries have a large disparity against boys in upper secondary education, with no change since 2000.

- Some regions are progressing faster than others, including Central and Southern Asia, mostly thanks to change in India. But sub-Saharan Africa remains far from parity at all education levels.

- In countries with low primary and secondary completion rates, the relative disadvantage of girls worsens with poverty.

- Parents tend to read more often to girls, one of the factors associated with them outperforming boys in reading in primary school assessments.

- Technical and vocational programmes remain a male bastion, while the opposite is true for tertiary education. Subject choice is also gender segregated. Only just over a quarter of those enrolled in engineering, manufacturing and construction programmes, and in information and communications technology programmes are women.

- Harmful social norms can prevent change from happening in education with women still frequently seen as being wives and caregivers; over a quarter of people think that ‘a university education is more important for a boy’. In most countries, girls are also more than twice as likely to be involved in child domestic work than boys.

- Achieving gender equality will not occur without strong political commitment. Laws should ban child marriage and enable pregnant students to go to school. At least 117 countries and territories still allow children to marry.

- Social institutions can be discriminatory and hold back progress for girls and women. One in four countries had a high or very high discrimination level in 2019.

- More commitment is needed to protect girls’ right to go back to school after pregnancy in laws and policies. In sub-Saharan Africa, four countries enforce a total ban against their return.

- School-related gender-based violence impacts on school attendance and learning. One in four students in mostly high-income countries and one in three in mostly low- and middle-income countries reported having been bullied in the previous 12 months. Violence is exacerbated in displacement settings.

- Comprehensive sexuality education expands education opportunities, challenges gender norms and promotes gender equality, resulting in more responsible sexual behaviour and fewer early pregnancies.

- Too many schools lack sanitation facilities essential for menstrual hygiene management. Only half of schools in 2016 had access to handwashing facilities with soap and water.

- Teaching is frequently a female profession with men in charge. Nearly 94% of teachers in pre-primary education, but only about half of those in upper secondary education, are female. Many countries struggle to deploy female teachers where they are most needed, as in displacement settings, and there is little training in gender-sensitive teaching, which reinforces gender stereotypes in the classroom.

- Donor aid to gender equality in education needs to lead to sustainable results that are effective, scalable, replicable and participatory. Across OECD DAC member countries, 55% of direct aid to education was gender-targeted, ranging from 6% in Japan to 92% in Canada.

- Many sector plans ignore key priorities for gender equality. Analysis of 20 countries showed that cash and in-kind transfers are the most popular policy, featuring in three in four plans. Curriculum and textbook reform, girls’ participation in STEM courses and safe access to schools were the least popular, appearing in only a fifth of countries’ plans.

- The plans of Angola, the Central African Republic, Djibouti and Mauritania made scant references to gender inequalities in education, but those of Niger, Guinea and Somalia are strong roadmaps for change.
Achieving gender equality in education participation, in the teaching and learning process and in access to social and economic opportunities that education can facilitate are key interlinked ambitions in two of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: SDG 4 on education and SDG 5 on gender equality. These aims are also key to the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which calls on countries to adopt strategies that not only cover access to education for all but also address substantive gender equality issues: ‘supporting gender-sensitive policies, planning and learning environments; mainstreaming gender issues in teacher training and curricula; and eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence in schools’.

The 2019 Gender Report is based on a monitoring framework first introduced in the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report. In addition to focusing on gender parity in education participation, attainment and learning achievement, the framework examines broad social and economic contexts (gender norms and institutions) and key education system characteristics (laws and policies, teaching and learning practices, learning environments, and resources). The framework also looks at the relationship between education and selected social and economic outcomes. For instance, a move towards parity in education attainment may increase women’s labour force participation rates, but low levels of labour force participation feed into existing norms and may constrain expansion of education opportunities for women (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1:**
A broad framework is used to monitor gender equality in education

Source: GEM Report team.
Analysis of the domains of the report’s monitoring framework for gender equality in education is further informed by a discussion of intersections between gender, education, migration and displacement. This discussion is based on the theme of the 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report (Box 1).

Finally, the report outlines a range of approaches that bilateral donors, multilateral donors and non-government organizations (NGOs) have taken in recent years to address selected priority areas in girls’ education. It also explores the extent to which education sector plans in 20 education systems with wide disparity at girls’ expense envisage adopting and scaling up such approaches. This analysis feeds into the recent debate, spurred by the 2019 G7 French Presidency, on the need to strengthen gender-responsive education sector planning.

**BOX 1: Intersections between education, migration and displacement are not gender-neutral**

Being on the move, whether as a migrant or a forcibly displaced person, has gender-specific implications for education responses and outcomes alike. In a few cases, movement creates opportunities to break free from social moulds, but generally it exacerbates gender-based vulnerability. Moreover, the education and skills women have or gain can affect their ability to exercise agency or mitigate vulnerability in migration and displacement contexts. Thus a gender lens should be used in education analyses (North, 2019).

An analysis of internal migration patterns in 58 countries between 1970 and 2011 showed that the share of women did not change much over the decades (Abel and Muttarak, 2017). Exceptions included China, where the gender ratio, formerly skewed towards males, equalized among younger migrant workers (Chiang et al., 2015). Between 1990 and 2017, the share of females in the total international migrant population remained stable at 50%. Looking beyond averages, some countries are major hubs of gender-specific emigration, such as the Philippines for women and Nepal for men (UNDESA, 2017).

However, although the share of women who migrate has not changed radically, the share of women who migrate independently or for work, rather than as accompanying family members, has increased. This phenomenon has been termed the feminization of migration. Research shows how demand for and supply of migrant women’s labour are affected by unequal gender norms in the labour market (Hochschild, 2000; Yeates, 2012).

Among displaced populations, women and girls again account for roughly half of the total (Liebig and Tronstad, 2018). Their condition is particularly vulnerable because of the lack of privacy, protection and security in conflict contexts (ILO, 2017b; O’Neil et al., 2016).

Two compacts endorsed in December 2018 recognized the importance of education for migrants and displaced persons. The Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration, endorsed by 152 of the 193 United Nations member states, outlines a range of non-binding commitments on education in areas including access, content and the need for gender-responsive interventions in non-formal and vocational education (United Nations, 2018a). The Global Compact for Refugees, which espouses the principle of refugee inclusion in national education systems, makes explicit references to the need for flexible programmes for girls (United Nations, 2018b).
Monyrath, 7, at school in Kampong Cham, Cambodia.

CREDIT: Hanna Adcock/Save the Children
Despite progress, significant challenges to achieving parity in education opportunities remain

Over the past 25 years, substantial progress has been made towards achieving gender parity thanks to sustained efforts to improve girls’ education, including policies and programmes aimed at changing social attitudes, providing financial support to female students and making schools more accessible (UNESCO, 2015). The fifth goal of the Education for All programme envisaged achieving parity by 2005, a target that was missed; however, continuous progress was made throughout the 1990s and 2000s, with the result that parity was reached in 2009 in primary and secondary education and had almost been achieved in youth literacy by 2016.

Nevertheless, gender disparity to the disadvantage of females remained in adult literacy, where 63% of illiterate adults are female. And in tertiary education, gender disparity flipped to the disadvantage of males: As early as 2004, men became less likely than women to participate at the tertiary level (Figure 2).

While gender parity has been achieved globally, on average, the situation varies by region. The gender parity index for Central and Southern Asia, dominated by progress in India, has improved rapidly at all three levels. By contrast, sub-Saharan Africa is far from parity at all levels, especially in upper secondary education, where progress has been very slow. Northern Africa and Western Asia, which has experienced stagnation due to conflict, is now the region furthest from parity in primary education (Figure 3).

Likewise, achieving gender parity on average obscures the fact that many individual countries remain far from reaching it. The number of countries that have achieved gender parity in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education enrolment has increased since 2000. Yet just two in three countries have achieved it in primary, one in two in lower secondary and one in four in upper secondary education. The share of countries with a large disparity to the disadvantage of girls (an adjusted gender parity index less than 0.9) has halved since 2000, but remains 7% in primary, 12% in lower secondary and 16% in upper secondary education. The opposite phenomenon, a large disparity to the disadvantage of boys (an adjusted gender parity index above 1.1) is less common in primary and lower secondary but very common in upper secondary education (25%), where no change has been seen since 2000 (Figure 4).

Overall, girls are more disadvantaged in low-income countries, in some cases even from the point of entry to

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**FIGURE 2:**
There has been steady movement towards gender parity for more than 25 years
Adjusted gender parity index for selected gross enrolment ratios and literacy rates, 1990-2017

![Graph showing adjusted gender parity index over time](image-url)
FIGURE 3:
Progress towards gender parity has varied by region
Adjusted gender parity index for selected gross enrolment ratios and regions, 2000–2017

Source: UIS database.

FIGURE 4:
Many countries have yet to achieve parity in secondary education
Percentage of countries that have achieved gender parity in the gross enrolment ratio, by education level, 2000 and 2017

Source: GEM Report team analysis based on UIS data.
school, as in Afghanistan and Mali. More commonly, while boys and girls start primary school on an equal footing, disparity increases progressively. In Togo, for instance, only 4 young women are enrolled in tertiary education for every 10 young men. Boys are more disadvantaged in upper-middle-income countries. In many middle-income countries, gender disparity increases at each level of education to the disadvantage of young men, as in the Dominican Republic (Figure 5).

GENDER, POVERTY AND LOCATION INTERACT TO EXACERBATE INEQUALITY

Patterns of growing disparity are often linked to underlying unequal gender norms and institutions, which may affect vulnerable boys and girls differently in differing contexts. Just as gender parity has been achieved on average globally but large gaps remain between countries, the same is true within countries. In general, the interaction of gender with poverty or location tends to work to the disadvantage of girls in poorer countries with low completion rates and social expectations that they marry early, and to the disadvantage of boys in richer countries with high completion rates but social expectations that they enter the labour force early.

At the primary education level, most countries with a completion rate below 60% exhibit gender disparity at girls’ expense, particularly poor and rural girls. In Mauritania, the adjusted gender parity index is 0.86 on average, but only 0.63 for the poorest 20%, while there is parity among the richest 20%. In countries with completion rates

FIGURE 5:
Gender gaps tend to grow over the education trajectory in many countries
Adjusted gender parity index at five key transition points, 2017 or latest year

Note: Countries are those with data for all indicators. Countries are ordered by income level.
Source: UIS database.
between 60% and 80%, gender disparity is generally smaller, but disparity at the expense of poor girls is especially marked in Cameroon, Nigeria and Yemen. Exceptions in the opposite direction are observed in countries with pastoralist economies that rely on boys’ labour, such as the Kingdom of Eswatini, Lesotho and Namibia (Figure 6a).

At the secondary education level, too, the interaction of gender with poverty or location worsens disparity. In Burundi and Malawi, there is gender disparity in lower secondary completion at the expense of girls among poor and rural populations and at the expense of boys among rich and urban populations (Figure 6b). Practically no poor girls graduate from upper secondary school in several sub-Saharan African countries with completion rates below 20%, including Chad, Côte d’Ivoire and the United Republic of Tanzania. By contrast, in most countries with completion rates above 45%, there is disparity at the expense of boys, on average, and it is worse among poor boys in countries including Belize, Mongolia, the Philippines and Viet Nam (Figure 6c).

There is nothing predetermined about the speed at which countries close the gender gap. New analysis of completion rates by the Global Education Monitoring Report ("GEM Report") team shows that some countries have been more successful than others. For example, with respect to primary completion, Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire were at the same level of gender disparity in 2000, but while Burkina Faso managed to close the gender gap and achieve parity, Côte d’Ivoire stagnated. At the lower secondary level, Nepal overtook Pakistan, Mali moved ahead of Senegal and Afghanistan progressed much faster than South Sudan, which now has the worst gender disparity record (Figure 7). This suggests that political will to address disparity, along with effective policies, can make a difference.

**Gender dimensions of migration and displacement affect children’s education opportunities**

Just as location and socio-economic status can affect boys’ and girls’ education opportunities differently, gender-related aspects of migration and displacement phenomena can also be linked with variable effects on education trajectories. For instance, education attainment and achievement of boys can follow a different path than that of girls when one or both parents migrate (Box 2). When parents and other family members send remittances home, the extent to which these are used to finance education can differ by gender (Box 3). And the impact of displacement on access to education has a distinct gender dimension in many contexts (Box 4).

**IN TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL AND TERTIARY EDUCATION, GENDER GAPS PERSIST IN ACCESS AND SUBJECT CHOICE**

Technical and vocational programmes account for 22% of upper secondary education enrolment and are disproportionately male. Globally, the share of females enrolled in upper secondary technical and vocational programmes is 43%, with regional shares ranging from 32% in Central and Southern Asia to 50% in Latin America and the Caribbean. Female students in such programmes are often predominantly enrolled in fields such as food and nutrition, cosmetology and sewing. Gender norms, which often translate into segmented employment opportunities, determine to a large extent what education opportunities are open to boys and girls.

In tertiary education, 111 young women are enrolled for every 100 young men. But there are wide differences between regions: Women in sub-Saharan Africa are far less likely to enrol than men (72 women for every 100 men), while the opposite is observed in Oceania (70 men for every 100 women) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (76 men for every 100 women).

Despite being the majority of university graduates, women are under-represented in certain programmes. Across more than 120 countries, the share of female students in tertiary engineering, manufacturing and construction programmes and in information and communication technology (ICT) is just over 25%. Countries closer to parity include Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. The countries with the lowest shares in both types of programme are largely in western Africa (Benin, Ghana, Mali) and western Europe (Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland) (Figure 8).

The choice of field of study is linked to future job aspirations. In countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 15-year-old boys are more than twice as likely as girls that age to expect to work as engineers, scientists or architects. Only 0.4% of 15-year-old girls want to work as ICT professionals, compared with 5% of boys. In Finland, 6.2% of boys expect to work as engineers, scientists or
architects, four times higher than the percentage of girls with similar aspirations (1.4%). Women account for less than 20% of entrants to tertiary computer science programmes in OECD countries and about 18% of engineering entrants, on average (OECD, 2017).

**DISPARITY IN READING SKILLS HAS ROOTS IN THE HOME**

The most recent cross-national assessment providing results on literacy is the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which assessed the reading skills of grade 4 students in more than 50 education systems in middle- and high-income countries. The results show girls doing better than boys, a reminder that gender gaps in literacy skills begin in early grades. The gap is small but significant in high-income countries in Europe, becoming larger in countries throughout Northern Africa and Western Asia (Figure 9). In South Africa, the score gap of 52 points is equivalent to more than a year of schooling.

In the 18 mostly high-income countries that took part in all four PIRLS rounds between 2001 and 2016, there is evidence that the gap is slowly closing. The trend is more evident in some countries, including Bulgaria, Slovakia and the United States.

There are significant differences in how parents approach early reading activities at home with their daughters and sons. In most countries, parents were more likely to read books often at home to girls than to boys. The largest gap was observed in Italy, where 54% of girls but only 46% of boys experienced frequent reading activities at home (Figure 10).

Students’ reading abilities in grade 4 differ according to the frequency of early literacy activities. Students who were exposed to more of these activities in early childhood had higher reading scores in PIRLS in nearly all countries. However, gender seemed to play a role in the relationship between early reading activities and reading abilities. In most participating countries, a lack of early reading activities affected boys more than girls. On average, the reading score difference of boys whose parents read books to them often in early childhood, compared with those whose parents hardly ever read to books to them, was 64 score points, compared with 55 points for girls – a gender gap of 9 points (IEA and UNESCO, 2017).

**BOX 2:**

**Gender factors influence the education of children left behind by migrating parents**

Being left behind as a child can disrupt education in ways that differ by gender. In Cambodia, left-behind children were more likely to drop out of school, and the effect was worse for girls. Three-quarters of 600 household heads suggested that, if necessary, they would take a girl out of school instead of a boy (Vutha et al., 2014). A study of 400 children in 10 rural communities in China who did not live with their parents found that they experienced increased stress and workload, which often led to depression. Left-behind girls were particularly vulnerable, since they faced a greater psychological burden as a result of heavier workloads (Jingzhong and Lu, 2011). In Kyrgyzstan, girls disproportionately had to take on unpaid family work in migrant households (Dávalos et al., 2017). In Mexico, parental migration had a negative effect on school attendance of 16- to 18-year-old girls, who had to take on more household chores (McKenzie and Rapoport, 2011).

Regarding internal migration, the gender of the migrating parent is important. Analysis for the 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report based on the China Education Panel Survey showed that children with absent mothers scored substantially lower in mathematics, Chinese, English and cognitive tests than children with both parents present (Hannum et al., 2018). Analysis using Indonesian data from 1993–2014 found that when the mother migrated, education spending dropped by up to 30% and children were more likely to be absent from school and achieve lower grades (Berbée, 2017). In Thailand, adults perceive mothers’ migration as affecting children’s well-being worse than fathers’ migration (Jampaikay et al., 2012).

Concerning international migration, variable effects according to the migrating parent’s gender have been observed. In some cases, maternal emigration can have a worse effect than paternal emigration. In Nigeria, when mothers emigrated and the father was the caregiver, the effect on child well-being was negative (Mazzucato et al., 2015). Children of migrant mothers from the Philippines were about 5 percentage points more likely to be behind in school than children of migrant fathers (Cortes, 2015). Yet in other cases, the education of children with a migrating father suffers more (Vanore et al., 2015). In Guatemala, the probability of enrolment in school was 37 percentage points lower if fathers migrated internationally (Davis and Brazil, 2016).
FIGURE 6:
In countries with low completion rates, the relative disadvantage of girls worsens with poverty
Adjusted gender parity index (GPI) of the completion rate, national average, rural areas, urban areas, poorest 20% and richest 20%, selected countries, 2013–2017

a. Primary

b. Lower secondary
Source: GEM Report team analysis using household survey data.
Box 3:

Gender aspects of migrant remittances have an impact on education

Remittances from migrant family members ease financial constraints and can open up opportunities for girls’ schooling (Ratha, 2013). However, migration also changes household composition, which may have a negative effect on girls’ schooling if they have to do additional household chores. Remittances may also foster a ‘culture of migration’, whereby the prospect of low- or semi-skilled migration generating high returns can prompt early school leaving (Kandel and Massey, 2002). In practice, remittances’ impact differs by migration context and by the gender of senders and recipients. In Jordan, remittances had a larger positive impact on men’s education attainment than on women’s (Mansour et al., 2011).

Globally, remittance-receiving households headed by women tend to spend more on education (Pickbourn, 2016; Ratha et al., 2011). In Albania, parental migration led to decision-making power shifting to grandfathers, who attached less value to girls’ education than to boys’, and the probability of dropout increased among girls (Gnannelli and Mangiavacchi, 2010). But in Mexico, when men migrated and left women with a greater role in household decision-making and resource allocation, there was a positive effect on girls’ education (Antman, 2015).

Box 4:

Displacement exacerbates gender imbalances in education

In many contexts, the education effects of displacement are not gender-neutral. Greater attention needs to be paid to vulnerabilities specific to displaced men and women and to how gender relations in communities of origin and of refuge influence displacement experiences.

Refugees experience gender gaps in access to school in many contexts. Barriers to refugee girls’ education include lack of safe transport, affordability issues and inadequate gender-responsive teacher training. In Myanmar, focus group participants reported that internally displaced girls were dropping out of school in adolescence to avoid mixing with men and to support families at home (Plan International and REACH, 2015).

In Ethiopia and Kenya, for every 10 boys, 7 refugee girls are enrolled in primary school and 4 in secondary school (UNHCR, 2018). In Dadaab camp, Kenya, enrolment rate gaps exist at all levels: Preschool (48% of girls and 62% of boys among 3- to 5-year-olds), primary (47% of girls and 76% of boys among 6- to 13-year-olds) and secondary (7% of girls and 22% of boys among 14- to 17-year-olds) (Women Educational Researchers of Kenya, 2017). An accelerated learning programme condensing Kenya’s eight-year curriculum into four years increased access more for refugee boys than for girls (Shah, 2015). In Somalia, an analysis of 486 settlements in 17 districts of Mogadishu found that only 22% of internally displaced girls over age 5 had ever attended school, compared with 37% of boys (UIPS, 2016).

Norms and education development in host communities also affect access. For Afghan refugees in Pakistan, the primary net enrolment rate for girls was half that of boys in 2011. While social and cultural norms demanded that adolescent girls only be taught by women, there were few female teachers. By contrast, Afghan refugee girls in the Islamic Republic of Iran have enjoyed higher levels of access to education as a result of more positive attitudes towards girls’ education (Nicolle, 2018).
FIGURE 9:  
Girls outperform boys in primary school assessments of reading skills  
Adjusted gender parity index of the reading scale score among grade 4 students, PIRLS 2016

![Graph showing gender parity in reading assessments among grade 4 students.](image)

Source: Mullis et al. (2017).

FIGURE 10:  
Parents tend to read more often to girls than to boys at home  
Gender gap in incidence of parents reading, PIRLS 2016

![Graph showing gender gap in incidence of parents reading.](image)

Note: Dark bars indicate that the gap is statistically significant.  
DESPITE PROGRESS, DISPARITY PERSISTS IN YOUTH AND ADULT SKILLS

International assessments, which show girls having an advantage in reading skills, are mostly administered in upper-middle- or high-income countries, where gender parity in school participation has long been achieved. In low- and lower-middle-income countries, where girls have had a disadvantage in school participation, the gender parity index of the youth literacy rate, which started from a baseline of 0.93 in 2000, was still just short of 0.97 in 2016, meaning that the gender gap is yet to be eliminated.

In 2016, the global literacy rate was 86%, equivalent to 750 million illiterate adults. The gender parity index of the adult literacy rate increased from 0.88 in 2000 to 0.92. In low-income countries, women’s average literacy rate still trails that of men by some 16 percentage points, which corresponds to a gender parity index of 0.77. A combination of slower progress in education access and adverse demographic trends means that, between 2000 and 2016, the number of adult illiterate women decreased by 42 million in upper-middle-income countries but increased by 20 million in low-income countries.

Women who lack literacy skills are particularly vulnerable in displacement settings, which disproportionately affect poorer countries. Programmes focusing on developing the literacy skills of refugee women receive little priority and need to overcome difficult cultural obstacles but can have a large impact on these women’s lives (Box 5).

There is gender parity in adult literacy skills in high-income countries. However, women are at a disadvantage in terms of numeracy skills. Among 30 countries that took part in the OECD’s Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the median gap in the gender parity index between literacy and numeracy skills was about 5 points. The contrast was particularly stark in countries such as Greece and Italy, where adult women were more likely than men to have a minimum level of literacy skills proficiency but less likely to have a minimum level of numeracy skills proficiency (Figure 11). Past and current inequality in labour market opportunities, which prevents women from using their numeracy skills, is one cause of such disparity.

**BOX 5:**

**Teaching resilience and life skills to adult displaced populations has important gender dimensions**

Adult education is often overlooked in humanitarian settings and, where it is considered, often focuses on formal education rather than non-formal resilience or life skills training. For instance, just one literacy and language class for adults and youth was planned in Djibouti, at a cost of US$70,000 out of a US$60 million budget (Hanemann, 2018). The omission needs to be addressed, as education can play a major role in building resilience and creating new opportunities for women. For Dinka women from South Sudan who fled to Kakuma camp in Kenya, displacement increased opportunities to study and improved the possibility of working outside the home when they returned to South Sudan and gaining access to positions customarily reserved for men (Chrostowsky and Long, 2013).

Language and literacy barriers impede displaced people’s access to information, which can be a particularly severe challenge for women. An analysis of understanding of questionnaires on access to services in north-eastern Nigeria found that while 66% of internally displaced men understood written material, only 9% of women did (Kemp, 2018). In Mali, 68% of internally displaced women could not read or write, compared with 32% of men (JIPS, 2013).

Where programmes exist, barriers often prevent adult women from participating. An analysis of internally displaced adults in Medellin, Colombia, revealed that lack of participation in education was linked to factors such as family obligations, low literacy levels and lack of confidence (Carrillo, 2009; Cooper, 2018). South Sudanese female refugees seeking access to education and other services in Cairo, Egypt, were exposed to sexual harassment and violence on the way to class.

However, experiences of refugee women in non-formal education settings suggest that such interventions support their agency and resilience, even when they do not fully help them realize their aspirations for economic opportunity and freedom from violence (North, 2019). Refugee women from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq and Somalia attending English language classes in a community centre in London appreciated the contribution these classes made to their family well-being and social networks (Klenk, 2017).
CONCLUSION

Despite the achievement of parity on average in school participation globally, many gender gaps remain in education attainment and achievement. There are differences between regions: Sub-Saharan Africa is far behind in gender parity at all education levels, while Southern and Central Asia has made rapid progress. There are differences between countries, three-quarters of which have not achieved parity in upper secondary completion, with disparity at the expense of both boys and girls. There are differences within countries: More vulnerable girls and boys, whether as a result of poverty or location, migration or displacement, are most at risk of falling behind. And there are differences between generations, with older women still suffering from past and current inequality and discrimination in norms, socio-economic opportunities and education systems, all feeding into one another. The next two sections speak to those forms of inequality.
Mohammad, 6, in his kindergarten class in Za’atari Refugee Camp, in Jordan, says, “When I grow up I want to become a policeman and I am going to drive their beautiful cars with all the lights and sirens.”

CREDIT: Christopher Herwig/UNICEF