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Leave no child behind

Global report on boys' disengagement from education

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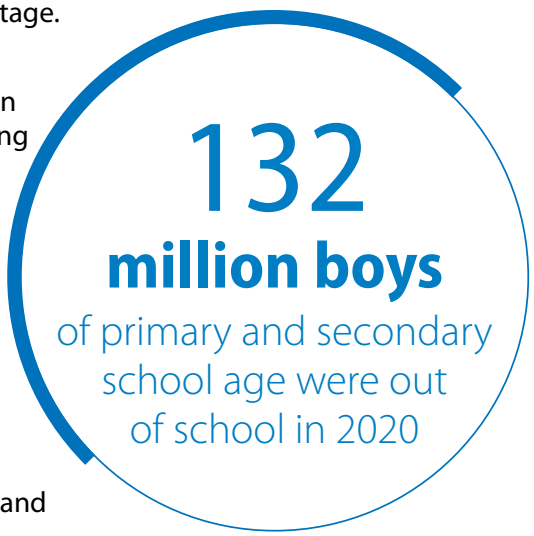
SHORT SUMMARY

Understanding boys' disengagement from education

To leave no child behind, UNESCO developed the first global report of this scope on boys' disengagement from education, bringing together qualitative and quantitative evidence from over 140 countries. This report provides an overview on the global situation on boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education. It identifies factors influencing boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education. It also analyses responses by governments and partners, and examines promising policies and programmes. Finally, it includes recommendations on how to re-engage boys with education and address disadvantage.

While girls continue to face severe disadvantages and inequalities in education, the report shows that boys in many countries are at greater risk than girls of repeating grades, failing to complete different education levels and having poorer learning outcomes in school. No less than 132 million boys of primary and secondary school age are out of school. They urgently require support.



As this report shows, supporting boys does not mean that girls lose out and vice versa. Addressing boys' disengagement not only benefits boys' learning, employment opportunities, income and well-being, it is also highly beneficial for achieving gender equality and desirable economic, social and health outcomes.

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"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"

Leave no child behind

Global report on boys' disengagement from education

Foreword

"Everyone has the right to education," states Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These unequivocal words make a universal promise – that education is for all.

Yet this promise of equality is not being fulfilled. While impressive strides have been made towards more equal access to education in recent years, important gender disparities remain.

While girls are more likely than boys to never attend school, boys in many countries are at higher risk of failing to advance and complete their education. As it stands, 132 million boys are currently out of school.

This report seeks to shed light on the factors driving boys' disengagement from education. Poverty and the need to work, for instance, can lead boys to drop out. Gendered norms and expectations can also affect their desire to learn. In particular, certain subjects can run counter to traditional expressions of masculinity, making them unpopular with boys.

Harsh discipline, corporal punishment and other forms of violence at school also negatively impact boys' academic achievement, while increasing absenteeism and dropouts.

To make education a universal right, we need to ensure that all youth have the educational opportunities to successfully shape their lives and futures. As this report underlines, we need to take decisive steps to keep boys in school and support them throughout their education.

This means, among others, supporting boys' return to education, banning corporal punishment and tackling violence at school. Policies, plans and resources to support these measures are instrumental in this respect.

Fulfilling this promise of equality not only benefits boys and men; it is a step forward for all humankind. Indeed, inclusive and equitable education is everyone's business. When everyone has equal rights and opportunities, we all stand to gain.

Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO

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This report is part of UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education. To better understand boys' disengagement from education, UNESCO commissioned five country case studies, authored by Wahab Ali (The University of Fiji), David Dingus, Max Eckert, Marvin Erfurth and Natasha Ridge (Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research), Norma Fuller (Pontifical Catholic University of Peru), Paseka Andrew Mosia (National University of Lesotho) and Said Omar (The Gulf Arab States Educational research Center-Kuwait).

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Acronyms List

AEP	Accelerated education programme
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
A&E	Accreditation and Equivalency
ALS	Alternative Learning System
AUD	Australian dollar
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EFA	Education For All
GPI	Gender Parity Index
GSHS	Global School-based Student Health Survey
GAGE	Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence
HBSC	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IIEP-UNESCO	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning
LAYS	Learning Adjusted Year of Schooling
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PASEC	Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PISA-D	Programme for International Student Assessment for Development
PATH	Programme of Advancement through Health and Education
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOGIE	Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression
SRGBV	School-related gender-based violence
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive summary

Executive summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development makes the promise to leave no one behind. While improving educational opportunities for girls globally continues to be of paramount importance to achieve gender equality in and through education, this focus on achieving gender parity and equality must not ignore boys. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – and achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls – SDG 5 – requires gender-transformative action.

Education is a fundamental human right for everyone. Realizing this right requires addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education. Addressing the issue not only benefits boys' learning, employment opportunities, income and well-being, it is also highly beneficial for achieving gender equality and desirable economic, social and health outcomes. The social and fiscal costs of boys' disengagement from education are enormous, underlining the need for a broad, inclusive approach to education, ensuring educational opportunity for all.

To leave no child behind, UNESCO developed the first global report of this scope on boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education, bringing together qualitative and quantitative evidence from over 140 countries.

To review the global situation, this report aims to:

- Provide an overview on the global situation on boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education.
- Identify factors influencing boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education.
- Analyse responses by governments and partners and examine policies and programmes.
- Make recommendations on how to re-engage boys with education and address disadvantage.

The report comprises four components of research and analysis:

1. **Data analysis:** Original analysis of statistical data sets for key education indicators.
2. **Literature review:** Review of all relevant literature on factors influencing boys' educational access, participation and learning.
3. **Policy and programme review:** Review of policy and programme documents as well as evaluations.
4. **Focused research in five countries (Fiji, Kuwait, Lesotho, Peru and the United Arab Emirates)**: National case studies on boys' disengagement from education, based on in-depth mixed-method research.

This report is not an overall comparative study of boys and girls, but a focus on countries and contexts where boys are struggling to access education and progress. While girls continue to face severe disadvantages and inequalities in education, the report shows that boys face similar and different challenges, that they are not a homogenous group and that certain boys need support. As this report shows, addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education is not a zero-sum game. Supporting boys does not mean that girls lose out and vice versa. Equal education opportunities benefit both girls and boys and the broader society.

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Key findings

The global situation on boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education

In many countries, boys are at greater risk than girls of repeating grades, failing to complete different education levels and having poorer learning outcomes in school. Where previously boys' disadvantage seemed most notable in high- or upper-middle-income contexts at the beginning of the millennium, this has shifted and now includes several low- and lower-middle-income countries. Secondary education is where boys' disadvantage is most prevalent.

The right to education remains unfulfilled for many boys. Far too many children and youth of primary and secondary school age are out of school. Just over half of them are boys. It has been a concern that the COVID-19 pandemic would lead to an increase in school dropouts. In 2020 – the last school year before the pandemic – an estimated 259 million children and youth of primary and secondary school age were out of school, 132 million of whom were boys. There will not be a clear picture of COVID-19 effects on enrolments before the end of 2022.

While in all regions the largest share of out-of-school boys is concentrated at the upper secondary level, in the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa, a large proportion of out-of-school boys (around a third) are also concentrated at the primary level.

While globally, girls remain less likely than boys to enrol in school, in many countries boys are at greater risk of repeating grades, failing to progress and complete their education and not achieving adequate learning while in school. At the global level, almost no country with data has achieved gender parity at the tertiary level. The gender parity index data in 2019 for tertiary enrolment showed 88 men for every 100 women enrolled at tertiary level. While previously boys' disengagement and dropout was a concern mainly in high-income countries, several low- and middle-income countries have seen a reversal in gender gaps, with boys now lagging behind girls in enrolment and completion. In 73 countries less boys than girls are enrolled in upper-secondary education. Boys are more likely than girls to repeat primary grades in 130 out of 142 countries with data, indicating their poorer progression through school.

In 57 countries with data on learning poverty, 10-year-old boys fare worse than girls in mastering reading skills and adolescent boys continue to fall behind girls at the secondary level. In mathematics, on the other hand, the gender gap that once worked against girls at the start of the millennium has narrowed or equalized with boys in half of all countries with data.

Factors influencing boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes

In the complex social milieu surrounding boys' and girls' participation in education, a range of factors – at the levels of the macrosystem (societal, economic, cultural), mesosystem (schools and other institutions) and microsystem (interpersonal and personal) – combine to influence participation, progression and learning outcomes. Overlapping factors exacerbate constraints on boys' education and lead to, and reinforce, poor educational outcomes.

Poverty and the need to work are important drivers of school dropout. Gendered norms and expectations impact on boys' motivation and desire to learn. In many contexts, school activities and certain subjects are considered at odds with expressions of masculinity, making education unpopular with boys.

Practices such as streaming of classes and gender segregation contribute to boys' low motivation, underachievement and disengagement from education. Harsh discipline, corporal punishment and other forms of school-related gender-based violence impact negatively on boys' academic achievement and attainment. Fear and experiences of violence lead to increased absenteeism and may contribute to dropout. Boys are more likely than girls to experience physical bullying and are often targeted because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (SOGIE).

Conflict and forced migration exacerbate challenges in accessing and completing education. Language barriers, mobility and discrimination contribute to educational exclusion. Prolonged school closures and the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on learning loss and school dropout are likely to exacerbate existing gender disparities unless steps are taken to address the learning needs of all.

Responses to address boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education

Despite boys'clear disengagement from and disadvantage in education in certain contexts, there are few programmes and initiatives addressing this phenomenon holistically, with system-level, gender-specific policies even more rare.

Scarce policy attention has been given to gender disparities in education that disadvantage boys. Existing policies are predominantly in high-income countries. Few low- or middle-income countries have specific policies to improve boys' enrolment and

completion of primary or secondary education, even in countries with severe disparities at boys' expense. Very few policies, programmes or initiatives address intersecting disadvantage, such as remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and religion.

The policy review done for this report shows that options to address boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education include: reducing the cost of schooling, improving school infrastructure, improving the accessibility and quality of pre-primary education, providing remedial support and non-formal education to support the return to education, avoiding streaming and segregation, improving teacher quality and recruitment, curriculum and pedagogy, banning corporal punishment and tackling gender-based violence.

Multi-level policies and programmes that aim to understand and address the factors influencing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education across levels (individual, family, peers, community, schools, and state and society) appear most effective. Collaboration across sectors and stakeholders, including youth, can ensure an informed and comprehensive approach.

Promising programmes start at a young age before children internalize gender and social norms. They critically examine gender stereotypes, dismantle traditional constructions of masculinity and emphasise the benefits of masculinity that respects gender equality. They also build boys' social and emotional skills, and keep boys engaged with education through reduction or risk behaviour and increased connectedness to peers.

Boy-specific programmes addressing gender-based violence have shown results. Community approaches have also shown to be successful in preventing violence and promoting learning for boys.

Parents, role models and inclusive learning environments are important to make boys thrive. Programmes engaging parents by providing reading materials and encouraging parents to read to their children can improve boys' literacy skills. Exposure to male role models and mentors can dismantle stereotypes and increase boys' motivation to learn. Whole-school approaches can support inclusive school environments, address learners' needs, and are particularly effective in changing harmful gender norms.

In contexts where boys are disengaged or disadvantaged, programmes aiming at improving education opportunities for all had a greater positive effect on boys than girls or showed potential to improve boys' situation. Interventions directly targeted at boys may be most effective when addressing constraints that are unique to them, and focusing on the marginalized.

Overall, rigorous evidence about the effectiveness of policies, programmes and interventions addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education remains thin, especially related to intersectionality.

Recommendations

To leave no child behind and to address boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education, governments, bilateral and multilateral organizations, civil society, the private sector, academia, communities, schools, students, families and caregivers need to work together. In this respect, the report makes the following recommendations to be tailored to countries' specific contexts (see the following table):

Recommendations

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK SYSTEMS	MICROSYSTEM			MESOSYSTEM		MACROSYSTEM	
Stakeholders	STUDENTS	FAMILY	PEERS	COMMUNITIES	SCHOOLS	GOVERNMENTS	DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS
Advance equal access to education and prevent boys' dropout							
In line with SDG 4, provide 12 years of free, publicly funded, inclusive, equitable and quality education, without discrimination, including by subsidizing indirect costs associated with schooling, providing social protection programmes such as cash transfers for poor families, and ensuring education systems and schools are responsive to gender-specific needs.						x	
Mobilize support to advance gender-transformative policies for both girls' and boys' education.				x			x
Provide flexible, accelerated learning and bridging programmes for boys who, alongside girls, missed out on education or whose education was interrupted.						x	x
Strengthen and enforce labour laws and employment regulations, ensuring that they are aligned with compulsory education policy, to protect youth from exiting the school system and prevent harm.						x	
Monitor students' learning performance, attendance rates and other predictors of dropout, following up with students and parents as necessary.	x	x			x	x	
Support interventions, including career counselling, that help boys and young men understand the value of higher education.	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Work with local communities where boys are at risk of dropout to raise awareness on the importance of boys' completion of a full cycle of basic education.		x		x	x	x	x
Reform traditional practices or adapt their timing, such as initiation ceremonies, which pull boys and young men out of school.	x	x		x		x	
Build on the lessons of the extensive work identifying and addressing barriers to girls' education.				x	x	x	x
Make learning gender-transformative, safe and inclusive for all learners							
Create gender-transformative and inclusive learning environments that address all learners' needs. This includes training teachers on gender-transformative pedagogies, enabling them to challenge rigid gender norms and making curricula, teaching and learning materials gender-transformative, inclusive and free of stereotypes.	x				x	x	x
Promote a positive learning culture that stimulates the interests of all learners, with teachers being fair and having high expectations of all learners, and providing constructive feedback to students, building high-quality teacher–student relationships.	x				x		
Introduce or strengthen language-related support for learning, including options for mother tongue language of instruction and remedial language support for ethnic minority, migrant, displaced and refugee students.					x	x	
Implement tutoring and mentoring programmes for underachieving boys.					x	x	
Promote whole-school approaches to promote gender equality and include parents and the community in activities designed to dismantle gender stereotypes.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Prohibit corporal punishment at school; introduce, disseminate and enforce codes of conduct for teachers and students; and provide training on positive non-violent discipline for teachers, as well as effective monitoring and response mechanisms.					x	x	
Abolish streaming of classes and minimize gender-segregation practices.					x	x	
Abolish repetition policies and implement automatic promotion to the next grade, alongside appropriate remedial support.					x	x	
Develop and make use of effective pedagogical strategies to develop boys' reading skills.					x	x	x
Implement comprehensive sexuality education, including addressing harmful gender norms and masculinities.					x	x	x

Target and include boys and girls, young women and men in programmes to challenge harmful gender norms and engage critically with restrictive masculinities, via core or add-on curricula, extracurricular and/or community-based activities.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Incorporate curricular reforms to support social and emotional learning and skills.						x	
Prevent and respond to all forms of school-related gender-based violence, through legislation, policy guidance, teacher training, whole-school approaches, community-based interventions and robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms.				x	x	x	x
Provide access to non-judgemental and accurate information on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in educational settings.					x	x	
Offer extracurricular activities that keep boys engaged in the school environment and build social and transferable skills.					x	x	
Invest in better data and generate evidence							
Collect and make publicly available data disaggregated by sex and intersecting characteristics to better understand boys' educational participation, progression and learning outcomes, including the most marginalized. Collect and handle sensitive data with care.					x	x	x
Support governments, where needed, to enhance intersectional analysis on boys and young men, and to use this analysis for evidence-based policies and education-sector plans.							x
Invest in longitudinal studies to gain better understanding of how gender attitudes develop during adolescence and to identify the key points for intervention.						x	x
Invest into research on the effectiveness of policies, programmes and interventions addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education, especially related to intersecting disadvantages.						x	x
Conduct rigorous evaluations to identify what works to retain or get boys back in school and learning, with a focus on boys at high risk of learning poverty and dropout.						x	x
Conduct research on the economic and social cost of boys' disengagement from education in different contexts.						x	x
Conduct research on the role that homophobia and transphobia plays in boys' disengagement from education and develop adequate strategies to address this and protect LGBTIQ youth from discrimination.						x	x
Build and finance equitable, inclusive and gender-transformative education systems							
Use the current rethinking of education systems in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to build back better and make education systems gender-transformative and resilient to future crises.						x	x
Develop gender-responsive education sector plans and polices, drawing on Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) guidance, including a broader equity approach where challenges disproportionally experienced by or specific to boys are identified and acknowledged to ensure that the needs of all learners are addressed.						x	x
Invest significantly in education with a focus on girls and boys most in need.						x	x
Invest in early childhood care and education to lay a foundation for learning.						x	x
Finance the implementation of evidence-based responses that aim to prevent or close gender disparities in all aspects and at all levels of education.						x	x
Promote and ensure integrated, coordinated and system-wide approaches							
Build and participate in multi-stakeholder partnerships, under government leadership, to improve education for boys and girls.						x	x
Collaborate with local education groups (facilitating education sector policy dialogue between government and partners under government leadership) and the Education Cluster (coordinating response to ensure education needs are met during crisis).						x	x
Ensure comprehensive and coordinated approaches to address boys' disengagement from education, bringing together actors from the education, gender, labour, youth, health and justice sectors.						x	x

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

Background and rationale

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development makes a promise to leave no one behind. This entails transformative thinking and action. In line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education, it requires ensuring that girls and boys have equal opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge they need for life and the world of work, and that they are empowered to lead the lives they aspire to. To realize the right to education for everyone and to eliminate gender disparities and address inequalities in education – as expressed in target 4.5 of SDG 4 – countries and the international community must not only increase their efforts to address barriers that keep girls out of school and learning, but also understand and develop strategies to tackle low achievement and dropout of boys, particularly from disadvantaged groups. Gendered expectations affect all learners, girls and boys, young women and men. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all – SDG 4 – and achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls – SDG 5 – requires gender-transformative action.

Globally, improving educational opportunities for girls continues to be of paramount importance if gender equality in and through education is to be achieved. Not only do girls in many countries continue to face challenges in accessing quality education, but they also have to contend with inequality, discrimination and exploitation as they transition into the world of work and adult life, even when they perform better than their male peers at school.

Yet it is also important to ensure that a focus on achieving gender parity and equality does not ignore boys. Ensuring access to quality education for all is not a zero-sum game; pitting girls' and boys' needs against each other runs counter to an inclusive approach to education as championed by the SDG agenda (Barakat et al., 2016). Supporting boys does not mean that girls lose out and vice-versa. Equal education opportunities benefit both girls and boys and the broader society.

Boys' disengagement from education and poor progression in school have broader repercussions for society (Barker et al., 2012). Education has a positive impact on economic growth and salaries. Skills are especially important for economic growth; secondary and higher education have high wage returns (Sperling et al., 2016). The underperformance of boys and young men and their early school leaving can thus have significant economic implications. Boys' education is also important for achieving gender equality, as well as for social and health outcomes. In line with SDG target 4.7, education is an opportunity to challenge discriminatory gender norms through gender-transformative curricula and pedagogy. Educated men are found to more likely treat women and men equally and support gender equality policies (Barker et al., 2012). Better-educated men are more likely to help in the household and take on care responsibilities (McCormack and Brownhill, 2014). Men with higher educational attainment have better health and well-being. Lack of education and employment opportunities can push men into criminal gangs (Imbusch et al., 2011).

Secondary education can be particularly important for gender equality (Barker et al., 2012; Fulu et al., 2013). For example, boys who have a secondary education are more likely to condemn gender-based violence (Marcus, 2014). Addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education could thus be transformative in promoting gender equality, reducing violence and protecting the futures of all.

The fiscal and social cost of boys not completing basic education can be very high. Early school leaving and not being engaged in work and study after school generates costs for individuals. It not only affects their job prospects, salaries and work satisfaction, but also has effects on their choices and behaviour, which can then impact their health, role as citizens and family decisions. These costs accumulate during working life. This implies costs to the taxpayer such as less tax revenue, but also increased public expenditure such as on health and crime. There are also social costs related to the loss of personal earnings and the consequences of crime (see **Box 1**).

Box 1

Estimated costs of early school leaving and disengagement from education are high for boys

A study from Australia used a conservative estimate of the fiscal and social cost of early school leaving and being disengaged from education and work. It found that every student who fails to complete 12 years of schooling as promised by SDG 4 or disengages from school and work produces a direct cost for society. Per cohort, the lifetime fiscal cost for male early school leavers was estimated at Australian dollar (AUD) 9.3 billion and a social cost of AUD 16.6 billion. For the equivalent female cohort, the fiscal cost was estimated at AUD 3.4 billion and social cost at AUD 6.6 billion. The higher losses for males reflect higher crime rates and higher shortfalls in earnings compared to their peers completing a full cycle of basic education. For the cohorts of young people disengaged from education and work, the lifetime fiscal costs for males were estimated at AUD 8.3 billion and a social cost of AUD 19.3 billion with female equivalent costs about AUD 10.5 billion and AUD 30.2 billion respectively (Lamb and Huo, 2017). The estimated cumulative costs of this phenomenon are enormous, underlining the need for a broad, inclusive approach to education, ensuring equitable educational opportunity for both girls and boys.

Boys are not a homogenous group. Not all boys disengage from education or are disadvantaged. Evidence from high-income countries point to wider variations in educational outcomes among boys than girls (Cuttance and Thompson, 2008; Robinson and Lubienski, 2011). The literature also points to the need to recognize the importance of intersectionality, considering how gender intersects with poverty, location, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression (Cappon, 2011; UNESCO, 2020a, 2020b) and how this compounds disadvantage. The question thus becomes *which* boys require support. Overall, boys and men are privileged globally, as severe gender gaps in economic participation and opportunity, as well as political empowerment, at women's expense persist, with the latter gap even growing (World Economic Forum, 2021). Girls' and women's better educational outcomes alone are not enough to close these gender gaps (OECD, 2021c). Yet support needs to be channelled to those boys and young men who are lagging most behind.

Many factors influence boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education. Push factors, such as the irrelevancy of education and costs of school, and pull factors, including parental pressure and social expectations for boys to work, steer them away from school, at times against their will (Cunningham, 2008). Boys and young men may perceive that educational attainment adds little to their income if there are few job opportunities for men with higher education. In some contexts, relatively easy entry into the labour market may result in complacency towards education (Jha and Kelleher, 2006). Gendered norms and expectations impact on boys' motivation and desire to learn. Gender stereotypes linked to unequal power relations and negative notions of masculinities further disengage boys from schooling, potentially exposing them to risky behaviour, crime and violence. Poverty and the need to work intersect with educational policy and practices that push boys out of school.

This report will help to understand the many factors influencing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education and the implications for progress towards gender equality in education and the wider society. Alongside a better and deeper understanding of factors and the way they interact, it is important to understand what factors prevent such a trend from occurring and how these trends can be reversed. This report will also analyse policies and programmes to identify best and promising practice in addressing boys' disengagement and disadvantage.

This report is not an overall comparative study of boys and girls, but a focus on those countries and contexts where data has shown that boys are lagging behind and struggling to access and progress in education. While girls continue to face severe disadvantages and inequalities in education, the report points out that boys face similar and different challenges, that they are not a homogenous group and that certain boys need support.

This report is an outcome of UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education to better understand boys' disengagement from education (see **Box 2**). In alignment with UN and partners' recent publications (e.g. The Commonwealth Education Hub and UNGEI, 2016; European Commission, 2021; UNESCO, 2018a; UNGEI, 2012; World Bank 2022), it is the first global report of this scope on boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education, including qualitative and quantitative evidence from over 140 countries.

Box **2**

Achieving gender equality in and through education – better understanding boys' disengagement from education

UNESCO started to review the situation globally, document good practice and spark collective action on boys' disengagement from education, in 2019. UNESCO has worked with various partners from bilateral development agencies, multilateral organizations, civil society organizations and academia to understand the economic, social and cultural factors that impact boys' disengagement from education and to develop strategies to address this challenge. A technical consultation was held 4 to 6 December 2019 and five country case studies were finalized in 2020, which have been used in this report.

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Objectives and research questions

This report is part of broader efforts to guarantee that no child and young person is left behind in the joint efforts to achieve SDG 4, which aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.' The report aims to:

- Review the current global situation related to boys' educational participation, progression and learning outcomes, with an emphasis on intersecting characteristics which may compound disengagement and disadvantage.
- Identify the structural and gender-related factors at the level of the individual, family and peers, community, school and broader society that hinder or facilitate boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes.
- Document promising policy and programmatic initiatives, assessing what makes certain strategies work in particular contexts, and potential implications for other settings.

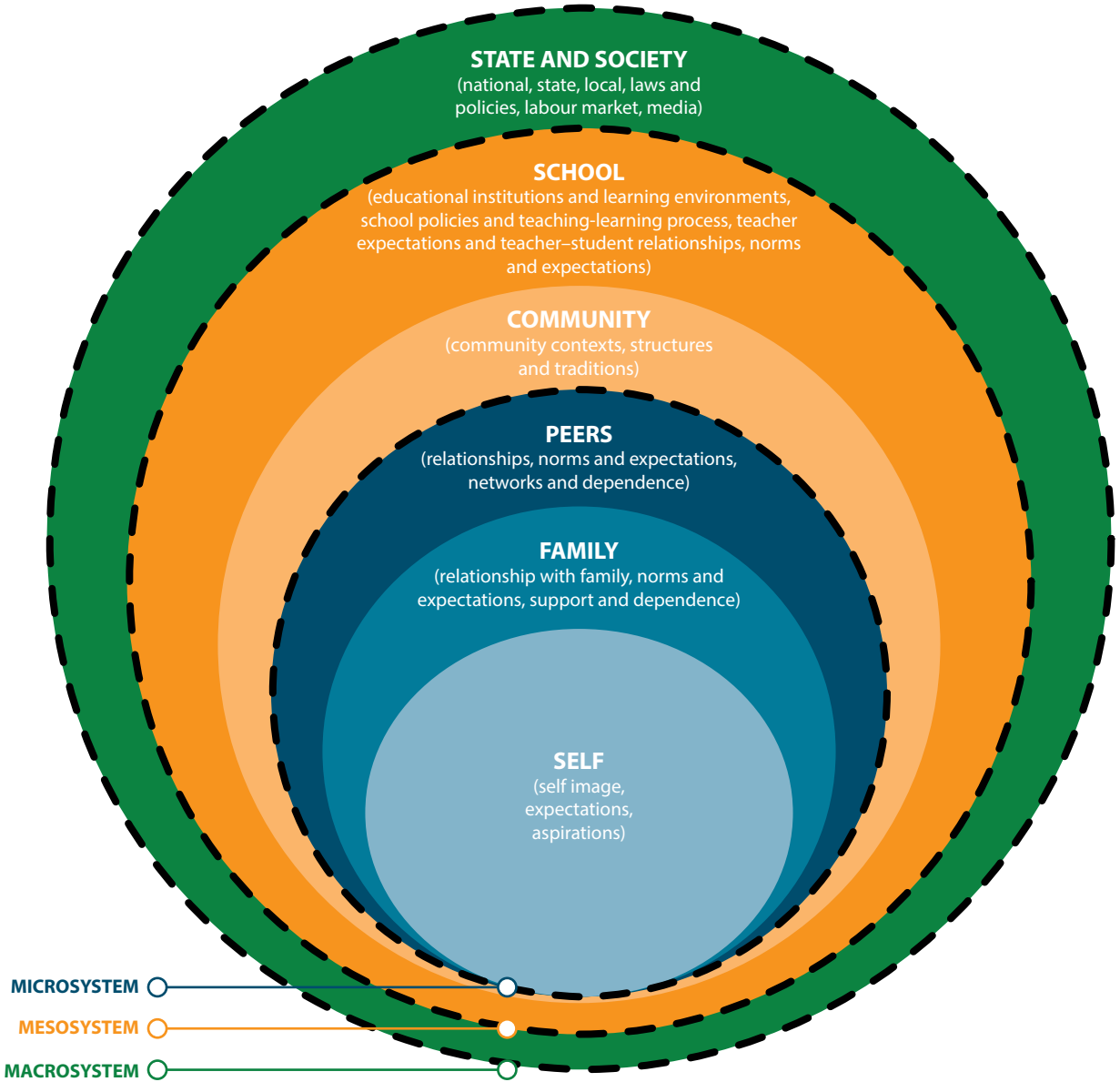
The report aims to answer the following research questions:

- What is the current global situation on boys' disengagement from education? How are boys doing on all key education indicators?
- Where are boys lagging behind (particular countries, regions) and at which levels of education?
- What are the factors (economic, social, cultural or others) that influence boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education? How do other characteristics intersect with gender to compound disadvantage?
- How do gender norms and societal gender expectations, reproduced in schools and classrooms, affect boys' participation and progression in education and learning outcomes?
- What are the impacts of COVID-19 on boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education?
- What have countries and partners done to address these challenges?
- What are the specific aspects of policies and programmes that appear to have worked, and what elements can potentially be replicated across contexts? What are the preconditions of success? What have been the reasons for failure that others need to consider in the process of adaptation or replication?

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this report is based on the ecological systems theory approach originally developed by Bronfenbrenner (1989, 1995) which considers the multifaceted and interrelating factors that influence a child's development. This model has been used widely in behaviour change interventions, including those addressing education and health, and considers the risk and protective factors that exist at the level of the individual, family, peers, community, school, and State and society. The Bronfenbrenner model is one of the most widely known and accepted explanations of the influence of social environments on a child's development (Velez Agosto et al., 2017). While the report borrows the notions of systems and their interconnectedness from the model, it adapts it as represented in **Figure 1** for the research framework, considering six levels within three systems: the individual, family and peers within the microsystem (those closest to the individual), community and school within the mesosystem (the systems in the individual's environment, in this case educational institutions) and state and society, considered as one entity, as the macrosystem (the larger system including norms at the level of state and society). The ecological model system levels are described in more detail in **Table 1**.

Figure 1: Ecological model



Source: Adapted from UNESCO (2019h), p. 6 (unpublished).

Table 1: Six levels within the ecological model as applied to education

Level	Description	Interrelationships
Self (microsystem)	Self-image (including 'masculine' identity), expectations from others (including family, friends and school) and aspirations (in education, work life and adult life) that can influence (positively or negatively) educational participation, progression and learning outcomes.	The self interacts with all levels of the model, and can be influenced by but also influence other levels.
Family (microsystem)	Social and gender norms, expectations and aspirations, parental and caregiver support to education, and household size, composition, socioeconomic status and location.	Family and peer influences could reinforce each other or could also be contradictory, with implications for engagement with education.
Peers (microsystem)	Peer expectations, prevalent gender norms, formal and informal social networks (such as sports associations and gangs) and social support systems that can influence (positively or negatively) educational participation, progression and learning outcomes.	
Community (mesosystem)	Customs or traditions, community accountability structures, community contexts, and formal and informal networks that can influence (positively or negatively) educational participation, progression and learning outcomes, including religious and traditional institutions, and civil society engagement in education.	Community structures and processes can influence family, peer groups, school and therefore also the self.
School (mesosystem)	Characteristics of educational institutions that influence (positively or negatively) educational participation, progression and learning outcomes, including school environments, teacher workforce, teacher professional development opportunities, pedagogical practices, social norms and gendered expectations, levels of school violence, availability and implementation mechanisms for school policies and other factors, including teacher attitudes, expectations and teacher–student relationships.	School and its interrelationship with other institutions as well as the self is the most critical, as this is the locus for engagement with education.
State and society (macrosystem)	Local, State and national laws and policies (or lack thereof) that influence (positively or negatively) educational participation, progression and learning outcomes, as well as the broader social, economic and employment context (including prevalence of juvenile crime, employability and labour markets, social mobility), and support for gender equality, including prevalent societal norms and practices, and cultural expectations.	State and society influence all other systems and structures. Suitable policies with appropriate institutional mechanisms have the potential to shift harmful social norms.

Source: Adapted from UNESCO (2019h), p. 7 (unpublished).

The report applies a complementary theoretical lens which considers the application of a gender and masculinity perspective in boys' disengagement from education. This framework analyses what shapes boys' and young men's (and girls' and young women's) attitudes and behaviours around education, employment, delinquency and other issues.

This report recognizes that the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions cannot be limited to a binary concept of girls and boys, women and men. Nonetheless, in the absence of effective and widespread systems to collect information on such under-researched and often stigmatized aspects of people's lives, the analysis of this report is primarily based on sex-disaggregated data. Where additional data and evidence exists, this is referenced in the report.

Definitions and concepts

Boys' disengagement from education is understood in this report as a gendered phenomenon that partially stems from norms and concepts of masculinity within societies. These norms and concepts of masculinity may lead boys and young men consciously or unconsciously to disengage from education. Other social, economic and cultural factors, in families, communities and schools, may also lead to boys' poor engagement with education and contribute to dropout.

Disadvantage in education refers to the extent to which a particular group (e.g. boys or girls) is observed to be lagging behind other groups in various educational outcomes. In this report, this disadvantage is often expressed through measures of gender disparity, but also acknowledges the particular disadvantage experienced through other intersecting characteristics.

The report sees **masculinities** as socially constructed, produced and reproduced. Masculinities are variable and can change across time and space, within societies and through life (Kimmel et al., 2004). Masculinities can refer to identities (such as 'provider' or 'protector'), social norms (such as being aggressive or not showing emotion) and power dynamics (such as the subordination of women and girls and men who do not conform to dominant gender norms).

Gender equality in education is understood to mean that the right to education of all learners is respected equally. All learners are given equal access to learning opportunities, resources and protections, and all learners benefit equally from and are treated equally in education.

Gender equality through education refers to education's key role in addressing the wider issue of gender equality. Educational institutions can promote new attitudes and patterns of belief, transforming the way people think about traditional gender roles and helping to build long-term sustainable change. And achieving equal outcomes for female, male and non-binary learners can help to empower all people to create better lives (UNESCO, 2019b).

Gender norms are understood as ideas about how men and women should behave: the expectations and standards that are set for each gender in different societies, cultures and communities. People internalize these 'rules' at an early age, in the beginning of a cycle of gender socialization and stereotyping that continues for the rest of their lives. Gender norms thus not only become individuals' expectations of others, but also of themselves (UNICEF et al., 2019). The socialization process happening within educational institutions often replicates that of broader society and reproduces social and gender norms (Stromquist, 2007).

Gender-transformative means addressing the underlying causes of gender inequalities. It includes policies and initiatives which not only address the different needs, aspirations, capacities and contributions of girls, boys, women and men, but also challenge existing and discriminatory policies and practices, creating radical change (UNESCO, 2018b). A gender-transformative approach to education is one that encompasses policy, programming and interventions to create opportunities to actively challenge gender norms and wider inequalities. This includes engaging with gender equality through curricular and teaching reforms.

Gender-responsive means that strategies include evidence-based gender analysis which identifies and acknowledges existing gender differences and inequalities (UNESCO, 2018b). Activities at this level include specific policies and actions that address inequalities. Gender-responsive strategies, such as training in gender-responsive pedagogy, can be used as part of a system-wide, gender-transformative approach to education.

Intersectionality in this report refers to the way in which different forms of discrimination and disadvantage combine and overlap. Characteristics such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity, geography, displacement, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression can intersect with each other, causing multiple levels of disadvantage and marginalization (UNESCO, 2020a). Evidence suggests that multiple hierarchies leaning heavily on notions of masculinity push boys towards differential outcomes within schooling systems (Froschl and Sprung, 2005). These notions of masculinity interact with the above characteristics.

Methodology

This report draws on desk-based research which combines original analysis of statistical data sets for key education indicators, a review of literature on factors influencing boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education and policy and programme reviews. The report also incorporates findings from national case studies involving primary research.

Statistical data for this report are based on secondary data analysis of data sets compiled from data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) database, which was accessed in August 2021, unless indicated otherwise. 162 countries report sex-disaggregated data to the UIS. The analysis considers current performance of countries and regions against key indicators and progress since 2000, the turn of the millennium, in order to reflect changes between data captured to monitor the Education for All (EFA) goals and since the onset of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDG 4. The most recent year for which data are reported as being available from the data sets is for 2020. However, in practice, few countries reported on these data indicators for 2020. For example, data on the adjusted gender parity index for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary completion rates returned zero data points for 2020. Even for 2019, data were not available for all UN countries and territories. For example, only nine countries reported the adjusted gender parity index for primary education in 2019. To address this problem of data availability, and capture data for as many countries and territories as possible, this report used data from two different five-year periods. For 2000 to 2005, the earliest available data point was selected. For instance, if a country had data for 2001, 2003 and 2004, the analysis used the 2001 data point in this report. For 2015 to 2019, the latest available data point was selected. For instance, if a country had data for 2015, 2017 and 2018 the analysis used the 2018 data point in this report.

When reporting on individual countries, this report refers to the actual year (both in the earlier and later period) which has been reported in the UIS database. For example, if comparing the adjusted gender parity index for primary education for Nepal, this may refer to 2003 for the earlier period and 2018 for the later period. This is reflected in **Chapters 2 and 3**.

The accompanying literature review in **Chapter 2 and 3** was conducted drawing on (1) published academic research; (2) government policy documents; (3) documents and reports from international agencies and non-governmental organizations via public websites; (4) other grey literature including evaluation reports and research blogs. Following initial scans of content, literature was only reviewed in more detail if it referenced boys' education or gender and education, except in the case of COVID-19–related reports and agreed topics of interest, such as comprehensive sexuality education. High-quality, peer-reviewed journals were prioritized, but grey literature and research blogs were also used, particularly where they covered emerging research (e.g., the Center for Global Development, UKFIET). Details of the main websites and documents consulted are listed in the **Appendix**, as are the key search terms. Searches were initially restricted to literature from 2010 onwards, although exceptions were made in order to cite original research or acknowledge research fundamental in the field.

UNESCO also undertook a policy review and identification of programmes and initiatives that can be considered good or promising practice. For the policy review, documents from selected countries were reviewed, summarized and used to develop a dashboard of key policies responses. While the review's focus was on policy specifically targeting boys, it also considered general responses, particularly in relation to gender and inclusion, that address educational constraints that disproportionally affect boys in those

country contexts. Nineteen countries[1] were selected for review based on criteria that included key indicators of boys' disadvantage: a gender parity index (GPI) of greater than 1.10 for one or more enrolment and/or completion indicators, consistently lower achievement rates, and robust research indicating disadvantage in quality/school environment measures, such as the experience of school violence. Consideration was also given to ensuring a range of countries, including from across regions and country income groups. Selection also depended on availability of policy documents in English, although two sets of documents in Spanish from Latin American countries were translated prior to analysis. In addition to the 19 countries, selected examples from other countries were added. Key sources include the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO) Planipolis database and the Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER) website developed by the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) policy response papers (COVID-19 related); and World Bank, UNESCO and Overseas Development Institute (ODI) analytical papers and reports. More information can be found in the **Appendix**.

To identify good and promising practice, programmes and initiatives addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education were selected based on the following criteria. The programme/initiative:

- Addresses one or more dimensions of the ecological model or structural barriers to education
- Was active over the past 10 years
- Has been evaluated and shown positive impact on boys' (or both boys' and girls') education (good practice) or is relevant, coherent and has potential for positive impact on boys' (or both boys' and girls') education, but further evidence is needed (promising practice)
- Has the potential for replicability.

UNESCO also undertook focused country research in the form of a series of case studies to understand the phenomenon of boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education, the underlying factors, and promising practice to ensure boys thrive in and through education at the national and subnational context. Recognizing that this phenomenon varies significantly by region, national case studies were undertaken across four regions (the Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa). National research teams examined the situation in five countries – Fiji, Kuwait, Lesotho, Peru and the United Arab Emirates – using an adaptation of the Bronfenbrenner ecological model as an analytical framework (**Figure 1**). These studies are based on in-depth mixed-method research. More information can be found in the **Appendix**.

A reference group was established to contribute to the case studies through the sharing of key documents, contributing technical expertise, reviewing progress and endorsing important stages throughout the initiative. A technical consultation meeting was held at the end of 2019 to bring together the reference group, national research teams and UNESCO to review and discuss findings of the national-level case studies (see **Box 2**).

Ethical review

Standard ethical guidelines were developed for the research on the country case studies. Data collection instruments were verified and validated by UNESCO. In line with the guidelines, consent forms for all types of tools were read and signed by respondents, or read out to the respondents and signed by the person administering the tool, mentioning date and place. All parents and guardians in participating schools were informed of the study, and the potential for their child's participation, with the right of refusal. For children, in addition to providing their own consent, additional forms were provided for the schools to consent as caretakers. All participants had the option to opt out of the study or withdraw from the study at any point in time. All names of individuals were anonymized at the time of data collection to ensure that any data provided could not be traced back to respondents in reports, presentations and other forms of dissemination. Data sets from the original data collection were kept confidential and not shared with participating schools or other bodies outside of the research team.

1. Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Colombia, Croatia, Finland, the Gambia, Honduras, Ireland, Jamaica, Jordan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Namibia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Rwanda, Suriname and Sweden.

Limitations

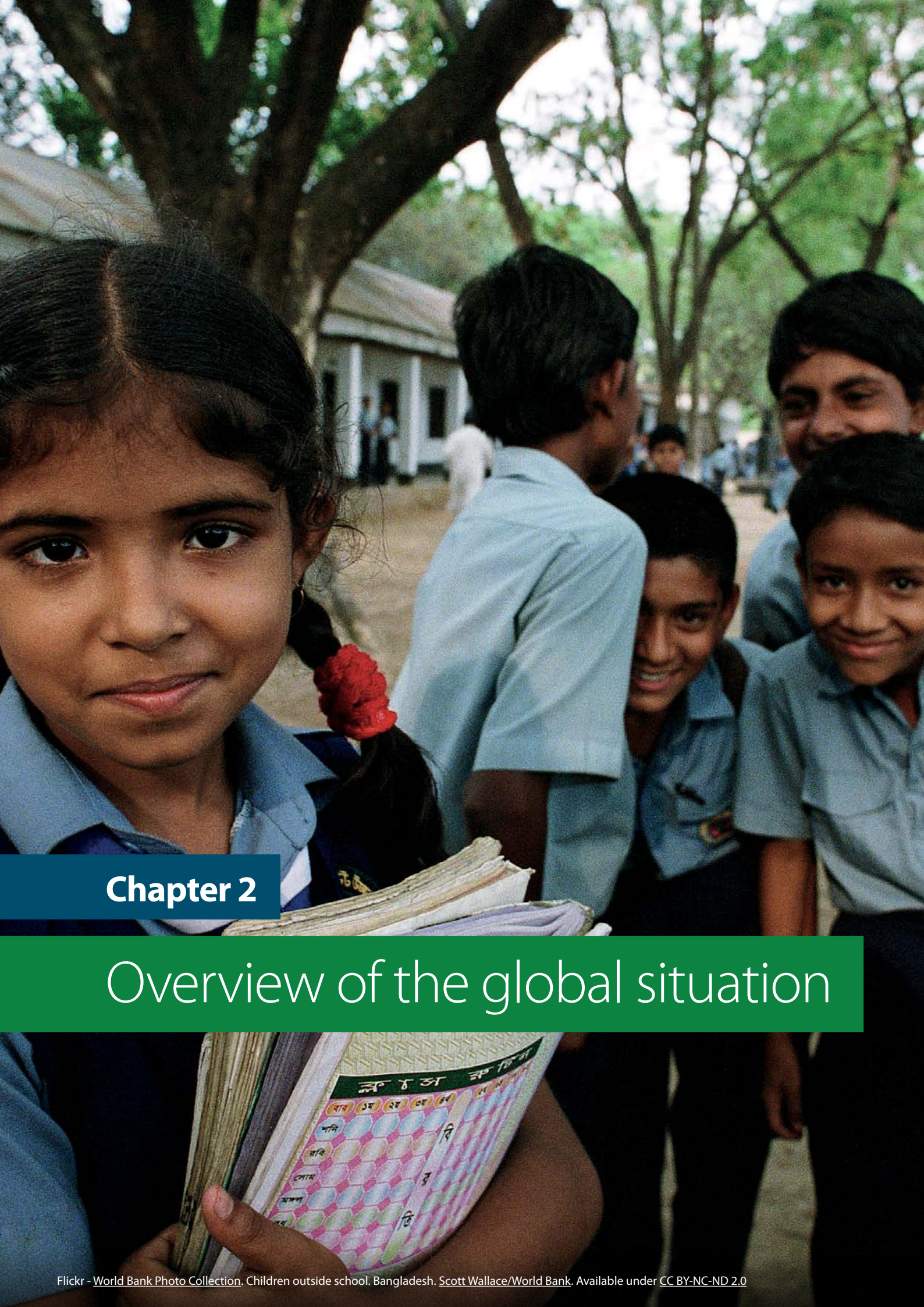
Global reviews of this nature are limited by language, especially as the major academic databases consulted carry research primarily published in English. This limited the scope of the evidence and skewed it towards Anglophone countries and research. Several of the high-income countries had limited numbers of policy documents available via the Planipolis or PEER websites, which were the primary sources of documentation for the policy analysis. In such instances, reference was made to the summary EFA Review reports, which may not have been the most current documentation, but offered a historical perspective on previous and ongoing policy responses.

Critically, several key research studies reporting on intersecting characteristics of interest (e.g. disability, migrant/refugee status) and sectors (technical and vocational education and training (TVET)) did not examine gender dimensions or disaggregate data by gender beyond methodological descriptions. This was particularly notable in the summary reports on policy responses to COVID-19.

Full research design was only applied to four of the five country case studies commissioned. Findings of the case study on Peru were largely limited to a literature review.

Report structure

The report provides an overview on the global situation on boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education **(Chapter 2)** and identifies factors influencing boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education (**Chapter 3**). It analyses responses by governments and partners, examining policies and programmes (**Chapter 4**). Finally, the report makes recommendations on how to re-engage boys with education and address disadvantage (**Chapter 5**).



Chapter 2

Overview of the global situation

Flickr - World Bank Photo Collection. Children outside school. Bangladesh. Scott Wallace/World Bank. Available under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Key messages

Far too many children and youth of primary and secondary school age are out of school. More than half of them are boys. It has been a concern that the COVID-19 pandemic would lead to an increase in school dropout. In 2020 – the last school year before the pandemic – an estimated 259 million children and youth of primary and secondary school age were out of school, 132 million of which are boys. There will not be a clear picture of COVID-19 effects on enrolment and re-enrolment before the end of 2022.

While in all regions the largest share of out-of-school boys is concentrated at the upper secondary level, in the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa, a large proportion of out-of-school boys (around a third) is also concentrated at the primary level.

While globally, girls remain less likely than boys to enrol in school, in many countries boys are at greater risk of repeating grades, failing to progress and complete their education, and not achieving adequate learning while in school.

At the global level, almost no country with data has achieved gender parity at the tertiary level. The gender parity index (adjusted) data in 2019 for tertiary enrolment showed 88 men for every 100 women.

In all regions except sub-Saharan Africa, young men are disadvantaged in tertiary enrolment. This disadvantage is particularly acute in the North America and Western Europe and the Latin America and the Caribbean regions, where 81 young men for every 100 young women are enrolled at tertiary education. In East Asia and the Pacific, the equivalent is 87, while in the Arab States and Central and Eastern Europe region, it is 91.

While previously boys' disengagement and dropout was a concern mainly in high-income countries, several low- and middle-income countries have seen a reversal in gender gaps, with boys now lagging behind girls in enrolment and completion. Where there are gender differences in enrolment in upper secondary education, 73 countries see this at boys' disadvantage, while in 48 countries this is at girls' disadvantage.

Among 74, predominantly low and middle-income, countries with data available between 2015-2019, 27 have gender disparities at boys' expense, 24 have gender disparities at girls' expense, and 23 have achieved gender parity in lower secondary education completion. Of the 73 countries with data at upper secondary level, 33 exhibit gender disparities at boys' expense and 31 have gender disparities at girls' expense.

Boys are more likely than girls to repeat primary grades in 130 of 142 countries with data, indicating poorer progression through school.

In 57 countries with data on learning poverty, 10-year-old boys fare worse than girls in mastering reading skills and adolescent boys continue to fall behind girls in reading skills at the secondary level.

Gaps in reading skills are found to start early. In 23 of 25 countries with data for proficiency in reading at Grade 2/3, the proportion of girls achieving minimum proficiency in reading is higher than the share of boys. The largest of such disparities are found in Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati and Lesotho.

In mathematics the gender gap that once worked against girls at the start of the millennium has narrowed or equalized with boys in half of all countries with data.

Overview of the global situation

Despite tremendous progress in enrolment over the last 15 years, global estimates indicate that 259 million children and youth were out of school in 2020, 132 million of them boys (UIS database, November 2021). As such, millions of girls and boys are failing to complete the 12 years of schooling inherent in the SDG 4 target of free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education for all.

To address this challenge, the gender dimensions of children's entry and progression in education need to be understood. For boys, strategies to prevent boys' disengagement and dropout are needed. In countries in Latin America and Europe, boys, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are less likely to enter and complete secondary education.

This chapter presents a global overview of boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education, focusing on participation, progression and learning outcomes. It considers where and at what education levels boys are lagging behind.

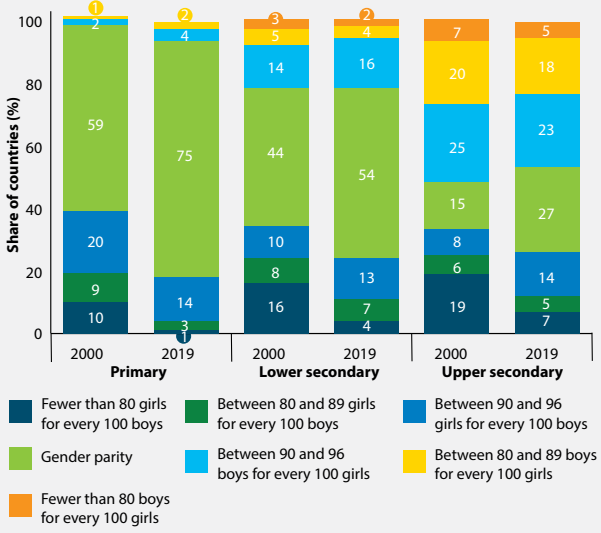
Boys' participation in education is lagging behind in many parts of the world

Progress towards achieving gender parity in enrolment

Globally, there have been considerable improvements towards achieving gender parity in education with this being achieved at all levels except tertiary education. Yet the global average can mask disparities by region and by country. A gender parity index (GPI) measures the ratio of females to males of any given indicator. For access to education, a GPI of 0.96 or less means there are more boys than girls accessing education; between 0.97 and 1.03 signals an equal ratio of boys and girls; and a GPI equivalent to 1.04 or above means that there are fewer boys compared to girls. At the start of the millennium, when the EFA goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted by the international community, 59 percent of countries with data had achieved gender parity in enrolment at primary level, 44 percent in lower secondary and 15 percent in upper secondary enrolment. By comparison to the current period, the equivalent for the same subset of countries with data are 75 percent of countries achieving gender parity in enrolment for primary, 54 percent for lower secondary and 27 percent for upper secondary. A number of countries have successfully transitioned from a situation where girls were once less likely to access school than boys to one where gender parity has been achieved. Since 2000, the proportion of countries with data showing gender disparities at girls' expense in lower secondary enrolment, for example, has reduced from 34 percent to 24 percent of countries.

The share of countries where fewer boys are enrolled than girls, on the other hand, has increased marginally at primary level and remains unchanged at lower secondary level, at just 22 percent of countries **(Figure 2)**. At upper secondary, fewer countries have achieved gender parity, though progress has been made since 2000.

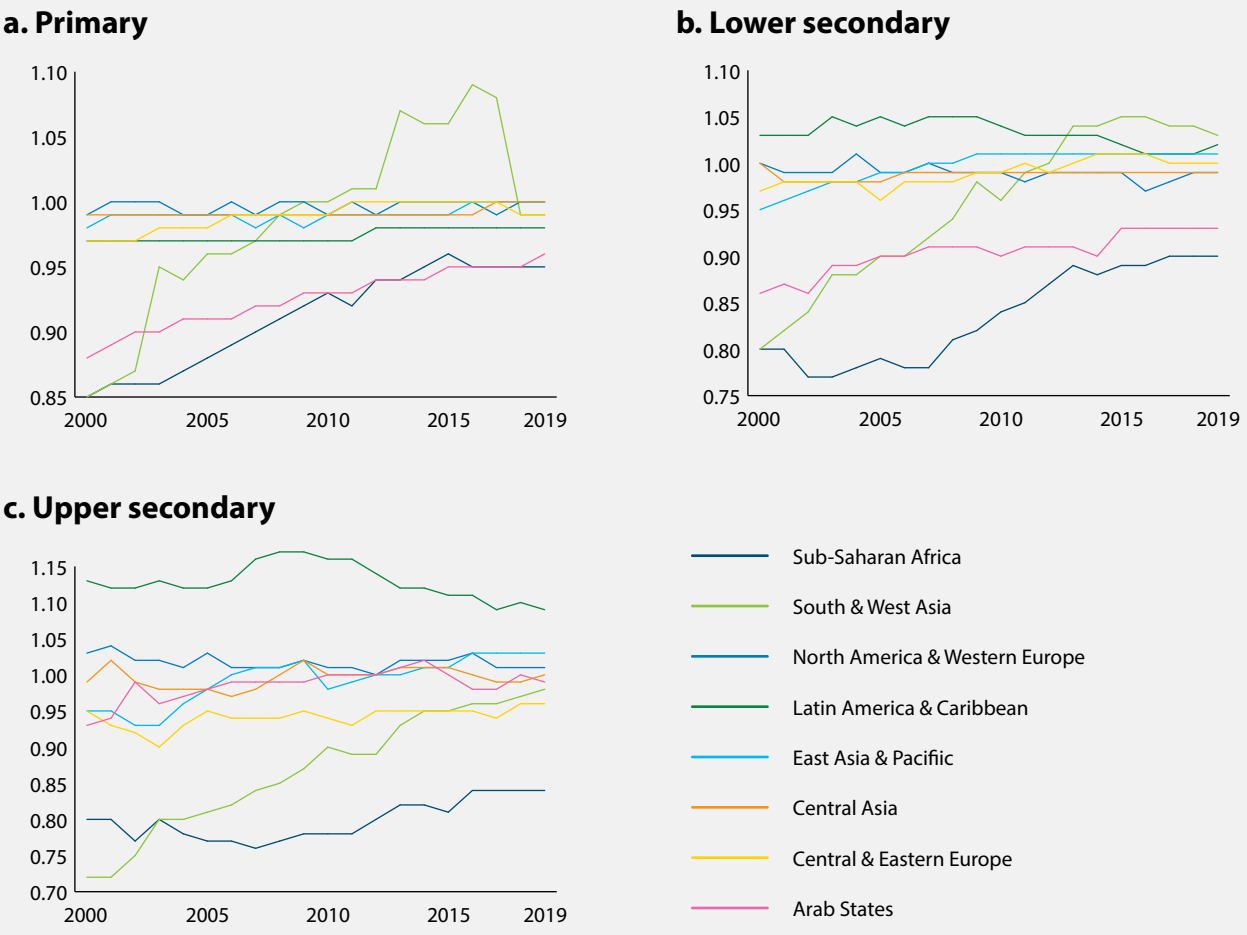
Figure 2: Percentage of countries which have achieved gender parity in gross enrolment rates worldwide by level of education, 2000 and 2019



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed August 2021.
Note: Data are sourced from administrative data (school registers and school surveys). Totals may not add up to 100%, as figures have been rounded up/down to the nearest percentage.

The GPI for enrolment at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels shows that globally – for each of these levels of education – the situation has shifted from one which disadvantaged girls in 2000 to one where gender parity was achieved in 2019. However, progress varies widely by region and by level. The average GPI for sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States, for example, shows girls still lagging behind boys in enrolments at primary and lower secondary levels. At upper secondary level, girls in Central and Eastern Europe, South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa lag behind boys. Boys currently lag behind girls at lower secondary level in South and West Asia, though this is largely driven by India. Girls' parity has largely been achieved due to an upward trend in girls' lower secondary enrolment ratios. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where boys had previously lagged behind girls at the lower secondary level at the start of the century, gender parity in enrolment has now been achieved **(Figure 3)**. However, these regional averages disguise the disadvantage that boys face in certain contexts, including low-income countries. In a number of high-income countries, including Belgium, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand and Sweden, boys who lagged behind girls in lower secondary enrolment at the turn of the century continue to do so.

Figure 3: Gender parity index of gross enrolment by region and by education level, 2000 to 2019



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed August 2021.
Note: The data used is administrative data (school registers and school surveys).

Few gender gaps exist at the pre-primary level

Globally, and by region, the gender gaps in access to pre-primary education is low. However, where a child lives can greatly influence the probability that they will access primary education. In many contexts, this is influenced by the availability of pre-primary education, and the costs to households given that pre-primary access is not free. Latest data indicate that for 227 countries and territories, only 95 offer at least one year of free pre-primary education. The supply of affordable, quality pre-primary education is limited.

Despite this, enrolment at pre-primary level has risen steadily over the past two decades. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) is defined as the number of students enrolled at a given level of education regardless of age as a percentage of the official school-age population for that level of education. In 2019, the global GER for boys in pre-primary education was 61 percent (up from 33 percent in 2000). But this figure hides considerable regional disparities. The GER for pre-primary education for boys living in North America and Western Europe was 88 percent and 84 percent in East Asia and the Pacific contrasting with 30 percent in the Arab States and 27 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. Access to pre-primary education appears strongly linked to income, with the GER for pre-primary education for boys at only 20 percent in low-income countries, compared with 85 percent in high-income countries. This is despite strong evidence to suggest that participation in pre-primary education is one of the strongest determinants of children being ready for primary school, staying in primary school for longer, and subsequent achievement in early grades of primary education (Martinez et al., 2012; UNESCO, 2012).

Changing patterns in achieving gender parity in enrolment at primary and lower-secondary levels

Primary education level

While globally, girls have traditionally been less likely to enter and enrol in primary education than boys, several countries have experienced changes in gender composition at the primary level. In five countries and territories – the Gambia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Monserrat, Niue and Senegal – where there was a disparity in primary level enrolment to the disadvantage of girls in 2000, boys were less likely to be enrolled in primary education in 2019. The Gambia, for example, had 88 girls for every 100 boys enrolling into primary education in 2000, 94 boys for every 100 girls in 2015, and 90 boys for every 100 girls in 2019 **(Figure 5a).**

Countries where gender gaps have reversed underline the dynamic nature of achieving gender parity. Caution is needed in interpreting changes in gender parity at all levels as they may reflect undesirable developments in the education system or wider social impacts rather than improvements in education participation for all (Colclough, 2007). In the Gambia, Nepal and Senegal, increases in girls' enrolment in primary education relative to boys resulted not only from more girls enrolling but also from more boys dropping out of school. In Senegal in 1999, far fewer boys than girls had dropped out of school. By 2011, however, this trend had reversed with more boys dropping out than girls: 113 boys for every 100 girls (UNESCO, 2015b). As of 2019, only 88 boys were enrolled in primary education for every 100 girls.

Lower secondary education level

In a number of Latin American and Caribbean countries, boys experienced disadvantage in enrolling in lower secondary education in 2000 (**Figure 3b**), and many of these countries had either achieved gender parity or come close to achieving it by 2019. In the Dominican Republic, 87 boys for every 100 girls were enrolled at lower secondary level in 2000; by 2019 gender parity had been achieved. Since 2000, Honduras and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have made progress towards closing the gap in boys' disadvantage in lower secondary enrolment and both countries are close to achieving gender parity. In Honduras, for every 100 girls enrolled at lower secondary level the number of boys was 88 in 2000, and 95 in 2018. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, for every 100 girls enrolled at lower secondary level, the number of boys increased from 87 in 2000 to 95 in 2019.

In other regions, 12 countries reversed the gender gap from girls' disadvantage to boys' disadvantage **(Figure 4)**. Among these are sub-Saharan countries including Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Gambia and Senegal. In the Gambia and Senegal, where 67 and 70 girls, respectively, were enrolled for every 100 boys in 2000, girls are now more likely to be enrolled in lower secondary education than boys **(Figure 5b),** which likely reflects the lower numbers of boys than girls participating in and completing primary education. Boys' disadvantage in enrolment in lower secondary education has also emerged in India. In 2000, some 85 girls were enrolled at lower secondary level for every 100 boys in India; by 2015 the situation had reversed with only 94 boys enrolled for every 100 girls, rising slightly by 2019 to 96 boys enrolled for every 100 girls.

In other countries, boys continue to be disadvantaged or the gender gap is widening in secondary level enrolment. In 2019, just 76 boys for every 100 girls were enrolling at lower secondary level in Lesotho – a situation little changed since 2000 when it was 75. Similarly, in Bangladesh, disparities in enrolment to the disadvantage of boys have widened: between 2000 and 2019, the number of boys enrolled for every 100 girls has fallen from 88 to 79. Longitudinal research in the late 2000s demonstrated that boys' disadvantage in Bangladesh was partly linked to dropout. Girls were less likely to drop out, overall, and to instead remain in secondary education longer than boys. This reflects the success of campaigns and incentives previously established to promote enrolment and discourage girls' dropout (Sabates et al., 2013).

Figure 4: Gender parity indices of gross enrolment ratios for 12 countries with a reversal in the gender gap in lower secondary education

Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed August 2021.

Gender disparity at boys' disadvantage remains wide at the upper secondary level and almost no country has achieved gender parity at the tertiary level

Upper secondary education level

At the upper secondary education level, gender disparity at boys' disadvantage remains wide, including for many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean where, at the turn of the century, far fewer boys than girls were enrolled at upper secondary education. For example, in Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, fewer than 80 boys for every 100 girls were enrolled in upper secondary education in 2000. Despite progress at lower secondary levels, enrolment at upper secondary only marginally improved by from 82 boys in 2000 to 87 boys in 2019 for every 100 girls. Elsewhere, countries which had previously experienced lower enrolments among boys appear to have achieved gender parity. In Jamaica, just 90 boys for every 100 girls were enrolled in upper secondary education in 2000: by 2019, gender parity had been achieved. Similarly, in Mongolia, 69 boys for every 100 girls were enrolled in upper secondary education in 2000. By 2019, gender parity had been achieved.

Latest data show that girls are enrolled at greater numbers as boys in a number of countries where upper secondary education participation was previously lower for girls than boys. This includes Nepal where the gender gap in upper secondary enrolment has reversed dramatically. In 2000, there were just 62 girls enrolling for every 100 boys; by 2019 there were 89 boys enrolled for every 100 girls.

Overall in the current period, where there are gender differences in enrolment in upper secondary, 73 countries see this at boys' disadvantage, while in 48 countries this is at girls' disadvantage.

Tertiary education

At the global level, almost no country with data has achieved gender parity at the tertiary level. The gender parity index (adjusted) data in 2019 for tertiary enrolment showed 88 young men for every 100 young women. In all regions except sub-Saharan Africa, young men are disadvantaged in tertiary enrolment. This disadvantage is particularly acute in the North America and Western Europe and the Latin America and the Caribbean regions, where 81 young men for every 100 young women are enrolled at tertiary education. In East Asia and the Pacific, the equivalent is 87, while in the Arab States and Central and Eastern Europe region, it is 91.

Beyond regional averages, there was disparity at young men's expense in 74 percent of 151 countries with data in 2019. Among countries with the greatest disparities at young men's expense were Qatar, where 53 young men are enrolled for every 100 young women, along with Kuwait (66), Namibia (67) and Oman (68).

There is still a gender divide in the subjects that men and women pursue at tertiary levels. Men are overrepresented in subjects relating to engineering, manufacturing, construction, and information and communication technology (ICT) and underrepresented in education, health, arts, humanities and social sciences (UNESCO, 2020a).

Boys' poor progression in education can lead to dropouts and early exit from education

In many countries, boys are at greater risk than girls of failing to progress and complete education (UNESCO, 2020a). Whilst, at a global level, girls are still less likely than boys to enrol in school in the first place, and many remain excluded from education, boys are often at greater risk of leaving school early (UIS, 2019), especially for those living in poverty. Strategies are needed to prevent boys' disengagement and dropout and evaluations of such strategies to know what works.

Grade repetition signals poor progression through school

Rates of grade repetition are of concern, both as an indicator of low achievement and as a pathway to dropout. Analysis of primary school panel data in Bangladesh (Sabates et al., 2013) and Senegal (André, 2009; Glick and Sahn, 2010), both countries with low rates of completion for boys, found that grade repetition was a significant predictor of dropout.

Data collected by UIS reveal that while repetition rates have decreased globally, boys' repetition rates remain higher than those for girls in a majority of countries with data. Of the 142 countries with data on repetition at the primary education level, 130 had higher rates for boys than for girls. Some of the widest gaps in rates were in countries in the Southern and North African regions, including Algeria, Eswatini, Lesotho, Morocco, Namibia and South Africa. Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) data show that among 15-year-olds in Guatemala, Honduras and Paraguay, boys were more likely than girls to have repeated a grade (OECD, 2020a).

Available research in the European Union indicates that boys are more likely than girls to repeat a year of schooling. In Slovenia, for example, 62 percent of students who repeated a grade in the 2019/2020 school year were boys. In Slovakia, 57 percent of grade repetitions were undertaken by boys (European Commission, 2021). In Australia, adolescent boys were found to be more likely than girls to be kept back a year. Analysis of data of over 3,200 Australian high school students indicated that grade repetition was associated with greater school absenteeism, low motivation and poor academic engagement (Martin, 2011).

Changing patterns in lower secondary education completion see boys' disadvantage emerge in some low and middle-income countries

Data on lower secondary education completion based on the period 2015 to 2019 are available for 74 countries, predominantly low and middle-income countries.[2] Of these 74 countries, 27 have gender disparities at boys' expense, 24 have gender disparities at girls' expense, and 23 have achieved gender parity. Similarly, of the 73 countries with upper secondary completion data available for 2015 to 2019, 33 exhibit gender disparities at boys' expense and 31 have gender disparities at girls' expense. The countries with the widest gender gaps in completing lower secondary and upper secondary at boys' expense include Kiribati, Lesotho and Suriname.

While in some parts of the world, boys continue to lag behind girls in completion of secondary education, with little change in recent years, a few low- and middle-income countries have closed or reversed previous gender disparities in completing secondary education at girls' expense. Analysis of 48 countries with data on lower secondary completion from both the start of the Education for All movement in 2000 (2000–2004) and the most recent time period (2015–2019), show shifting patterns in gender disparities over the last 20 years (see **Figure 5a**).

For 16 countries where a disparity at boys' expense in completing lower secondary existed in 2000, 11 countries continue to experience this disparity (top right-hand quadrant of **Figure 5a**). These countries, including Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Paraguay, are geographically concentrated in the Latin American and Caribbean but also include countries such as the Philippines and Thailand. In the Philippines, the most recent data show that 87 boys for every 100 girls complete lower secondary in 2018 (slightly up from 85 in 2000). In Haiti, for every 100 girls, 86 boys completed lower secondary in 2017 (down from 96 in 2000).

2. The UIS data set on completion does not include many high-income countries, particularly from North America and Western Europe.

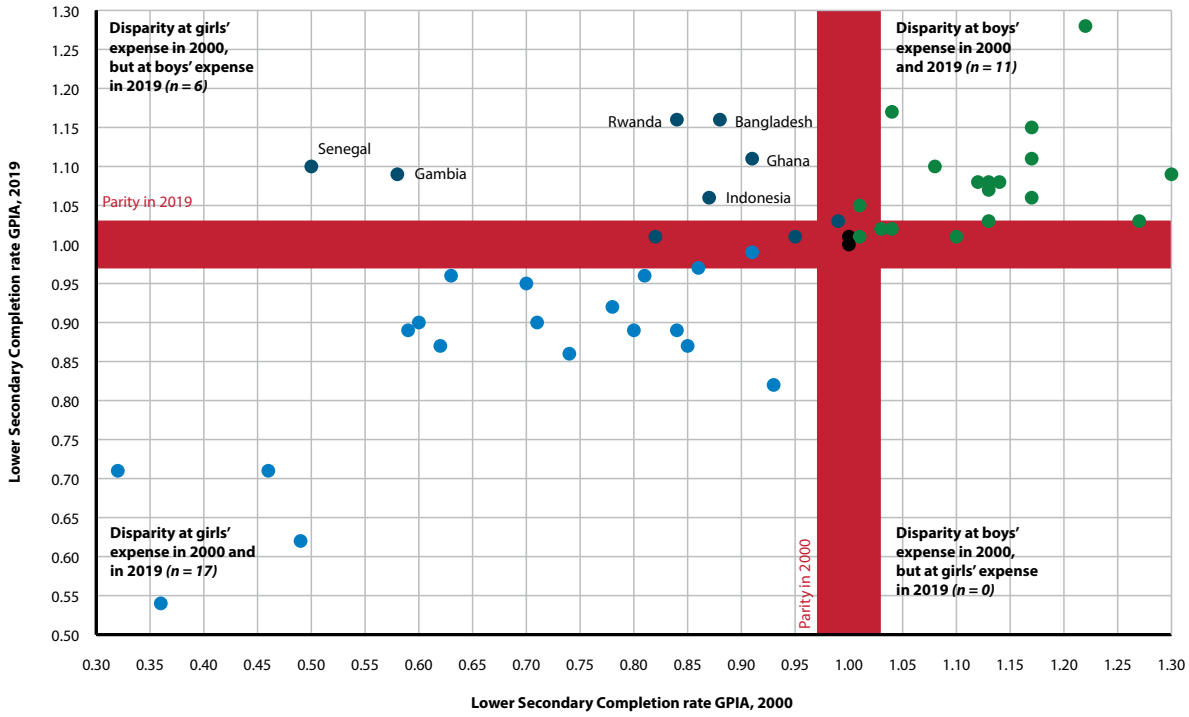
In 2000, 27 out of 48 countries with data experienced a disparity at girls' expense in completing lower secondary (top and bottom left-hand quadrants of **Figure 5a**). By 2019, while four of these countries had achieved gender parity, six saw a reversal in this gender gap: Bangladesh, the Gambia, Ghana, Indonesia, Rwanda and Senegal (top left-hand quadrant of **Figure 5a)**. In Bangladesh and Rwanda, 86 boys for every 100 girls were completing lower secondary education in 2019, compared to 88 girls for every 100 boys in Bangladesh, and 84 girls for every 100 boys in Rwanda in 2000.

At upper secondary level, of 47 countries with completion data for both 2000 and 2019, girls remained at a disadvantage in 20 countries in 2019 (bottom right-hand quadrant, **Figure 5b**), which included not only low- and lower-middle income sub-Saharan African countries but also Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Tajikistan. In nearly the same number of countries, 21, boys lag behind girls in completing upper secondary, of which in 16 countries, boys were at a disadvantage both at the turn of the millennium and in the most recent period (top right-hand quadrant, **Figure 6b**), indicating little change over the last 20 years. Most of these countries are in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also include Armenia, Jordan, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand. In Ethiopia and Iraq, girls were less likely to complete upper secondary; this shifted to boys' disadvantage. In Albania, El Salvador and Mexico, which previously had gender parity in upper secondary completion rates, boys are now at a slight disadvantage.

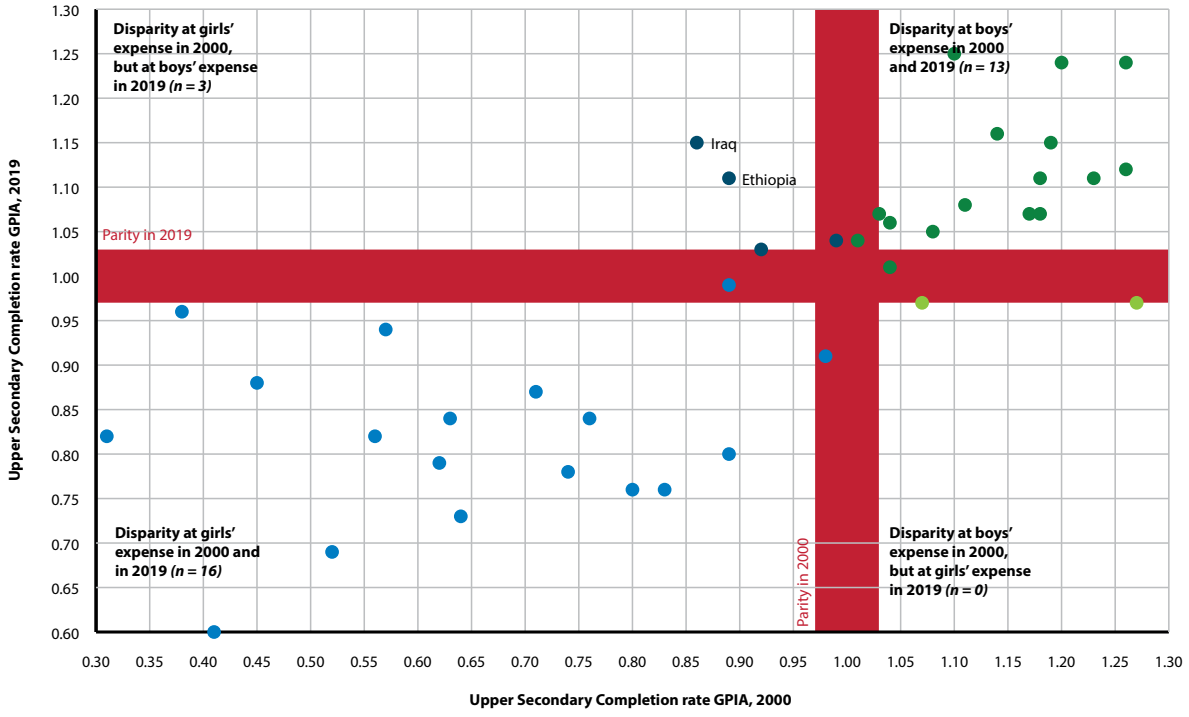
While some patterns emerge from the data, it should be noted that the number of countries with data for the different points considered is low: 48 for lower secondary and 47 for upper secondary. So, only a snapshot is available, as data are excluded for the many high-income countries for which data are absent.

Figure 5: Gender parity index (adjusted) for completion rates at secondary level

a. Lower secondary



b. Upper secondary



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed August 2021.

Note: Data were sourced by UNESCO-UIS using population censuses and household surveys. A gender parity index (GPI) measures the ratio of females to males of any given indicator. A GPI of 0.96 or less means there is disparity at the expense of girls. Between 0.97 and 1.03 signals an equal ratio of boys and girls. A GPI equivalent to 1.04 or above means that there is disparity at boys' expense.

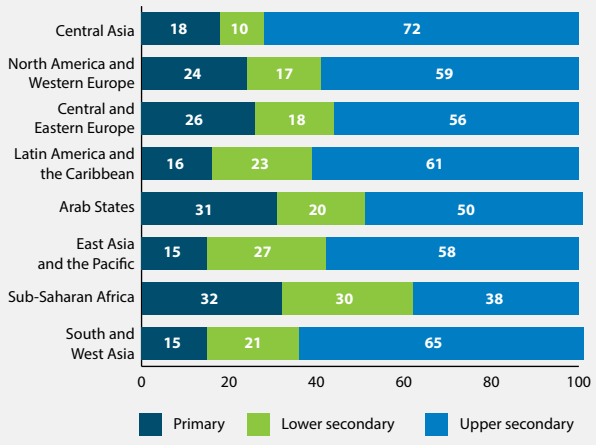
Out of education - failing to transition to work

As noted in the introduction, this report covers data up to 2019. Yet, given the concern that the COVID-19 pandemic would lead to an increase in school dropout, the latest available overall figures at the publication of this report are also presented here: In 2020 – the last school year before the pandemic – an estimated 259 million children and youth of primary and secondary school age were out of school, including 132 million boys. While 30 million boys were out of school at primary level, 33 million were out of school at lower secondary and 69 million boys at upper secondary level (UIS database, November 2021). There will not be a clear picture of COVID-19 effects on enrolment before the end of 2022.

The number of out-of-school children has been falling since 2015. But the decline in the absolute number of out-of-school boys appears to have stagnated. Between 2000 and 2015, the number of boys out of school fell, on average, by 2.5 million per year. The equivalent for the period 2015 to 2019 was 0.8 million per year. Regionally, close to three quarters of the world's out-of-school boys are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia (UIS database, November 2021).

While the largest share of out-of-school boys are concentrated at the upper secondary level in the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa, a large proportion of out-of-school boys, around a third, are also concentrated at the primary level of the system **(Figure 6).**

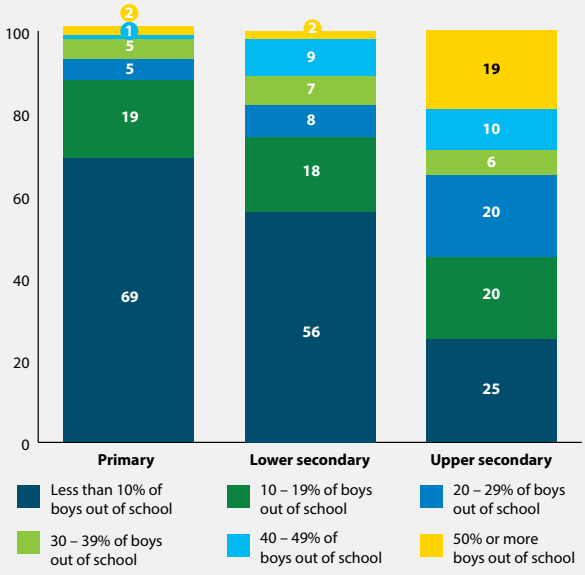
Figure 6: Share of out-of-school boys in 2019, by region and level of education (percent)



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed November 2021.
Note: In order of region from largest share of out-of-school boys to smallest. Totals may not add up to 100%, as figures have been rounded up/down to the nearest percentage.

In 15 of the 126 countries with data, or 12 percent, the share of primary-aged boys out of school is 20 percent or more. All of these countries and territories are in sub-Saharan Africa except Jamaica, the Marshall Islands and Puerto Rico. In Mali, Niger and Senegal, between 30 and 40 percent of primary school-aged boys are out of school. Of 140 countries with data, 37, or 26 percent, had 20 percent or more lower secondary school-aged boys out of school. The equivalent for upper secondary level was 87 of 158 countries, or 55 percent. In 30 percent of countries, over half of all boys of upper secondary age were not in school **(Figure 7)**. In Chad in 2019, over half, 55 percent, of lower secondary school-aged adolescent boys were out of school; in the United Republic of Tanzania in 2016, the equivalent was two thirds (UIS database, November 2021).

Figure 7: Distribution of countries according to share of out-of-school boys out of total population of school-age boys, 2019



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed August 2021.

Note: Totals may not add up to 100%, as figures have been rounded up/down to the nearest percentage.

Youth not in education, employment or training

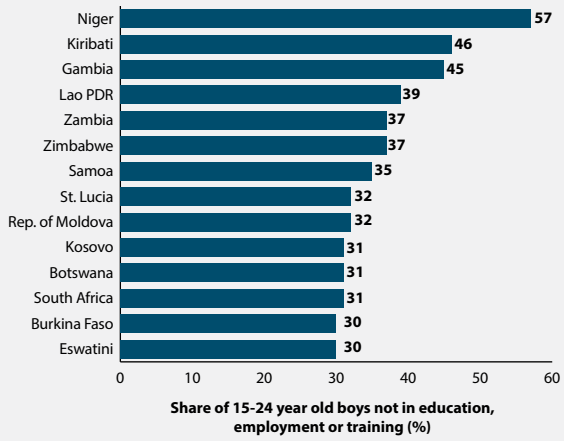
In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, SDG target 8.6 pledged to increase youth employment and opportunities and reduce the proportion of youth who are not in education, employment or training. However, for many countries around the world, the nature of employment is precarious and vulnerable. Significant gender differences are apparent among the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training. In most cases, there is disparity at female youth's expense.

In 107 of the 131 countries with data, some 82 percent, there is disparity at the expense of female youth aged 15–24 not in education, employment or training related to their male counterparts. In some countries, female youth aged 15–24 are the majority of those not in education, employment or training, including in Afghanistan (66 percent), Niger (77 percent) and Pakistan (55 percent). Overall, it is clear that girls and women face substantial challenges in many countries, in both accessing formal levels of schooling and participating in the labour market. Time-series data, however, do indicate an upward trend in the ratio of female-to-male participation in the labour force in recent years (World Bank, 2021).

The overwhelming majority of the remaining 24 countries where the share of male youth aged 15–24 not in education, employment or training was greater than their female counterparts are in North America and Western Europe. However, even in countries with disparity at female youth's expense, the share of male youth not in education, employment or training is high, indicating that, as a group, they also require attention. This includes the Gambia where 45 percent of 15- to 24-year-old male youth are not in education, employment or training, Kiribati (46 percent), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (39 percent), Niger (57 percent), Zambia (37 percent) and Zimbabwe (37 percent). Countries with the highest proportions of male youth aged 15–24 who were not in education, employment or training are mainly in sub-Saharan Africa **(Figure 8)**.

In terms of overall numbers, male youth aged 15–24 who were not in education, employment or training are concentrated in countries with the largest populations due to their overall population size. The largest number is in India in 2020 with 14.8 million male youth not in education, employment or training, followed by 3.8 million in Indonesia in 2020, 3.6 million in Nigeria in 2019 and 3.3 million in Brazil in 2020.

Figure 8: Countries with the highest share of 15-24-year-old male youth who are not in education, employment or training (percent)



Data Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. Accessed October 2021. Available under CC BY 4.0

Boys have poorer learning outcomes particularly in reading

In 2015, SDG target 4.1 pledged to ensure that children achieve 12 years of quality schooling by 2030, which would translate into all children being in school for 12 years *and* that they are learning. However, in 2015 globally 617 million children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age were not achieving the minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics skills (UNESCO, 2017c). Data showed that 58 percent of children and adolescents globally were not achieving minimum proficiency in reading skills and 55 percent not achieving minimum proficiency in mathematics skills. This learning crisis was uneven between regions, with close to 9 in 10 children and adolescents residing in sub-Saharan Africa not achieving minimum proficiency in mathematics compared with 1 in 10 in North America and Western Europe (UNESCO, 2017c).

Being in school and learning

Up until recently, the standard metric used to measure access to schooling was the average number of years a student was in school. However, as evidence from global and regional assessments demonstrates – most notably the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in Reading Literacy Survey (PIRLS) – countries where students have completed similar years of schooling can have very different learning outcomes. In Nigeria, only 19 percent of young adults who had completed primary education were found to be literate. The equivalent for the United Republic of Tanzania was much higher at 80 percent (Filmer et al., 2018). Schooling, therefore, is not the same as learning (Pritchett, 2013).

To better understand this, Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling, also known as LAYS, was introduced in 2018. LAYS is a composite indicator developed by the World Bank. It seeks to combine access and learning outcomes into a single measure (see **Box 3** for a detailed definition).

Box **3**

Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS)

Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS) adjusts the standard years of schooling measure to incorporate learning by measuring how much students learn for each year they are in school (Filmer et al., 2018). It combines access and learning outcomes into one single comparable measure by addressing both *quantity* (the number of years a child is in school) and *quality* (how much children are actually learning at a given level). With both these sets of information, the average years of schooling attained by a child in a given country is then adjusted for how much they have learnt. This is measured relative to standardized benchmarks of learning, such as the TIMSS and PIRLS assessments.

In 2019, data were available for 153 countries, of which there were 53 high-income countries, 44 upper-middle-income countries, 38 lower-middle-income countries and 18 low-income countries. Currently, LAYS data allow gender comparison relating to the mean number of years spent in school vs the mean number of years spent in school *and* learning.

LAYS is useful for policy-makers to understand the state of a given education system. It helps inform whether a country is on track to achieve the SDG target of 12 years of access to quality education and whether the focus should be on increasing the mean years of schooling, the quality of schooling systems when in school, or both (Crawfurd et al., 2021).

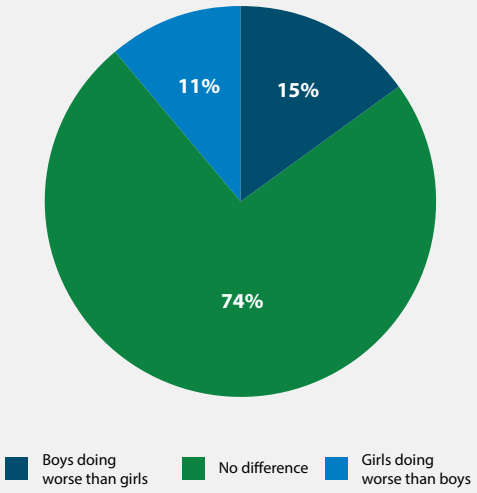
In 74 percent of 153 countries with data, there is no or no significant difference[3] between girls and boys in the mean number of years a child is in school. The 11 percent of countries where girls are estimated to have significantly fewer mean number of years of schooling than boys are all low-income countries, the majority in sub-Saharan Africa. The 15 percent of countries where boys are estimated to spend fewer years in school compared with girls are mainly middle- and high-income countries, but also include low-income Burundi and the Gambia **(Figure 9a).**

Of the 153 countries, 68 percent do not exhibit significant gender differences in the number of years a learner is in school *and* learning. In only 5 percent of countries are girls faring worse than boys and in 27 percent of countries, boys are faring worse than girls **(Figure 9b)**; except for Burundi, all of the latter set of countries are middle- or high-income from various regions. Countries which show some of the largest disparities are Arab States and include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.

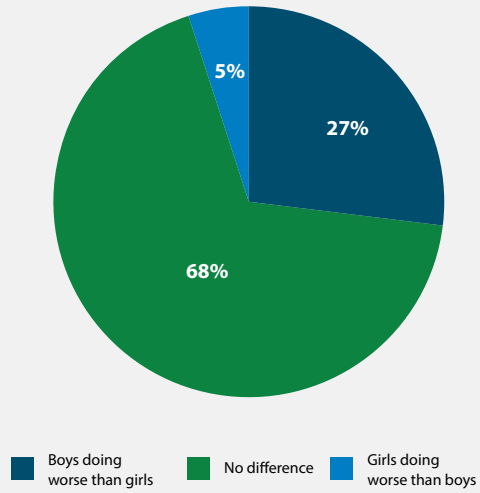
3. For the purpose of this report, 'no significant difference' has been defined as a difference of 0.5 years or less between boys and girls.

Figure 9: Gender disparities in schooling and learning

a. Average years in school



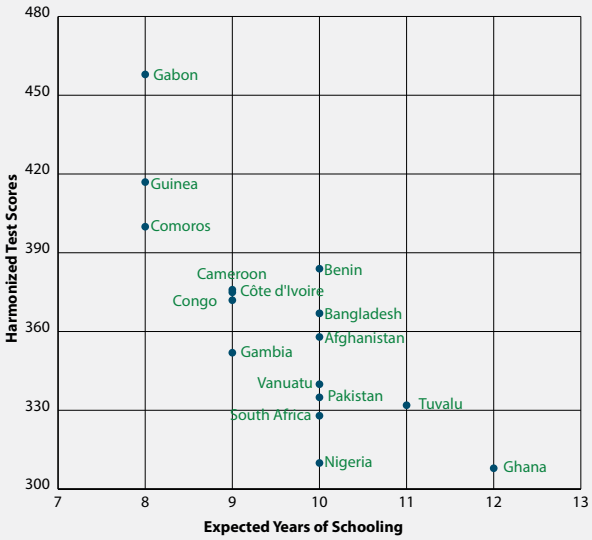
b. Average years in school and learning



Data Source: World Bank Human Capital Index. Accessed August 2021. Available under CC BY 3.0 IGO

As **Box 3** discussed, the LAYS measure is useful for policy-makers to understand what is required to reach the SDG 4 target of 12 years of access to quality education. For example, boys in Gabon take 8 years of education to achieve a learning-adjusted years of schooling score of 5.8 years, boys in Ghana take on average 12 years to get a LAYS score of 5.9 years **(Figure 10)**.

Figure 10: Countries with similar LAYS scores for boys (between 5.0 and 5.9) achieve these scores through different combinations of schooling and learning



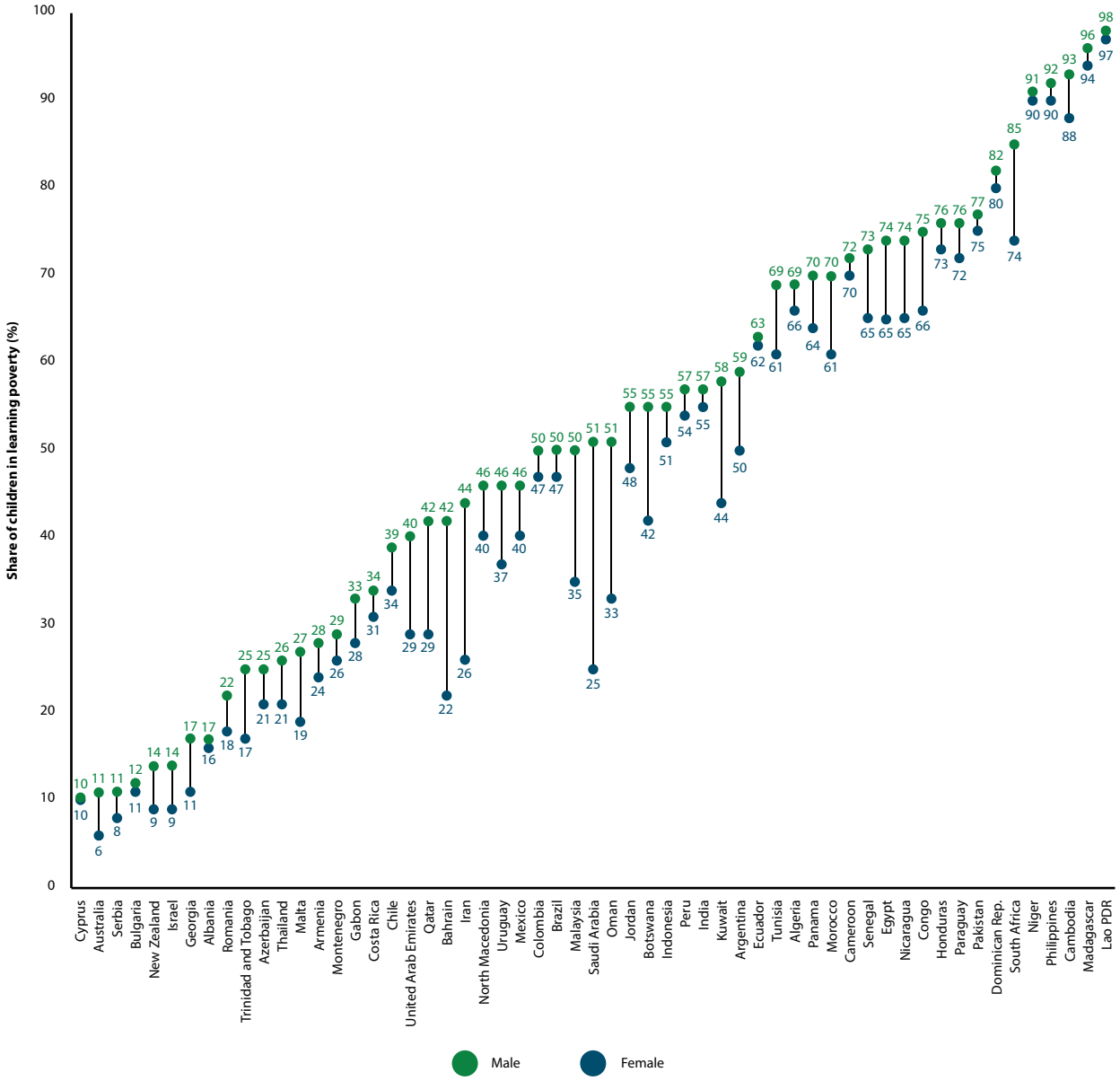
Data Source: World Bank Human Capital Index. Accessed August 2021. Available under CC BY 3.0 IGO

Learning poverty

To underscore the importance of the learning crisis, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been developing indicative, comparable measures of progress related to learning. In 2019, the World Bank developed the 'learning poverty' indicator. This measures whether a learner can read and understand a straightforward text at age 10. The learning poverty indicator starts with the share of children who have not achieved minimum reading proficiency (measured in schools) and adjusts this according to the proportion who are out of school, and are assumed not to be able to read proficiently. In 2019, 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries suffered from learning poverty (World Bank, 2019).

Across regions, boys are more negatively affected by learning poverty. Analysis by Azevedo and colleagues (World Bank, 2019) of the World Bank's learning poverty data based on 91 cross-national learning assessments found that despite the barriers to education faced by girls, more boys (56 percent) were in learning poverty in low- and middle-income countries than girls (50 percent). The regions of East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Arab States show some of the largest disparities at boys' expense in terms of learning poverty. The latest round of learning poverty data from July 2021, which is an update of the data used in Azevedo and colleagues analysis' (World Bank, 2019) showed that Argentina, Bahrain, Botswana, Oman, Saudi Arabia and South Africa had some of the largest disparities at boys' expense in in learning poverty **(Figure 11)**.

Figure 11: Share of end-of primary-aged children in learning poverty (percent)



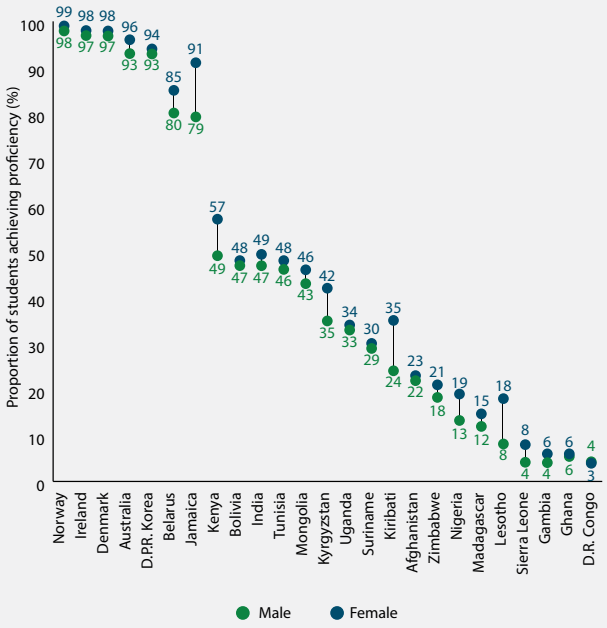
Data Source: World Bank Learning Poverty data set. Accessed October 2021. Available under CC BY 4.0

Boys' disadvantage in reading skills and literacy

Differences in learning outcomes for girls and boys enrolled in school are small in comparison with other key background characteristics such as socioeconomic status. However, in many countries, over the last 20 years gender disparities in reading and language skills where boys perform less well than girls have grown (Reilly et al., 2019). This phenomenon has attracted a great deal of interest. Disparities are evident across different regions and at different stages of the education system, with the disparities beginning from the earliest, foundational levels. This finding is supported by data relating to the learning poverty indicator, discussed in the previous section, which is based on primary-aged children's reading skills.

Gaps in reading skills are found to start early. While data on learning is limited for the early grades, in 23 of 25 countries with data for proficiency in reading at Grade 2/3, the proportion of girls achieving minimum proficiency in reading was higher than the share of boys. The largest of such disparities are found in Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati and Lesotho **(Figure 12).** When considering proficiency of reading and literacy skills at these early grades, boys in half of all countries with available data were found to be at a disadvantage compared with girls. In the Gambia, Kiribati, Lesotho, Nigeria, North Macedonia and Sierra Leone, fewer than 80 boys for every 100 girls were found to achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading at these foundational grades.

Figure 12: Minimum proficiency levels achieved in reading in Grade 2/3, latest year

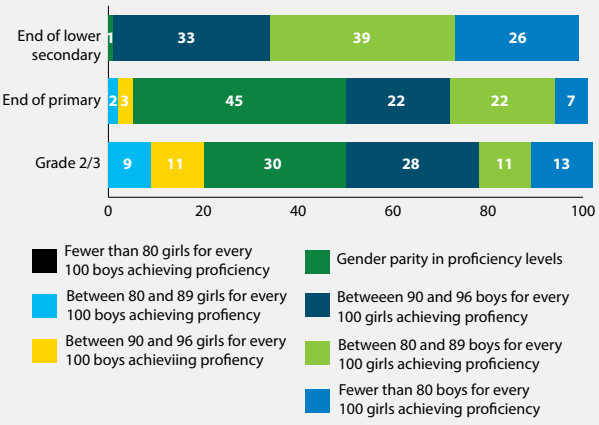


Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed August 2021.

International assessments have found gender disparities in reading at primary and secondary levels. PIRLS, administered once every five years, is a comprehensive assessment of Grade 4 students' achievement in reading and literacy. The 2016 survey, for which the latest data are available, found that in 48 of the 50 participating countries, girls had higher average scores than boys. The performance gap between girls and boys was the equivalent to about one third of a school year (Mullis et al., 2017). Gaps in reading scores tend to increase as learners progress through the education system. The 2018 PISA measures reading and mathematics scores at the end of lower secondary education. Participating countries are mainly concentrated in high- and middle-income countries. Girls outperformed boys in reading in all of the participating countries and economies, with the performance gap in reading between girls and boys translating into two thirds of a school year. The gap was narrowest in Latin American and Caribbean countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama and Peru) and widest in the Arab States (Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) (OECD, 2018).

When measuring boys' disadvantage in reading literacy, the adjusted gender parity score shows that at early grades of primary school, 52 percent of countries have fewer boys than girls achieving basic proficiency (**Figure 13**). In the Gambia, Kiribati, Lesotho, Nigeria and North Macedonia, fewer than 80 boys achieve proficiency in reading for every 100 girls. Even in Pakistan, where it is girls who traditionally face barriers to education, 86 boys for every 100 girls achieve reading proficiency. Similarly, for reading proficiency at the end-of-primary level, boys are at a disadvantage in half of the 60 countries with data (**Figure 13**). Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Oman and Saudi Arabia have the greatest gender disparities, with fewer than 80 boys for every 100 girls attaining proficiency in reading. By the end of lower secondary, 59 of 60 countries show boys at a disadvantage in reading proficiency,[4] with one quarter showing severe disadvantage – fewer than 80 boys for every 100 girls achieving expected levels of reading proficiency (OECD, 2016).

Figure 13: Share of countries which have achieved gender parity (adjusted) in reading/literacy by level, 2015–2019



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed August 2021.
Note: The data by level of education correspond to a different subset of countries. Totals may not add up to 100%, as figures have been rounded up/down to the nearest percentage.

4. PISA assesses reading proficiency for the end of secondary school as students being able to answer questions based on their comprehension of extended passages of text (OECD, 2016).

Analysis of 2012 and 2018 PISA data for European Union countries shows that the gap between girls and boys narrowed across nearly all countries, although in only a few was this due to boys' improved reading performance. Instead, gaps shrank due to girls' declining performance over time while boys' performance remained relatively stable or declined at a slower rate. On average, girls' reading score declined by 13 points between 2012 and 2018 compared to 3 points for boys (European Commission, 2021). In only a few countries, including Estonia, Slovenia and Sweden, did the gender gap between boys and girls narrow because boys improved faster than girls over time. In Sweden, boys improved their reading score in PISA by 31 points from 2012 to 2018, while girls improved only by 14 points (ibid.) As with enrolment and completion rates, these changes over time underline the need for careful interpretation of measures of gender parity. A situation where gender gaps are narrowing due to declining performance of girls is not a desirable outcome.

In contrast to reading literacy skills, there appears to be a convergence towards gender parity in numeracy and mathematics. Whereas at the turn of the millennium, girls, on average, were not performing as well as boys in mathematics, the PISA 2018 scores show that girls now perform as well as boys in mathematics in over half of the 79 countries and economies participating and do better than boys in over one quarter (UNESCO, 2020a). On average, for all participating countries, boys outperform girls by 5 score points in mathematics (OECD, 2018).

Furthermore, the most recent round of the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) shows that gender gaps in numeracy are not particularly pronounced among young adults under 25 in 32 OECD countries, reflecting greater equity in educational opportunities over the last two decades (OECD, 2019d). Among older adults, however, differences in educational attainment and gendered occupational choices and labour market outcomes may partially explain disparities in literacy and numeracy proficiency at older women's expense, particularly in numeracy (ibid.)

It should be noted that PISA and PISA for Development (PISA-D) surveys only test adolescents who are in school. However, given that many of the poorest performing students will likely drop out, test scores which only include those who have persisted in school to age 15 can be assumed to be biased upwards, especially in countries with large numbers of out-of-school children. Citizen-led assessments, on the other hand, capture the learning outcomes of children who are both in and out of school. For a country like Pakistan, where one in three 5- to 16-year-olds – the equivalent of 22.8 million children and adolescents – are out of school, these assessments are a useful comparison to in-school assessment survey data.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of enrolment, completion and learning trends by gender over the last 20 years. The data reveal that in many countries boys are at greater risk of repeating grades, failing to complete different education levels, and having poorer learning outcomes while in school compared with girls. Where previously boys' disadvantage was generally found in high- or upper-middle-income contexts at the beginning of the millennium, this has now shifted and includes several low- and lower-middle-income countries. Secondary education is where boys' disadvantage is most prevalent. In such situations, governments and policy-makers need more and better research to understand the changing shifts in children's engagement with education and how to ensure equitable access.

Chapter 3

Factors influencing boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes

Key messages

Multiple factors combine to prevent boys from engaging fully with learning and contribute to boys exiting education early. Poverty and the need to work are important drivers of school dropout.

The poorest boys in several countries are at a disadvantage in primary completion, including Bangladesh, where 82 of the poorest boys completed primary education for every 100 of the poorest girls, and Haiti, with 78 of the poorest boys for every 100 poorest girls.

For boys in school, impacts of poverty can be seen in learning outcomes. In 24 of the 79 countries and economies taking part in the PISA 2018 survey, over 70 percent of boys from the poorest income quintile did not achieve the minimum proficiency reading levels.

In 2020, an estimated 160 million children – or 1 in 10 children worldwide – were engaged in child labour, of which 97 million were estimated to be boys.

Of 146 countries with data, only 55 countries have a minimum age of employment clearly aligned with the end of the countries' stipulated years of compulsory education and above the age of 15, while 31 percent have a minimum age for employment below the age of 15 or not clearly defined.

Gendered norms and expectations impact on boys' motivation and desire to learn. In many contexts, school activities and certain subjects are considered at odds with expressions of masculinity, making education unpopular with boys.

Practices such as the streaming of classes and gender segregation contribute to boys' low motivation, underachievement and disengagement from education.

Harsh discipline, corporal punishment and other forms of school-related gender-based violence impact negatively on boys' academic achievement and attainment. Fear and experiences of violence lead to increased absenteeism and may contribute to dropout.

Boys are more likely than girls to experience physical bullying and are often targeted because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

Conflict and forced migration exacerbate challenges in accessing and completing education. Language barriers, mobility and discrimination contribute to educational exclusion.

Prolonged school closures and the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on learning loss and school dropout are likely to exacerbate existing gender disparities unless steps are taken to address the learning needs of all.

Factors influencing boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes

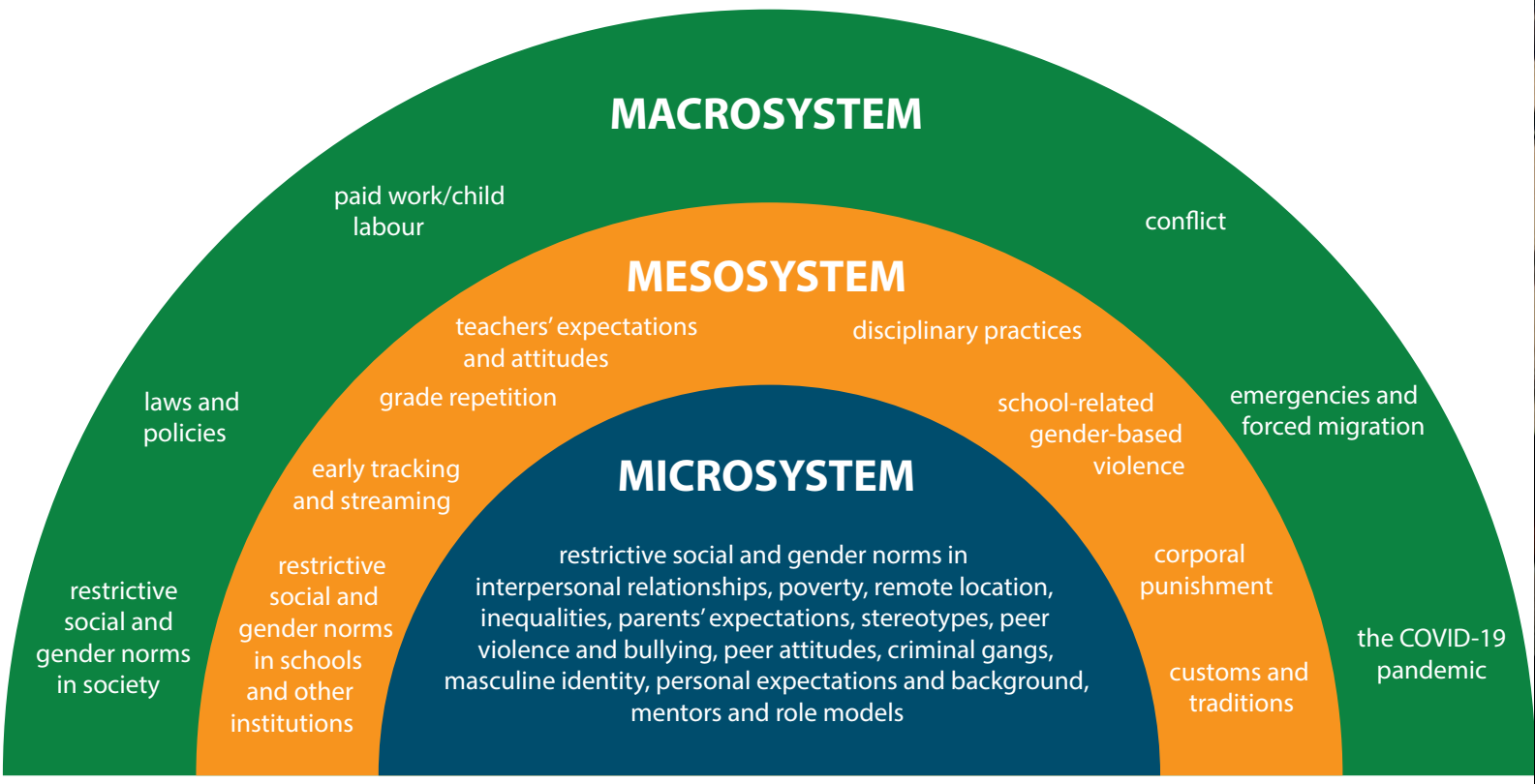
This chapter identifies key factors that influence boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education, and how gender norms and expectations in society, reproduced in schools and classrooms, affect boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education. This chapter also highlights particular areas of concern, including the gender dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the complex social milieu surrounding boys' and girls' participation in education, a range of factors – at the level of the macrosystem (societal, economic, cultural), mesosystem (schools and other institutions), and microsystem (interpersonal and personal) – combine to influence participation, progression and learning outcomes (see **Figure 14**). Overlapping factors exacerbate constraints on boys' education and lead to, and reinforce, poor educational outcomes. Erratic attendance, poor achievement, grade repetition, low motivation and disengagement are common precursors for students' early, permanent exit from school and may disproportionately affect boys in some contexts (Hunt, 2008).

Social and gender norms can negatively impact boys as well as girls

Societal norms surrounding constructions of gender are fundamental to understanding drivers of boys' disengagement from education. Notions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2011) argue that while men and boys are not discriminated against simply because of their gender, many struggle under the prevailing gender norms and stereotypes that uphold existing inequalities in society and its institutions (Heilman et al., 2017; Woodrow, 2016). Perceived norms of masculinity among boys, teachers and parents can result in low expectations of boys' academic ability and behaviour, resulting in poor motivation, disengagement with schooling and eventual dropout. In some countries in Southeast Asia and the Arab States, parents and teachers view boys as less academically inclined than girls (UNESCO, 2020a). Perhaps as a reflection of this, fewer boys in these regions progress to tertiary education (ibid.). Attitudes to boys' academic ability also intersect with discriminatory race-based and ethnic norms, such that boys from specific ethnic groups may be further stereotyped as trouble-makers or academic underperformers (Redding, 2019; Reichert and Nelson, 2020).

Figure 14: Factors influencing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education



Source: Authors

Gendered experiences at school that reproduce negative masculine norms and power dynamics can normalize discriminatory and violent behaviours. Boys that do not conform to rigid norms regarding male identity face additional challenges and discrimination within schools and communities (Heilman et al., 2017), which can impact on their participation and learning. For example, a study in Chile (Olavarría et al., 2015) found that young people consider reading to be an unsuitable, feminine activity for men, and boys who show interest in reading are often mocked, which discourages them from doing so (Heilman et al., 2017). Boys and young men who are gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer are particularly at risk of discrimination and targeted violence in schools based on their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, with transgender students among those most at risk (UNESCO, 2021d).

Understanding how masculinities and societal gender norms interact with boys' (and girls') participation, progression and learning outcomes at school is critical to ensuring gender equality in and beyond the classroom. Boys may express inequitable gender attitudes (Patel et. al., 2021), dominate classroom spaces and condone or enact gender-based violence – literally 'learning to be violent' (Leach, 2003; 385). These are attitudes and behaviours that, if not challenged, will perpetuate gender inequalities in young people's future lives. Furthermore, while poor educational outcomes can set many boys on a path to limited life choices (Hunt, 2008; Silver, 2007), for others, their lower achievement and attainment than girls do not necessarily lead to disadvantage in future educational trajectories or transition to work (UNESCO, 2020a). A study in the United States of boys with troubled backgrounds, discipline issues and lower learning aspirations found no evidence of a greater impact on tertiary education enrolment, employment and income on men than women (Lei and Lundberg, 2020). In Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, men's limited educational outcomes compared with women have not been a barrier to well-paid employment (see **Country Case Study 1: Kuwait** and **Country Case Study 4: United Arab Emirates**). At the same time, a narrowing and reversal of gender gaps in educational attainment in Bangladesh and Malawi – now favouring girls – did not translate into substantive gains in labour market opportunities for women (Chisamya et al., 2012).

Flickr - World Bank Photo Collection. In the village of Ait Sidi Hsain, near Meknes 254 households have benefited from the Tayssir conditional cash transfer. Arne Hoel/World Bank. Available under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Country Case Study 1: Kuwait – Entitlement culture: Why tire myself with learning?

Kuwait is an example of a high-income country where boys are disengaged from education. The population is segregated into Kuwaiti urban, Kuwaiti Bedouin and non-Kuwaiti expatriates, which is also replicated in the education system. Kuwait is a rentier state, meaning that it derives most of its revenue from selling resources to other countries. Kuwaiti boys know that they will find a good job and that the state will provide for them regardless of their education, which is the main reason for their disengagement.

Kuwaiti boys are lagging behind in learning outcomes

Boys lag behind girls in education in Kuwait. They do less well than girls in reading, science and mathematics. While shrinking in recent years, the difference in reading scores measured through PIRLS at fourth grade was 34 points at girls' favour in 2016 (Mullis et al., 2007; 2012; 2017). Likewise, in TIMSS, fourth grade boys scored on average 39 points lower than girls in science and 7 points lower in mathematics in 2019. At eighth grade, the gender gap in performance was 35 points in science and 9 points in mathematics at boys' disadvantage (Mullis et al., 2020). Boys also repeat grades more often than girls. In 2020, boys represented 58 percent of repeaters in primary education and 66 percent of repeaters in lower secondary education (UIS, 2021). School life expectancy was 13.2 years for boys compared to 15.2 years for girls (UNDP, 2020) and they participated at lower rates in higher education, with a gross enrolment ratio of 43 percent for young men vs 82 percent for young women in 2020 (UIS, 2021). In general, Kuwaiti, Bedouin and older boys are affected more by educational disengagement than non-Kuwaiti, urban and younger boys.

Boys' disengagement is linked to low educational aspirations, unstable family environments and reckless behaviour

The case study found that boys have lower educational aspirations than girls. Many of them do not make any significant effort in learning, as one 15-year-old boy interviewed noted:

> **"The school does everything for us, but boys are lazier than girls.**

According to the focus group discussions undertaken in the study, boys were reported to display overconfidence and believe that they will be successful without doing well at school, as expressed by a 17-year-old girl:

> **"Boys have excessive self-confidence, arrogance, self-inflation, and feel that no one can defeat them.**

Unstable family environments, lack of parental support for boys' education, and low expectations of sons' achievement were found to have a negative effect on boys' academic performance. One teacher interviewed for this study noted:

> **"One of our fellow teachers wanted to summon a boy's father to discuss his son's learning difficulties. The father sent his secretary at work instead of coming himself to the school.**

The study also suggested that the heavy dependency on domestic workers reinforces disengagement among boys and has a negative impact on their Arabic language skills. According to the study, peers appear to adversely affect boys' education outcomes, promoting reckless behaviour and the challenging of authority.

Undervalued teachers and absenteeism among boys

In Kuwait, public schools are attended by Kuwaiti students and private schools by expatriates' children, who are prohibited from attending public school (UNESCO, 2019c). Public secondary schools are segregated into boys' and girls' schools. Violence, bullying and drug abuse is more prevalent in boys' schools. Teachers have low motivation due to the absence of professional development opportunities and a lack of appreciation by parents and students. Some of the teachers do not always encourage boys to do well in school. A 16-year-old boy commented,

> **"A few days ago, a teacher came to me and said: why don't you leave the school and join the police? Why do you tire yourself in completing education? These words broke my heart and caused me great frustration.**

According to the study, boys are often absent from school and cheating seems to be frequent. A community member commented,

> **"Cheating has become an integral part of our societal culture, not just a phenomenon that is widespread in society. The boy feels that cheating in exams is an inherent right for him. In many cases, the school administration gives instructions to**

teachers to disregard cheating in exams. The evidence that cheating has become a culture in our society is that the MOE [Ministry of Education] does not trust school principals and rotates them during the testing period.

Structural and social factors leading to low motivation among boys

Boys are disinterested in education because of structural and social factors. Social mobility in Kuwait is not linked to educational attainment and boys adopt a mentality that the state will provide for them early on. An expert commented,

"The non-Kuwaiti boy must get an educational qualification to find a job, while the Kuwaiti boy is usually not interested in his future because he believes that everything will be prepared for him, especially that at the age of 18, he gets a car and a private housing.

Boys know that they will get government jobs or jobs in the military and oil industry easily, independent of their educational qualifications. They are also aware that the Kuwaiti state will always support them financially. The study suggests that girls, on the contrary, need a good education to improve marriage opportunities, get a good job and have more autonomy. A parent commented,

"The girl is usually keen to continue education to secure her future and freedom, to be financially independent, and to make friends outside the home. She does not want to be locked up in the house after marriage; rather, she wants to have friendships.

Absence of country-level programmes, policies and initiatives that explicitly target boys

Despite evidence of boys' underperformance and lower participation, particularly in higher education, no government programmes or policies were found that explicitly target boys. Schools are implementing two types of activities to improve the academic performance of boys and girls. The first is formal, extracurricular activities, following Ministry of Education instructions run in all boys' and girls' schools. An example of the activities is the so-called 'activity-class.' In these classes, children can pursue hobbies such as arts and sports. These classes have been shown to increase girls' and boys' engagement at school and their motivation to learn. Another example is the 'Project of Promoting Values' which promotes students' moral values such as honesty and respect for others and aims to prevent bullying and cheating. These values are taught through various means, such as exhibitions and seminars, and promoted through competitions for prizes organized among students and school administrators. This project has been deemed important by teachers and headmasters in addressing behavioural problems at school. The second type of activity is initiatives taken at the level of the school administration to address specific school issues. An example identified by the case study is the 'Educational Park Project' implemented at an all-boys' school in the Al-Jahra region. The project allowed teachers to do lessons outdoor, taking them out of the classroom into a furnished place in the school garden. According to the headmaster, this helped reduced absenteeism rates and improved educational outcomes. The school has also organized cultural, artistic and sports competitions in the school breaks, which was reportedly highly appreciated by the boys. In addition, the school organized seminars whereby invited speakers gave lectures on the dangers of smoking and drug abuse, bullying, violence at school and advice for personal development.

The need to address structural factors and the relationship between citizens and the state

Given the current economic and social structures created by state policies, it is unlikely that education interventions alone can improve boys' educational performance. The case study suggests that policies are needed that positively change relationships between citizens and the state. This means reconsidering government subsidies provided regardless of merit and making job opportunities dependent on skills and qualifications. This would incentivize boys to do well at school. In the education system, discipline and safety procedures at school need to be strengthened to prevent bullying, violence and drug abuse. Teaching, learning and evaluation methods should become more student-centred. Continuous professional development for teachers should be provided and their working conditions improved. Positive male role models may help to re-engage boys in education. Boys could also benefit from career counselling programmes at the secondary school level. Finally, parents' and communities' involvement in boys' education needs to be further encouraged, such as through the creation of parents' councils at school and the engagement of the community in the development of education policies.

Source: Based on Omar (2022).

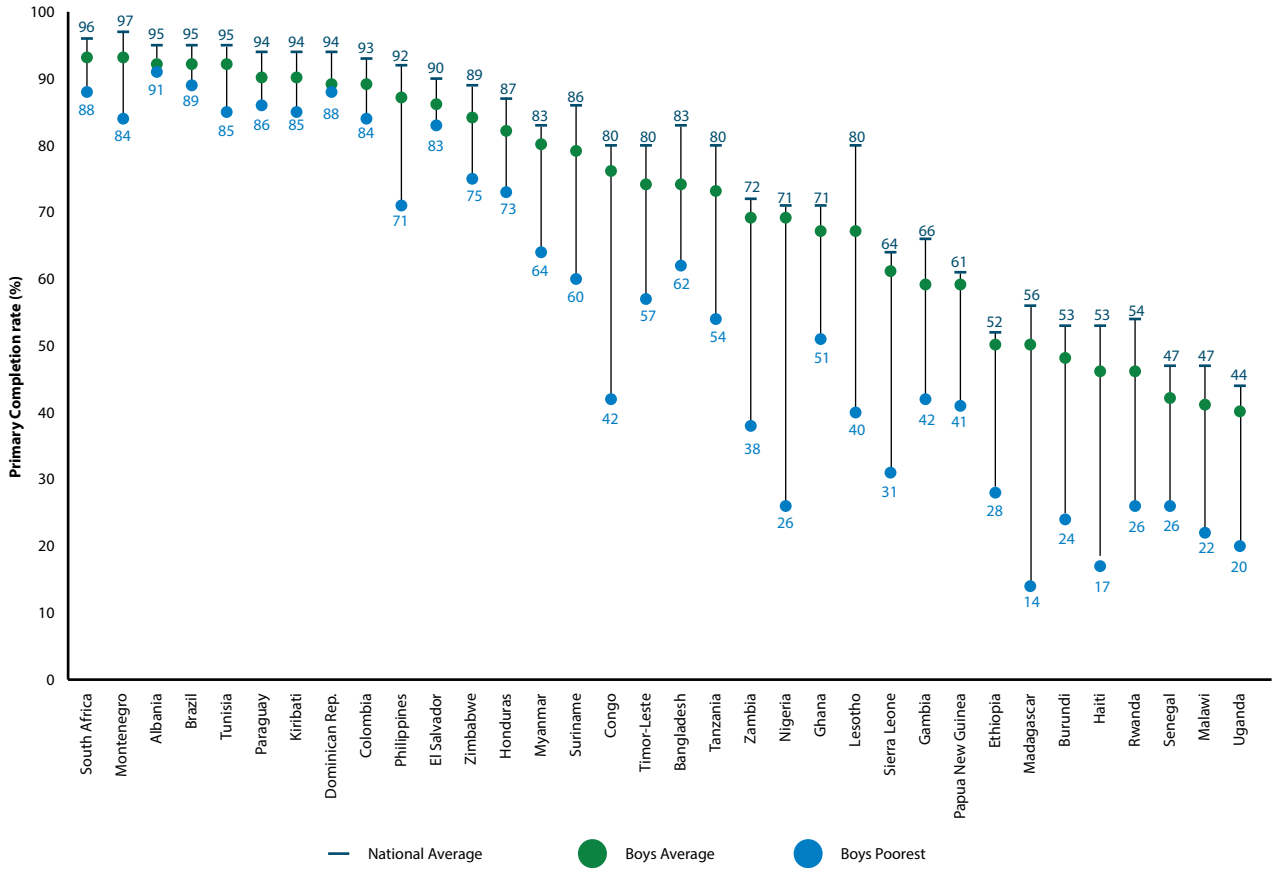
Poverty is a key driver of boys' poor education outcomes

Poverty, especially extreme poverty, has multiple, long-term effects on academic attainment. Globally, poverty is perhaps the most significant predictor of low achievement and dropout. While the gender dimensions of the causes and effects of poverty differ, household poverty has been identified as being the key factor, above all else, that affects the chances of completion of primary and secondary education for both boys and girls (Rose et al., 2017).

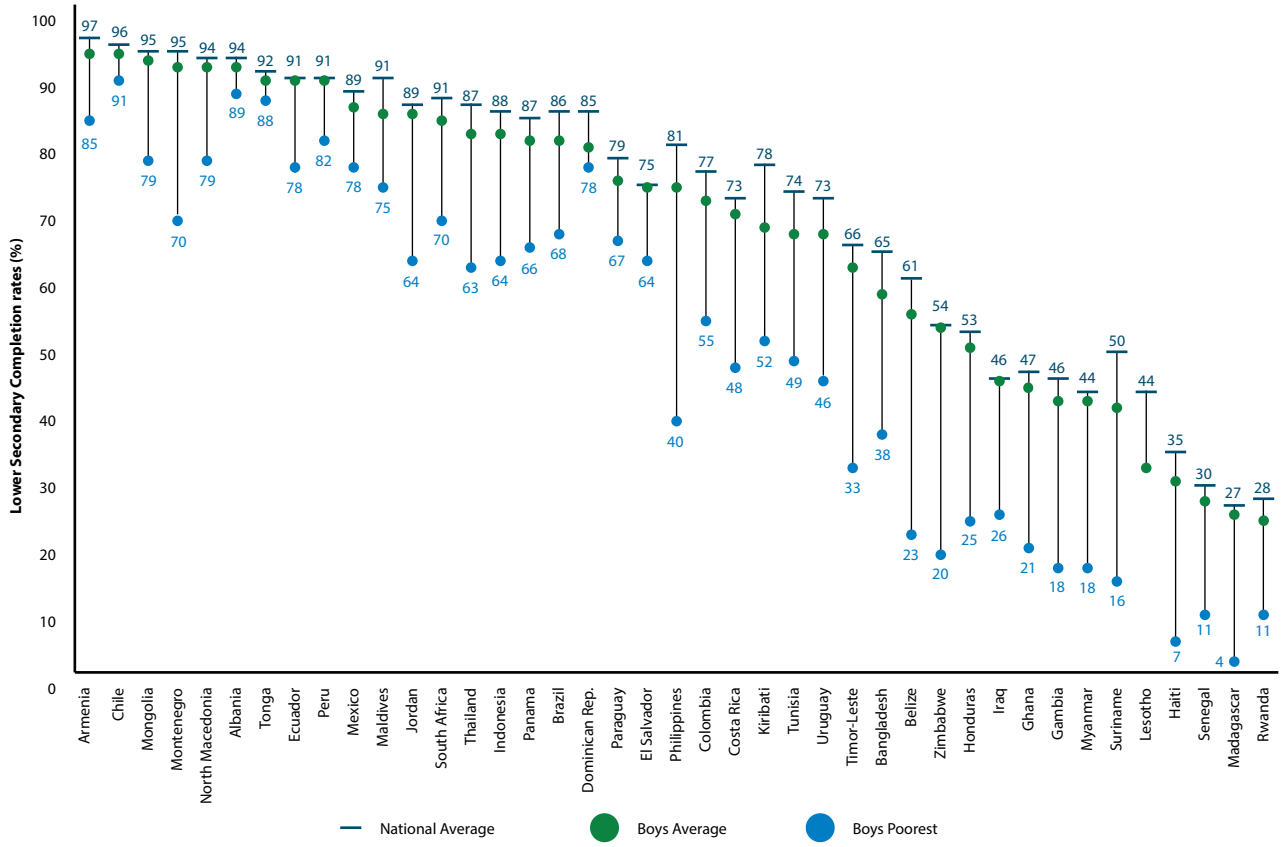
Data on primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education all support this. For example, 75 percent of all boys enrolled in lower secondary school in the Philippines are likely to complete a full cycle, but this falls to 40 percent when limiting the analysis to boys from the poorest households **(Figure 15b)**. Similarly, in Zimbabwe while 54 percent of boys are likely to complete lower secondary education, this falls to 20 percent for the poorest boys**.** In Haiti, where private, fee-paying schools account for the vast majority of education provision at primary and secondary levels (IIEP-UNESCO, 2020), only 17 percent of the poorest boys complete primary education (compared with a national average for boys of 53 percent), and just 7 percent complete lower secondary (**Figures 15a and 15b**). Similar patterns occur for upper secondary (**Figure 15c**). While, on average, some 4 in 10 boys complete upper secondary in Honduras and Uruguay, the share drops to 1 in 10 boys from the poorest quintile. Even in countries with high completion rates, the poorest boys are being left behind. In Mongolia, 95 percent of students complete lower secondary but only 70 percent of the poorest boys do so (**Figure 15b**). In Montenegro, 86 percent of students complete upper secondary but only 52 percent of the poorest boys do (**Figure 15c**).

Figure 15: Completion rates according to gender and wealth disadvantage, latest year

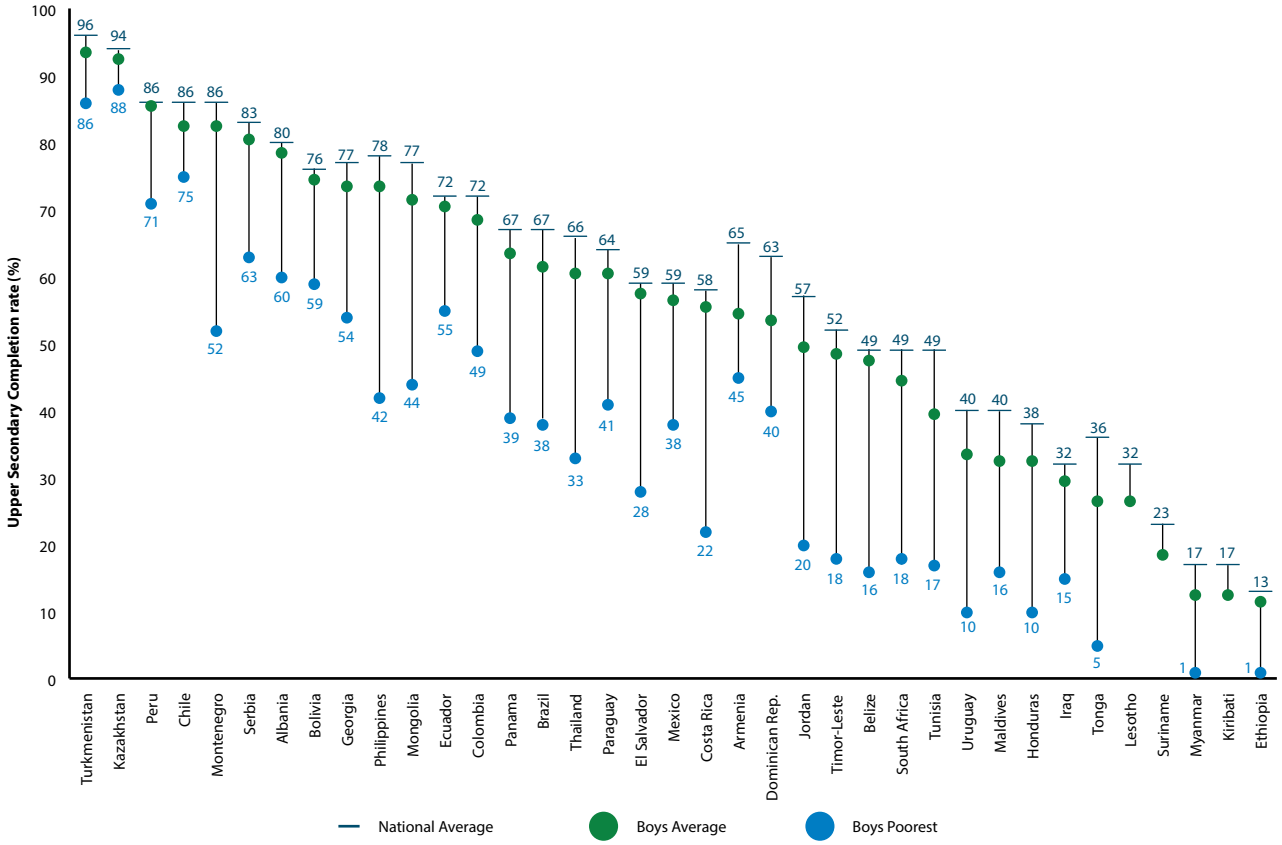
a. Primary



b. Lower secondary



c. Upper secondary



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed August 2021.

Notes: This is based on household data sourced from various DHS or MICS reports. All countries included have GPI for completion rates of greater than 1.04, indicating a gender gap at boys' expense. No data on poorest boys was available for Lesotho on lower secondary and upper secondary, and for Kiribati and Suriname on upper secondary completion.

In some contexts, poverty exacerbates gender disparities, with gender gaps in education widest among the poorest income quintiles, and especially for girls. For the sub-Saharan Africa region, gender parity in primary education completion has been achieved, on average, for the richest quintile, but among the poorest quintile, 94 girls complete primary education for every 100 boys. This drops to 68 for the poorest girls at lower secondary and upper secondary levels, demonstrating across the region a severe disadvantage for girls where gender intersects with household poverty. In a few sub-Saharan African countries, however, including Burundi, the Gambia, Rwanda and Senegal, gender disparities at boys' expense have emerged, with the poorest boys now less likely than the poorest girls to complete primary education. For Lesotho, which has one of the world's widest gender gaps at boys' expense (a GPI of 1.25 in primary completion), for every 100 of the poorest girls, only 67 of the poorest boys complete primary education. In other regions, the poorest boys in several countries are at a disadvantage in primary completion, including Bangladesh, where 82 of the poorest boys completed primary education for every 100 of the poorest girls, and Haiti, with 78 of the poorest boys for every 100 of the poorest girls.

A large body of research maps out how the various dimensions of poverty influence school attainment, both in terms of demand for schooling (lack of school fees, pressure to work, poor health) and school supply, with schools serving poorer communities often of inadequate quality and further impacting on children's engagement (Hunt, 2008). A review of research from predominantly high-income countries found that children growing up in families of low socioeconomic status are at greater risk of school dropout (De Witte et al., 2013a). Poor families may lack the material, human and cultural resources to support their children's education (De Witte et al., 2013b). Furthermore, those living in poverty struggle with food insecurity, poor neighbourhood dynamics and inadequate health care, all of which may negatively impact children's ability to attend school (Berliner, 2009).

In low-income countries, school costs make up a disproportionately higher portion of household expenses for poorer families, who may have to make difficult decisions about which of their children to support (Foko et al., 2012; Zubairi and Rose, 2016). Qualitative research in Malawi and southern Nigeria found that boys in poor, rural communities are often expected to be self-sufficient and work for their own subsistence, including paying for their education. In such situations, boys may fail to cover school costs, be excluded from school or attend irregularly, leading to permanent dropout (Crossouard et al., 2021; Jere, 2014).

For boys in school, impacts of poverty can be seen in learning outcomes. In 24 of the 79 countries and economies taking part in the PISA 2018 survey, over 70 percent of boys from the poorest income quintile did not achieve the minimum proficiency reading levels (UNESCO, 2020a). Poverty can restrict children's learning opportunities in many ways, hampering performance and leaving the poorest students behind. In rural India, for children's learning is often supplemented by private tuition; poorer children whose families cannot afford to pay for tuition are disadvantaged compared with wealthier peers (Alcott and Rose, 2015). In the United States, families living in poverty are less likely to make use of extended learning opportunities, such as pre-primary education, extracurricular clubs and summer school programmes (Berliner, 2009).

Many boys engage in paid work, leading to absence and school dropout

Weak employment regulations and a lack of alignment of labour laws with schooling fails to adequately protect against young people's early exit from education (UNESCO, 2019e). Of 146 countries with data, only 55 countries have a minimum age of employment clearly aligned with the end of the countries' stipulated years of compulsory education and above the age of 15, while 31 percent have a minimum age for employment below the age of 15 or not clearly defined. In Peru and Paraguay, the minimum employment age is 14 but the end of compulsory schooling is age 17 and 18, respectively (ibid.)

In Brazil, where the minimum age of employment is not clearly aligned with compulsory education, many boys in low-income urban settings drop out of school, often from a young age. Education is seen as lacking relevance and offering no guarantee of future employment; manual labour, construction and other semi-skilled jobs do not require completion of secondary education (Barker et al., 2012; Cardoso and Verner, 2007). Research in South Africa found that more boys than girls left school early because earning money and attaining adult status was more attractive to them than staying in school (Hunt, 2008); however, today, gender gaps appear to have closed at secondary level.

High levels of informality in the labour market contributes to boys' access to low-skilled work. In rural communities in Peru, almost three quarters of paid jobs are the informal sector, which do not comply with legal requirements such as age restrictions (see **Country Case Study 3: Peru**). Young men's relatively easy entry into the labour market may result in complacency towards education in some contexts (Jha and Kelleher, 2006). As a community member interviewed for the case study on Kuwait noted:

> **"The boy nowadays says 'I want just to succeed with the least degree, join the army or the police, and get a large salary without getting tired.**
> (Community Member, Kuwait)
> *Source:* Omar (2022).

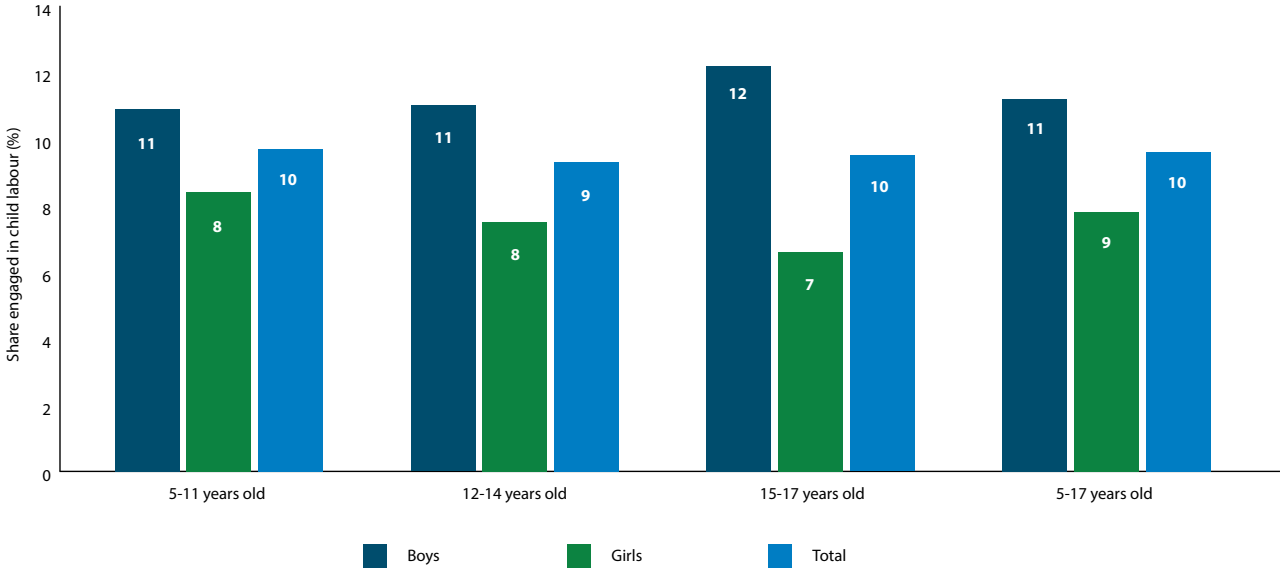
A qualitative study of the emergence of artisanal diamond mining in Zimbabwe during the country's economic crisis found that boys in poor rural communities, already disillusioned with education and its limited value in securing employment, dropped out of school to join the trade for its promise of high earnings (Mukwambo, 2021).

In 2020, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that 160 million children – or 1 in 10 children worldwide – were engaged in child labour, of which 97 million were estimated to be boys. Since 2016 progress against child labour has stagnated. Between 2016-2020 the absolute number of children in child labour grew by over 8 million. While a higher proportion of boys (11 percent) than girls (8 percent) are engaged in child labour **(Figure 16)**, once the child labour definition expands to include 21 hours or more on household chores, the gender gap between boys and girls is reduced by half (ILO, 2021).

Based on DHS, MICS and other national-level surveys, in 52 of 89 countries, 10 percent or more of children aged 5 to 17 were found to be engaged in child labour activities, which include time spent on household chores. In 59 countries, boys make up a larger share of children engaged in child labour than girls. In 26 countries, at least 10 percent of boys are engaged in child labour. Boys' engagement in child labour is highest in countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In Ethiopia, 51 percent of boys aged 5 to 17 were engaged in child labour, while in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Madagascar, two fifths or more of such boys were engaged in child labour (UNICEF, 2021a).

In some countries, the gender gap between boys and girls aged 5 to 17 engaged in child labour was extremely high. In Ethiopia, Haiti, Paraguay, Senegal, Tonga and Zimbabwe, a larger proportion of boys are engaged in child labour compared with girls **(Figure 17a).** In Chad, Comoros and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a significantly higher proportion of girls are engaged in child labour compared with boys **(Figure 17b).**

Figure 16: Percentage of children aged 5–17 engaged in child labour in 2020, by age and gender

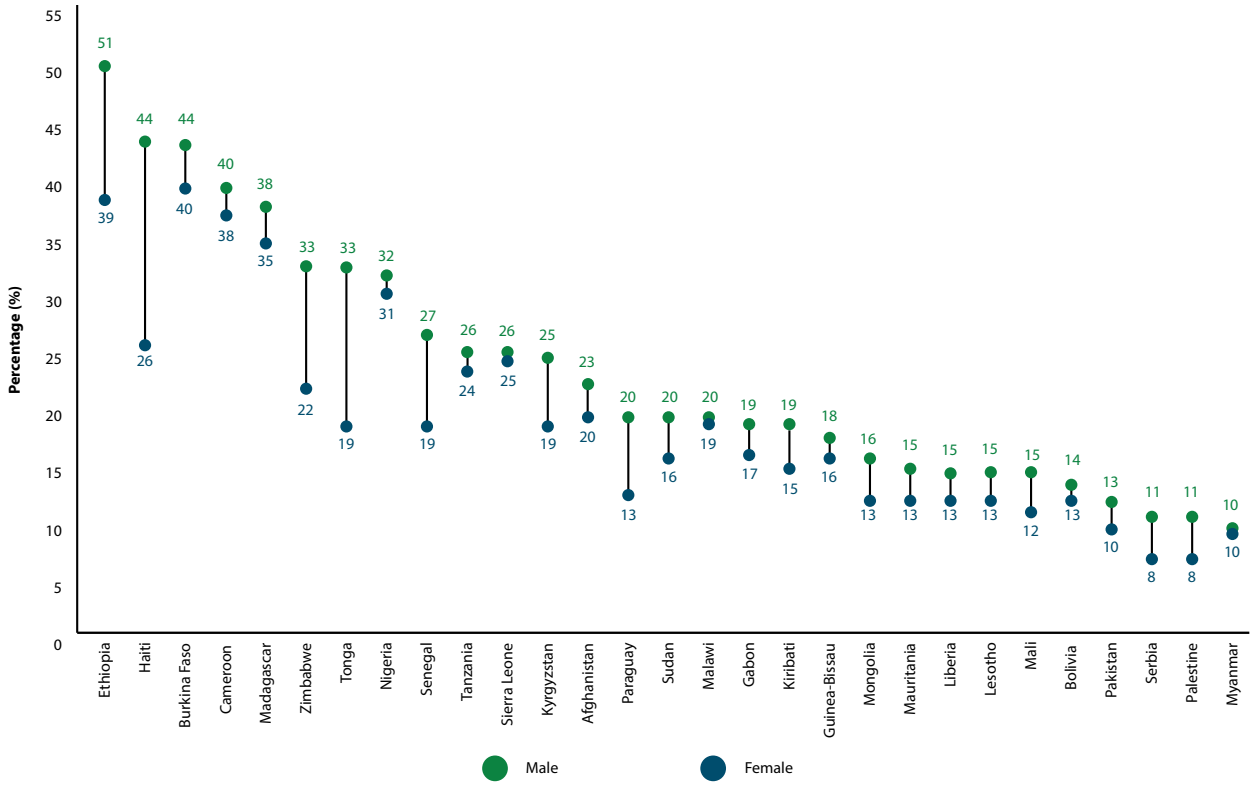


Data Source: International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund (2021). Available under CC BY 4.0

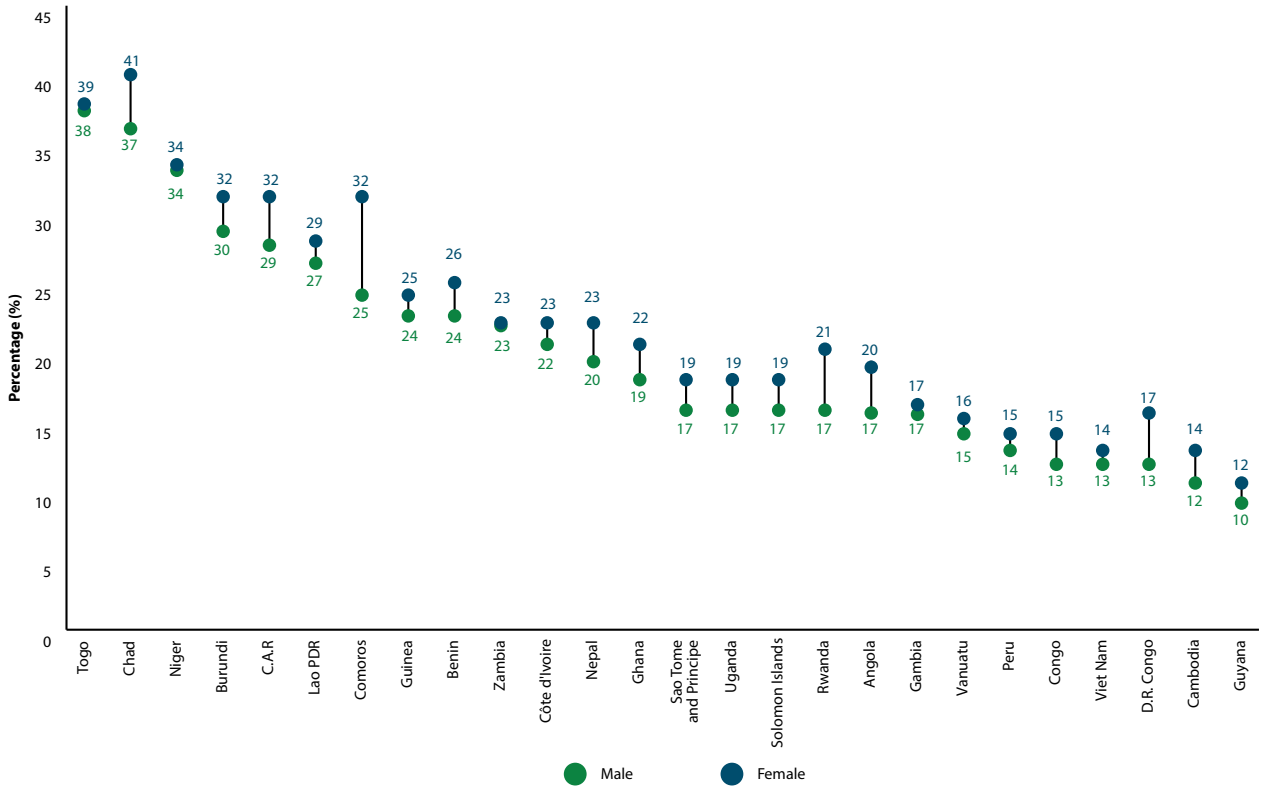
Notes: Child labour for the ILO-UNICEF 2021 report is defined as work that children are too young to perform and/or work that, by its nature or circumstances, is likely to harm children's health, safety or morals. In technical terms, child labour encompasses work performed by children in any type of employment with two exceptions. The first is light work permitted for children within the age range specified. The second is work that is not classified as among the worst forms of child labour.

Figure 17: Countries where at least 10 percent or more of boys aged 5–17 are engaged in child labour

a. Countries where the share of boys engaged in labour is greater than girls



b. Countries where the share of girls engaged in labour is greater than boys



Data Source: UNICEF (2021a). Available under CC BY NC 3.0 IGO

Notes: The definition of the child labour indicator is the percentage of children 5 to 17 years old involved in child labour at the moment of the survey. A child is considered to be involved in child labour under the following conditions: (a) children 5 to 11 years old who, during the reference week, did at least one hour of economic activity and/or more than 21 hours of unpaid household services, (b) children 12 to 14 years old who, during the reference week, did at least 14 hours of economic activity and/or more than 21 hours of unpaid household services, (c) children 15 to 17 years old who, during the reference week, did at least 43 hours of economic activity.

Poorer families may respond to economic shocks, including those most recently triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, by withdrawing boys from school to work (Avezedo et al., 2021). As a head of school interviewed for the case study on Fiji noted:

> **"Parents always look up to their boys as a 'source of income' and even encourage them to do some odd jobs and holiday jobs to earn some pocket money. While they see this exercise as a symbol of maturity and responsibility, it leads to boys being disadvantaged as they lose interest in school work.**
> (Head of school, Fiji)
> *Source:* Ali (2022).

In Peru, when financial difficulties are triggered by family crisis – often the absence of the father – boys are expected to assume the role of provider and leave school to earn an income (Pease and Mannarelli, 2019). In Brazil, a 2007 study found that the likelihood of boys from poor households dropping out of school following a sudden fall in family income was 46 percent higher than boys from non-poor households (Duryea et al., 2007). In Malawi, among households impoverished by HIV and AIDS, boys and girls are often expected to take on adult roles and older boys will leave school to obtain temporary labour to support households (Jere, 2014). During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, data from phone surveys in Pakistan indicate that the proportion of boys working outside the home increased from 9 percent in September 2020 to 15 percent in February 2021, leaving boys less time for study than girls (Crawfurd et al., 2021).

Gender norms influence children's work

Traditional, gendered labour roles can impact on boys' participation in formal education. In Southern African countries where fewer boys than girls complete primary and secondary education, including Lesotho (see **Country Case Study 2: Lesotho**) and Namibia, boys are taken out of school early to herd cattle or migrate to South Africa to work in mines (Jha and Kelleher, 2006; Morojele, 2013). Initiation ceremonies in Lesotho underpin this transition to work and adulthood (Pridmore and Jere, 2011). In Ethiopia, herding is a traditional job for boys and families' ownership of livestock is negatively associated with school enrolment, since tending to animals is often incompatible with class schedules (Chuta and Morrow 2015). In Mongolia, boys in herder families have historically experienced high rates of dropout (Steiner-Khamsi and Gerelmaa, 2008) and while girls are encouraged to attend school, boys tend to drop out to help with family livestock and labour market activities (Stewart et al., 2021).

Country Case Study 2: Lesotho – Social customs adversely impacting boys' education

Lesotho is an example of a lower-middle-income country where boys are disengaged from education. Powerful social customs such as the tradition of initiation schools and herding make boys disengage from formal education, especially at the secondary level. Initiation schools are institutions where boys learn about 'societal norms, manhood values, traditional beliefs and customs' (Rathebe, 2018, pp. 1–2). Starting as early as the age of 12, it is a passage into adulthood and becoming a man.

Boys make up a crushing majority of secondary school-age children who have never been to school

In 2018, 65 percent of out-of-school children aged 6–12 and 92 percent of dropouts of the same age group were boys. Of those children aged 13–17 that have never been to school, 86 percent were boys (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019, p. 27). Poverty and living in a rural area intersect, compounding boys' disadvantage. Enrolment in upper secondary education is low overall, with 51 percent of girls and 36 percent of boys enrolled in 2017 (UIS, 2021). Secondary education is inaccessible for many poor families as they cannot afford school fees. Fewer boys than girls aged 7–14 acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills (Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). In 2015/16, 12 percent of young women were enrolled in higher education and 8 percent of young men. Yet, more men than women are able to enter science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers (Council on Higher Education, 2016). Male youth contribute disproportionally to the high crime rate in Lesotho, where most of the crimes are committed by those aged 30 and under, and by those who only have a high school or lower qualification (Lesotho Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and Correctional Services, 2017).

Boys' disengagement linked to disinterest, family demands and peer pressure

The case study found that bad health, engagement in romantic relationships and boys' conception of themselves affect their education experience. Poverty is also an important factor. A 16-year-old boy from urban Lesotho commented,

> **"Having no lunch at school discourages me to love school as I sometimes go to school with an empty stomach. Sometimes when I cannot afford to buy myself lunch or do not have a lunchbox it means that I am not eating that day.**

The use of drugs and having little interest in education contributes further to disengagement. Boys, especially in rural areas, lack role models that could motivate them to stay in formal education; 81 percent of the heads of households in rural parts of Lesotho have no education (World Bank, 2015). Parents, especially from low socioeconomic backgrounds, value education less and give boys burdensome tasks and responsibilities, such as fetching water at a long distance, which leads to absenteeism and less time for studying. As a 15-year-old boy from the Senqu River Valley commented,

> **"Parents tell me to go and search for missing cattle, I sometimes return late and no longer have a chance to read.**

Many families cannot afford to send their children to secondary school which is not free. According to the case study, while in urban areas, some peers encourage boys to use drugs, in rural areas, peers influence boys to leave formal education for the initiation school. A father in the Lesotho Highlands described,

> **"Our children are forced to go to initiation school by their peers. Those that are not circumcised are discriminated by their friends. This is because most boys in our community went to initiation schools and these cause them to leave school early.**

Lack of schools and inadequate curriculum as barriers

The case study found that rural communities do not have enough schools. Consequently, children often must walk long distances to get to school. Moreover, schools are often ill-equipped and lack electricity. At the school level, boys and parents feel that the curriculum is disconnected from the realities of their lives and their communities. Even if deemed relevant, the curriculum is not always implemented well. Teaching and learning materials are inadequate and teachers are sometimes not well-trained. They also lack skills to identify students at risk. Corporal punishment is still widely used by teachers. A 16-year-old boy from urban Lesotho commented,

> **"Corporal punishment makes me lose interest in going to school.**

Initiation schools and herding lead to boys dropping out of the formal school system

Social and economic expectations were found to lead to boys' disengagement from education. After initiation school, young men are expected to look for work and get married. The timing of initiation rites clashes with formal schooling. When young men return from initiation schools, many of them have lost their interest in formal schooling as it does not align with their received view of masculinity. A male school board member from the Senqu River Valley commented,

> **"When they come back from initiation schools, they consider themselves men and can't go back to school with kids … Boys after reaching a certain age should go to initiation, get married and have kids, so the child grows up channelled this way.**

Some of the boys who return to the formal school system after initiation are reported to behave disrespectfully towards teachers. A 16-year-old girl from the Lesotho Highlands commented,

> **"Boys from initiation school have a bad attitude towards teachers and they no longer respect them, hence, they do not do better than those who did not go to initiation schools.**

Most boys in rural Lesotho drop out of school to become herders, either for their own families who practise subsistence farming or for large farms for a small salary. Poor families expect their sons to contribute to the family income. According to the case study, 'good boys' are characterized by the community as being obedient, understanding and respectful, which makes them non-assertive and less likely to claim their right to education. A 19-year-old man from the Lesotho Highlands commented,

> **"A good boy is the one who can listen to his parents and help other people when they are in need.**

Impunity and the absence of country-level programmes, policies and initiatives that explicitly target boys

The provision of education is guided by two main acts in Lesotho. The Education Act declares that primary education is free and compulsory. The Children's Protection and Welfare Act declares that education is a human right and prevents exclusion based on pregnancy or participation in a cultural rite. It also provides protection against exploitative child labour. While laws exist, violation of these laws generally goes unpunished. Education policies in Lesotho do not acknowledge boys' disengagement from education. The Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy focuses only on learners with disabilities instead of adopting a broad definition of inclusive education which could further stimulate boys' engagement in education. However, a few general measures have been taken that can benefit boys. To retain learners from poor families, the government provides at least two meals per days in public primary schools. Non-formal education is used as a broad intervention to provide basic education for those who cannot access formal education. Yet this intervention does not seek to bring children back to school but to provide programmes to enhance their literacy and numeracy skills. More recently, the government launched a life skills education programme and plans to make this a graded subject at school.

The need to improve the knowledge base, schools, application of laws and financing

To address the gender disparities in education at boys' expense in Lesotho, the case study recommends that a comprehensive study should be conducted to develop effective policies to address the issue. More schools within walking distance of communities must be constructed. Existing schools need to be better equipped. Existing laws protecting the right to education must be duly enforced. Lastly, non-formal education programmes must be expanded to respond to the needs of all.

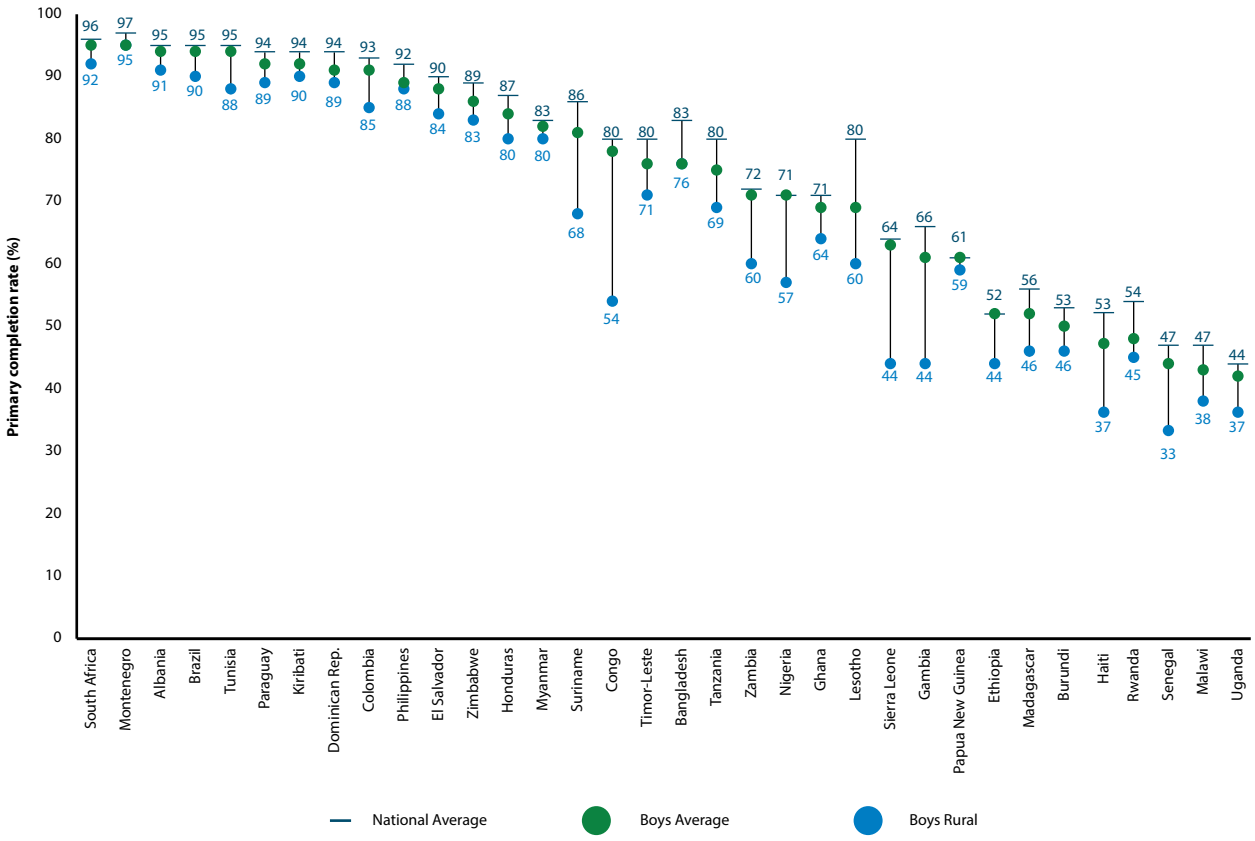
Source: Mosia (2022).

Location is also a factor in school attendance and completion

Alongside poverty, students' place of residence can be an important factor in the likelihood of their completion of primary, lower or upper secondary school, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In the Gambia, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal and Sierra Leone, boys living in rural areas are far less likely to complete a full cycle of primary education compared to the national average (**Figure 18a**). At the lower secondary level, several countries – including those in the Latin American and Caribbean region – exhibit large differences between the national average for completion rates and the completion rates for boys living in rural areas (**Figure 18b**).

Figure 18: Completion rates for boys, by location (rural), latest year, showing national average

a. Primary



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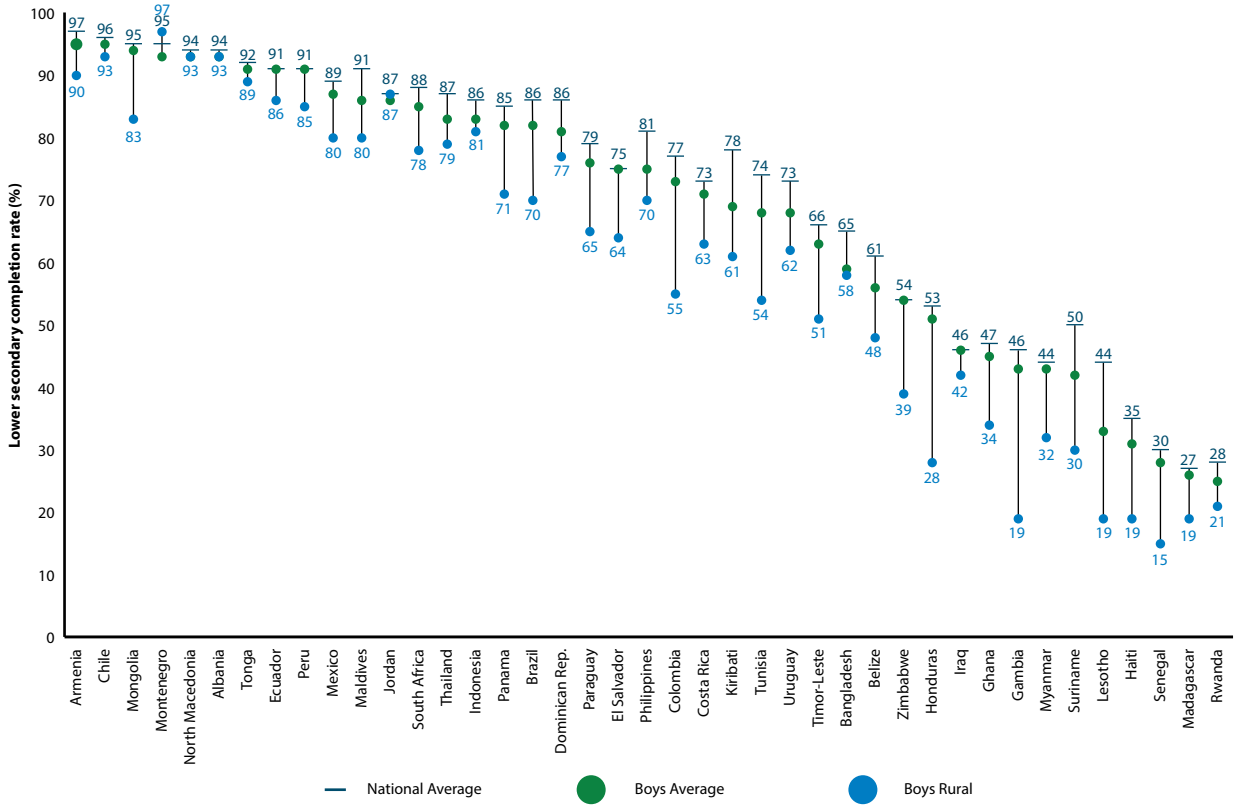
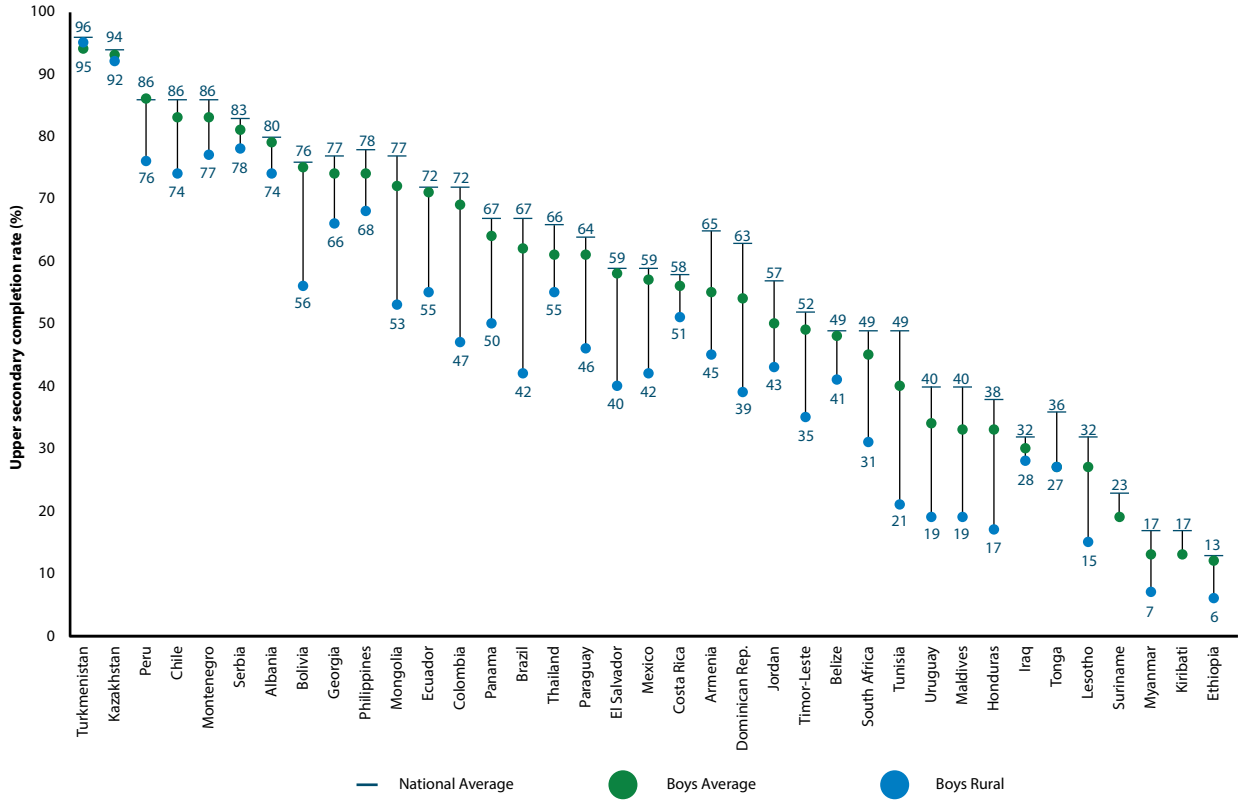
b. Lower secondary



c. Upper secondary



Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed August 2021.

Note: This is based on household data sourced from various DHS or MICS reports. No data on rural boys was available for Kiribati and Suriname on upper secondary completion.

In Latin American and Caribbean countries, where boys have consistently fared relatively poorly in achievement and completion rates compared with girls, children in rural areas are less likely to be in school and face multiple risk factors for school dropout, including poverty, distance to secondary schools, lack of relevant curricula and fewer employment opportunities that require upper-secondary qualifications (Jha et al., 2012; Murphy-Graham et al. 2021). In Honduras, where fewer than 80 boys complete upper secondary for every 100 girls, non-completion rates for upper secondary are twice as high for boys in rural areas (62 percent) as those in urban areas (32 percent). In Peru, poverty, child labour and low-quality education drive high dropout rates in rural areas, particularly for children from indigenous communities (see **Country Case Study 3: Peru**).

Country Case Study 3: Peru – Work competing with education opportunities

Peru is an example of a multicultural and multilingual country where boys are slightly more disengaged from education than girls. Work opportunities especially compete with school and boys from indigenous communities are of particular risk of dropping out of education.

Boys complete less secondary education than girls and indigenous children are at particular risk

In Peru, gender disparities emerge at the secondary school level. In 2019, 78 percent of boys completed secondary education vs 81 percent of girls (INEI, 2019). Differences between boys and girls in performance have disappeared over the last decade except for female advantage in reading skills (Barr Rosso et al., 2018). While gaps in mathematics closed further, boys are still at advantage (Andrade, 2016). In 2017/18, slightly more boys than girls dropped out of secondary education (SIAGIE, 2019). There are 55 indigenous or native groups in Peru and, according to the 2017 Census, 25 percent of the country's population self-identifies as indigenous, and 16 percent speak an indigenous language (INEI, 2017). In 2019, 31 percent of those speaking an indigenous language were poor compared to 18 percent of those who speak Spanish (INEI, 2019).

Indigenous children's reading achievement is low, both in indigenous languages and in Spanish (Peru Ministry of Education, 2015). In 2019, 67 percent of those speaking indigenous languages completed secondary education vs 81 percent of non-indigenous speakers (INEI, 2019). However, the gap in access to secondary education and completion of studies between indigenous and non-indigenous students has been significantly reduced in recent years. The proportion of school-aged indigenous students who are not studying secondary education (10 percent) is slightly higher than that of non-indigenous students (9 percent) (ibid.).

For indigenous learners, barriers to education are compounded by difficulties in accessing school facilities and language barriers (Cueto et al., 2010; Espinosa and Ruiz, 2017). It is difficult and costly to access schools, particularly secondary schools. Adolescents often must move to another community or town to continue education. At the primary level, children are taught in their mother tongue. Secondary education, on the other hand, is in Spanish. As a result, indigenous students face difficulties in transitioning to and following secondary level courses, to the detriment to their academic performance and grade retention (Espinosa and Ruiz, 2017). Teacher absenteeism is also acute, linked to teachers' lack of presence in school and to their lack of interest in teaching. According to the study, teachers at the secondary level often come from cities or the Andean region, find it difficult to adapt to the new cultural environment and tend to show, even in their gestures, contempt for the customs of indigenous populations.

Boys seeking autonomy

The case study shows that boys disengage from education because they want or need to generate income and get access to consumer goods. Lack of interest in studying also stops boys from continuing with higher education. According to a key informant, boys can earn high incomes without higher qualifications when they engage in mining or drug trafficking. Illegal activity is attractive to young men, as it offers the opportunity to earn money quickly and reaffirms masculine values such as strength, authority

and competence. In 2017, 96 percent of young people under the age of 22 detained in youth centres were male. Only 10 percent of these young people have a full secondary education (Peru Ministry of Education, 2019). In Amazon indigenous communities, boys often seek autonomy and adventure, which takes them out of schools. Fathering a child can also lead to disengagement. The teenage pregnancy rate in Peru is 13 percent, one of the highest in Latin America, and in rural environments, it rises to 24 percent (INEI, 2017). In urban and rural Andean environments as well as among indigenous populations of the Amazon, fatherhood is found to be an important experience in boys' lives. To fulfil obligations linked to paternity, they may have to find work (Fuller, 2000, 2005, 2012, 2013). The study found that grade repetition is an issue for boys. But if boys are older than what is considered appropriate to be in school, stigma makes them drop out of school.

Families looking for additional income

Families, regardless of their socioeconomic background and region, place a high value on education and believe that it can lead to better jobs. But gender norms require young men in rural areas to work, be productive and generate income for the family (Rojas et al., 2017). In Peru, 26 percent of children and adolescents aged 5–17 work about 14 hours a week. This is the case for 28 percent of boys and 24 percent of girls. More children and adolescents work in rural areas (INEI, 2017). When families experience crises, particularly the absence of a father, the son is expected to assume the role of the family's provider and protector (Pease et al., 2019). The division of labour in the indigenous communities of the Amazon assigns most of the field work to women and tasks that involve greater geographical displacement, such as logging, mining, construction and transportation, to men. Boys usually help their parents. Economic hardship experienced by the family is a major reason for dropping out of school in rural areas (Alcázar, 2008). In some cases, boys need to take care of relatives, especially young brothers. In rural areas and indigenous communities, parents usually have a low level of education and cannot help with homework. Peers appear to have a negative attitude towards literacy and studying. Peers expect other boys to endure bullying to prove that they are a man. The bullying of LGBTIQ children is common in Peruvian schools; 44 percent of children aged 12–17 surveyed suffered from it. This increases the risk of dropping out of school and performing worse at school (Cáceres and Salazar, 2013). Bullying of LBGTIQ children can be linked to a rejection of those who do not conform to what is seen as standard gender norms and expectations (Fuller 2001; Olavarría et al., 2015).

Authoritarian school environment

According to interviews with education ministry staff, the public secondary school system is characterized by strict discipline. Boys are often exposed to verbal and physical violence by teachers as they assume that boys are strong and should endure it. Teachers perceive boys as being less disciplined and therefore lower their expectations of their performance.

No social or education polices addressing the specific concerns of boys

Peru has implemented various policies since the 1990s to close gender gaps in education, but social and education policies do not recognize the specific education challenges of boys. However, there are interventions that address the competition between attending school and going to work, which appears to be the main factor for boys' disengagement from school. This is the case for the Full Day School programme, the Rural Secondary School Pedagogical Support programme and the Horizons Programme. While not specifically targeting boys, these programmes have been shown to increase boys' educational opportunities. The three programmes are analysed in detail in **Chapter 3**.

Policies and programmes are needed to address child labour, bullying, adolescent paternity, gender stereotypes and peer culture

The case study recommends identifying gender-specific problems that affect boys' school performance and dropout, including child labour, bullying, adolescent paternity, gender stereotypes and peer culture. Moreover, educational policies and interventions are needed to prevent bullying and change negative attitudes towards boys who do not fit into conventional gender roles. More analysis is needed on how interventions such as the Full Day School programme, the Rural Secondary School Pedagogical Support programme and the Horizons Programme impact boys' choices of education over work and how they can be scaled up and replicated.

Source: Based on Fuller (2022).

Other inequalities raise barriers to education

Boys are not a homogenous group. Gender and poverty intersect with other markers of difference and diversity, carrying the risk of low achievement, disengagement and early school exit for marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2019d). In many contexts, young people facing structural inequalities in society – migrants and refugee populations, children with disabilities, children from lower castes, such as the Dalits in India and Nepal, ethnic and linguistic minorities and LGBTIQ children and youth – face disrupted access to education and additional challenges within learning environments (ibid.) While research into how these inequalities intersect with gender has been useful in identifying challenges for girls' education (Unterhalter et al., 2020), such analysis can also help map out disadvantages faced by boys. Greater efforts to collect gender-disaggregated data and data related to other forms of diversity will help build understanding of how different sociodemographic factors intersect with boys' achievement and engagement with school, highlighting where particular disparities emerge.

Racial, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples often experience disadvantage in educational participation and completion. Australian studies into education inequalities reported extremely high dropout rates among Aboriginal youth as compared to non-Aboriginal youth (Hallett et al., 2008; Schwab, 2012), as well as gender differences at Aboriginal boys' expense in reading literacy, attendance and upper secondary completion (Dean, 2019). The challenge of addressing Aboriginal school attrition is especially pressing given evidence that Aboriginal adolescents who drop out of school experience higher rates of depression, suicide and emotional difficulties, are more likely to be involved in risky behaviours such as substance abuse and violence, and are more prone to being incarcerated (ibid.) In the United States, boys, especially those from minority groups, are less likely than girls to graduate from high school (Robison et al., 2017).

An unfamiliar language of instruction can negatively impact on learning. Results of the 2019 Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC) learning assessment survey in West Africa demonstrates a large decline in Burundian students' reading performance at the end of primary school since 2014, despite their strong performance at the beginning of primary. One reason is that students are tested in their mother tongue in Grade 2 (Kirundi) but in French in Grade 6. Test scores were not disaggregated by gender, however, so observations on the impact on boys' reading alone could not be made. In the United Arab Emirates, Emirati boys from lower-income households struggle with increasing use of English language content in schools, contributing to low achievement (see **Country Case Study 4: United Arab Emirates**). In Peru, indigenous children's reading achievement is low compared with Spanish speakers (see **Country Case Study 3: Peru**).

Country Case Study 4: United Arab Emirates – Boys from low socioeconomic backgrounds at risk

The United Arab Emirates is an example of a high-income country where boys are disengaged from education. Emirati boys, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are at greater risk than girls of being marginalized and alienated from the education system. In the United Arab Emirates, Emirati nationals mainly enrol in the public system, which is free of charge for them, gender-segregated from Grade 6, and with Arabic as the language of instruction. In contrast, non-nationals overwhelmingly choose private schools and universities, which are mostly co-educational, with English as the language of instruction.

Emirati boys are one year of schooling behind girls of the same age

Girls' enrolment in education increases relative to boys' enrolment from primary to tertiary levels. Schooling averages 14.3 years for girls and 13.4 years for boys (UNDP, 2019). Emirati boys perform worse than girls, with the largest gap in reading ability: 15-year-old girls scored on average 50 points higher than boys in the 2015 PISA. Young men are also underrepresented in higher education compared to girls. In the 2018/19 academic year, 17,299 students enrolled for a Bachelor's degree programme, of which only 40 percent were young men (UAE Ministry of Education, 2019). Young women make up an even higher percentage at universities with 77 percent of Emirati women enrolling in higher education, making up 70 percent of all university graduates (UAE Gender Balance Council, 2021). Lastly, the country's education system incentivizes boys to pursue careers in the public sector, predominantly in the military and police, which do not require high levels of education but provide relatively high salaries, discouraging the pursuit of higher levels of education (Ridge et al., 2017). As a male student of secondary school age commented,

> **"I only knew about two professions growing up: the military and the police.**

Boys' disengagement is linked to lower educational ambition and family involvement

Boys were found to have less educational ambition than girls. A female student of secondary school age noted,

> **"For boys' school, it's fine. Skip class, fine. Bring phone, fine ... Boys don't study as much ... they have more opportunity.**

Boys often do not see a clear connection between school and the labour market. Peers and family have a strong influence on boys' and girls' educational choices. Young men were found to choose higher education programmes based on the choice of male friends. Mothers were more likely to encourage their sons than daughters to study overseas. Fathers' involvement was found in the case study to be highly predictive of the academic success of boys and girls. The lower the socioeconomic background, the less fathers were involved in their children's education.

Weak student–teacher relationships, a harsh school environment, dense curriculum and limited networks are driving disengagement

Poor teacher–student relationships, particularly in public boys' schools, were found to have a negative effect on boys' educational ambitions and their academic performance. Sometimes these relationships were characterized by violence. As one male student of secondary school age put it,

> **"I still remember the hitting. In Grade 5, I had a teacher who for some reason hated me and made me hate studying. As a result, I became stubborn and refused to study. I still remember the teacher once brought an electrical cable and had two boys hold me, and he hit my legs with the wire to the point where I couldn't walk.**

The curriculum was perceived by many boys as being dense and uninteresting. They expressed the desire to be able to choose elective courses that interest them. Some schools have been successful in engaging boys through extracurricular activities and clubs. Structural barriers include a difficult transition from the second to the third education cycle due to a more demanding curriculum and less free time, as well as the increasing use of English as a medium of instruction, including for nationals. Interpersonal factors, including networks, i.e. where you live and who you know, were identified as predetermining boys' education and life choices. These penalize boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Absence of country-level programmes, policies and initiatives that explicitly target boys

Four policies and strategies address education in the United Arab Emirates: Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030, the New School Model, Dubai Plan 2021 and the Dubai Inclusive Education Policy Framework. They aim to make education more inclusive, improve student performance in international assessments through providing the best educational services possible, add new subjects and English as a language of instruction to public schools, and social and human development through education, such as by increasing attainment rates or encouraging women's engagement in the workforce. Even though boys' disengagement from education is socially and structurally produced, none of these strategies or policies, nor accompanying initiatives, explicitly target boys. The only exception is the military service which was designed to provide discipline and structure for boys and to support the creation of a national identity. Yet, it may also have a potential negative impact on university studies, as boys neither speak English during their service nor engage in an academic environment for almost two years. This creates more barriers for their reintegration into an academic environment following military service. Outside military service, only a few targeted programmes were found to reach boys, such as Hands on Learning in Ras Al Khaimah and some reading initiatives; however, these are small scale.

Need to address family, socioeconomic and school factors

To address gender gaps in education at boys' disadvantage, the case study recommends taking measures to increase parents' involvement and in particular, the involvement of fathers in their children's education. Boys' awareness should be raised on the long-term benefits of higher education, including through school counselling. The potential of military service as a period to re-engage young Emirati men in education and training should be explored. The current United Arab Emirates curriculum would benefit from more flexibility, allowing girls and boys to choose courses based on their interests. The quality of teaching needs to be improved in general, including through adequately recruited, well-trained and professionally qualified teachers. Weaker students require extra support from their schools. Finally, students' grades and their attendance should be recorded and if needed, follow-up conducted with students.

Source: Based on Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research (2022).

Migrant children who do not know the language of instruction, and may also be adjusting to a less familiar culture, are at risk of being left behind in classrooms (UNESCO, 2020a). Analysis of 2018 PISA data across European Union countries found that children who are first-generation migrants perform substantially worse in reading than their native peers, and that first- and second-generation migrant boys perform worse, on average, than their female counterparts (European Commission, 2021). Migrant children, and boys in particular, are also at greater risk of disengagement and dropout from school. Data from European countries from 2019 show that 24 percent of foreign-born male youth aged 18 to 24 left school or training early, compared with 20 percent of their female counterparts (European Commission, 2021). In Belgium (Flanders), being a boy, coming from a migrant background and a non-Dutch speaking household are all key risk factors for unauthorized absenteeism (Vlaanderen, 2020).

Globally, children, adolescents and youth living with disabilities account for 12 percent of the in-school population, but 15 percent of the out-of-school population (UNESCO, 2020a). Children with disabilities are disproportionately disadvantaged in terms of educational access in low and middle-income countries, where over half of the 65 million children with disabilities are not in school. An analysis of data from 49 countries has shown that in most countries women with disabilities have lower literacy rates than men with disabilities (UIS, 2018). Yet, a cohort analysis of census data from 19 low and middle-income countries[5] indicates that boys with disabilities have seen the slowest increase in primary and secondary completion rates over time (Male and Wodon, 2017). In 19 countries, gains in completion rates for primary and secondary education by children with disabilities have matched those made by children without disabilities over the past decades. For children without disabilities, completion rates at the primary level increased by 21 percentage points for boys and 34 percentage points for girls without disabilities compared to 8 percentage points for boys with disabilities and 24 percentage points for girls (ibid.). As a result, the gap in primary completion rates between children with and without disabilities has widened over time to 18 percentage points for boys and 15 percentage points for girls in the countries analysed for this study. A similar pattern is observed at the secondary level, with the gap in completion rates between children with and without disabilities at 14 percentage points for boys and 10 for girls (ibid.). This suggests that in the countries reviewed, once in school, girls with disabilities are more likely than boys with disabilities to complete the full education cycle, though both groups remain at a disadvantage compared to children without disabilities.

Conflict, emergencies and migration exacerbate educational disadvantages

The dual crisis of humanitarian emergencies and COVID-19 is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children and adolescents to continue learning (UNESCO, 2021g). Children caught up in conflict and politically fragile and complex emergency situations often find difficulties continuing their learning and remaining in school; if not properly supported, they may drop out permanently.

Boys and girls growing up in fragile and conflict-affected contexts are more than twice as likely to be out of school as their peers who live in safe and stable environments. In 2019, almost one third of both primary school-aged boys (30 percent) and girls (31 percent) live in countries that are conflict affected and in protracted crisis. These children make up almost three quarters of primary school aged boys (70 percent) and girls (74 percent) who are out of school. For lower secondary, children in conflict-affected countries make up over half of all out-of-school children with boys at 52 percent and girls at 57 percent.

The out-of-school rates of young people living in conflict increase with education levels. For boys, 17 percent of those living in conflict are out of school at primary level, 29 percent at lower secondary level and 46 percent at upper secondary level. The legacy of conflict's impact on education is stark. Analysis of household survey data from conflict-affected countries has shown that cohorts of children that were of school-going age during a time of conflict have lower educational attainment that persists over time, indicating that many of these children did not resume their education after a conflict (UIS, 2010).

5. Bangladesh 2011, Burkina Faso 2006, Cambodia 2008, Costa Rica 2011, Dominican Republic 2010, Ethiopia 2007, Ghana 2010, Indonesia 2010, Kenya 2009, Liberia 2008, Mali 2009, Malawi 2008, Mexico 2010, Mozambique 2007, Peru 2007, South Africa 2011, South Sudan 2008, Viet Nam 2009, and Zambia 2010.

Boys and girls are impacted in different ways in conflict-affected countries, where direct attacks on schools and elevated levels of violence in communities create an atmosphere of insecurity that fuels a decline in the number of young people attending school, especially girls. (GCPEA, 2014; UNESCO and UNGEI, 2015).

When schools are inaccessible or shut down, children and particularly boys, are more at risk of child labour or recruitment into armed groups (UNICEF, 2021b). Child recruitment at or on the way to school was reported in at least 16 countries from 2015 to 2019 (GCPEA, 2020).[6] Recruitment of boys as child soldiers not only results in devastating and long-lasting harm to their mental and physical well-being (Tierney et al., 2016) but also to their education. Child soldiers returning from previous or current conflict face severe challenges reintegrating into society and schooling, often facing stigma and exclusion, or being viewed as a threat (Allen et al., 2020; O'Malley, 2007; Rose and Greeley, 2006). In Northern Iraq, recent research found that very few services are available for Arab-Sunni boys who are former ISIS soldiers to support their reintegration. Continuing their education is not possible since these boys cannot return to their communities to collect required documentation, as retaliation from militia groups would put them in physical harm (Allen et al., 2020).

Voluntary migration can also increase the risk of disadvantage for boys. For example, a recent report by the European Commission (2021) on the performance of boys in education in European Union countries suggests that boys from poorer households, rural communities and migrant families may be at risk of a 'double disadvantage,' due to both their gender and marginalized group status. The report calls for further research to better understand intersectionality in relation to gender disparities in learning and participation in education (ibid.).

While forced migration greatly increases the vulnerability of girls to exclusion from education, gender-based violence and early marriage, displaced boys, particularly those who are unaccompanied, face hardships that are often ignored (UNESCO 2019d). They may be viewed as a threat, placed separately from women and families and face restricted mobility (ibid.) Syrian refugee boys in Jordan reported frequent experience of violence, which is a major reason for dropping out of school (Presler-Marshall, 2018). A small-scale study on sexual violence against migrants and asylum seekers in Greece found that 28 percent of survivors of sexual violence who sought care were male (Belanteri et al., 2020). Sexual violence against boys was also found to be common along the central Mediterranean route (Women's Refugee Commission, 2019). Compounding the problem, humanitarian response efforts are often targeted at girls and women, perpetuating harmful stereotypes that boys are better able to cope with hardships, less vulnerable and less in need of such services (Brun, 2017).

School policies and practice can contribute to boys' disadvantage

Interrelationships between individual and interpersonal (microsystem) and school-level institutional factors (mesosystem) shape patterns of participation and learning. Mesosystemic policy and strategies enacted at the school level can impact negatively on boys' achievement and can lead to exclusion, especially among already disadvantaged groups.

Early tracking and streaming of students can perpetuate low achievement, especially for disadvantaged boys

Research from high- and middle-income countries suggests that streaming classes according to ability can disadvantage boys, especially those from minority groups (Brind et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2019). The main argument against streaming is that students who are moved to 'lower' level classrooms may suffer further from negative peer effects, as well as stereotyping and loss of self-esteem and motivation, which may place them on a permanently lower trajectory of learning (Glewwe et al., 2016). In the Small Island Developing State of the Seychelles, the government made renewed efforts to stamp out the practice of streaming in schools after the 2006 Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) learning assessment survey highlighted wide gender gaps in Grade 6 reading and mathematics scores, consistent with boys' lower performance in national examinations (Bruns et al., 2019; Leste, 2005). Research suggested that teachers' perceptions of girls as less disruptive and more capable than boys favoured their entry into top streams and resulted in a selection bias that led to the severe overrepresentation of boys in the lowest streams (Leste, 2005).

6. Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Yemen.

In transitions to upper secondary, streaming into general and vocational tracks disproportionately affects boys from poorer or minority households in higher-income countries, potentially limiting future life choices (Barakat et al., 2016). Evidence from a global survey of TVET providers and students suggested that poor career guidance reinforces stereotyping and exacerbates disadvantage. For refugees and young people living with disability, for example, their aspirations were characterized as unrealistic and inappropriate, and guidance used to stream them into unpopular and less market-orientated vocational programmes (Alla-Mensah et al., 2021). In the United States, research has shown that boys of Mexican or Latino descent are disproportionately steered by counsellors to community colleges and lower ranking institutions (Martinez Jr. and Huerta, 2020). In Estonia, programmes offered without adequate guidance contribute to low motivation, disengagement and dropout (Beilmann and Espenberg, 2016).

Evidence from the 2018 PISA suggested that boys tend to perform better if they are in classrooms with a higher share of girls (OECD, 2019c). Research from high-income countries suggests that classes with more girls are less disruptive and boys benefit from positive peer effects of girls attitudes to learning (European Commission, 2021). In contrast, if boys are in single-sex classrooms, there can be a negative impact on their behaviour and educational outcomes (ibid). Bullying, for example, is more prevalent in boys-only schools or those with a clear majority of boys (OECD, 2019c).

Grade repetition fails to support learning and attainment

As noted in **Chapter 2**, grade repetition is an outcome of inadequate learning and increases the risk of poor educational outcomes. Irregular attendance, low achievement, especially in the early grades, and disengagement from learning may all contribute to boys' higher rates of grade repetition in countries where promotion to the next grade is not automatic (UNESCO, 2018a; Hares, et al., 2020).

Grade repetition is a practice that impacts on both educational quality and students' progress in school. Not only is repetition costly and inefficient for education systems and schools (OECD, 2020a), but repeating students who are over-age for their grade can become demotivated and disengaged (Hunt, 2008). One reason for dropout reported by boys in Kiribati was shame or embarrassment due to falling behind and being older than the rest of the class (Kiribati Education Improvement Program III, 2018). Analysis of 2018 PISA data found that among 15-year-olds who took part in the learning assessment survey, both boys and girls who had repeated a grade were significantly more likely to have been bullied compared with peers who were promoted to the next grade (Lian et al., 2021).

Results from PISA and PASEC learning assessments have confirmed that grade repetition, despite the views of some parents and teachers, does not lead to improved student performance and can instead negatively affect retention (OECD, 2020a; CONFEMEN, 2020). Despite numerous reforms to reduce grade repetition in many of the West African PASEC countries, 54 percent of children surviving to the last grade have, on average, repeated at least one grade by the end of primary (Le Nestour, 2020). As opportunity costs of schooling rise with age, grade repetition increases the risk of permanent, early exit from school (Hares et al., 2020).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Discriminatory and unsafe schools affect boys' learning and continuation in education

Teacher expectations and attitudes

Differential treatment in the classroom matters for students' motivation and educational trajectory. Gender norms and societal expectations, reproduced in schools and classrooms, can affect but boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education. Teachers' expectations are based on their beliefs about students' performance and what different students can achieve on a daily or long-term basis (Rubie-Davies, 2010). Teachers may underestimate students' abilities due to prevailing social norms and stereotypes. While much of the body of research on teacher expectations does not distinguish between students' gender, there is some evidence that teachers' low expectations impact negatively on participation and engagement of boys (Jussim and Harber, 2005; Page and Jha, 2009), especially among those from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds such as migrants or children with disabilities (Bešić et al., 2020). In the United States, evidence suggests that teachers' expectations influence college completion and African-American students suffer from systematically lower expectations held by their teachers (Papageorge et al., 2020). Experimental research in Peru showed evidence of teacher bias against children of lower socioeconomic status (Bertran et al., 2021).

Research from countries in Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean reported that boys are often seen as unruly and more disruptive in class than girls (Jha and Pouezevara, 2016), and teachers have lower expectations of them (see **Country Case Study 3: Peru**). Such attitudes are a challenge for boys exhibiting behavioural difficulties (Beaman et al., 2006). Studies suggest that some teachers are less tolerant of boys than girls displaying symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and more likely to refer boys for clinical medication (Sherman et al., 2008). Teachers' poor attitudes toward students with ADHD are a risk factor for low academic achievement (Ewe, 2019). Poor relationships between teachers and students as well as parents and teachers can lead to disengagement (see **Country Case Study 5: Fiji**).

An important caveat here is that while teachers' expectations contribute to boys' low achievement, boys' dominant behaviours in class often result in their receiving more attention, albeit negative. Issues of girls' low self-efficacy and visibility within learning spaces should not be ignored (Jha and Pouezevara, 2016).

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Country Case Study 5: Fiji – Boys as future breadwinners and poor relationships between teachers, parents and students

Fiji is an example of a Small Island Developing State where boys are disengaged from education. Culture and tradition impact boys' school trajectories, expecting them to be future breadwinners, which makes them more likely to disengage from education.

Boys progress less in school

Boys in Fiji are slightly more disengaged from school than girls. The survival rate to the last grade of primary education was higher for girls (93 percent) than boys (90 percent) in 2015. Girls also had a higher progression rate (91 percent) at the secondary level than boys (87 percent). In 2010, girls had higher pass rates (69 percent) in year 13 examination than boys (66 percent). Drug abuse among students is high and leads to violence and disruptive behaviour at school (Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts, 2016).

Gendered expectations: Boys as future breadwinners

According to the case study, boys in Fiji are expected by the community to be heads of the household, which encourages them to disengage from school. One 16-year-old girl commented,

> **"Boys are viewed to be breadwinners in the family and expected to do odd jobs in order to be able to put food on the table.**

Boys see themselves as helping hands for their parents and often assist them in farming. Boys were also found to have more freedom and were held generally less accountable than girls, which makes them more relaxed towards school and less responsible for their achievements. In Fiji, the student's home environment plays a key role in determining boys' chances to attend and progress at school. Boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to disengage from school. Lack of parental guidance affects their performance in schools. A School Management Committee member explained,

> **"Parents are not very much concerned about the performance of the boys as they will have to work on the farms and take charge of the farms from their parents. They give more attention to girls in the family as they will have to get married and move on with their husbands. And if something goes wrong, they can still find jobs and stand on their feet.**

Boys face peer pressure to socialize at night, which can have adverse impacts. Single parenting is an issue in Fiji. The lack of parental guidance and economic hardship often experienced in single-headed families incentivizes boys to leave school for a job.

Poor parent, teacher and student relationships

The case study found that boys in Fiji are expected to be in control and be respected, given their future role as heads of the household and community. But teachers are reported to make negative comments about boys in front of their peers, which damages their self-esteem and can make them dislike school. A 16-year-old girl commented,

> **"Boys are scolded by teachers for failing and not performing well in the tests. They are humiliated in front of the class and this makes them embarrassed. Some boys do well but some do not do well in subjects like mathematics. Some teachers are good and do not shame students in the class but call them into their offices.**

Additionally, poor parent, teacher and student relationships lead to boys' poor performance and contribute towards their disengagement from schools. A teacher described,

> **"Parents hardly turn up to discuss their children's performance. Some even do not turn up on special days allocated for signing off students' report sheets. The situation worsens when children stay with guardians and grandparents. At times many reminders are sent to the parents and only then they turn up at schools.**

Moreover, exam-oriented teaching and learning exert undue pressure on students, instilling a fear of failure.

Inclusive education policies but an absence of country-level programmes, policies and initiatives that explicitly target boys

Even through Fiji has a National Gender Policy that calls for the elimination of inequalities, traditional and cultural practices continue to fuel gender inequalities. This study did not find any specific policies, programmes or initiatives that address boys' disengagement from school. However, several policies and initiatives aim to improve access to education for all children. These included free milk for Grade 1 students, free transport to school including by boat, benefiting 89,000 students, and free textbooks benefiting over 190,000 students in 2016. For the 2021–2022 budget, the government set funding aside as transportation assistance for more than 103,000 primary and secondary students from low-income families (Fiji Ministry of Economy, 2021). For 2021–2022, the government committed to continue to ensure that every child receives primary and secondary education fully paid by the Government (Fiji Ministry of Economy, 2021). Counselling services for students are provided through full-time counsellors at the district level and teachers trained with basic counselling skills.

The need to address cultural and traditional, family, socioeconomic and school factors

The case study recommends that gendered expectations and gender roles be addressed so they are not barriers to boys' engagement in education. As set out in the framework of the Gender Policy in Fiji, awareness-raising on gender equality is needed. Measures need to be taken to increase parents' engagement in their children's education. This includes strengthening dialogue between parents and teachers. Assistance and guidance should be provided to families from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Single-parent households should be supported to become self-sufficient. Good teacher–student relationships should be developed, with teachers treating boys respectfully. Teaching and learning practices need to engage students, encouraging them to want to go to school. Lastly, schools should maintain a data system disaggregated by sex to monitor girls' and boys' enrolment and retention.

Source: Based on Ali (2022).

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School-related gender-based violence impacts negatively on school experiences and outcomes

School-related gender-based violence, whether perpetrated by peers or school staff, has a profound impact on children's experiences of school, often with lasting negative consequences for education and health and well-being. School-related gender-based violence refers to acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools. Such violence is generally perpetrated as a result of discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics and wider inequalities (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Vulnerabilities and experiences of violence often differ by gender, including one's perceived gender identity or expression, and can result in student absence, lower learning outcomes and even dropout (Ginestra, 2020; UNESCO, 2021d). For example, PISA-D data from six low- and middle-income countries that asked children their reasons for being out of school found that boys were more likely than girls to report a fear of violence (OECD, 2020a).

School-related gender-based violence encompasses physical violence, including corporal punishment and bullying, verbal or sexual harassment, non-consensual touching, sexual coercion and assault, and rape (UNESCO and UNGEI, 2015). Violence can also occur online, especially in high-income countries where children's access to the internet and social media channels places them at risk of cyberbullying (Ginestra, 2020).

Peer violence and bullying

Both boys and girls can be victims or perpetrators of school violence and bullying. Globally, evidence indicates that girls are at greater risk of sexual forms of violence, while boys are more likely to experience physical violence and bullying (Ginestra, 2020; UNESCO and UNGEI, 2015). The Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam found that boys are at greater risk than girls of being physically and verbally bullied, and girls are more likely to face psychological forms of bullying (Pells and Morrow, 2018).

Cyberbullying is a growing problem. Most available data on cyberbullying is from surveys in high-income countries in Europe and North America. The proportion of children and adolescents who are affected by cyberbullying ranges from 5 percent to 21 percent and while girls appear to be more likely to experience cyberbullying than boys (UNESCO, 2019a), boys are also affected. In a US survey of 20,406 high school students, 8 percent of boys reported being victim to cyberbullying in combination with school bullying, and among youth who self-identified as LGBTIQ, 23 percent reported this combination too (Schneider et al., 2012).

International learning assessments that collect self-reported data on students' experiences provide striking evidence of the global prevalence of school bullying. Analysis of 2018 PISA data from 80 participating countries indicated, on average, that 23 percent of students reported being bullied at least a few times a month and that boys were more likely to experience all types of bullying (OECD, 2019b). Data from the Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) and Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study (HBSC) covering both high and low-income countries, shows that experience of physical bullying is 21 percent among male students compared with 10 percent of female students (Ginestra, 2020). Gender differences in experiences of bullying are particularly notable in several Arab States (UNESCO and UNGEI, 2015), where high levels of bullying, physical violence and substance abuse and discipline and safety problems are believed to contribute to boys' low academic performance (see **Country Case Study 1: Kuwait**).

Violence in schools can have serious detrimental effects on children's health and well-being and their ability to learn to their full potential. Bullying has been shown to increase absenteeism in Brazil, Ghana and the United States (Abramovay and Rua, 2005; Dunne et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2013), a risk factor for future disengagement and dropout. Analysis of Ghana GSHS data found that boys and girls who were bullied in the previous month had significantly higher rates of absenteeism than those who were not bullied (Dunne et al., 2013), but that having friendship networks appeared to lower the risk of bullied students' school avoidance (Psaki et al., 2017). PISA 2018 data indicated that greater exposure to bullying is associated with lower performance in reading and that, on average, bullied students score 21 points lower than their non-bullied students in OECD countries (Ginestra, 2020). A sex-disaggregated analysis of 2011 TIMSS data found that Grade 8 boys and girls who reported being bullied scored lower in mathematics. In Jordan, Oman, Palestine and Romania, Grade 8 boys who were bullied were the least likely to reach basic proficiency in mathematics (UNESCO and UNGEI, 2015).

Bullying at school is often directed at children perceived as different or disadvantaged, linked to ethnicity, race or religion, disability or body image as found in GSHS and HBSC surveys (Ginestra, 2020), asylum seeking and refugee status (UNESCO, 2019d).

Children and youth perceived to be transgressing gender norms of masculinity or femininity are particularly at risk of bullying, including cyberbullying (Ginestra, 2020; Parkes, 2014; UNESCO 2019a). An online survey of over 3,700 LGBTIQ young people aged 11–19 from schools in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for example, found that almost half (45 percent) had been bullied because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and that boys of diverse sexual orientation or gender identity or expression were three times more likely than girls to be physically bullied (Bradlow, 2017). In Peru, male university students in Lima who express traits perceived as 'feminine' were bullied and subject to violence as the **Country Case Study 4 on Peru** shows (Fuller, 2022).

A new report by UNESCO reveals critical differences at the intersection of sexual orientation and gender (UNESCO, 2021d). Data from Europe and the United States indicate that gay and bisexual male students are more likely to be targets of violence compared with lesbian and heterosexual students (ibid.) A multicountry study in Europe with transgender youth aged 15–24 found that transgender boys had experienced more physical bullying than transgender girls at school or university. In Serbia, 60 percent of transgender boys had experienced bullying compared with 35 percent of transgender girls (ibid.) Conversely, research from China and Viet Nam found transgender girls reporting higher rates of bullying than transgender boys (ibid.)

Studies on gender-based violence in schools have predominantly focused on sexual violence against girls; particularly in sub-Saharan African countries, where school-related gender-based violence had been identified as a serious challenge to girls' education (Parkes, 2014). More recently, national and multicountry prevalence surveys have shown that many boys also suffer sexual violence in school (UNESCO 2019a). During a Violence Against Children Survey in Nigeria, 27 percent of boys reported that their first experience of sexual violence was perpetrated by a classmate or schoolmate (ibid.) A 2014 five-country study in Asia revealed incidences of sexual violence against both boys and girls. In Indonesia, 12 percent of both boys and girls aged 12–17 reported experiencing sexual violence in the previous six months (Plan International and ICRW, 2014). Few cross-country learning assessments collect data on sexual forms of school violence, thus hampering globally comparative analysis of impacts on educational outcomes. Analysis of longitudinal data from the Malawi Schooling and Adolescent Study, however, suggests that boys who had experienced sexual violence at school, defined in this study as inappropriate touching or assault, were less likely than their peers to perform well in local language (Chichewa) reading comprehension and more likely to be absent from school (Psaki et al., 2017).

During conflict and emergency settings, elevated levels of violence, including sexual violence, have a lasting impact on attitudes to violence. A 2012 study on gender-based violence in schools in Liberia found that almost half of boys and a third of girls agreed that sexual abuse and violence were a normal part of relationships (Postmus et al. 2014).

Disciplinary practices and corporal punishment

Disciplinary practices include those that can be categorized as school-related violence. Such practices that exclude students from learning – through banning class entry, forced absenteeism, deliberate exclusion, suspension or expulsion – have a negative impact on boys' motivation to attend, learn and progress in education. Evidence from high-income countries indicates gendered differences in disciplinary practices that particularly impact boys from minority groups. Research has established that African-American and Latino boys in the United States are disproportionately faced with harsh disciplinary practices, including suspension and expulsion, placing them at increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system and subsequent poor performance and transition to further education (Huerta et al., 2021). Analysis of State Department high school data from southern states in the United States revealed that expulsion is strongly associated with permanent school dropout for boys (Robison et al., 2017).

On average across OECD countries, the disciplinary climate was reported by students as more positive in schools where more than 60 percent of students were girls, and in gender-balanced schools compared with school where boys represented more than 60% of the student body (OECD, 2019c). Students who reported a positive disciplinary climate performed better in reading scores, after accounting for the socioeconomic profile of students and schools (ibid.)

A review of literature from sub-Saharan Africa describes how poorer children are often punished for circumstances outside their control, such as their families' inability to cover the costs of school uniforms or payments demanded by schools and home and work commitments that make them late for school or unable to complete homework on time (Dunne et al., 2021). Disciplinary practices meted out by teachers

are often highly gendered and include corporal punishment and harsh physical labour, especially for boys. In such situations, students may keep themselves out of school completely rather than face punishment (ibid.) This also came to the fore in the country case studies. As a 14-year old boy interviewed for the case study in Lesotho put it:

> **"I have a problem with the way we are being taught. For example, our English teacher does not cooperate with us; he does not communicate well with us and uses corporal punishment.**
> – 14 year old boy, Lesotho

Boys, especially those from ethnic minorities or living with disabilities, are more likely to experience corporal punishment than their peers (Gershoff, 2017). In India and Peru, corporal punishment is used to enforce gender norms and cultural expectations of masculinity; to 'toughen up' boys (Pells and Morrow, 2018). Teacher-perpetrated corporal punishment is often gendered. Analysis of 12 national Violence Against Children[7] surveys in low- and middle-income countries found that experiences of corporal punishment vary significantly by gender, and male teachers perform more corporal punishment against boys than girls. All countries surveyed, apart from Nigeria, reported higher percentages of boys experiencing physical violence from a male teacher (Together for Girls, 2021). Yet gender dynamics of teacher violence can be complex. While most data indicate that male teachers are more likely to use physical violence (ibid.), a study in Delhi, India found that female teachers were more likely than male teachers to physically punish male students, as a means to assure male students' respect and reinforce their authority (Ginestra, 2020).

Boys from disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly at risk. Young Lives research in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam described how poorer students are disproportionately affected by corporal punishment and bullying; boys from poorer households are frequently absent from school to work and then risk physical punishment on return (Pells and Morrow, 2018). In Mongolia, research showed that the higher likelihood of boys facing corporal punishment at school contributed to boys' dropout, especially for those from marginalized, rural communities (Hepworth, 2013). Analysis links corporal punishment with increased rates of absenteeism and dropout (UNESCO and UNGEI 2015). In refugee camps in Lebanon, 68 percent of Palestinian boys who had left school reported harsh treatment by their teachers as a reason (Pereznieto et al., 2010).

As with girls, boys with disabilities are at heightened risk of violence, particularly when disability intersects with other forms of marginalization (UNESCO and UNGEI, 2015). A qualitative study with Palestinian and Syrian adolescents in refugee camps in Jordan found that boys with disabilities attending school were more likely than their female counterparts to experience peer violence and violence from teachers (Odeh et al., 2021). It should be noted, however, that access to education for girls with disabilities was often severely disrupted due to challenges of mobility and fear of violence while travelling to school (ibid.)

Relationships and support for learning have strong influence on school success

An individual's immediate environment (microsystem), reflected in relationships with others, and how these interact with school-level and community characteristics (mesosystem), can have a strong influence on school success. Family and community cohesion and support, positive peer effects and an inclusive school climate all reduce risk of dropout among young people (Jha and Pouezevara, 2016; Robinson, 2013; Robison et al., 2017; Stewart, 2007). Conversely, social institutions and networks can also perpetuate harmful forms of masculinity and reinforce behaviours – within groups and within the self – that create barriers to boys' engagement with education. Parents and peers are central in shaping gender attitudes and norms (Kågesten et al., 2016).

Family support for children's learning is influenced by household structure, gender attitudes and priorities in different cultures and contexts. Analysis of 2016 PIRLS data found significant gender differences in how parents support their children's early reading activities. In the majority of participating countries, parents were more likely to read with girls than boys (UNESCO, 2019c). Students' reading abilities in Grade 4 were positively associated with the frequency of early reading activities with their parents. However, boys' reading was more likely than girls to be affected by the lack of such reading activities. On average, the reading

7. Together for Girls conducted secondary analyses of 12 national Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys, nationally representative household surveys of males and females ages 13 to 24 that measure violence in childhood. Countries surveyed included Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Honduras, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

score difference between boys whose parents read books to them often and those whose parents did not was 64 points. The equivalent difference for girls was 55 points – a gender gap of 9 points (ibid.)

Gender differences in family support for learning were apparent during school closures and provide lessons for countries as they emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) COVID-19 Phone Survey, conducted in 2020, found significant gender differences in family support for learning, time and privacy for studying, with considerable variation across contexts. While girls in Bangladesh and Ethiopia had less support than their male siblings, boys in Jordan received far less support for their learning – a reflection of pre-pandemic patterns of educational disadvantage (Jones et al., 2021).

Peer groups can have a strong influence on boys' disengagement

From early adolescence onwards, boys often face considerable pressure from male peers, parents and teachers to conform to masculine stereotypes (Barker et al., 2020). As boys get older, peer acceptance can become more important than academic success, and if the dominant masculine culture sees interest in school as 'uncool' then boys may disengage from their studies from fear of ridicule or losing friendships (Reichert and Nelson, 2020; Vantieghem et al., 2014). In the Caribbean, academic pursuits can be considered 'feminine' and female teachers may find that they have little authority over older boys (Jha and Kelleher 2006; Jha and Pouezevara, 2016). If success in particular subjects – such as reading and arts-based subjects — or study skills do not align with masculine norms and expectations then boys may well reject them, impacting negatively on achievement (Jha and Pouezevara, 2016). Research from high-income countries concerned about boys' 'underachievement', including Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, found that boys in their peer groups 'act out', using 'laddish,' disruptive behaviour in schools as a defence mechanism against the very negative stereotypes that they are enacting (Hartley and Sutton, 2013; Heilman et al., 2017).

In several countries across Latin America, a culture of machismo, peer pressure and disillusionment with education can lead boys into gang affiliation and early school exit (Parkes, 2014). A recent study of gender and education in Jamaica describes how boys assert their masculinity by dominating public spaces in communities – spaces where gang leaders recruit new members (Clarke, 2020). Gang violence can have devastating effects on students, schools and education systems (GCPEA, 2020). In the Northern Triangle of Central America – El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – and Brazil, there is evidence that armed confrontations, gang borders and forced recruitment prevent students, especially boys, from attending school (ibid.) Not only does gang violence put students and teachers at risk but it also affects learning outcomes and attainment. Students exposed to drug battles in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* (informal settlements) scored lower on tests, in an environment of school closures and high rates of student and teacher absenteeism (Monteiro and Rocha, 2017). In some neighbourhoods affected by gang violence in El Salvador and Honduras, almost half of all children do not attend school (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2019).

In other contexts, peer groups can have positive influences and help mitigate factors that negatively affect academic achievement. Research with high-achieving Afro-Caribbean boys in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for example, found that friendships and sibling networks, as well as a strong sense of community and family support, underpinned boys' resilience against low expectations and stereotyping and helped build peer groups that supported academic success (Robinson, 2013).

Mentors and role models positively influence boys' engagement and wider gender equality outcomes

Positive attachment to a significant adult, role model or mentor can help address boys' lack of motivation and academic engagement. Studies showed that close attachment to a teacher is related to positive motivation (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Cha, 2020) and better academic achievement (Ramsdal et al., 2013). Research from Malawi and Zimbabwe indicated that encouragement and emotional support from mentors and club leaders reduced boys' isolation and anxiety and boosted confidence and motivation to learn, and thus improved their participation in school activities (Chitiyo et al., 2008; Jere, 2012).

A systematic review of research into teacher–student relationships found that high-quality relationships between teachers and students with disabilities are a protective factor against students' disengagement (Ewe, 2019). Research with primary school children in a Kenyan refugee camp suggested that fostering a sense of belonging at schools could improve students' motivation and retention, especially among boys who demonstrated lower motivation than girls (Cha, 2020). In New Zealand, a nationally representative survey of secondary school

students to identify factors that support sexual and gender minorities found that teachers' expectations of success and feelings of school belonging had positive effects on learning achievement (Fenaughty et al., 2019).

Finally, opportunities to interact with role models (e.g. family members, teachers, community members, sports professionals) who demonstrate non-stereotypical views and behaviours can encourage boys to question prevailing gender norms and adopt more positive attitudes and behaviours in relation to gender equality (Stewart et al., 2021).

COVID-19 negatively impacts boys' education

School closures likely exacerbate learning gaps...

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, UNESCO (2020c) estimated that nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries were impacted by educational institution closures. Pre-pandemic learning gaps are likely to worsen due to the crisis, underpinned by prevailing gender norms and affecting boys and girls in different ways. Research in low- and middle-income countries indicates that household demands on girls and boys, particularly among the poorest families, constrained their ability to participate in remote learning (UNESCO, 2021g). Girls' increased time spent at home often carried a greater burden of domestic responsibilities, as documented in several countries including Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Niger, Pakistan and Sierra Leone (ibid.), while boys' participation was often limited by the need to take on paid work to contribute to the family income (ibid.)

In sub-Saharan Africa, a gendered digital divide means that girls are more likely to lack online devices and often face greater difficulties in accessing remote learning (Amaro et al., 2020). Yet boys' disengagement from their studies is also a concern. An online survey of young people in five Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries – Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe – found that while more girls than boys reported facing problems accessing remote learning during school closures, a greater proportion of girls reported continuing with their studies, despite difficulties (78 percent) compared with boys (59 percent) – indicating boys' lower engagement (MIET Africa, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, boys' lower engagement with reading is likely to impact further on lower pre-pandemic literacy skills (see **Box 4**).

In Pakistan**,** a phone-based two-item mathematics assessment conducted with children enrolled in low-fee private and public–private partnership schools in September 2020 and again in February 2021 found that boys experienced learning losses while girls did not, likely due to girls spending more time studying (UNESCO, 2021g) while boys worked outside the home (Crawfurd et al., 2021).

Box **4**

In the wake of COVID-19, boys lag behind in curriculum coverage and reading

In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a study conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research with almost 3,000 school leaders and teachers from 2,200 primary and secondary schools across England revealed that in the majority of schools, teachers had covered less than 70 percent of the curriculum by July 2020. Students were estimated to be three months behind on average in their learning. While in the majority of cases, no substantive gender differences were observed, over 20 percent of teachers did report that boys had fallen further behind than girls (Sharp et. al., 2020). A survey by the National Literacy Trust found that boys, who on average score lower in reading skills assessments, were less likely to be reading for pleasure compared with girls and that this reading enjoyment gap had increased more than five-fold – from just over a difference of 2 percentage points at the start of 2020 to a 12-percentage-point difference during lockdown. Three in five girls (60 percent) said they enjoyed reading during lockdown, an increase from just below half (49 percent) pre-lockdown. Only 49 percent of boys said they enjoyed reading amid the pandemic, compared with 47 percent pre-lockdown, showing little change. The report suggested that audiobooks might be a way to re-engage boys with stories, as this was the only format reported to be enjoyed more by boys than by girls (Clark and Picton, 2020).

...and place young people at risk of permanent dropout…

An estimate based on 180 countries and territories indicated that around 24 million learners from pre-primary to tertiary education were at risk of not returning to their studies in 2020 following school closures (UNESCO 2020c). Of these, 12.8 million (53 percent) were young men and boys (ibid.) In some countries, boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be forced to drop out of school to support their families, because income was reduced or lost due to the pandemic, and find it difficult to return (OECD, 2020b).

In Cambodia, a survey of over 7,600 students and caregivers in districts with a high risk of school dropout found that male students had a 2 percent higher risk of dropout than their female counterparts and children in male-headed households had a 5 percent higher risk of dropping out than those in female-headed households. Risks were compounded in households where Khmer was not spoken, and no household members had education (UNESCO, 2022). Evidence from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence COVID-19 Phone Survey indicates an increased risk for boys of dropping out because of school closures in Jordan, but not in Palestine (Jones et al., 2021); both countries had high pre-pandemic rates of dropout among boys in upper secondary. Such examples highlight the importance of understanding the interplay of sociopolitical contexts and gendered educational outcomes when mitigating COVID-19 impacts (UNESCO, 2022; UNESCO, 2021g).

… leaving more young people without education, training or employment

In the face of high youth unemployment – an increasing global problem before the pandemic – young people who have had their studies interrupted are at a disadvantage when trying to enter the labour market. In the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis in OECD countries, the proportion of 15–29 year olds not in employment, education or training increased by the end of 2020 to 12 percent: 2.9 million more young people compared with the previous year (OECD, 2021b).

Lockdowns and closure of schools, colleges and workplaces offering apprenticeships has affected millions of TVET students. Students find themselves with limited or no access to practical learning opportunities, tutors with little knowledge or experience of delivering remote learning, limited digitization of content and poor or expensive connectivity (Alla-Mensah et al., 2021). Evidence demonstrates that disadvantaged young people, especially those living in poverty, are disproportionately impacted by lockdown restrictions. In northern Europe, where TVET is a firmly established educational trajectory for boys and young men, disadvantaged youth found it harder to access online alternatives and experienced the greatest disruption to apprenticeships (Avis et al., 2021). Apprenticeships in the informal economies of Latin American and African countries have also faced severe disruption, leading to loss of income, accommodation and job security (ibid.)

Unfortunately, much of the research data on the effects of the COVID pandemic on older youth in post-secondary education, training or apprenticeships are not disaggregated by sex, limiting a deeper analysis and understanding of the gender dimensions of the pandemic's impact on their education trajectories.

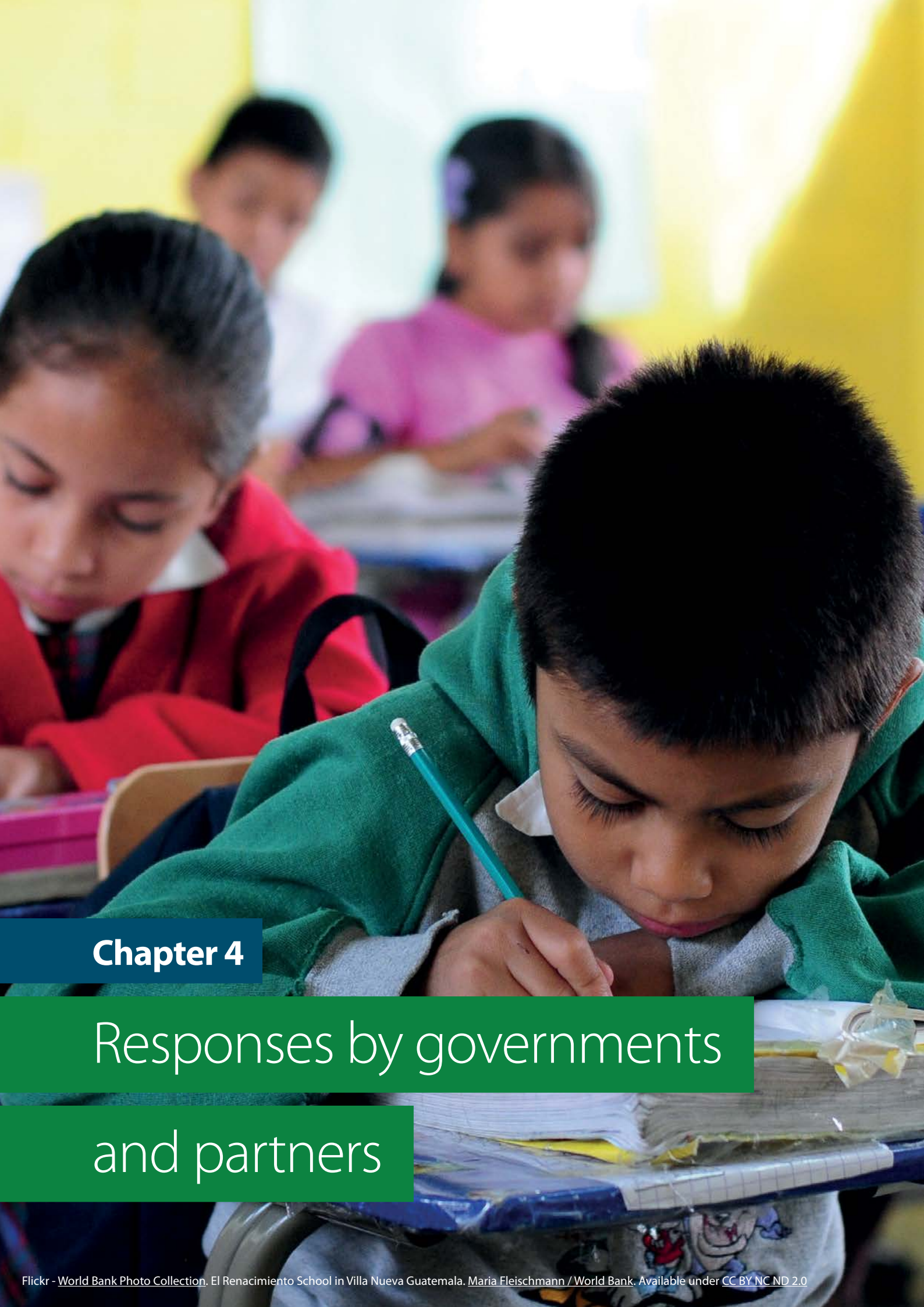
A chance to build back better

The current rethinking of education systems provides a unique opportunity to build back better and make education systems gender-transformative and resilient to future crises. As the UNESCO report, *When Schools Shut: gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures,* has demonstrated, this will necessitate no-tech and low-tech remote learning solutions, enabling schools to provide psychosocial support and to monitor participation in learning through sex-disaggregated data (UNESCO, 2021g).

Conclusion

Structural factors that influence boys' disengagement and dropout include poverty and the need or desire to work. Social norms and gendered stereotypes, expressed at family and community levels, may push boys into certain occupations that pull them out of school early. At the institutional level, low teacher expectations and bias, ability streaming and grade repetition are demotivating factors for boys, negatively affecting learning outcomes and retention. Authoritarian school environments, harsh discipline and fear of violence also contribute to absenteeism and push boys out of school. At the interpersonal level, family support – or its absence – and peer pressure influence boys' retention and performance at school.

Where challenges that are disproportionally experienced or specific to boys can be identified, a broader equity approach may be required to ensure that the needs of both boys and girls are addressed, and that boys are not overlooked (Hensels et al., 2016). As with girls, boys from marginalized and vulnerable groups face disproportionate disadvantage across educational outcomes. Macro-level contexts such as conflict, humanitarian crises and the current COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability, and a weak legal and policy environment, further compound inequalities and challenges to ensuring all boys (and girls) receive an inclusive and quality education.



Chapter 4

Responses by governments and partners

Key messages

Addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education is not a zero-sum game for girls. Supporting boys does not mean that girls lose and vice versa. It benefits both girls and boys and society as a whole.

Despite boys' clear disengagement from and disadvantage in education in certain contexts, there are few programmes and initiatives addressing this phenomenon. System-level, gender-specific policies to address the issue are even more rare. The policies in place are predominantly in high-income countries.

Few low- or middle-income countries have specific policies in place to improve boys' enrolment and completion of primary or secondary education, even in countries with severe disparities at boys' expense.

The policy review shows that options to address boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education include: reducing the cost of schooling, improving school infrastructure, improving the accessibility and quality of pre-primary education, providing remedial support and non-formal education to support the return to education, avoiding streaming and segregation, improving teacher quality and recruitment, curriculum and pedagogy, banning corporal punishment and tackling gender-based violence.

Very few policies, programmes or initiatives address intersecting disadvantage, such as remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, religion and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

Multi-level policies and programmes that aim to understand and address the factors influencing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education across levels (individual, family, peers, community, schools, and state and society) appear most effective. Collaboration across sectors and stakeholders, including youth, can ensure an informed and comprehensive approach.

Promising programmes start at a young age before children internalize gender and social norms. They critically examine gender stereotypes, dismantle traditional constructions of masculinity and emphasise the benefits of masculinity that respects gender equality.

Promising programmes build boys' social and emotional skills. They keep boys engaged with education through reduction or risk behaviour and increased connectedness to peers.

Boy-specific programmes addressing gender-based violence have shown results. Community approaches have also shown to be successful in preventing violence and promoting learning for boys.

Programmes engaging parents by providing reading materials and encouraging parents to read to their children can improve boys' literacy skills. Exposure to male role models and mentors can also dismantle stereotypes and increase boys' motivation to learn.

Whole-school approaches can support inclusive school environments, address learners' needs, and are particularly effective in changing harmful gender norms.

In contexts where boys are disengaged or disadvantaged, programmes aiming at improving education opportunities for all had a greater positive effect on boys than girls or showed potential to improve boys' situation. Interventions directly targeted at boys may be most effective when addressing constraints that are unique to them, and focusing on the marginalized.

Rigorous evidence about the effectiveness of policies, programmes and interventions addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education remains thin, especially related to intersectionality.

Responses by governments and partners

While policies and programmes of governments and partners to improve opportunities for girls' education have been well-documented (see for instance Unterhalter, 2014a, 2014b), regional and national initiatives to address gender disparities in education outcomes that disadvantage boys are few in comparison; international programmes even more absent. Major donor agencies have only acknowledged that boys are falling behind in many countries in the past 15 years or so (based on Ridge et al., 2017).

In the early 2000s, some high-income countries have developed relevant educational policies and some initiatives were launched to address the issue of boys' disadvantage in education, particularly in the Caribbean (Cobbet and Younger, 2012), where various initiatives and programmes were implemented to address boys' disengagement from school and risk behaviours (Ridge et al., 2017). Yet overall, it appears that there is not enough political will to understand boys' disadvantage in education, despite increasing evidence of their underachievement (UNESCO, 2019g).

This section will contribute to a better understanding of what actions work to address boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education. It discusses programmes and initiatives that can be considered good or promising practice. The programmes and initiatives analysed here address one or more dimensions of the Bronfenbrenner ecological model (see introduction) or target specific groups of boys and young men and specific situations such as emergency settings. Some of the programmes and initiatives and policies presented here speak to more than one dimension of the model. Programmes often work across the macrosystem, mesosystem and microsystem as a strategic intervention (see **Box 5**).

A policy review feeds into this section. For this, documents from selected countries were reviewed, summarized and used to develop a dashboard of key policy responses (see **Table 2**). While the review's focus was on policies specifically targeting boys, it also considered general policies, particularly in relation to gender and inclusion. Nineteen countries[8] were selected for review based on criteria that included key indicators of boys' disadvantage and robust research indicating disadvantage within learning environments, such as the experience of school violence. They were selected to ensure a range of countries across regions and country income groups. In addition to the 19 countries, selected pertinent examples from other countries were added.

8. Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Colombia, Croatia, Finland, the Gambia, Honduras, Ireland, Jamaica, Jordan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Namibia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Rwanda, Suriname and Sweden.

Box 5

Multilevel interventions are especially promising

Several of the programmes, initiatives and policies described work strategically across levels of the Bronfenbrenner model – individual, family peer, community, school and state and society – for effectiveness. A randomized control trial showed that the **Good School Toolkit project** in Ugandan primary schools significantly reduced levels of corporal punishment in schools by addressing schools' organizational cultures, improving teacher–student relationships and working closely with parents and community leaders to initiate change (Devries et al. 2015; Kyegombe et al., 2017). The programme has been highly effective: over two years, the risk of physical violence from teachers to students decreased by 42 percent and by 40 percent from peers (Devries et al., 2015). Even though violence was reduced for both girls and boys, evidence suggests that the effect was bigger for boys (Raising Voices, 2020). In Colombia, the **Aulas En Paz** (Classrooms in Peace) programme that combines a dedicated curriculum with peer group and parent workshops has shown success in reducing violent behaviour and bullying (Mejía and Chaux, 2017). The highly successful **Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future (O3) Programme**, which had reached 28 million learners by 2020, has moved into a second phase. 2021–2025, the **Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future PLUS (O3 PLUS) Programme** will be implemented in Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The aim of the programme is to ensure positive health, education and gender equality outcomes among young men and women in higher and tertiary education institutions, by reducing HIV infections, gender-based violence and unintended pregnancy. Over 250,000 students will be trained on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), over 150,000 students tested for HIV through mobile and in-reach programmes and over 5,000 peer counsellors trained to provide information on sexual and reproductive health and rights. The programme is promising as it explicitly acknowledges that for young men support to understand and address harmful masculine norms and practice, issues of consent and respectful gender relationships can lead to more equitable relationships and healthier lives. The activities of the programme address several levels: institutional strengthening, student health and well-being and safe and inclusive campus environments. The programme was designed based on the findings and recommendations of a baseline survey (UNESCO, 2021b, c).

Programmes and initiatives addressing the individual level

Boys' self-image, including their masculine identity, expectations and aspirations, has an important influence on their participation, progression and learning outcomes in education. Great efforts have been made over the past years by development actors and NGOs to change the attitudes and self-image of girls and women, but far fewer initiatives have included boys and men (Molyneux, 2020). However, there have been more programmes working with boys and young men on gender norms over the past years. Recognizing that adolescence is a critical time for forming one's gender identity and adhering to gender norms, Marcus et al. (2018) undertook a systematic review of such programmes in low- and middle-income countries, finding overall a positive impact on gender equality. The review in this report supports this finding.

Gender-transformative programmes are most effective at a young age

Some programmes and initiatives have been or are currently implemented to address the limitations that rigid masculine gender norms can impose on boys and young men. The **Global Boyhood Initiative** is a new partnership in the United States, including Promundo, the Kering Foundation, Plan International and other partners. It supports boys aged 4–13 to share their emotions in healthy ways, accept and connect with others, stand up and speak out against bullying and inequality, and break free from gender stereotypes. The initiative combines research, public campaigns and programmes, including evidence-based activities, tools and educational resources. The initiative has transformative potential as it starts at an early age. Children internalize gender norms early and it is then difficult to change attitudes and behaviour with age

(IRCW, 2020). The initiative has published *The State of America's Boys Report* (Reichert and Nelson, 2020), a report on the presentation of masculinity in popular television programming in 2020, and a national survey on healthy masculinity during the time of COVID-19 (Kering Foundation and Promundo, 2021).

Successful programmes on gender stereotypes critically examine masculinities

Successful school-based programmes that address gender stereotypes have encouraged young men to critically examine social norms and gender inequalities as well as gender-based violence (Stewart et al., 2021). Some of these programmes especially focus on dismantling traditional constructions of masculinity, the costs of restrictive forms of masculinity and the benefits of masculinity that respects gender equality. The **Breaking the Man Code program** implements two-hour experimental workshops where adolescent boys examine the risks associated with negative norms of masculinity and try to make a break with them. Implemented by the Australian social enterprise, Tomorrow Man, activities aim to encourage boys to talk about their emotions to build their resilience, self-confidence and peer connectedness. Tomorrow Man also implements a long programme for adolescent boys with six modules building emotional intelligence and their own versions of masculinity (Tomorrow Man, 2021). The NGO, Instituto WËM, started the **WËM Joven project** in 2012 in Costa Rica with the aim of providing young men with emotional support and helping them build positive models of masculinity. Group discussions address anger management, violence, relationships with other men, family and couple relationships, communication, machismo and paternity (Cordero, 2019). In 2015, some of the project's participants launched the **Soy Cero Machista campaign** to make adolescents think about the traditional Latino macho culture, within which men measure their masculinity in terms of how well they can perform a social role of dominant, hypermasculine and hyperheterosexual and avoid being tender and effeminate (Crichlow, 2014; Ellis, 2018). As part of the campaign, adolescents created a 'machimetro' – a scale measuring the machista thoughts of Costa Rican adolescents (Cordero, 2019).

For 25 years, **MAVA (Men Against Violence and Abuse)** has taught thousands of young men in India in schools, colleges and communities about sexual health, gender equality, deconstructing negative stereotypes and norms on masculinity, emphasizing that gender discrimination affects both men and women equally, and empowering men to become part of the solutions. MAVA works with 700 youth mentors through interactive workshops, street theatre, folk songs, film festivals and social media, collaborating with colleges, universities, women's groups, grass-roots organizations and health activists. The Government of India has recognized their activities as one of the Best Governance Practices in the country (MAVA, 2021; UNESCO, 2021f). In 2002, Promundo developed **Program H** to engage young men in changing violent and inequitable norms related to masculinity through dialogue, participatory meetings and critical reflection. Since then, 9 countries have replicated the programme and 36 countries have adapted it. Fourteen impact evaluations carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Croatia, Ethiopia, India, Kosovo, Namibia, Rwanda, Serbia, the United States and Viet Nam found that the programme had positive effects on men's gender attitudes in most settings (Doyle and Wallace, 2021). Based on the success of Programme H, Promundo launched **Program D** in 2007, which promotes respect for sexual diversity and engages adolescents to critically reflect on homophobia (Promundo, 2020).

Some programmes focus on social and emotional skills for boys. The **Becoming a Man program**, implemented by Youth Guidance in Chicago, USA, helps guide young men through difficult circumstances that may lead to violence and to build the social and emotional skills they need to succeed. Counsellors meet with groups of young men at school during non-class periods. In 2015/16, 48 schools in Chicago hosted the programme, reaching more than 2,500 young men from Grades 7 to 12 (Lansing and Rapoport, 2016). Two randomized control trials showed that the programme reduced violent crime arrests by 50 percent and improved by 19 percent secondary school graduation rates for young men (Heller et al., 2015). The **Connect with Respect programme** is a curriculum tool to assist teachers. It draws on scientific literature on violence prevention, gender norms and the programmatic experience of school-based interventions (Cahill et al., 2016). The programme toolkit includes a learning tool for teachers to build their own knowledge and awareness on related topics, as well as more than 30 learning activities teachers can use to increase knowledge, positive attitudes and skills among students. Designed for lower secondary school learners, activities can be integrated within a range of subjects, including literacy, social studies, civics/citizenship education, health, life skills and sexuality education. Initially developed by a team from the University of Melbourne for use in the Asia-Pacific region, the curriculum tool has undergone regional adaptation for use in Eastern and Southern Africa (Cahill and Romei, 2019).

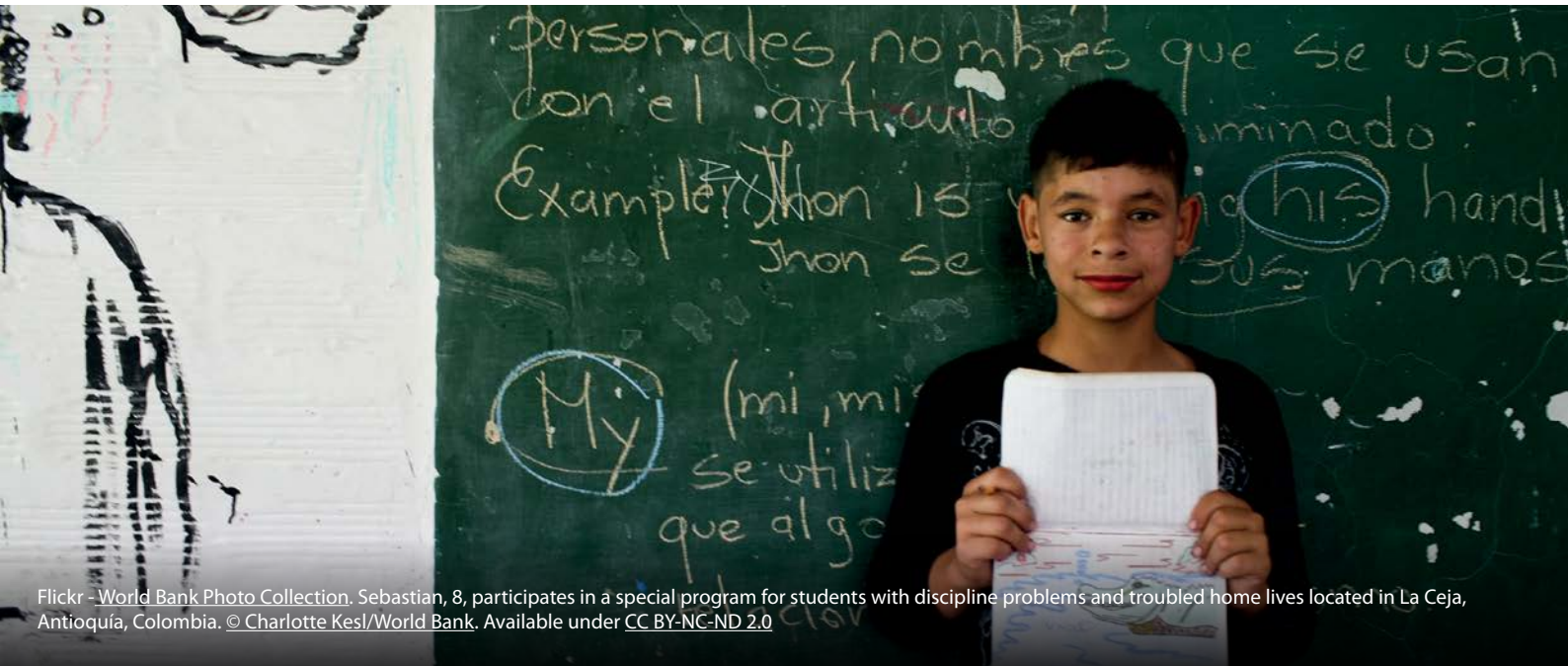
The results of a pilot study carried out in schools in Eswatini, Thailand, Timor-Leste, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia show that the programme can have a positive impact on the relationship skills of both boys and girls: 77 percent of students felt that their relationship skills improved; girls were more likely than boys to demonstrate a positive change in help-seeking behaviours post-implementation. To improve outcomes for boys, teachers recommended a gender-responsive approach to engage boys to promote more equitable gender norms and challenge harmful notions of masculinity (Cahill et al., 2022).

Other programmes and initiatives focus on the broad promotion of gender equality. India's **Project Khel** teaches children aged 8–18, particularly boys, in India about gender equality and topics such as gender-based violence and child marriage and reproductive health. The project is designed to increase self-confidence and decision-making skills of students. Specially trained 'play-ducators' engage children through age-appropriate games, including activities to simulate real-life situations, followed up by discussions. The project is run in various contexts: public and private schools, after-school programmes, shelter homes, slums and rural schools in the Lucknow region (UNESCO, 2021f).

These programmes are successful or promising for keeping boys and young men engaged with education through reduction of risk behaviour and increased connectedness to peers. Addressing boys' and young men's understanding of the self and harmful social norms of masculinity open up opportunities for boys to contribute to gender equality. Lessons for policy development can be learned from large-scale non-governmental programmes that have shown success in tackling personal conflict and violence in schools and engaging men and boys to challenge negative masculinities and gender attitudes.

Boy-specific programmes addressing gender-based violence show positive results

Several programmes to raise awareness on gender-based violence are targeted at boys. The **Young Men Initiative**, implemented by CARE in 2013–2016 in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, offered a gender-transformative life skills training to foster non-violent, gender-equitable and healthy lifestyles among male students. An evaluation of the project found that boys got more involved in household chores, showed less violent behaviour and improved their interactions with girls and marginalized boys. Participants were also willing to promote gender equality (CARE International, 2016). The International Centre for Research on Women, together with the Futures Without Violence Group, adapted the **Coaching Boys into Men program** to the Indian context. The programme called **'Parivarthan' (Transformation)** worked with cricket coaches and mentors in schools and the community in Mumbai, India to teach boys about managing aggression, preventing violence and hate speech, and promoting respect (UNESCO, 2021f), with 26 coaches and 16 community mentors trained. A programme evaluation showed that participating boys developed positive gender attitudes. Some boys became significantly less supportive of girls' physical abuse. Despite improvements in intentions to intervene, bystander intervention behaviours did not change. Yet, peer violence declined and participants also reported a decline of sexual violence. The programme has been replicated across the country (Das et al., 2012). These programmes not only have the potential to reduce violence against girls, but also other boys, thereby increasing the chances of girls and boys to succeed at school. They can also have an effect at the peer level, since the new behaviours learned by participants can positively influence their peers.



Flickr - World Bank Photo Collection. Sebastian, 8, participates in a special program for students with discipline problems and troubled home lives located in La Ceja, Antioquía, Colombia. © Charlotte Kesl/World Bank. Available under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Few countries have programmes to improve boys' reading skills

In certain contexts, some boys believe that men and boys do not read or that reading is a feminine activity. But only a few countries with significant gaps in reading skills have implemented programmes to improve boys' reading skills (UNESCO, 2018a). **Premier League Reading Stars** (PLRS) is a programme implemented in England by the National Literacy Trust in cooperation with the Premier League. It uses role models from football to engage boys and girls who are interested in football in reading and improve their literacy skills. Administered by teachers and school librarians, football stars share their passion for reading over 10 weeks (Wood et al., 2016). The programme targets children with low attainment and low engagement with reading and writing; 80 percent of participants are boys, aged 9–13. Since research has shown that children that benefit from free school meals perform less well in reading than their peers, the programme targets schools with a high number of such children (Pabion, 2014). An impact evaluation found that the programme has shown to improve participating children's reading confidence. PLRS also significantly impacted reading autonomy and competence. It increased frequency of reading and improved significantly reading ability by 3.7 standardized reading score points. When the programme was delivered by men, student outcomes were better, but gender was also found to be significantly associated with interest in football (Wood et al., 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic, a PLRS Reading Festival was organized online, where authors of children's books led workshops, read their books and took questions from students (National Literacy Trust, 2021). Programmes like PLRS are successful, because they dismantle stereotypes that reading is not for boys or men.

Information on the benefits of education can increase years of schooling

A promising demand-side intervention is the **provision of information on the returns of education**. In the Dominican Republic, secondary school completion rates are low. In an experiment, information on the return of additional years of schooling was provided to randomly selected Grade 8 boys from poor households. Boys who got the information were 4 percent more likely to be in school the year after and four years later, the study found that boys who received the information completed 0.2 more years of schooling on average (Jensen, 2010). In 2015–2016 a group of researchers partnered with the Ministry of Education in Peru to implement a randomized evaluation on the impact of delivering information on the returns to education through video series and tablet applications. Both in rural and urban areas, dropout rates reduced by 19 percent, with the effect largely driven by changes in boys' behaviour (IPA, 2018).

Programmes and initiatives addressing the family level

At the family level, social and gender norms, expectations and aspirations, parental or caregiver support to education, household size, composition, socioeconomic status and location have an impact on boys' education. Relatively few programmes were identified in this review that address the family level.

Programmes include parents to improve boys' literacy skills

Marginalized boys seldom have male role models that can guide them to become readers (UNESCO, 2018a). In Sweden, the programme **Las for mey, Pappa (Read to me, Daddy)** has targeted fathers, mostly immigrants who belong to local trade unions, based on the observation that men at local trade unions did not read enough and thus do not help their children to read. Local trade unions organize 'Daddy Days', where a working-class author reads from his book and a child-development specialist provides advice to fathers on how they can improve their children's reading habits (OECD, 2012b).

Reading materials are proven to be most effective when given to parents of young children along with encouragement to read regularly with their children. Early reading for leisure has shown to have a lasting effect on children's reading skills regardless of their gender (OECD, 2018, 2012b). In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the **Bookstart programme** gives free reading materials to parents of babies during their medical checks and parents of three-year-olds at nurseries and preschools; 95 percent of children in the target age group nationwide receive the reading materials. Dual-language materials were developed for parents with an immigrant background. Studies showed that students who benefited from the project achieved higher scores in reading tests, including at age 7 (EU Read, 2021; OECD, 2012b). In

Germany, the **Lesestart (Start to read) programme** cooperates with local libraries and pediatricians to distribute books and reading guides to parents of children aged 1–3. An evaluation showed that 62 percent of parents who receive the material from pediatricians increase the time reading to their children and 72 percent of participating libraries acquired new books for children aged 1–3 (Lesestart, 2021; OECD, 2015). Even though these programmes do not target boys in particular, they address boys' needs. In England (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), two thirds of the gender gap in reading in primary education can be attributed to the fact that boys start school with language skills below expectation and have lower levels of attention (Moss and Washbrook, 2016).

Mentoring and violence prevention programmes involve parents and community leaders

Mentoring and violence prevention programmes have the potential to keep boys and young men engaged since they not only address the parents and family level, but also the wider community context. In 2019, the British Council launched the **Boys' Can Mentoring Programme** with support of the Grace & Staff Community Development Foundation in Jamaica. The three-year programme is implemented in 15 schools, bringing together mentees, mentors, teachers and parents to work on career development, emotional intelligence, leadership and confidence building, conflict management, communication and problem-solving skills. The mentors are expected to encourage young men to stay in school and help them develop healthier relationships and lifestyles (British Council, 2019). The **Positive Pathways project**, 2020–2025, implemented in Jamaica by Democracy International and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is designed to support families in youth violence prevention and to develop alternative pathways for youth at-risk. The project targets communities, parents and families through school safety programmes and parenting interventions (USAID, 2020a). The project builds emotional resilience, life skills and economic opportunities for youth that are at risk of engaging in crime (Democracy International, 2020). In 2021, 26 community leaders were trained online on social and behavioural science for violence prevention (Jamaica Observer, 2021).

Programmes and initiatives addressing peers

Peers influence boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education through their expectations and the prevalent gender norms they represent, as well as through social support systems and formal and informal networks, such as sports associations and gangs.

Programmes and initiatives recognize that boys and young men need to be engaged to reduce violence at school

There is a growing consensus that boys and young men need to be engaged to prevent school-related gender-based violence. A systematic review on working with men to prevent gender-based violence identified three promising strategies: group education; community outreach and media campaigns; and service-based programmes (Barker et al., 2007).

Some programmes have used peer-to-peer approaches. **Program H** (see section on the individual level) was adapted to the context of the United States with the programme **Manhood 2.0**, which uses group education, role playing and peer-to-peer discussions to challenge harmful norms related to masculinity. It raises awareness on sexual and reproductive health among young men aged 15–24 and aims to reduce dating violence and bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity. A programme evaluation in Washington, D.C. found participants had an increased understanding of sexual and reproductive health (Promundo, 2019). Equipping boys and men with knowledge about sexual and reproductive health can also ensure safer pregnancy and motherhood (Kato-Wallace et al., 2016).

Some programmes and initiatives use peer role models or peer change agents. The purpose of the **Yes I Do programme** is to end deep-rooted discriminatory gender and social norms in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Pakistan, Peru and Zambia. The programme is implemented by Plan International Netherlands, the African Medical and Research Foundation, Rutgers, Choice for Youth and Sexuality, and the Royal Tropical Institute together with local partners. It is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. It aims to mobilize girls and boys as change makers and to increase awareness of young people's sexual and reproductive

health needs (UNESCO, 2019d). The **Champions of Change** (CoC) intervention is part of the programme. It develops groups of young people at the community level, focusing on self-esteem, rights awareness, collective power and girls' economic empowerment. Acknowledging that boys and men play an important role in overcoming gender discrimination and inequality, boys learn how to avoid contributing to gender inequality, how masculine norms can restrict them and how they can support gender equality. Girls and boys discuss their views on gender and collaborate to work on social transformation in their communities. CoC also equips young people in Latin America with the knowledge and skills to stand up for their LGBTIQ peers, and supports dialogue with parents on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence (Plan International, 2018).

An evaluation of CoC in Malawi found that young people from all backgrounds participated in the activities, with a reported increase of young people with disabilities in activities. It showed that gender roles were shifting, with traditionally female tasks being done by men and vice versa. Yet girls are still expected to do most of the work. Boys exhibited more gender-equal attitudes than girls related to safety of, and violence against, women (Munthali et al., 2021). In Peru, the CoC intervention also yielded positive results. The percentage of adolescents that had adequate knowledge on child protection rose from 28 to 91 percent, with a larger increase for adolescent boys, 74 percentage points, than for adolescent girls, 54 percentage points. The proportion of adolescent boys who believed it justifiable to hit a woman went down by 28 percent (Plan International, 2021a). The results in the Plurinational State of Bolivia were equally positive. The proportion of adolescents knowing how to report violence increased from 69 percent to 95 percent with an increase for adolescent boys of 30 percentage points compared with 16 percentage points for adolescent girls (Plan International, 2021b).

Peer violence in communities extends into school spaces. Gangs can be strong networks pulling boys and young men out of school. Engaging boys and young men in and through cultural, artistic and sport activities may help keep them engaged in education. In Brazil, **Escola Alberta (Open School Initiative)** aims to reduce violence in urban communities outside school and to prevent youth from joining gangs. The initiative is run in partnership with the government and UNESCO. It combines cultural, artistic and sport activities with training workshops on citizenship, rights and diversity (Parkes, 2016). Both quantitative and qualitative studies found a reduction in some forms of violence at schools, including theft and threats (Aniceto França et al., 2013).

Sports networks can help to bring peers together in a constructive way. The **Grassroot Soccer Curriculum** implemented by Grassroot Soccer in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe uses soccer to engage female and male youth to make health decisions, using an evidence-based health curriculum, and working with local mentors and coaches as role models (Grassroot Soccer, 2021). There is a direct relationship between masculinity and health. Masculine norms and practices can reinforce neglecting one's own physical and mental health (PAHO and WHO, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the smartphone-based SKILLZ Boy programme was implemented where five boys and a coach were able to discuss COVID-19 prevention, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and mental well-being. According to Grassroot Soccer, boys improved their knowledge of positive gender norms by 43 percent through the programme (Grassroot Soccer, 2020).

Programmes and initiatives addressing the community level

Customs and traditions, community contexts, formal and informal networks including religious and traditional institutions, and civil society engagement in education influence boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes.

Community approaches are successful in preventing violence and promoting learning for boys

Some teacher training programmes to prevent gender-based violence engage the community. The **Doorways training program** was developed by USAID to help teachers, community members and students to prevent and respond to school-related gender-based violence. The Teacher Training Manual on School-Related Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response aims to equip teachers with teaching practices and attitudes that promote a safe learning environment for all learners. Community members contribute by forming school management committees to hold schools accountable. A programme evaluation in Malawi showed that after the programme, 96 percent of teachers thought that it was unacceptable to whip boys compared to 75 percent before. Teachers' awareness of sexual harassment of boys at school increased from 26 percent to 64 percent and of and girls at school from 30 percent to 80 percent (Queen et al., 2015).

Some countries have successfully included community traditions to promote learning. From 2008, the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education and the Mongolian Ministry of Education, Culture and Science implemented the **Literacy and Life Skills for Herder Families programme.** The nomadic lifestyle of herder families in Mongolia encourages boys to drop out of school to help their family. The programme taught adolescents and adults from herder families literacy in combination with life skills, enabling them to improve literacy skills and gain new vocational skills. To provide information on the programme and encourage participation, cultural and athletic activities such as sumo wrestling, group dancing and singing were organized. The project evaluation showed that participants' literacy skills improved and their attitude towards learning changed dramatically, leading to greater interest in education. After participating in the programme, 5 percent of learners re-entered formal secondary school, 47 percent continued elementary and secondary education through equivalency programmes and 4 percent continued to study at the national centre of occupational training. One of the programme's key success factors was the integration of literacy training with life skills and vocational skills learning. Free meals and stationery were provided which increased attendance. The organization of cultural and sports events changed the perception that the programme was for illiterate persons only, attracting various groups of learners (UNESCO, 2021f).

Programmes that are relevant to the community have shown positive results. In the 2000s, the Spirit of Youth Association (SOY) in Egypt started to implement the **Learning and Earning in Cairo's Garbage City** project with initial funding from UNESCO and since 2010 from Procter & Gamble and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Living on the outskirts of Cairo, the Zabaleen (Arabic for 'garbage people'), who survive by collecting trash and recycling it, are the largest group absent from education. SOY's core project is the Recycling School for Boys, which provides literacy training combined with work-oriented content and activities, including on increasing income and the environmental aspects of business. As of 2015, 130 boys aged 9–17 graduated from the school and 50 enrolled in middle school and 20 in high schools after graduation. 129 parents obtained a literacy certificate. The young men participating in the school not only acquired literacy skills, but also started their own businesses, including start-ups for collecting and recycling garbage (UNESCO, 2021f).

In certain contexts, boys witness community violence. **Creating Peace** in Pittsburgh, the United States, provides a trauma-based response. It is implemented in community spaces, together with churches and youth-serving agencies, in partnership with the county's trauma response team. The programme makes use of arts-based strategies to examine racial injustice and gender inequity that can perpetuate violence. Based on Promundo's Manhood 2.0 program, Creating Peace has shown positive preliminary results, increasing bystander behaviour preventing violence (University of Pittsburgh, 2022).

School-level programmes and initiatives

Boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education are impacted by school environments, teacher workforce, teacher professional development opportunities, pedagogical practices, social norms and gendered expectations, levels of school violence, and the availability and implementation mechanisms for school policies. Teachers' attitudes, expectations and teacher–student relationships play an important role.

Inclusive school environments respond to the need of all learners

Schools need to be responsive to all learners' needs. UNICEF developed the **Child-Friendly Schools Manual** in 2006, which is still used today. The manual proposed that the school is a model of the community and the environment where children learn about gender and cooperation between men and women. Therefore, mothers and fathers, female and male teachers, and girls and boys must equally participate in decision-making at school. In child-friendly schools, both boys and girls can speak freely about their protection needs. Child-friendly schools should be sensitive to how gender norms put children at risk differently. They need to have zero-tolerance policies for harassment or gender-based violence by teachers. A key component of child-friendly schools is the development of school codes of conduct. Child-friendly schools are gender-responsive and inclusive, engaging all boys and girls (UNICEF, 2006). An evaluation of UNICEF's child-friendly school programming showed that in schools with high family and community participation, students felt safer and more engaged (Osher et al., 2009).

Some initiatives aim at promoting diversity in the teaching workforce and include training on gender equality

Some strategies have aimed to increase the number of men in the teaching force at the lower education levels, especially in early childhood care and education. To get more men working in pre-primary education, Germany implemented the **Mehr Männer in Kitas** (More men in day-care centres) programme in 2011–13 and **Quereinstieg – Männer und Frauen in Kitas** (Lateral entry – Men and women in day-care centres), a programme to reorient men and women seeking to change careers in 2015–20 (OECD, 2019a). The programmes helped increase the share of men employed in early childhood care and education from 3 percent in 2006 to 7 percent in 2019 (Koordinationsstelle Chance Quereinstieg, 2019); however, gender parity is far off. In 2013, the National Agency for Education in Sweden launched a **national campaign** to encourage men to choose a career in early childhood care and education (OECD, 2015). Between 2008 and 2011, the **Flemish Community of Belgium** also made funding available to attract underrepresented groups to the teaching profession, targeting men, those with an immigrant background and people with disabilities (OECD, 2015).

Simply recruiting more male teachers does not automatically translate to the greater inclusion of boys, nor to improved levels of engagement. Teachers need training. Some countries offer teacher training on gender. Sweden provides gender-awareness training for teachers and the state of Queensland in Australia offers online courses on inclusive education (OECD, 2015). Some countries target both teachers and students to dismantle gender stereotypes. **Gender click for boys** is an interactive website provided by the **Flemish Community of Belgium**. Targeting boys and girls in upper secondary school, it aims to raise awareness on stereotypes about men. A brochure called 'Gender click in preschool' is also distributed to teachers providing advice on how to address gender stereotypes among preschool children (OECD, 2015).

Some programmes focus on improving reading pedagogies

Some programmes focus on improving reading pedagogies to increase boys' and girls' literacy skills. In Liberia, the **EGRA Plus program**, funded by the World Bank and USAID, trains teachers how to teach reading and is run in 180 schools. Teachers are trained on what to teach, when and how. A student report card is used to inform parents about their children's performance. An evaluation showed that boys and girls improved their reading performance, girls more than boys (Piper and Korda, 2010). The **Läslyftet (Boost for reading and writing development)** programme in Sweden was implemented by the National Agency for Education from 2015 to 2020, aiming to increase children's reading and writing skills and strengthen teaching quality. Teachers learn from and with each other with the help of an assigned tutor (OECD, 2015). From preschool to secondary school, teachers provide literacy activities every second week within their usual subject teaching. Activities include reviewing text critically, paying attention to power and gender. A study showed that teachers implemented activities aiming at improving student's literacy skills in the form of additional activities rather than embedding literacy

activities in the school subject. It concluded that teacher development programmes need to provide more advice on how to use reading in different school subjects (Kirsten, 2019). Schools in Australia have implemented **Reading for Pleasure** pedagogies to engage boys and girls in reading. A study investigating these pedagogies' impact looked at one classroom. In the school, students had literature-focused library lessons once a week taught by a librarian. A book week was organized, and authors were invited regularly to exchange with students. The study found a positive effect but noted that teachers need to better understand the theoretical framework of the pedagogies to better inform their actions (Vanden Dool and Simpson, 2021).

Many programmes use a curriculum-based approach to change norms and attitudes

Gender norms are especially difficult to change, since change involves transforming rules that profit the more powerful segment of the population who have put these rules in place. Resistance from their part as well as from institutions which authorize and support gender norms can be particularly strong (Harper, 2020). Schools can reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms. In Lebanon, the ABAAD-Resource Centre developed the **'Playing for Gender Equality Toolkit'**, which includes a training guide on 10 games to be played with children aged 8–12. Launched in 2013, the objective is to teach boys and girls about concepts of gender equality at an age when beliefs and attitudes on gender consolidate. The resource provides tools for teachers to explore gender equality through interactive games and exercises, followed by discussion. Five trainings of trainers were organized in partnership with Save the Children until 2015 in various governorates benefiting 125 trainers, 16 percent of which were men (ABAAD-Resource Centre, 2015). The toolkit includes a guidebook for social actors and people working with children on the importance of working with parents when implementing programmes on gender equality with children and youth (ABAAD-Resource Centre, 2021). **Breakthrough India** developed their curriculum '**Taaron ki Toli**' for boys and girls. Implemented in school, it uses games and stories to discuss gender-based discrimination and to understand how it can be prevented at school, home and in the community. Girls and boys learn how they can work together to protest against and prevent gender-based discrimination. They draw up their own campaigns to discuss the issue in their communities in collaboration with other stakeholders including fathers' groups (IRCW, 2020). These programmes are promising because they go beyond school, involving families and the larger community.

Challenging gender norms requires working with both boys and girls. A **multiyear experiment** at a secondary school in Haryana, India aims to change adolescents' gender attitudes and their support for restrictive gender norms. The programme involves regular classroom discussions on gender equality and training on communication and negotiation skills, for instance, to persuade parents to allow them to postpone marriage. A randomized controlled trial showed that the gender attitudes of adolescents improved; beneficiaries described their more gender-equitable behaviour, with boys reporting helping more in domestic chores (Dhar et al., 2018). The **Gender Equity Movement in Schools program** promotes gender equality at school, training teachers on a two-year curriculum, which dismantles gender stereotypes, critically questions gender norms and challenges the use of violence. The curriculum has been implemented in more than 25,000 schools in Bangladesh, India, the Philippines and Viet Nam (ICRW, 2021; Kelly, 2016). An evaluation showed a positive change in attitudes on gender and violence among students and a decline in support for corporal punishment. Boys reported a 15 percent reduction of use of violence and communication between boys and girls also improved (Achyut et al., 2016).

Measures to reduce school violence and challenge restrictive gender norms can be included in existing curricula, and implemented in the classroom or through extracurricular activities. In Hyderabad, Pakistan, boys and girls aged 12–14 were engaged in sports and games in schools in through the programme **A Right to Play**. Boys were encouraged to adopt positive forms of masculinity (WhatWorks, 2021). An evaluation showed peer victimization decreased by 33 percent for boys and 59 percent for girls; peer violence perpetration reduced 25 percent for boys and 56 percent for girls; and a significant decrease in depression (Karmaliani et al., 2020). **CHOICES**, a curriculum-based programme, engaged 10- to 14-year-old boys and girls in Nepal in eight two-hour sessions over three months to challenge gender norms, choosing the age range based on research showing that pre- and early teenage years are especially critical for internalizing norms. Age-appropriate activities were implemented to reflect on gender inequities and to discuss gender norms in all-boy, all-girl and mixed groups. The activities were facilitated by trained young men and women aged 18 to 24. An evaluation showed the intervention led to more gender-equitable norms among boys and girls. Significantly fewer beneficiaries

said it was acceptable for a man to beat his wife if she disagrees with him and significantly more beneficiaries thought that girls should have the same education opportunities as boys. Most programme participants thought that gender inequity was normal but unfair and needs to be changed. Boys reported making changes in their behaviour such as helping in the household, advocating for their sisters' education and against early marriage Girls also reported that boys showed such changed behaviour. Parents confirmed that their sons helped daughters with schoolwork and household chores (IRH, n.d.).

Whole-school approaches can be particularly effective in changing harmful gender norms. In 2018/19, the **Lifting Limits programme** was piloted in five primary schools in London, England, with the objective to equip 270 school staff and 1,900 students with the tools to spot and correct unintentional gender bias that could limit expectations and aspirations. An evaluation of the intervention showed that girls and boys increased their awareness of more diverse possible roles for themselves and others. 71 percent of children aged 7–11 reported that nursing can be for everyone, up from 35 percent before the intervention. The share of boys saying that they could become a teacher rose from 24 percent to 42 percent. Success factors were the whole-school approach, effective staff training, the breadth and quality of training resources and the appointment of gender champions at school (Lifting Limits, 2019).

Initiatives to reduce violence in educational institutions include codes of conduct, training and awareness-raising campaigns

Codes of conduct can help reduce gender-based violence for boys and girls, young men and women. To be successful they need sufficient distribution, awareness-raising and training and effective monitoring and response mechanisms for those affected. A study with 60 students in 3 technical and vocational colleges in Malawi found both female and male students were subject to sexual violence. Within the framework of the Skills and **Technical Education Programme,** implemented by UNESCO and funded by the European Union, a code of conduct was developed for TVET instructors and administration staff as well as trainees, and a training programme was offered. The programme aimed to reduce the incidence of sexual violence in TVET institutions by providing a definition of sexual violence and how to report it. After the distribution of the code of conduct and the training, 77 percent of institutions reported a reduction in the number of sexual violence incidents (Heath, 2019; UNESCO, 2017b, 2018c). However, as this figure was not reported directly by students, its interpretation is potentially limited.

Research indicates, as described previously, that bullying has a negative effect on school attendance and academic performance (OECD, 2019c). In Finland, the **KiVa anti-bullying programme**, which adopts a whole-school approach, has shown success in reducing levels of bullying in schools (UNESCO, 2017a). The KiVa approach has been rolled out to over 90 percent of government schools in Finland and is being implemented by partner organizations in other countries including Belgium, Chile, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain (KiVa Antibullying Program, 2021). The programme consists of age-appropriate lessons for children aged 7–15, with a focus on reducing and preventing bullying incidents and mitigating the harmful consequences of violence. Lessons and online activities increase children's empathy towards those affected and provide safe strategies for supporting those targeted by violence, emphasizing the important role of bystanders in influencing bullying behaviour in schools (Salmivalli et al., 2009). The KiVA programme encourages training all teachers and school staff to respond proactively to bullying incidents and working directly with children to promote their agency and voice (UNESCO, 2017a). A series of robust evaluations and research studies have shown that bullying rates significantly decreased among participants, especially among boys and those in younger grades (Saarento et al., 2015; Salmivalli et al., 2009).

The **Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programs** in Hong Kong, China, taught secondary school students to become constructive social bystanders. Financed by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the programme included a pilot phase (2005–2012), a school implementation phase (2009–2016) and a community-based extension phase (Shek and Wu, 2016). The programme included awareness-raising activities on bullying, space for self-reflection and opportunities to practise new behaviour, as well as a gender perspective with a view to retain boys, as it was hypothesized that they would be more likely to drop out of a programme that emphasized values such as caring for others that could clash with restrictive masculine values (Tsang et al., 2011). The school implementation phase was accompanied by a six-year longitudinal study to understand the programme's psychosocial effects on adolescents, which found positive effects on personal development and reduced risk behaviour among boys and girls (Shek and Wu, 2016). The programme shows

the importance of including a gender perspective in activities aimed at reducing bullying.

Medienhelden (Media Heroes) is a programme aiming to prevent cyberbullying developed in Germany in 2012 and implemented by trained teachers within the existing school curriculum. It targets students Grades 7 to 10, teachers and parents by promoting media literacy. The programme is either implemented as a one-day training or as a long-term programme over 10 weeks. The programme builds on research that has shown that students who have more empathy engage less in cyberbullying. Media Heroes develops students' empathy through role play and showing films on situations of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is addressed at the individual, classroom and family level (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2018). The programme appears to be especially important for boys, who usually show a decrease in empathy over time at this age (Van der Graaff et al., 2013). Boys participating in the programme did not show any decrease in empathy (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2018). The programme showed that behaviour change interventions may be more effective when spread out over a longer time period.

A few programmes and initiatives support boys' retention or re-enrolment in school

Efforts to retain boys in school have been limited (Edström et al., 2015). Some programmes have been implemented to reduce school dropout, increase levels of attainment and re-enrol children and youth in school. Some of these programmes were successful in retaining boys. In the United States**, Academy schools** have reduced school dropout. The **National Academy Foundation (NAF)** is a national network of education, community and business leaders implementing an academic curriculum which blends work-based learning with career-themed instruction. They serve 675 schools with over 96,000 students in minority and low-income neighbourhoods. A study tracked 600,000 students in 6 states from NAF Academies and other schools in the same district with a similar student population from 2011 to 2015. Students in NAF Academies were 3 percent more likely to graduate, of which 3 percent more boys and 2 percent more girls graduated (Sun and Spinney, 2017). In Liberia, the **Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children program** implemented by USAID, aims to improve education for out-of-school girls and boys. It condenses six years of primary education into three years, allowing learners to re-enter formal schooling in a shorter amount of time and engaging them to pursue further education, training or employment. The project also aims to foster positive gender norms. From 2017 to 2021, it enrolled over 32,000 boys and over 30,000 girls (USAID, 2021b).

Some programmes aiming to reduce school dropout specifically target boys. In 2014 in the United Arab Emirates, the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research adapted the **Hands-on-Learning programme** for at-risk secondary school students, originally developed in Australia, for implementation at schools in Ras Al Khaimah. The programme re-engaged secondary school boys in education by taking them out of their usual class environment one day per week to help them improve behavioural skills, increase self-confidence, acquire new skills, implement hands-on projects, and work together with peers and teachers. Students set behavioural goals for their class and prepared and ate meals together. Recently, a toolkit was developed to roll out the programme to more schools (Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research, 2021). Beneficiaries of the programme reported that they enjoyed learning, developed self-confidence and understood the importance of cooperation. In a survey carried out in 2018, every participant reported concentrating fully in the classroom, compared to 60 percent before the intervention, and 83 percent of the boys believed that education is crucial for success compared to 33 percent before the intervention (Rizvi, 2019). While the programme was successful in re-engaging boys, challenges were identified including recruiting qualified staff, convincing parents and teachers of the value of having boys participate one day per week, and funding (Ridge et al., 2017).

Dropout of boys has been implicitly addressed through general initiatives in middle- and high-income countries

In some middle- and high-income countries, boys have been an implicit target of programmes and initiatives, given their overrepresentation among low achieving students and early school leavers (OECD, 2018). Some initiatives aimed for better cross-sectoral collaboration to prevent school dropout. From 2010 to 2011, the **Ungt fólk til athafna (Youth in Activity) programme** – a collaboration between the education and employment sector in Iceland – aimed to help people aged 16–29 to return to studies or enter the labour market. The programme offered placements in an educational programme, internship or job within three months. A drop-in service was established in a special office in a shopping centre to receive young people (Tägtström and Olsen, 2016). An evaluation showed that 40 percent of participants moved on to further study or work after the programme (Helgadottír, 2012).

Tracking students has been an important element of these initiatives. In 2011, France established **The Follow-up and Support to Early School Leavers Platforms**, which coordinate collaboration between local actors from the education, labour, youth and justice departments. It identifies early school leavers and interviews them to understand the reasons for dropout and to define together a plan for reintegration into the education system. While 60 percent of students in one of the zones studied had already found education programmes and 30 percent were not reachable, 10 percent benefited from the guidance (European Commission, 2016). In 2002, the government of Iceland introduced the **Aanval op de uitval (Drive to Reduce Dropout Rates) programme** to prevent early school-leaving. A Youth Unemployment Taskforce adopted three strategies: prevent early learning and ensure that young men and women obtain a basic qualification; implement compulsory working and learning programmes; and implement a supervision and development programme as well as a system for tracking the participation of every student each day (Hoffman, 2011). By 2013, the annual number of dropouts had fallen from 71,000 to 27,000 (Centre for Public Impact, 2016). Also in Iceland, a specially designed **risk detector platform** supports counsellors to identify students at risk of dropping out before completing upper secondary education (Borgonovi and Maghnouj, 2018). The risk detector platform received positive feedback from school counsellors, but has not been evaluated (ibid., European Commission, 2013).

Some middle-income countries where boys are disengaging from and are disadvantaged in education, such as Peru, have put programmes in place that do not directly address the issue, but have the potential to benefit boys, including by reducing the risk of dropout (see **Box 6**).

Box 6

Reducing school dropout and raising attainment levels in Peru

A number of programmes analysed as part of the **Country Case Study on Peru** appear to have an impact on boys' disengagement from education. The overall aim of the **Full Day School programme** is to improve the relevance and quality of Peruvian public secondary schools in both urban and rural areas. To achieve this, the programme extends the school day from 35 to 45 teaching hours in a select number of schools with the aim of then expanding and reaching all schools. A key strength of the Full Day School programme is that it provides increased funding to public secondary schools. The average spending per student in schools with this programme (USD 2,000) almost doubles the average spending per student in the rest of public secondary schools (USD 1,100). A greater emphasis is given to employment-oriented education in the Full Day School educational model. This feature could have a particularly significant influence on school disengagement, as secondary education completion may provide greater employment opportunities. There is evidence that the programme has a positive impact on students' learning outcomes, especially for those from poor households (Agüero, 2016; Cuenca et. al, 2017). The programme does not address gender-related educational issues, and there is no evidence of it having a different impact for boys and girls in terms of academic achievement; however, given the competition between secondary education and entering the workforce for boys, the programme could motivate boys to re-engage in and complete secondary education.

Starting in 2014, the Ministry of Education of Peru implemented **the Rural Secondary School Pedagogical Support programme**. The aim of the programme is to improve the quality of rural education, especially in mathematics and communication, because of the impact these skills have on opportunities to access the labour market and higher education. The programme seeks to address school dropout and violence, which have a strong impact on individual and group well-being within the school, in addition to learning (Espinosa and Ruiz, 2019). Schools receive pedagogical support for mathematics and communication. A teaching assistant is assigned for every eight teachers. Each assistant makes one visit per month which includes observation of teaching and the provision of pedagogical advice to teachers. The first visit consists of a diagnostic and the last an evaluation. A community worker engages with school principals, families and the community, identifying psychosocial problems affecting students, and sexual harassment and school violence (Cuenca et al., 2017). An evaluation showed that the programme increased achievement in reading and mathematics (UN, 2018). The fact that the programme addresses school violence is very relevant for boys' engagement in education. In Peru, bullying among male peers is frequent and boys are more likely to targets of corporal punishment. Boys who do not conform to hegemonic masculinity are frequently victims of violence. Further research is needed on the impact of the programme on the academic performance and engagement of boys.

The **Horizons Programme** has been implemented jointly by the Peruvian Ministry of Education and UNESCO since 2018. It seeks to reduce the gaps between rural and urban secondary education, reduce school dropout rates and help make the problems of rural adolescents more visible (UNESCO, 2019f). The programme has three components. First, it aims to equip secondary school teachers and students with socioemotional and intercultural skills and to provide a double certification of students: secondary and technical education. Second, the programme aims to retain adolescents at school by building resilience of at-risk students and a community network which helps detect and accompany students at risk. Third, the programme tries to raise the profile of rural education in national and regional policies. The programme also addresses gender-specific risk factors, such as the competition between work and school for boys, school violence for girls and boys, and early and unintended pregnancy. Its strengths are the intercultural approach, given that many rural schools are in indigenous communities, the combination of technical and secondary education, which may incentivize boys to continue education, and its flexibility in delivery.

Source: Based on Fuller (2022).

School counselling programmes can widen career opportunities for boys

Some countries have set up initiatives to promote male students' interest in professions that are traditionally dominated by women. Germany has set up a national network and information platform called **Neue Wege für Jungs und Boys'Day (New Paths for Boys and Boys'Day)** which supports gender-sensitive career orientation for boys and dismantles stereotypes related to jobs. It promotes jobs in which at most only 40 percent of men work, including health and care professions. Information is provided to education professionals, career advisors and parents. Exchange between researchers and practitioners is organized through conferences. Over 300,000 boys have participated in Boys'Day activities since 2008. An evaluation has shown that 61 percent of boys felt that their participation was useful for their career decisions and 89 percent of participating companies and institutions reported a good level of boys' interest and engagement (Boys' Day, 2021; OECD, 2015).

Few programmes for boys address intersecting disadvantage or specific groups

Few programmes address boys' intersecting disadvantage in relation to educational participation, progression and learning outcomes. One of the few programmes that does so is **Puentes Escolares (School Bridge Programme**) developed by Buenos Aires City, Argentina, in 2001, with the aim to provide homeless and vulnerable boys and girls with access to education. More than twice as many boys than girls aged 15–18 are homeless in Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires City, 2021). The programme assesses the socioeducational needs of children whose education has been interrupted and aims to reintegrate boys and girls in education by offering learning spaces through NGOs. It builds bridges between NGOs and formal education by accompanying future students individually from the school selection and registration process to graduation (Buenos Aires City, 2001; Ginestra, 2020). Also in Argentina, Buenos Aires Province together with UNICEF started the programme **Salas maternales: madres, padres y hermanos/as mayores, todos en secundaria (Maternity rooms: mothers, fathers and older siblings, all in secondary school)** in 2008. The programme uniquely targets young fathers. It sets up nurseries in schools or in nearby kindergartens to accommodate adolescent parents' children. While children engage in early learning, parents can attend classes. Parents also receive support to carry out their parental role. In 2017, over 80 nurseries had been set up. An evaluation found that the programme was able to increase school retention, leading to more school completion among adolescent parents. While the programme included fathers, the evaluation showed that more targeted efforts are needed to reach young fathers through the programme (UNICEF, 2017). The **Learning basic skills while serving time programme**, funded by the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, Vox, aims to increase literacy and numeracy attainment of prisoners in Norway. The programme was piloted in 2009 in the all-male Bastoy Prison, involving reading, writing and numeracy classes run by teachers and prison staff over four months, building inmates' self-esteem and confidence with the intention of improving job prospects after prison. Participants' literacy proficiency level increased by 25 percent through the programme and participants expressed interest in continuing to learn. Their future job prospects were improved by learning to write a CV and job applications (UIL, 2016). The Bastoy prison achieved the lowest reoffending rate in Europe – 16 percent – by treating offenders fairly and providing prisoners with education and training (James, 2013). Success factors included the close cooperation between teachers and prison staff, the use of computers and the possibility for learners to co-create course content. After the pilot, the programme was extended to 12 other prisons between 2010 and 2012 teaching both male and female inmates (UIL, 2016).

Programmes addressing gender and ethnicity received mixed feedback. In 2014, the White House launched the **My Brother's Keeper initiative** in the United States. The programme was designed to improve life opportunities of boys and young men of colour through the reform of school discipline policies and practices, mentoring and job training, reaching 250 communities and raising USD 600 million from the private sector and philanthropies (White House, 2016). The initiative was criticized as seeing young African-American men and boys as being 'damaged' and attributing problems to them instead of to the economic and social order which negatively affects their opportunities (Dumas, 2016). Some argued that the exclusive focus on boys ignores the structural economic and racial conditions affecting both African-American girls and boys (Crenshaw, 2014). In 2015, the **My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Alliance** was launched to bring the initial initiative to scale, which later became an initiative of the Obama Foundation, focusing on youth violence prevention and mentorship programmes (Obama Foundation, 2021). In Oakland, California, MBK implements the African American Male Achievement programme, focusing on classes for male African-American students taught by male African-American teachers, delivering social-emotional training

and academic support, African-American history and culturally relevant pedagogy. A programme evaluation showed a reduction in dropout of African-American males by 43 percent and smaller but still significant reductions in dropout of African-American young women (Dee and Penner, 2019).

In 2011, New York City launched the **Young Men's Initiative** to address disparities faced by young men of colour, including the **Young Adult Literacy program**, which aimed to improve literacy and numeracy of young adults not in education, not working and with reading levels of grades 4 to 8. Starting from 2015, a bridge model combined academic instruction with workforce services to build skills and competencies needed for work. A programme evaluation showed that participants increased grade levels in literacy by 1.4 and in math by 1.1. Those who started with the lowest education level made the most gains (Westat, 2013). Another evaluation found that the programme filled an important gap in services for disconnected and disadvantaged youth and identified small class sizes, one-to-one support and the ability to learn at one's own pace as its strengths (Hossain and Terwelp, 2015).

Transgender boys are disproportionally bullied and often discriminated against in school (GLSEN, 2018; UNESCO, 2021d). The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) developed a **Model School District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students** in the United States. It offers guidance and policy to teachers and school staff on bullying, school sports, student privacy, dress codes and equal access to school facilities based on school policies and federal court rulings (GLSEN, 2018). Also in the United States, the **Human Rights Campaign Foundation** runs the Welcoming Schools programme to improve school climates with LGBTIQ inclusive trainings, employing certified facilitators to work closely with school leadership to tailor training to individual school needs. The facilitators provide professional development and accompanying lesson plans as well as book lists, including on preventing bullying at school, helping transgender and non-binary students to do well at school and creating classrooms that welcome all families. The programme also builds school districts capacity by training district facilitators to deliver training to elementary schools (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2021).

Overall, and in line with other research, programmes need to pay attention to intersectionality, as well as the accessibility and relevance of programmes to marginalized boys and adolescent men. Boys and men should not be framed as 'the problem' (Marcus et al., 2018).

Programmes in emergency and conflict situations tend to neglect boys and men

During emergencies, strategies which have proven to be effective in helping both girls and boys continue to learn include keeping up community demand, creating child-friendly spaces and running back-to-school campaigns (Sperling et al., 2016).

Some programmes for re-enrolling out-of-school children have shown benefits for boys. Accelerated education programmes (AEPs) can be effective during conflict or crisis. Accelerated education aims to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth in a flexible, age-appropriate and accelerated manner. This may include those who had to interrupt their education or entirely missed out on it because of poverty, marginalization, conflict or crisis. AEPs equip learners with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education though effective teaching and learning approaches in a shortened time cycle (INEE, 2021). In 2012–2015, the Norwegian Refugee Council supported an **accelerated learning programme** within the **Dadaab Alternative Basic Education Strategy** in Kenya, aimed at helping younger Somali refugee learners in Dadaab camps to access the formal school system and ensure that older students achieve functional literacy. The AEP condenses Kenya's eight-year curriculum into four years and 58 percent of boys attending the programme had interrupted their formal education (Flemming, 2017). There is evidence that the programme increased access for male out-of-school children in particular (Shah, 2015). A study identified the programme's strengths: it identified, targeted and enrolled girls and boys that were over-age and out of school; it offered a shorter school day suitable for adolescent learners who had additional responsibilities; and school was free and facilities were newly constructed and secure (Flemming, 2017).

Second chance programmes can help displaced boys gain access to education. The Cox's Bazar District in Bangladesh hosts the majority of the displaced Rohingya population. Enrolment in primary education is the lowest in the country. While fewer girls than boys are enrolled, the dropout rate in primary education is particularly high for boys – 40 percent vs 23 percent for girls. **The Second Reaching Out of School Children Project for Bangladesh**, implemented by the World Bank for 2018 to 2022, aims at improving equitable access, retention and completion of primary education for out-of-school children. One of its objectives is to provide safe and equitable learning opportunities for boys and girls, young women and men of the displaced Rohingya population. This includes a particular focus

on working with adolescent boys. Cultural events, sports, gardening, tree planting and arts and craft are used to raise awareness to prevent gender-based violence and the exploitation of boys as drug peddlers and to discourage them from getting involved in anti-social activities (World Bank, 2018).

Both girls and boys can be vulnerable in emergency situations, especially if they have to flee their homes. Plan International's **Boys for Change project** works with 12- to 17-year-old boys in refugee camps in Rwanda to reduce abusive behaviour by building empathy and respect towards girls and women. Boys acquire the knowledge and skills they need to become committed to sharing messages about peaceful relationships and gender equality among their peers (Plan International, 2017). In 2017, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) started to implement awareness-raising activities on sexual violence against boys and girls from a search-and-rescue ship in the Mediterranean. These included providing information on the different types of sexual violence boys experience and the benefits of receiving medical care for survivors. This resulted in an increase in the proportion of male survivors accessing medical care from 3 percent in 2017 to 33 percent in 2018 (UNICEF, 2021d). **Child-friendly spaces** can help boys and girls attend early childhood care and education during displacement. World Vision Uganda and Save the Children implemented child-friendly spaces for refugee girls and boys in Uganda fleeing from conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2012. Tent areas were set up for activities as well as latrines and playground equipment. Literacy and numeracy activities were organized as well as sports and play activities. A randomized survey showed that 71 percent of boys and 75 percent of girls attended the spaces (Metzler et al., 2013).

Programmes and initiatives for girls can have a positive effect on boys …

Programmes focusing on improving girls' access to education can also have a positive spillover effect on boys. In Burkina Faso**,** a programme that provided lunch to primary school students and **take-home rations for girls**, conditional on attendance, increased enrolment for both girls and boys by about 4 to 6 percentage points. Boys who lived in villages where girls received take-home rations increased enrolment whether they had a sister or not (Kazianga et al., 2012). However, while school feeding programmes can attract boys and girls into school, they do not automatically translate into learning (Krishnaratne et al., 2013).

… but should be inclusive

Programmes aiming at increasing gender equality can lead to unintended outcomes, such as resentment from boys. The first phase of the **UN Joint Programme for Girls Education in Malawi**, funded by the Government of Norway was implemented in 2014–2017. The objective of the programme was to improve access to and the quality of education for girls and boys through a human rights–based approach, targeting over 80 primary schools, and involved improving the learning environment and teachers' attitudes and skills, providing school meals, running a second chance programme for out-of-school-girls, and providing sexual and reproductive health services and empowering girls and boys to reduce gender-based violence (JPGE, 2019). The programme focused on girls' education and did not include boys as a group to support girls' education. But it directly and indirectly benefited girls and boys from poor vulnerable families. The programme reduced the dropout rate of girls from 16 percent to 5 percent. By the end of 2017, over 50,000 girls and nearly 48,000 boys had received school meals and nearly 13,000 girls and over 1,600 boys had received take-home rations. While the programme was very succesful and helped reduce gender inequality, boys' resentment was an unexpected outcome. Boys and their families felt that it was unfair that girls received more support. A lesson learned from the project is that activities aiming at closing an existing gender gap should not exclude boys. The needs of both girls and boys must to be considered. Awareness-raising activities need to target both girls and boys (WFP, 2019).

Policies at the state and society level

National laws and policies, or lack thereof, can influence boys' and girls' participation, progression and learning outcomes in education. The media, which operates at the level of society, also play an important role in how gender norms are perceived and impacts girls' and boys' understanding of their selves as well as their education (see **Box 7**).

Box 7

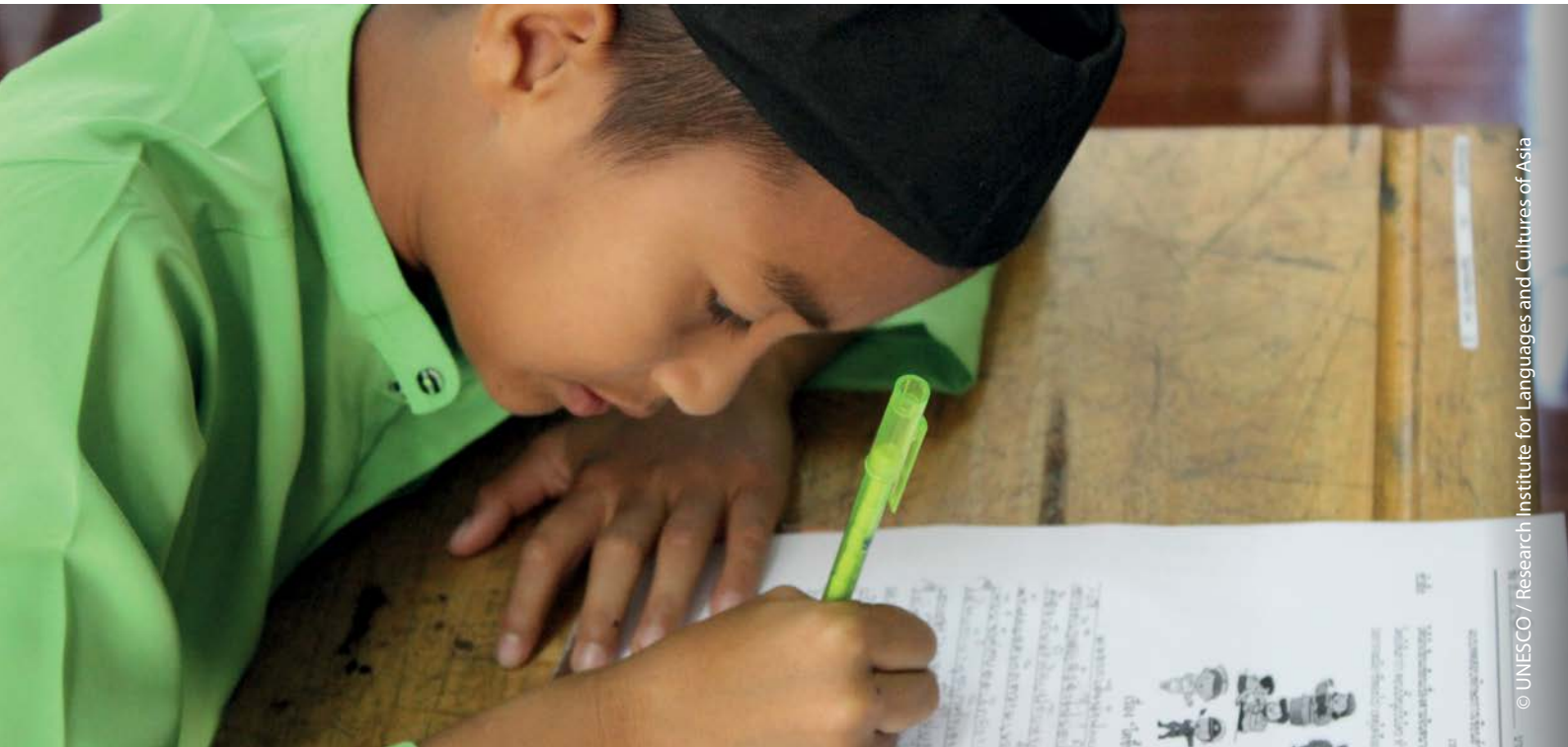
Media-based interventions to engage boys

The media are powerful in shaping opinions and validating or challenging social values. They have an important impact on how gender norms are received and evolve (Council of Europe, n.d.; Ward and Grower, 2020). Media can be an influential vehicle for awareness-raising campaigns and for challenging social norms related to harmful forms of masculinity. Yet, a recent review showed that despite some positive change over the last two decades, masculinity is still conveyed in harmful and restrictive ways (Ward and Grower, 2020).

Media-based interventions can help support boys' engagement and interest in learning. The educational television show, ***Sesame Street***, has been shown to improve school readiness, in particular for boys and for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Kearney and Levine, 2015).

With only a few notable exceptions, very little policy attention has been given to gender disparities in education outcomes at boys' expense. Some countries have gender equality as an overall criterion for designing any policy. The Netherlands for example, has gender equality as one of the criteria in any policy design, making sure that all policies benefits boys and girls equally (OECD, 2018). More specifically for education, existing relevant educational policies are predominantly found in high-income countries. After what came to be known as the 'PISA shock' (Fischman et al., 2019) in the early 2000s, which highlighted boys' low achievement in international assessments of literacy skills relative to girls, several European countries, including Austria, Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, made reducing boys' lower achievement a policy priority (Eurydice, 2010; OECD, 2012a).

In the Caribbean, regional conferences kicked off initiatives to respond to boys' disengagement and dropout (Figueroa, 2010). New Zealand established a **Boys' Educational Achievement Reference Group** to undertake research and provide policy advice on matters relating to the educational achievement of boys at secondary school (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015). And Norway put in place a **National Commission on Gender Equality in Education**, which acknowledged the need to address a performance gap at boys' expense (see **Box 8**).



Box 8

National Commission on Gender Equality in Education, Norway

The Government of Norway appointed a **National Commission on Gender Equality in Education** in 2017. Its mandate was to generate knowledge on the reasons for gender gaps in education and to provide recommendations to close these gaps.

The Commission published a report in 2019 which showed that boys systematically fare worse than girls in school. The performance gap was particularly large in literacy skills and Norwegian language. The report highlighted that 70 percent of the students receiving special needs education were boys; dropout rates were higher among boys; and 30 percent of boys and 20 percent of girls had not completed upper secondary education. In 2015, for the first time, more women than men obtained a doctorate degree and, in 2016, 40 percent of men aged 30–39 held a university degree compared with 60 percent of women.

Based on existing knowledge of gender gaps in education, the report developed 64 recommendations grounded on the following principles. Policy measures should: improve boys' performance and not impair girls' performance; contribute to closing the socioeconomic gap in performance; target boys and girls, men and women; contribute to an inclusive learning environment; and be evidence-based. Recommendations were developed in four areas: early intervention and adapted education, such as models for flexible school starting age; content and structure in primary and lower secondary education, such as models establishing different weighting of final and examination marks; transitions in educational pathways, for example inscribing into law the right to apprenticeships for students in TVET programmes; and evidence systems for pre-primary school, primary and secondary education, for instance, the development of a national course database for education (Norway National Commission on Gender Equality in Education, 2019).

Few low- or middle-income countries have specific policies to improve boys' enrolment and completion of primary or secondary education, even in countries with severe disparities at boys' expense (Jha et al., 2012). In some countries, despite evidence of boys' needs gender equality discourse in educational policy and planning has retained an exclusive focus on girls' education. In the Philippines, where the country's Education for All 2015 review recommended the development of policy to address boys' disengagement and dropout (Philippines Department of Education, 2014), gender equity mechanisms for education only refer to women and girls (Philippines Department of Education, 2017). There is some progress. In Lesotho, where more than 140 girls were enrolled in secondary education for every 100 boys in 2012, policy documents made no mention of strategies to tackle constraints on boys' education (UNESCO, 2015c) until the 2016 Education Sector Plan, which acknowledges the role of non-formal distance teaching centres in retraining herder boys and out-of-school youth (Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training, 2016).

This section considers countries' actions to respond to the challenges of boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education and highlights several key policy options. The Dashboard in **Table 2** summarizes educational policy documents and sector plans from selected countries that have demonstrable gender disparities at boys' expense in enrolment, completion and/or learning. In some countries, gender disparities at boys' expense have long existed but show improvement, while in other countries disadvantage at boys' expense has more recently emerged.

The analysis focuses on policy responses that address identified inequalities and governments' key groups of interest. While the initial aim of the review was to focus on policies targeting boys, in very few cases are boys, as a group, listed as a policy concern and the analysis was subsequently widened. Even where disparities at boys' expense are acknowledged, this report's analysis shows only very limited attention to issues of boys' disadvantage. Of the countries reviewed, only four – Bangladesh, the Gambia, Jamaica and New Zealand – had a policy specifically targeting boys. Jamaica has been particularly successful in improving the situation for boys.

Key policy responses considered here include both demand-side strategies (e.g. reducing school costs, non-formal and complementary basic education provision, remedial support and career guidance) and supply-side strategies (e.g. infrastructure, teacher quality, curricular and pedagogical reform), as well as means to ensure safe and inclusive learning environments (**Table 2**). In contrast to strategies to improve girls' education, advocacy and campaigns rarely target boys and while accountability measures will benefit all children, gender-responsive budgeting more commonly spotlights issues relating to girls and female teachers. Several strategies emerging from the review are discussed briefly below. This analysis is supplemented with pertinent examples from other countries.

Table 2: Dashboard of policy responses to address inequality in education and boys' disengagement and disadvantage

	TACKLING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION – POLICY RESPONSES											
COUNTRY	SCHOOL COSTS: FEES, STIPENDS, CCTS, SCHOOL FEEDING	INFRASTRUCTURE E.G. SCHOOLS, WASH, ACCESSIBILITY	ADVOCACY: PROMOTING ENROLMENT AND RETENTION	PROGRESS, REMEDIAL SUPPORT & FLEXIBLE OR NON-FORMAL LEARNING	TEACHER RECRUITMENT, TRAINING & DEPLOYMENT	INVESTING IN FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS: PRE-PRIMARY, ECCE EARLY GRADE LITERACY	CURRICULAR/ PEDAGOGY REFORM, E.G. GENDER-RESPONSIVE, INCLUSIVE, ICT	TACKLING SCHOOL VIOLENCE, E.G. ANTI-BULLYING, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	TRANSITIONS TO WORKPLACE, E.G. SKILLS, TVET, COUNSELLING	ACCOUNTABILITY E.G. GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGETS & MONITORING, DATA COLLECTION	TARGETING BOYS	KEY GROUPS
ARMENIA	✓					✓				✓		PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
BANGLADESH	✓	✓				✓			✓		✓	PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. GIRLS, BOYS
BHUTAN	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		GIRLS
COLOMBIA		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			RURAL POPULATIONS
CROATIA	✓			✓					✓			NON-LITERATE ADULTS
FINLAND	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓			MIGRANTS, RURAL POPULATIONS
GAMBIA	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SEN, ADOLESCENT MOTHERS
HONDURAS	✓			✓			✓	✓		✓		RURAL POPULATIONS, IP, AFRO-HONDURAN
IRELAND	✓			✓						✓		MINORITY LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

JAMAICA	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	BOYS, SEN, GIFTED CHILDREN
JORDAN	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓			REFUGEES
MONGOLIA				✓	✓	✓						HERDER CHILDREN, PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
MYANMAR	✓			✓		✓	✓					ETHNIC MINORITIES, LOW SES
NAMIBIA		✓	✓			✓				✓		PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, RURAL & STREET CHILDREN OVER-AGE,
NEW ZEALAND		✓							✓	✓	✓	
PHILIPPINES		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		IP, MUSLIMS, PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, BOYS
RWANDA		✓	✓		✓				✓			SEN, FEMALE TVET/ STEM STUDENTS
SURINAME	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓			
SWEDEN	✓			✓		✓		✓				LINGUISTIC MINORITY, MIGRANTS

Source: Authors' analysis of education policies, sector plans and EFA review documents accessed through UNESCO-IIEP Planipolis at https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/

Notes: CCTs: conditional cash transfers; ECCE: early childhood care and education; ICT: information communication technology; IP: indigenous peoples; SEN: persons with special educational needs; SES: persons with lower socioeconomic status; TVET: technical and vocational education and training; WASH: water, sanitation and hygiene.

Reducing the costs of schooling

Enacting policies to make primary education free and compulsory – central to the EFA movement – has been critical in driving increases in educational access globally (UNESCO, 2015c). Yet large numbers of the poorest children remain out of school, with families unable to meet additional costs related to schooling – books, uniforms, transport – or to forgo the opportunity costs of children's work in or outside the home.

SDG target 4.1 calls for universal free secondary education to reduce financial barriers to education and improve young people's attainment. As of 2020, 51 countries of 188 with data had yet to establish legal frameworks guaranteeing 10 or more years of free, compulsory education (UIS, 2021a), the threshold for lower secondary education. In many of these countries, including Bangladesh, Burundi, Croatia, the Gambia, Haiti, Jamaica, Lesotho, Myanmar and Samoa, all secondary education charges fee. Yet a policy shift to free secondary education is likely to be limited in impact in countries where large numbers of children fail to complete primary education or cannot meet the additional costs that accrue to a transition to secondary education (e.g. transport, uniform, accommodation and families' opportunity costs). Analysis of low- and lower-middle-income countries where fee-free secondary education has recently been introduced, including in Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania, indicated that the share of the poorest, most disadvantaged children progressing into, and completing, secondary school was extremely small (Zubairi and Rose, 2019). Targeting of government resources to provide additional financial support for the most disadvantaged – beyond the removal of school fees – can help support their completion of a full cycle of primary and secondary education.

Thirteen countries where boys are less likely than girls to complete their education have adopted strategies to reduce school costs, but only few of them are targeted at boys (see **Table 2**). An exception is Bangladesh, where targeted stipends for girls contributed to raising the demand for girls' education and reduced and even reversed gender gaps in enrolment and completion previously at girls' expense (Sabates et al., 2013). Increases in girls' enrolment were not matched by boys' enrolment and in 2012, only 84 boys completed lower secondary school for every 100 girls (Baulch, 2011). Under the latest Bangladesh Education Sector Plan, various stipend programmes will be streamlined into one harmonized stipend for Grades 6 to 12 and extended to boys from low-income households, including for madrasahs, religious schools that provide a foundation in Qur'anic teachings alongside basic education (Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2020). Previously, the **Gambia** provided financial assistance for needy boys in Grades 7 to 9 to pay fees and other levies (Gambia Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, 2014), but following the removal of fees for basic education, only a bursary scheme for girls has remained (Gambia Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education and Higher Education Research Science and Technology, 2017). As of 2019, fewer boys than girls were completing primary and transitioning to secondary education, suggesting that the government should consider reinstating support for boys.

Conditional cash transfer programmes, which give payments to low-income, vulnerable households conditional on households fulfilling certain requirements, often include an educational component, such as additional cash sums for each child in school and attending regularly (Krishnaratne et al., 2013). Cash transfers can offset both direct and opportunity costs for poor households and have been shown to bring both short-term and long-term gains in school participation and learning (ibid.) Conditional cash transfers were introduced and gained popularity in Latin America (see **Box 9**). Yet, despite the popularity of large-scale cash transfer programmes as a social policy to support low-income families, some programmes have faced challenges in targeting the most vulnerable (Garcia-Jaramillo and Maranti, 2015) and have been critiqued for their lack of cost-effectiveness in improving learning outcomes in low- and middle-income countries (Damon et al., 2016; Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2020).

Box 9 Conditional cash transfer policies and programmes have a positive effect on boys in Latin America and the Caribbean

High levels of poverty, school costs and the desire or need to work impact on boys' school attendance and learning in Jamaica, especially in secondary education. In 2001, the Jamaican government established the **Programme of Advancement through Health and Education** (PATH) cash transfer programme to support low-income families, through which cash payments to households were made conditional on children being enrolled and attending school. To date, over 40 percent of households benefit from the scheme. A government evaluation found high non-compliance and dropout rates, especially among boys in lower secondary schools. Therefore, it was decided to increase payments for boys in higher primary grades – 10 percent more than for girls – to encourage boys to remain in school. This targeted approach was successful, leading to increased school attendance, especially for boys in the capital, Kingston. Urban boys who received PATH cash transfers performed better in their Grade 6 Achievement Tests compared with their non-PATH counterparts, consequently leading to their placement in higher-quality secondary schools (Bouillon et al., 2007; Clarke, 2020; Stampini, et al., 2016).

Launched in 1997 and running until 2019, Mexico's conditional cash transfer programme since 2014, called **PROSPERA**, has been continuously adapted. Starting with giving mothers money to send their children to school and health centres, the programme expanded to increase access to higher education and formal employment. It also provided access to financial services. In 2014, over 6 million households benefited from the programme (Dávila Lárraga, 2016). Several evaluations showed a positive impact on school enrolment rates, years of schooling, nutritional status and health (CONEVAL, 2016; Fernard et al., 2009; Secretaria de Desarollo Social, 2008). One study found that boys gained nearly 10 months of additional schooling, and girls nearly 8 months on average (World Bank, 2014). The programme was successful because its target population was extremely well-defined and the mechanisms for selecting beneficiaries were transparent and clear. Giving money directly to the families encouraged them to send their children to school and health centres. Moreover, the programme had a strong presence in the communities, enabling direct communication. Finally, the programme included built-in evaluations from the start, which helped to refine the programme design. PROSPERA has been replicated in many other countries around the globe (World Bank, 2014), for example, in Nicaragua, which adopted the PROSPERA framework (Dunn, 2021).

In Colombia, the programme **Youth in Action** motivates young men and women aged 18–24 to enter and complete higher education by contributing to their tuition fees and providing direct cash payments conditional upon the successful continuation of their studies. The programme provides support for students from low-income backgrounds with 300,000 young people benefiting. The programme may be particularly attractive to young men who are underrepresented in higher education. The gender parity index in enrolment for higher education was at a disadvantage for young men (1.17) in 2019 (UIS database, November 2021). As youth unemployment rose considerably during the COVID-19 pandemic, Youth in Action fast-tracked its intention to widen its age coverage to 18 to 28 years. An extra one-off payment to existing beneficiaries was made. An additional expansion to 200,000 more young people is planned (Álvarez-Iglesias et al., 2021).

Although evidence is mixed, a few conditional cash transfer programmes were associated with improved test scores and in some instances, the advantage persisted over the long-term. Evidence from Nicaragua showed that boys who benefited from five years on the conditional cash transfer programme had higher test scores in home language and mathematics 10 years after the start of the programme compared with boys who had only been on the programme for 2 years (Damon et al., 2016).

In Nepal, scholarships to attend government TVET institutions have been provided for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as low caste Dalits and young men previously caught up in the country's Maoist conflict. In addition, private institutions are mandated to provide scholarships for students from low-income backgrounds (Karki, 2012).

Improving infrastructure

Nine countries have policy guidance and education development plans that include strategies to improve school infrastructure and achieve minimum standards. Although these do not specifically target boys, boys are likely to benefit from such improvements. In Suriname, where boys and girls in the rural interior face difficulties due to long distances to school, the focus is on school construction (Republic of Suriname, 2014). Namibia, the Philippines and Rwanda all highlight the need to upgrade school facilities and examination centres to be accessible for children with disabilities in their education policies (Namibia Ministry of Education, 2013; Republic of Philippines Department of Education, 2017; Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2018). Bangladesh and Bhutan have programmes to roll out the construction of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities that are gender-segregated and disability-accessible (Bangladesh Directorate of Primary Education, 2018; Bhutan Ministry of Education, 2019).

Evidence indicates that where schools are in short supply, or of poor quality, the construction of additional infrastructure designed to promote girls' education can also have positive spillover effects for boys. An impact evaluation of the construction of 'girl-friendly' schools with facilities such as clean water and separate toilets for girls and boys, alongside other gender-sensitive initiatives, was shown to significantly increase enrolment ratios for both girls (22 percent) and boys (16 percent) (Kazianga et al., 2013). In India, the construction of toilets decreased girls' dropout rate by 12 percentage points and that of boys by 11 percentage points (Adukia, 2017).

Improving accessibility and quality of pre-primary education

Evidence indicates that disparities in learning outcomes start early. Policy options with the potential to address boys' low achievement, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, include investment in pre-primary education to improve accessibility and to support school readiness through the development of critical foundational skills. Good quality pre-primary education can also help reduce the likelihood of grade repetition in early grades (Hares et al., 2020). Investment and expansion of pre-primary education is a common strategy among the majority of countries reviewed (see **Table 2**) and has been a priority area for Armenia, Finland, Myanmar and Namibia. Mongolia's current education sector plan includes a kindergarten mapping exercise to support the expansion and upgrade of current facilities. A long-term aim is to achieve full enrolment of children from herder communities, who are historically educationally marginalized, in pre-primary education (Mongolia Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports, 2020).

Non-formal provision to support a return to education

Although approaches vary, accelerated learning is commonly delivered through non-formal settings, with community-based facilitators employing a condensed curriculum focusing on foundational and relevant learning (Longden, 2013). Complementary designs often start with mother-tongue instruction, but aim to bring children's learning up to a level that allows for re-entry into formal schooling (Carter et al., 2020). Through integrating complementary educational provision into education systems and policy, governments are better able to target out-of-school children: those from unreached communities, who exited formal schooling in the early grades, or had their education interrupted by conflict or humanitarian emergencies (DeStefano et al., 2006; Longden et al., 2013; Miske, 2013).

Although none of the policies reviewed made specific mention of boys as a target group for non-formal provision, such approaches could support disadvantaged boys in contexts where they are disproportionately out of school. For example, the **Alternative Learning System** (ALS) in the Philippines is a non-formal education system that provides a 'second chance' education for children and youth. This alternative, parallel system helps fulfil a constitutional mandate to provide free and inclusive secondary education for all (Smith et al., 2021). ALS includes two core components: the Basic Literacy Programme and the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Programme. The former targets out-of-school children and youth without foundational skills, while the latter targets young people over the age of 15 who can read and write and who, on completion, can transition into training and higher education institutions or to employment that requires a high school education (Mamba et al., 2021). Almost 60 percent of ALS graduates who pass the A&E exam enrol in tertiary education (World Bank, 2018). ALS classes are held in over 4,400 community learning centres across the country and are a key educational trajectory for disadvantaged young people (Mamba et al., 2021). ALS plays a vital role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of young people who are at risk, who have been through the juvenile justice system, or involved in conflict (Borela, 2020).

The development of accelerated learning programmes could counteract learning losses including those incurred during school closures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. The **Accelerated Education Working Group** has developed 10 principles for effective practice (see **Box 10**). In Jordan, where recent research found boys at particular risk of dropout during school closures (Jones et al., 2021), the Ministry of Education, in partnership with UNICEF, launched a national blended learning programme, **Learning Bridges**, in September 2020 for all students Grades 4 to 9. Trained teachers use printed activity packs developed for an accelerated learning core curriculum linked to online resources to support children's remote learning during school closure, and for additional support as schools reopen. Men trained as Learning Bridges Champions play an essential role in encouraging teachers in boys' schools to participate in the programme and engage boys in learning activities (UNICEF, 2021c).

Box **10**

Principles for effective accelerated education programmes (AEPs)

The Accelerated Education Working Group developed the following 10 principles for effective practice for AEPs:

1. AEP is flexible and for over-age learners
2. Curriculum, materials and pedagogy are genuinely accelerated, AE-suitable and use the relevant language of instruction
3. AE learning environment is inclusive, safe and learning-ready
4. Teachers are recruited, supervised and remunerated
5. Teachers participate in continuous professional development
6. Goals, monitoring and funding align
7. AE centre is effectively managed
8. Community is engaged and accountable
9. AEP is a legitimate, credible education option that results in learner certification in primary education
10. AEP is aligned with the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture

Source: INEE (2017).

Improving achievement and progression with remedial support

Despite marked gender gaps in reading and skills at boys' disadvantage, policy frameworks rarely address the gender dimensions of this issue. Initiatives to promote reading may focus on a particular demographic group, and are more commonly implemented by non-governmental organizations (see above for programmes and interventions addressing the school level).

Of the countries reviewed, Ireland and Sweden have policies to support students learning in a second language. Ireland's Department of Children and Youth Affairs established a national policy framework to improve the integration of migrants into its education system, including language support (European Commission, 2021). In 2015, Sweden launched its **Läslyftet (Boost for Reading**) training programme for pre-primary teachers (see above) as part of a broader effort to support the language acquisition of young children for whom Swedish is not their mother tongue (OECD, 2017). Finland has implemented policy that implicitly addresses boys' low performance (see **Box 11**). However, these initiatives lack a targeted focus on gender disparities.

Box 11

Addressing the low academic achievement of boys in Finland

Boys are generally overrepresented in special education in high-income countries (Cooc and Kiru, 2018). In Finland, the **three-tiered student support model** addressed factors associated with boys' underachievement. Each student's situation is monitored, and support provided immediately if needed and for as long as necessary. Three levels of support for learning and school attendance are provided: general, enhanced and special needs. These include different forms of support such as remedial instruction, part-time special needs education, school assistant services and special aids. They can be used in a flexible manner (Finland Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). An evaluation showed the model reduced the share of pupils enrolled in special schools from 2 percent to 1 percent from 2004 to 2014 (Pirttimaa, 2016).

Targeted funding has been used to prevent dropout and increase academic achievement of students. Since 2016**,** Finland provided **funding for promoting educational equity in disadvantaged schools** through municipalities to support schools in areas with high unemployment, low attainment rates and high shares of low-achieving students and students receiving special education needs support. In 2017, EUR 16 million was provided. Disadvantaged schools received funding for teacher or teaching assistant resources to reduce class sizes. An evaluation of the policy in Helsinki showed that dropout reduced by 3 percent for Finnish students and 6 percent for immigrant students. Effects were largest among low-performing Finnish boys with 30 percent fewer dropping out from upper secondary education compared with 10 percent for immigrant boys (Finland Ministry of Education, 2017; Silliman, 2017).

Finding alternatives to streaming and segregation

As highlighted in **Chapter 2**, grade repetition is a strong predictor of poor education outcomes, including dropout, and, on average, boys are at greater risk of repeating grades than girls. The Suriname Education for All 2015 Review noted that boys are more likely to repeat grades at primary school (Suriname Ministry of Education and Community Development, 2014), yet Suriname has no policies to address this. In West Africa, where repetition rates are very high, government attempts to curb repetition faced resistance from teachers and parents (Hares et al. 2020). One policy option to minimize grade repetition is to bring in automatic promotion to the next grade at the end of each school year, regardless of performance. This may support boys' learning and engagement, as long as adequate remedial support is provided for those lagging behind (Hares et al., 2020).

Regular remedial classes that employ learner-centred methodologies can provide such support. For example, the **Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)** approach, championed by the Indian NGO Pratham, which teaches primary-age children in groups based on learning needs rather than age or grade and regularly assesses progress, can give boys (and girls) the space to develop foundational skills, learn at their own pace and, ultimately, catch up with the curriculum (Teaching at the Right Level, 2021). This methodology has been taken to scale in India and has shown some success in Botswana (Banerjee et al., 2017). Further research into this approach as an alternative for streaming for boys is required. Other flexible, learner-centred approaches also warrant consideration, such as activity-based learning, which is based on innovative multigrade teaching methods that allow children to move through learning tasks at their own pace (Blum, 2009). Evidence-based strategies for remedial support are important policy options to help children catch up on lost learning following the COVID-19 pandemic (Azevedo et al. 2021). Complementing such strategies with appropriate teacher training is essential.

As a policy option to improve learning outcomes for boys, implementation of single-sex schools has limited appeal. Research, predominantly in higher-income countries, has not found evidence that single-sex schools produce better learning outcomes than co-educational schools, but rather reflect known predictors of success, such as higher household incomes (Halpern, et al., 2011). Conversely, research indicates that segregation by gender can undermine boys' motivation to improve and negatively impacts on classroom environments and learning outcomes (OECD, 2019c). As noted in **Chapter 3**, in OECD countries, having more

girls in classrooms is associated with a more positive learning environment (ibid.) However, girls' performance remains relatively constant regardless of whether there are more boys or girls in the classroom, suggesting that policies which focus on increasing the proportion of girls in schools and certain disciplines (e.g. in STEM or TVET) have a positive impact on boys' educational outcomes (European Commission, 2021). An important caveat, of course, is that this research is largely restricted to high-income countries where co-educational schools are the norm. In other countries and contexts, there may be cultural requirements for single-sex schools and research is lacking on the relative impacts on boys and girls of gender-balanced classroom settings. Single-sex schooling reduces boys' and girls' opportunities to work together in a supervised environment and learn first-hand about gender relations (Reilly et al., 2019). Positive and cooperative learning with others is an effective method for improving interpersonal relationships (Banks, 2015; Halpern, et al., 2011), with clear implications for gender equality goals.

Teacher quality and recruitment

In some high-income countries, there are concerns that the higher number of female teachers compared to male teachers will have negative effects on learners. But there is little robust evidence to show that teachers' gender alone affects boys' learning outcomes. Page and Jha's (2009) multicountry study — in India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago — concluded that a teacher's quality and competencies, rather than their gender, were what mattered for meaningful engagement with both boys and girls.

Yet policies to improve the inclusiveness of the teaching profession and build a more gender-balanced, ethnically diverse workforce may support boys' engagement, as well as provide much-needed representation for minority groups and fulfil wider social justice and gender equality goals (Carrington et al., 2007; Francis et al., 2008; Pollard, 2020; UNESCO, 2014). Evidence from the United States indicated that African-American male students assigned to an African-American teacher at primary school not only perform better on standardized tests, but are significantly less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to enrol in college compared with same-race peers assigned non-African-American teachers. These long-term outcomes were particularly pronounced for poorer students (Gershenson et al., 2018).

Seven of the policies reviewed for this report include strategies to recruit and retain teachers (see **Table 2**), though not explicitly to improve boys' participation or learning. The exception was Jordan's Education Strategic Plan, which acknowledged the lower quality of teachers in boys-only public schools and proposed policy options to improve teacher selection and recruitment (Jordan Ministry of Education, 2018). Education policy in Bhutan and Colombia includes incentives, professional development and teacher welfare initiatives to attract and retain teachers in rural areas, although no mention is made of specific strategies to improve the diversity of the teaching cadre.

Curriculum and pedagogical reform

Policy options to respond to boys' low achievement and disengagement need to address both what and how children learn. Inclusive and equitable learning can be promoted through curriculum reform and teacher training, including classroom approaches that foster active learning and collaboration and enhance transferable and socioemotional skills (Jha et al., 2012; OECD, 2021a; Saito et al., 2021). Policies to establish improved, evidence-based teaching strategies can be particularly effective if implemented within a school environment that promotes respect and cooperation (Jha et al., 2012).

While unconscious bias and stereotyping may reinforce the view that boys will benefit from more competitive interactions in classrooms (see **Box 12**), research indicates the opposite. A study of four different teaching styles in mathematics lessons in Nigerian secondary schools found that a cooperative strategy – incorporating teamwork, collaboration and sharing ideas – led to significantly better achievement of students in mathematics compared with those exposed to competitive, individualistic and conventional strategies (Oloyede et al., 2012). Both boys and girls benefited from the more collaborative classroom work (ibid.) A randomized trial of cooperative learning strategies in rural middle schools in the United States found that such strategies also helped improve peer interactions and reduced bullying incidences (Van Ryzin and Roseth, 2018).

Boys who are supported to build socioemotional skills in cooperation and engaging others are more likely to develop a greater sense of school belonging, in turn supporting academic achievement (OECD, 2021a). Teachers can help boys and girls counteract potentially harmful stereotypes by approaching socio-emotional skills as learnable skills rather than a fixed, gendered traits (ibid.)

A review of evidence on possible approaches to support disadvantaged students and close learning gaps as schools reopen in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland following COVID-19 closures calls for policy-makers to fund and prioritize socioemotional learning interventions (Outhwaite and Gulliford, 2020).

Box 12

What about boy-friendly policies?

Several researchers and practitioners have cautioned against simply shifting attention from girls to boys in contexts where boys are disadvantaged. Exclusion remains an issue for both girls and boys (Barker et al., 2012). Strategies have often involved making teaching and learning more boy-friendly by getting more men into the teaching profession, adapting content to boys, including more action-oriented pedagogy and setting up single-sex classes (Haywood et al., 2013; Watson-Williams and Riddell, 2011). Research has contested these strategies, since they often affirm an essentialist view of masculinity and emphasize differences by gender (Figueroa, 2010). They are based on unsubstantiated claims: that girls and boys are so different that their learning styles and educational needs are also entirely different, and that co-educational settings distract boys so much they cannot focus on learning (Kimmel, 2010). Rather than setting up boy-friendly schools, the creation of child-friendly learning environments which help boys thrive by supporting and motivating them is more constructive (Watson-Williams and Riddell, 2011). It is also not clear why action-oriented teaching and learning would suit boys better. Child-centred activity-based learning can promote learning among all children. Quality is key. Teaching and learning should be delivered in a manner that engages all students and provides positive feedback. Learning environments need to be made inclusive to all learners' needs.

Gender-responsive pedagogy, developed initially as an approach and training package for teachers to create gender-sensitive learning environments and promote awareness of girls' learning needs (Forum for African Women Educationalists, 2020), has the potential to benefit all students. Gender-responsive pedagogy reflects an understanding of gender roles and biases, and in addressing these, encourages equitable participation and outcomes. It includes strategies to enhance inclusion by paying attention to classroom set-up and interactions, adopting inclusive language and tackling gender bias in lesson content and materials (ibid.) Gender biases in textbooks can have significant implications not only for girls but also for boys (see **Box 13**).

Box 13

Gender biases in textbooks can limit boys' opportunities

Textbooks are a source of authority in classrooms and can be highly influential in constructing the gender identities of students. Textbooks can entrench traditional views of men and women or, conversely, challenge discriminatory norms and values. They not only transmit knowledge, but can reflect and reproduce social and gender norms, thereby influencing how girls and boys see the world (UNESCO, 2020a). Gender norms and values influence attitudes and practices. They also shape girls' and boys' aspirations and impose expected behaviours and attributes for men and women (Heslop, 2016). A review by the Global Education Monitoring Report Team has shown that countries still develop textbooks including gender-based stereotypes. In Europe, 23 out of 49 countries do not explicitly address sexual orientation and gender identity in their curricula (UNESCO, 2020b), rendering LGBTIQ students invisible. Case studies commissioned by UNESCO and the Global Education Monitoring Report have shown mixed progress in tackling bias in textbooks. In Comoros, textbooks still include gender stereotypes, partly due to the lack of gender training for textbook developers. Ethiopia has made progress, but stereotypes remain, which can be linked to women having been excluded from the process of developing textbooks. Nepal made textbooks and learning material more gender-sensitive by introducing guidance on gender, a gender expert to review the material and gender audits every five years (UNESCO, 2020a). While much research has looked into the implications of gender stereotypes for female learners, implications for boys are under-researched. Evans and Davies (2000) found that men are portrayed as aggressive, argumentative and competitive in elementary school reading books. When asked in a public consultation on gender discrimination in textbooks in the Republic of Korea, respondents noted that dancers and nurses were mainly shown as female (Republic of Korea Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2018). A study on Chinese primary school social studies texts showed that all the soldiers were male while all teachers were female (Benavot and Jere, 2016). This has serious implications on how boys construct their own sense of masculinity and may limit their career choices, such as in the care and teaching sector.

Eight of the reviewed policies (see **Table 2**) include strategies to promote gender-responsive pedagogy through curriculum reform and teacher training, although only one, Jamaica, relates specifically to improving boys' educational outcomes. Jamaica's national education strategic plan refers to the USAID-funded Expanding Educational Horizons project that incorporates gender-sensitive approaches in schools to address 'the sub-optimal performance of boys' (Jamaica Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 6). Other policies could benefit boys but do not mention boys explicitly. Namibia's Sector Policy on Inclusive Education includes reform of the national basic education curriculum to 'reflect the diversity of learning needs of all learners' (Namibia Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 7). India's 2020 National Education Policy promotes inclusive education to address access and learning needs of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. It includes a 'Gender Inclusion Fund' to prioritize strategies to tackle barriers facing girls and transgender children; again, boys are not specifically mentioned (India Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

School-based **comprehensive sexuality education** (CSE) (see **Box 14**) plays a vital role in promoting the health and well-being of young people and can address harmful gender norms and versions of masculinity and topics relating to gender equality. The successful engagement of men and boys for gender equality can be supported by a strong policy framework for sexuality education (Doyle and Kato-Wallace, 2021). In Sweden, sexuality education is expected to promote gender equality and the equal dignity of all and forms part of a wider compulsory school curriculum that explicitly upholds gender equality as an overall aim of education. The policy states that 'the school has a responsibility to counteract traditional gender patterns ... and provide scope for pupils to explore and develop their ability and their interests independently of gender affiliation' (Sweden Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 13).

Box **14**

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)

Comprehensive sexuality education is an age-appropriate curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip boys and girls with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to protect and improve their health and well-being. It helps young people to develop respectful, non-violent relationships and make positive choices, protecting their rights and those of others. CSE can be delivered in formal or non-formal settings and takes a variety of names in different settings (UNESCO, 2021e).

Of the 19 countries reviewed in depth for this report, 10 have some form of life skills or sexuality education at both primary and secondary levels in place. Documents from Bangladesh and Finland mention an overarching legal framework and/or policy but the specifics are not clearly detailed. Armenia has curriculum content that covers some aspects of sexuality education, but at secondary level only. Bhutan, Myanmar and Suriname currently have no guidance for comprehensive sexuality education in place.

A recent UNESCO global status report provides information on progress towards the uptake of comprehensive sexuality education in education policy and practice around the world (UNESCO, 2021e). Of 155 countries with data available, 85 percent report that they have policies, laws or legal frameworks related to some form of sexuality education. Despite this favourable policy backdrop, the report warns of a significant gap between policy and implementation, with teacher training a key concern. There is also substantial variation in content. While 49 countries reported gender-responsive, life skills–based sexuality education curricula at both primary and secondary levels, a more detailed analysis of the content across countries indicates that substantive progress is needed to have fully comprehensive curricula, as several key topics are missing or taught too late (ibid.) A focus on boys' needs is lacking at the policy level (ibid.)

There are important synergies between gender-responsive pedagogy and delivering comprehensive sexuality education. In Ghana**,** for example, work with education ministry experts to build capacity in gender-responsive approaches led to the validation of sexuality education modules that included activities on diversity, non-discrimination and gender equality in the classroom (Atangana-Amougou, 2017).

Banning corporal punishment

Preventing and responding to violence in schools requires a comprehensive approach comprising legislation, policy guidance supporting school and community-based interventions, and robust monitoring mechanisms (UNESCO and UNGEI, 2015). According to the **End Corporal Punishment** initiative of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (2021), global progress towards ending corporal punishment is accelerating. To date, 135 countries have enacted legislation fully prohibiting corporal punishment in schools. Colombia is the most recent to do so, becoming, in 2021, the 11th Latin American country to prohibit all corporal punishment of children. The enactment of the law is a result of partnership between the government and child rights activists, and requires government policy-makers to implement a **National Pedagogical Prevention** strategy to identify and provide training in non-violent disciplinary practices (Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, 2021).

In Bhutan, the Gambia and Jamaica, corporal punishment remains lawful in some educational settings, although Jamaica is one of several countries who endorsed a **Safe to Learn call to action** in March 2020, which includes a commitment to prohibit corporal punishment in schools and promote positive discipline (ibid.) In many countries, policy implementation is a challenge: to date 32 countries have educational policies or ministerial directives to limit corporal punishment in schools but they are not adequately enforced by national legislation or accountability measures, including in Armenia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Rwanda and Suriname (ibid.) In countries including India, Kenya, Peru, South Africa and Uganda, where corporal punishment in schools is banned, data indicate that prevalence remains high (Devries, et al., 2015; Gershoff, 2017; Guerrero and Rojas, 2016; Statistics South Africa, 2016; Together for Girls, 2021). **INSPIRE** is a technical package developed by 10 agencies led by the World Health Organization aimed at ending violence against children. It highlights the need for legislation and policy reform to prohibit corporal punishment in schools and communities and includes an evidence-based framework for policy and programming, recommending awareness-raising campaigns, training in positive discipline and community-based initiatives (Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children 2021).

A strong legal and policy framework is crucial in conflict-affected settings where unrest weakens accountability and exacerbates violence in schools, communities and refugee camps (Winthorp and Kirk, 2005). The **Interagency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards** for education integrates strategies for tackling violence in education settings into inter-agency cluster responses (coordinated response to ensure education needs are met during crisis) to complex emergencies (INEE, 2020).

Tackling bullying and peer violence

Seven out of the 19 countries reviewed have legislation and policies to specifically address peer violence and bullying in schools. In the Philippines, the **Anti-Bullying Act** requires all schools to adopt policies to address incidents of school violence, including bullying, cyberbullying and violence targeting students based on their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression (SOGIE) (Ioverno, 2021). It calls for setting up safe reporting mechanisms and outlines sanctions for non-compliance. The Act targets schools and communities, providing a framework for national awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives (UN, 2016). Policy documentation notes the risk of sexual violence and harassment in schools, including among boys and LGBTIQ individuals, and calls for the establishment of a Violence against Women and Children focal point in all schools. In Jordan, a guidance and counselling programme has been established to address violence, bullying and drug abuse and in the Gambia. Addressing gender-based violence is part of the Life Skills education syllabus.

Several countries in Europe have developed policies to mitigate gender-related violence in schools, including violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. In Portugal**,** new policies have been introduced to facilitate the inclusion of transgender and intersex students in schools, as well as national plans to tackle discrimination based on SOGIE. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the government has funded several programmes to prevent and respond to bullying in schools based on SOGIE. In East Asia and the Pacific, several countries have legislation and curriculum or policy-related guidance to address discrimination and, to a lesser extent, school violence based on SOGIE

(UNESCO, 2021d). In Fiji**,** the 2015 **Policy on Child Protection in Schools** requires schools to respect children's rights, wishes and sexual orientation, and to act against bullying, including homophobic bullying (UNESCO, 2015a).

In Honduras, concerns about high rates of gang violence and student deaths led the government to introduce curricular reforms to include peace education, conflict resolution, and human rights and values (Honduras National Board of Education, 2019). Though not explicitly mentioning male youth, the government also acknowledges that improving educational access and inclusion of those most disadvantaged can contribute to curbing violence (ibid.)

Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on boys' disengagement

The extent to which the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on boys' disengagement and disadvantage can be mitigated depends on the effectiveness of government responses while schools are closed, as well as the ability of households and students to access and participate in any offered remote learning (Azevedo, 2020). And yet multicountry surveys of governments' policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic's wide disruption of education do not indicate explicit targeting of boys, though many countries did implement strategies to reach a range of disadvantaged groups (UNESCO et al., 2021). Policy-makers will need to enact short and long-term compensatory measures to re-engage students and address learning losses, especially in hardest-hit communities and among already disadvantaged groups, or those with additional learning needs (Darmody et al., 2021) and with a gender lens, including how to address the needs of boys.

In high-income countries including the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, remedial support and small group or individual tutoring programmes provide students with opportunities to catch up (ibid.) In low- or middle-income countries where there are already large numbers of boys (and girls) out of school, both remedial support for students returning to school and accelerated learning programmes to reintegrate children into formal education may be critical policy options (Azevedo et al., 2020), although potential budget shortfalls need to be addressed.

A UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank (2020) joint survey carried out at the height of the school closures asked Ministries of Education in 149 countries about their policies to prevent the exclusion of students without access to remote learning. Most countries had introduced multi-platform strategies, with much variation across countries. One third of participating low-income countries stated that they had *not* taken specific measures to tackle the risk of students' exclusion from remote learning; six times higher than in high-income countries (Azevedo et al., 2020). High and middle-income countries were more likely to roll out a package of measures that provided flexible and self-paced platforms for learning: asynchronous learning platforms, as well as using school facilities to support learners with additional needs and those at risk (ibid.)

Many children returning to school will have fallen behind, necessitating remedial support to get back on track (Giannini et al., 2021). According to the 2020 UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank joint survey, 44 percent of education ministries surveyed had initiated remedial learning programmes to mitigate learning loss. Other responses included: the revision of academic calendars (39 percent), assessment of students on their return to school (35 percent) and revised policies of examinations and automatic grade promotion (18 percent). In 17 percent of countries, accelerated learning programmes were set up to reach out-of-school children (UNESCO et al., 2020). In Lesotho, the Ministry of Education and UNICEF have received a Global Partnership in Education grant to develop accelerated learning guidelines and programmes targeting disadvantaged students, with an emphasis on adolescent boys from herder communities in rural mountainous areas, who are already at greatest risk of dropping out of school (Global Partnership for Education, 2021).

In February to April 2021, a third iteration of the UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank joint survey, including OECD, updated information available on policy responses and their impact from 143 countries. The survey found that over two-thirds of countries reported that remedial measures to address learning gaps were being widely implemented for primary and secondary students as schools reopened (UNESCO et al., 2021), representing a substantial increase from previous rounds of the survey. Most of these were high- and upper-middle-income countries, which earlier had not reported implementing remediation (UNESCO et al., 2020).

For schools still under lockdown, equitable access to online learning remained a challenge, particularly for the only 25 percent of low-income countries that had plans to provide subsidized or zero-cost internet or devices. The vast majority of low-income countries

used TV or radio to deliver remote learning. However, over a third of low and middle-income countries using broadcast media reported that less than half of students were actually being reached (UNESCO et al., 2021). In terms of the gender dimensions of policy responses, less than half of countries reported taking one or more measures to support girls' education. No specific mention of boys was made (ibid.)

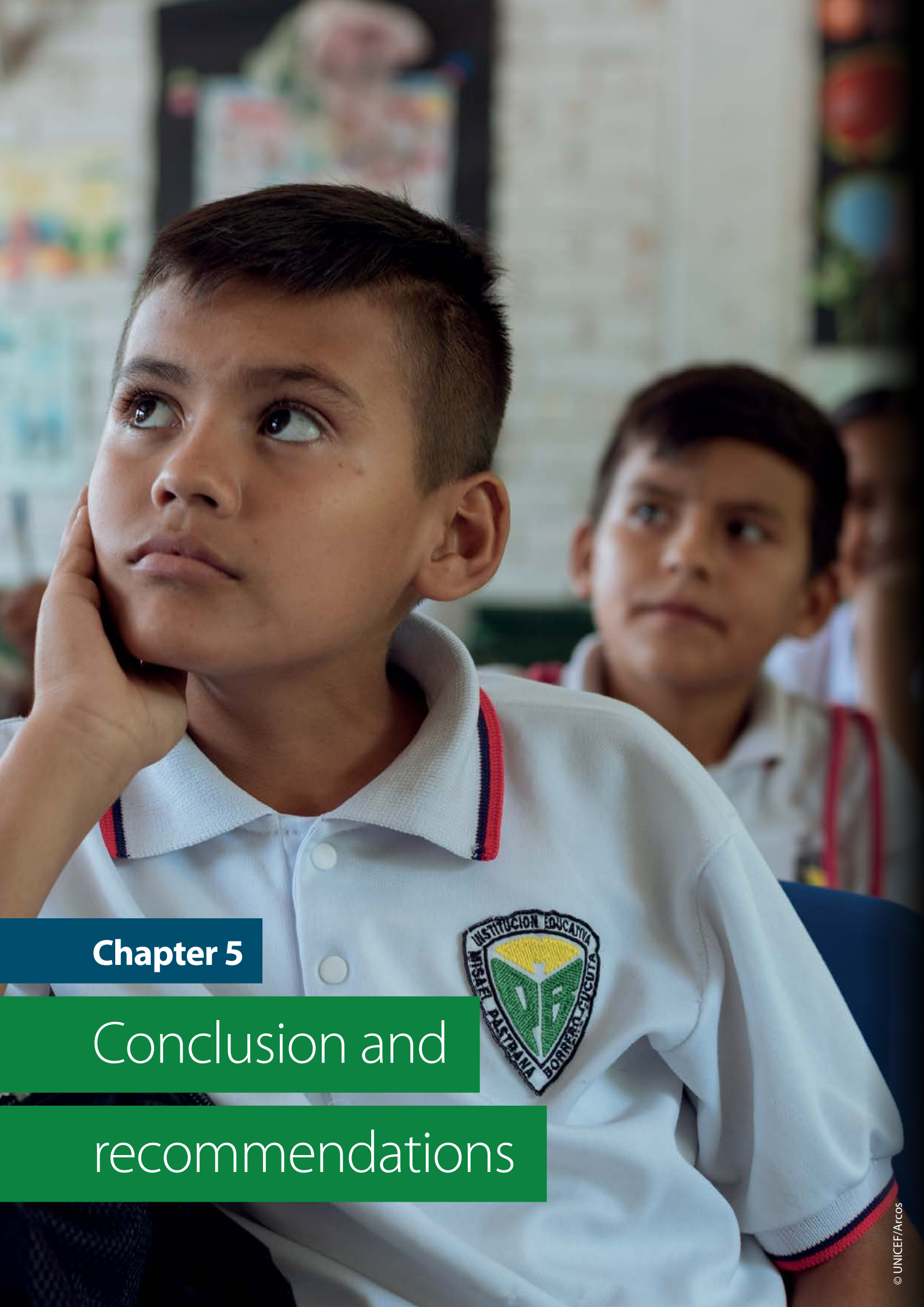
A UNICEF report on the inclusion of children with disabilities in COVID-19 policy responses, showed how the exclusion of children with disabilities has also been exacerbated, as learning shifted to remote and online delivery. In the East Asia and the Pacific region, only a fifth (19 percent) of governments surveyed had adopted measures to support learning for children with disabilities. In South Asia, 37 percent of governments had adapted their responses to make learning accessible for children with disabilities (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021). Despite acknowledging that, across the East Asia and the Pacific region, of children with disabilities, 'boys participate less than girls, and perform less well,' there is no mention of challenges faced by boys as a group (ibid., p. 29).

A few programmes and initiatives aimed principally at girls as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic have benefited boys. Making Ghanaian Girls Great!, funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development office under the Girls Education Challenge II programme, is an initiative that demonstrated positive effects in improving literacy and numeracy for both girls and boys through TV-based math and English content administered in classroom settings with teacher support (Johnston and Ksoll, 2017). When schools closed, the initiative worked with the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation to provide basic education lessons for learners at the kindergarten to senior secondary school levels. The lessons were offered through Ghana Learning TV, a new channel that provided the content at no cost for the viewer. The programme also provided ways for learners without access to live television and learners with disabilities to access content through audio recordings of televised lessons broadcast over the radio, and television shows with subtitles and sign language.

Conclusion

Despite clear gendered patterns in education in some countries, programmes and initiatives addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education remain few. System-level policies to address boys' constraints are even more rare. Programmes, initiatives and policies addressing intersectional disadvantage of boys are equally lacking. This review found some programmes working with boys to change norms around masculinity.

As this review has demonstrated, programmes, initiatives and policies implemented to improve education for all learners had a significant positive effect on boys in contexts where they are disengaged or disadvantaged. They are most effective when they mainstream gender and include targeted gender-transformative action. Interventions that work across levels, from the individual, peers and family, to schools and society and the state, could be strategic and effective. Overall, rigorous evidence about the effectiveness of policies, programmes and interventions addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education remains limited.



Chapter 5

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion and recommendations

The 2030 Agenda aims to leave no one behind with SDG 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all. This requires not only increased efforts to get girls into school and provide supportive learning environments, but also to keep boys in school and support them throughout their education. This necessitates gender-transformative teaching and learning content, processes and environments, and policies, plans and resources that support gender equality.

The right to education remains unfulfilled for many. While globally, girls remain less likely than boys to enter school in the first place, in many countries boys are at higher risk of failing to progress and complete their education. Previously, boys' disengagement and dropout was a concern mainly in high-income countries, yet in several low- and middle-income countries boys are now lagging behind girls in enrolment and completion in basic education. Globally, fewer boys progress to tertiary education. Boys make up just over half of out-of-school children globally, the majority of whom are out of school at the secondary school level. The global learning crisis has shown that many boys and girls may be in school but learning little. The persistent gender gap in reading and literacy skills at boys' expense continues to widen in many countries. COVID-19–related school closures and learning loss, as well as economic challenges, are likely to exacerbate existing gender disparities unless steps are taken to address the learning needs of all.

As this report has shown, multiple factors combine to prevent boys from engaging fully with learning and contribute to boys' dropout from school. Structural factors influencing boys' withdrawal from education include poverty and the need to work. Gendered norms and expectations impact on boys' motivation and desire to learn. Social norms and gender stereotypes pressure boys to choose certain occupations, which can result in them leaving school early. In some contexts, easy entry into the labour market for boys can result in early school-leaving. At the institutional level, low teacher expectations and bias, streaming by ability, and grade repetition are demotivating factors for boys, negatively affecting learning outcomes and retention. Authoritarian school environments, harsh discipline and violence or the fear of it also contribute to absenteeism and push boys out of school. At the interpersonal level, the absence of family support and peer pressure influence boys' retention and performance at school.

Boys from marginalized and vulnerable groups, similar to their female counterparts, face disproportionate disadvantage across educational outcomes, particularly when this intersects with poverty. Macro-level contexts, such as conflict, humanitarian crises, the current COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability and a weak legal and policy environment, further compound inequalities and challenges to ensuring all boys and girls receive an inclusive and quality education.

Even though there are clear gendered patterns in education in certain contexts, programmes and initiatives addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education remain few. System-level, gender-specific policies that target boys are even more scarce. Overall, very little policy attention has been given to the issue and the policies that are in place are mostly in high-income countries. Only a few low- and middle-income countries have specific policies to improve boys' enrolment and completion of basic education, even in countries where disparities at boys' expense are severe. There is a lack of policies, programmes and initiatives addressing intersecting disadvantage for boys, thereby often failing the most marginalized boys.

While rigorous evidence about the effectiveness of policies, programmes and initiatives addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education remains sparse, this report has identified several key elements with the potential to support boys' education (see **Table 3**).

Table 3: Key elements of good and promising practice

KEY ELEMENTS	MACRO SYSTEM	MESO SYSTEM	MICRO SYSTEM
Multi-level policies and programmes that aim to understand and address the factors influencing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education at the levels of the macrosystem (state and society), mesosystem (community and educational institutions) and microsystem (family, peers and individuals) impacting on boys' educational participation, progression and learning outcomes.	x	x	x
Gender-transformative policies, programmes and initiatives based on robust evidence that use a broad range of methods and perspectives.	x	x	x
Gender-transformative curricula and continuous activities in schools from an early age to encourage the critical examination of harmful social norms, gender inequalities and masculinities, and the strengthening of boys' social and emotional skills.	x	x	
Training on gender-transformative pedagogies and school environments for teachers and school leadership, using well-trained facilitators that have challenged their own gender biases.	x	x	
Collaboration between national and local actors from education, labour, youth, and justice departments to address early school leaving.	x	x	
Inclusive action that responds to the needs of both boys and girls, and does not improve education opportunities for boys at the detriment of girls and vice versa.	x	x	
Attention to intersectionality, as well as accessibility and relevance of programmes to marginalized children and youth, and ensuring marginalized voices are heard. Avoiding constructing marginalized boys as a problem population in programme and policy design, to avoid stigmatization.	x		x
Whole-school approaches across the school community to identify and address learners' needs, working with school leadership, teachers, parents and students.		x	x
Addressing boys' low achievement, early on, including in early childhood care and education and early support for reading. Exposure to male role models and mentors that dismantle stereotypes and increase boys' motivation to learn.	x	x	x
Active engagement of boys and girls and young men and women in interventions aimed at the prevention of school-related gender-based violence, including peer- and community-based approaches.		x	x

Recommendations

This report has analysed the many factors contributing to boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education. Within a broad, inclusive approach to education, targeted and adaptable support, where relevant, can both address the specific needs of boys and encourage different ways of thinking about gender. Policy and political will at all levels are needed to raise awareness of the challenges faced by disadvantaged and marginalized boys and to strengthen the enactment of appropriate programming and initiatives.

The future impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, in general, and on boys' education, is uncertain. To ensure the right to education and gender equality, it is important to continue to address current challenges and mitigate harm in the medium and long term. The recent UNESCO report When schools shut: Gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures makes several recommendations in this respect (UNESCO, 2021g).

To ensure the realization of the right to education for all boys, all stakeholders – governments, development partners (bilateral and multilateral organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia), communities, schools, families and caregivers, and students – will need to work together, with actions tailored to countries' specific contexts (see **Table 4**).

Addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education is not a zero-sum game. It benefits both girls and boys and society as a whole. Gender is always relational. Tackling gender inequality in and through education, as well as challenging traditional gender norms, must include boys and men. This includes ensuring that boys are in school and learning. Without this, a vital opportunity to engage boys in gender-transformative teaching, content and learning is lost. Education must be improved for male, female and non-binary learners, leaving no one behind. The right to education must be realized for all.

Table 4: Recommendations

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK SYSTEMS	MICROSYSTEM			MESOSYSTEM		MACROSYSTEM	
STAKEHOLDERS	**STUDENTS**	**FAMILY**	**PEERS**	**COMMUNITIES**	**SCHOOLS**	**GOVERNMENTS**	**DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS**
Advance equal access to education and prevent boys' dropout							
In line with SDG 4, provide 12 years of free, publicly funded, inclusive, equitable and quality education, without discrimination, including by subsidizing indirect costs associated with schooling, providing social protection programmes such as cash transfers for poor families, and ensuring education systems and schools are responsive to gender-specific needs.						X	
Mobilize support to advance gender-transformative policies for both girls' and boys' education.				X			X
Provide flexible, accelerated learning and bridging programmes for boys who, alongside girls, missed out on education or whose education was interrupted.						X	X
Strengthen and enforce labour laws and employment regulations, ensuring that they are aligned with compulsory education policy, to protect youth from exiting the school system and prevent harm.						X	
Monitor students' learning performance, attendance rates and other predictors of dropout, following up with students and parents as necessary.	X	X			X	X	
Support interventions, including career counselling, that help boys and young men understand the value of higher education.	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Work with local communities where boys are at risk of dropout to raise awareness on the importance of boys' completion of a full cycle of basic education.		X		X	X	X	X
Reform traditional practices or adapt their timing, such as initiation ceremonies, which pull boys and young men out of school.	X	X		X		X	
Build on the lessons of the extensive work identifying and addressing barriers to girls' education.				X	X	X	X
Make learning gender-transformative, safe and inclusive for all learners							
Create gender-transformative and inclusive learning environments that address all learners' needs. This includes training teachers on gender-transformative pedagogies, enabling them to challenge rigid gender norms and making curricula, teaching and learning materials gender-transformative, inclusive and free of stereotypes.	X				X	X	X
Promote a positive learning culture that stimulates the interests of all learners, with teachers being fair and having high expectations of all learners, and providing constructive feedback to students, building high-quality teacher–student relationships.	X				X		

Introduce or strengthen language-related support for learning, including options for mother tongue language of instruction and remedial language support for ethnic minority, migrant, displaced and refugee students.					x	x	
Implement tutoring and mentoring programmes for underachieving boys.					x	x	
Promote whole-school approaches to promote gender equality and include parents and the community in activities designed to dismantle gender stereotypes.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Prohibit corporal punishment at school; introduce, disseminate and enforce codes of conduct for teachers and students; and provide training on positive non-violent discipline for teachers, as well as effective monitoring and response mechanisms.					x	x	
Abolish streaming of classes and minimize gender-segregation practices.					x	x	
Abolish repetition policies and implement automatic promotion to the next grade, alongside appropriate remedial support.					x	x	
Develop and make use of effective pedagogical strategies to develop boys' reading skills.					x	x	x
Implement comprehensive sexuality education, including addressing harmful gender norms and masculinities.					x	x	x
Target and include boys and girls, young women and men in programmes to challenge harmful gender norms and engage critically with restrictive masculinities, via core or add-on curricula, extracurricular and/or community-based activities.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Incorporate curricular reforms to support social and emotional learning and skills.						x	
Prevent and respond to all forms of school-related gender-based violence, through legislation, policy guidance, teacher training, whole-school approaches, community-based interventions and robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms.				x	x	x	x
Provide access to non-judgemental and accurate information on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in educational settings.					x	x	
Offer extracurricular activities that keep boys engaged in the school environment and build social and transferable skills.					x	x	
Invest in better data and generate evidence							
Collect and make publicly available data disaggregated by sex and intersecting characteristics to better understand boys' educational participation, progression and learning outcomes, including the most marginalized. Collect and handle sensitive data with care.					x	x	x
Support governments, where needed, to enhance intersectional analysis on boys and young men, and to use this analysis for evidence-based policies and education-sector plans.							x

Invest in longitudinal studies to gain better understanding of how gender attitudes develop during adolescence and to identify the key points for intervention.						x	x
Invest into research on the effectiveness of policies, programmes and interventions addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education, especially related to intersecting disadvantages.						x	x
Conduct rigorous evaluations to identify what works to retain or get boys back in school and learning, with a focus on boys at high risk of learning poverty and dropout.						x	x
Conduct research on the economic and social cost of boys' disengagement from education in different contexts.						x	x
Conduct research on the role that homophobia and transphobia plays in boys' disengagement from education and develop adequate strategies to address this and protect LGBTIQ youth from discrimination.						x	x
Build and finance equitable, inclusive and gender-transformative education systems							
Use the current rethinking of education systems in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to build back better and make education systems gender-transformative and resilient to future crises.						x	x
Develop gender-responsive education sector plans and polices, drawing on Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) guidance, including a broader equity approach where challenges disproportionally experienced by or specific to boys are identified and acknowledged to ensure that the needs of all learners are addressed.						x	x
Invest significantly in education with a focus on girls and boys most in need.						x	x
Invest in early childhood care and education to lay a foundation for learning.						x	x
Finance the implementation of evidence-based responses that aim to prevent or close gender disparities in all aspects and at all levels of education.						x	x
Promote and ensure integrated, coordinated and system-wide approaches							
Build and participate in multi-stakeholder partnerships, under government leadership, to improve education for boys and girls.						x	x
Collaborate with local education groups (facilitating education sector policy dialogue between government and partners under government leadership) and the Education Cluster (coordinating response to ensure education needs are met during crisis).						x	x
Ensure comprehensive and coordinated approaches to address boys' disengagement from education, bringing together actors from the education, gender, labour, youth, health and justice sectors.						x	x

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Appendix: Methodology

Appendix: Methodology

This report is based on desk-based research as well as in-depth mixed-method research.

Methodological approach

This desk-based research combined original analysis of statistical data sets for key education indicators with a review of literature and policy analysis to answer key questions:

- What is the current global situation on boys' disengagement from education? How are boys doing on all key education indicators?
- Where are boys lagging behind (particular countries, regions) and at which levels of education?
- What are the factors (economic, social, cultural or others) that influence boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education? How do other characteristics intersect with gender to compound disadvantage?
- How do gender norms and societal gender expectations, reproduced in schools and classrooms, affect boys' participation and progression in education and learning outcomes?
- What are the impacts of COVID-19 on boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education?
- What have countries and partners done to address these challenges?
- What are the specific aspects of policies and programmes that appear to have worked, and what elements can potentially be replicated across contexts? What are the preconditions of success? What have been the reasons for failure that others need to consider in the process of adaptation or replication?

1. Global evidence and factors influencing boys' education opportunities:

Analysis of statistical data sets for key education indicators

Statistical data for this report are based on secondary data analysis of data sets compiled from data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) database, which was accessed where indicated in August 2021. 162 countries report sex-disaggregated data to UIS. The analysis considers current performance of countries and regions against key indicators and progress since 2000, the turn of the millennium, in order to reflect changes between data captured to monitor the Education for All (EFA) goals and since the onset of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDG 4. The most recent year for which data are reported as being available from the data sets is 2020. However, in practice, few countries reported on these data indicators for 2020. For example, data on the adjusted gender parity index for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary completion rates returned zero data points for 2020. Even for 2019, data were not available for all UN countries and territories. For example, only nine countries reported the adjusted gender parity index for primary education in 2019. To address this problem of data availability, and capture data for as many countries and territories as possible, this report used data from two different five-year periods. For 2000 to 2005, the earliest available data point was selected. For instance, if a country had data for 2001, 2003 and 2004, the analysis used the 2001 data point in this report. For 2015 to 2019, the latest available data point was selected. For instance, if a country had data for 2015, 2017 and 2018 the analysis used the 2018 data point in this report.

When reporting on individual countries, this report refers to the actual year (both in the earlier and later period) which has been reported in the UIS database. For example, if comparing the adjusted gender parity index for primary education for Nepal, this may refer to 2003 for the earlier period and 2018 for the later period.

Literature review

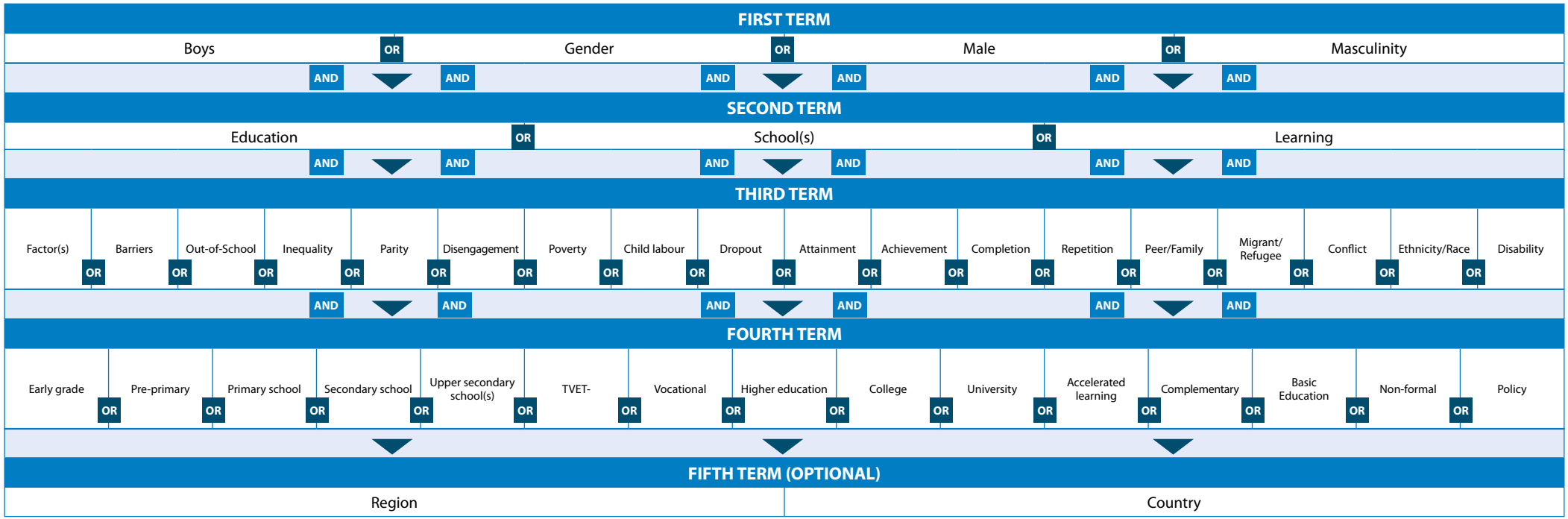
The study drew on a review of the following literature: (1) published academic research; (2) government policy documents; (3) documents and reports from international agencies and non-governmental organizations via public websites; and (4) other grey literature including evaluation reports and research blogs.

To initiate the review, references in previous known reports on boys' education were used to identify key authors. In subsequent literature identified, reference lists were reviewed to find the most relevant articles and publications. The 'cite' function on Google Scholar was used to identify more recent literature that cited identified and relevant literature.

A literature search was undertaken using key search terms (see below) on various search engines: Google Scholar, Web of Science, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and the University of East Anglia library database. These searches were supplemented by Google searches to ensure that reports and grey literature from non-academic institutions were not missed. The websites of key players in gender and education were used to search for key information. Twitter feeds were also used to identify newly released reports and research articles of relevance.

Literature was only reviewed if it referenced boys' education or gender and education, except in the case of COVID-related reports and literature. High-quality, peer-reviewed journals were prioritized, but grey literature and research blogs were also utilized, particularly where they covered current and emerging research (e.g. Center for Global Development, UKFIET).

Search terms



Websites used for literature review

- UNESCO and the Global Education Monitoring Reports: including Gender Reports and Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER)
- UNESCO Institute of Statistics
- IIEP-UNESCO Planipolis
- Align
- Center for Global Development
- CONFEMEN – PASEC
- Education Cannot Wait
- European Commission
- Gender and Education Association
- Global Campaign to End Corporal Punishment
- ILO
- INEE
- J-PAL
- ODI and the GAGE (Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence)
- OECD (including PISA and PISA-D)
- Plan International
- Promundo / Boyhood Studies
- UKFIET
- UNGEI
- UNICEF

2. Policy review

In order to answer the question, 'What have countries done to address these challenges?', policy documents from selected countries were reviewed, summarized on Excel and used to develop a dashboard of key policy responses. While the review's focus was on policy specifically targeting boys, it also considered general responses, particularly in relation to gender and inclusion, that address educational constraints that disproportionally affect boys in those country contexts.

The selection of 19 countries for review was based on criteria that included key indicators of boys' disadvantage: a GPI of greater than 1.10 for one or more enrolment and/or completion indicators, consistently lower achievement rates and robust research indicating disadvantage in quality/school environment measures, such as experience of school violence. Consideration was also given to the *range* of countries, including countries from across regions and country income groups.

Selection was also dependent on the availability of policy documents in English, although two sets of documents from Latin American countries were translated prior to analysis. Key sources include the IIEP-UNESCO Planipolis data set, OECD policy response papers (COVID-19 related) and World Bank, UNESCO and ODI analytical papers and reports.

Limitations

Reviews of this nature are limited by language, especially as the major academic databases consulted carried research primarily published in English. This limited the scope of evidence and skewed it towards anglophone countries and research. Several of the high-income countries had limited numbers of policy documents available via the Planipolis or PEER websites, which were the primary sources of documentation for the policy analysis. In such instances, reference was made to the summary EFA Review reports. It is acknowledged these may have not been the most current documentation, they offered historical perspective on previous and continuing policy responses.

Critically, several key research studies reporting on intersecting characteristics of interest (e.g. disability, migrant/refugee status) and sectors (TVET, youth) did not examine gender dimensions or disaggregate data by gender beyond methodological descriptions. This was particularly notable among the summary reports on policy responses to COVID-19.

3. Programme review

The programmes and initiatives analysed address one or more dimensions of the ecological model (see introduction) or target specific groups of boys and young men and specific situations such as emergency settings. They have been active over the past 10 years. The programmes and initiatives have been evaluated and shown positive impact on boys' (or both boys' and girls') education (good practice) or are relevant, coherent and have potential for positive impact on boys' (or both boys' and girls') education, but further evidence is needed (promising practice). Moreover, they have the potential for replicability.

4. Case studies

In-depth, mixed-method research was conducted in four countries in different regional contexts: Fiji, Kuwait, Lesotho and the United Arab Emirates. The case study on Peru was limited to a desk review and interviews with a few stakeholders.

The case studies aimed to:

1. Review the current situation related to boys' educational participation, learning achievement and completion, with an emphasis on national and sub-national contexts and overlapping disadvantages or intersectionality of features.
2. Identify the structural and gender-related factors at the level of the individual, family and peers, community, school and broader society that hinder or facilitate boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes.
3. Document promising policy and programmatic initiatives, assessing what makes certain strategies work in particular contexts, and potential implications for other settings.

The research questions were:

- What is the current situation of boys' access to, performance in and completion of education, with an emphasis on national and if possible, subnational contexts? Which boys are disengaging from education (examining intersectionality, including ethnicity, location and class)?
- At what level of education do gender disparities at boys' disengagement from education appear?
- What are the underlying factors for boys' disengagement from education at the level of the individual, family and peers, school, and broader society? To what extent does this differ depending on ethnicity, location, class or other parameters?
- To what extent has boys' disengagement from education been addressed at the national and subnational levels through policy and programmatic interventions by government, community- or NGO-led interventions? If so, what have been the process, reach and impact of each of these interventions?
- What are the specific factors in these policies and approaches that appear to have worked, and what elements can potentially be replicated across contexts? What are the preconditions of success? What have been the reasons for failure that others need to consider in the process of adaptation or replication?

To capture trends and the present situation related to boys' disengagement from education, the study included different methods, including focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs), to collect qualitative and quantitative data to answer the questions profiled above in five country case studies. Additional details by country are provided below.

Fiji Case Study

In ***Fiji***, a school ecology approach was undertaken and three schools were randomly selected for the purpose of this study. Original qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews and in-depth interviews and documentary data from national and subnational policies and legislation on this topic were reviewed. The study was conducted in an interpretive paradigm using a case study research design. Focus group protocols were used to achieve the stated objectives of this study. The interview protocols were supplied by UNESCO. Stratified random sampling was used to select three schools in Fiji. As with other qualitative techniques, the members of the focus group were not selected randomly. Instead, a purposive sampling method was used to get authentic and natural responses from the participants, which means getting insightful data to analyse and interpret beyond just the interview transcript. Focus group discussions were held with students, teachers, parents and community members.

Study sites selection

Three schools were selected using a random stratification process from a total of 173 secondary schools in Fiji, based on their location, size and organizational culture. They were located in urban, suburban and rural areas in the western division, the Lautoka/Yasawa and Ba/Tavua education districts of Fiji.

School A is located in close proximity of an urban centre and an iTaukei village. The villagers who are the parents of students attending School A mostly work in nearby hotels and in the town. School B is located in a suburban area and has students from a farming community and included children of labourers working in nearby towns and shopping complexes. School C is situated in a rural farming community about 40 kilometres from the nearest divisional education office. The parents of students are mostly sugarcane farmers, cane cutters, vegetable farmers and many work as farm hands on bigger farms. The stratified random sampling enabled the gathering of rich data about the root causes and nature of boys' disadvantage in and disengagement from education from students, teachers, parents and community members. All schools offer the same curriculum.

Attributes	Case Study 1 Community 1	Case Study 2 Community 2	Case Study 3 Community 3
Location*	Urban: The school is located just on the edge of Nadi town. Nadi is the main town for tourists staying at Denarau and nearby hotels. Students have easy access to amenities in the town and mostly live in the nearby settlement.	Peri-urban: The school is located about 6km from Nadi International Airport and 1km from Votualevu Shopping Complex. It is located about 2km from Challenge Plaza, New World and Courts Mega Store.	Rural: The school is located about 40km from the Divisional Education Office in Lautoka. It is situated in a farming community nestled on a plateau overlooking the farms.
Community	Consists of mostly Indigenous Fijians. Majority of the students belong to Christian religion. The management committee consists of landowners and while all customs and traditions are followed, indigenous culture and traditions are emphasized in the school. The school is well-equipped and is known for contribution to sports, especially rugby.	A 'mix school' where students are from both the major ethnic groups in Fiji. The majority of the Indigenous students are Christians while the majority of the Indo-Fijians are Hindus, while a few of them follow Islam. The management committee consists of working parents and all cultures and traditions are emphasized in the school.	A 'mix school' where students are from both the major ethnic groups in Fiji. The majority of the students are Indo-Fijians and are Hindus while a few of them follow Islam. The rest of the Indigenous students are Christians. The management committee consists of working parents and all cultures and traditions are emphasized in the school.
School	School A	School B	School C
Year of Establishment	1974	1977	1975
School Roll	874 students	622 students	178 students
Grade Level	Grades 9–13	Grades 9–13	Grades 9–13
Type of School**	Public	Public	Public
Medium of Instruction	English	English	English
Notable Characteristics	The school is well maintained and is quite well resourced. The school has set high standards and expectations for all students. Satisfactory school leadership. School office could be restructured with proper sitting arrangements for visitors.	The school is very well maintained and is very well resourced. Excellent computer lab and learning facilities. Visionary leader and hopes to further improve the facilities. The school has set high standards and expectations for all students. Office space very well utilized.	The school is well maintained. Room for improvement in the school library. Curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching. Focused professional development.

* The classification is based on the demographic location of the school.

** The Fijian Government discourages use of ethnicity for analytical purposes. As such, schools do not have any descriptive data in regards to ethnicity.

Focus group interview

In this study, focus group interviews included boys, girls, teachers, school deputy heads and parents and community members. It seemed most appropriate in eliciting the views of teachers, students and community members to conceptualize the root causes for boys' disengagement from education. The table below shows the participants in the research.

Schools	Boys	Girls	Teachers	School Deputy Heads	Parents and Community Members
School A	6	6	4	1	-
School B	6	6	4	1	6
School C	6	6	2	1	8
TOTAL	18	18	10	3	13

The participants in the study were purposefully identified at the three schools with the help of the teachers. The data were collected anonymously and efforts were made to see ensure gender balance in the selection of the participants. The interview data were captured using pen and paper and also recorded using phones and later transcribed. The data from three sites were analysed separately to better understand the context but were later pooled and triangulated for the purpose of discussion. Moreover, data were analysed under separate headings, which focused on: accessibility of resources; learning environment in the community; labour market trends for the community; and gender attitudes in the community. In-depth interviews were only held with the Assistant Principals of the three selected schools in the study.

Quantitative data were also collected using different methods to answer the questions posed by this study. This included a desk review of the literature including research, statistical data and documentation of educational policies and procedures; overseas literature used because of a lack of local literature; and Fiji gender policy and previous annual reports of ministry of education. Data emerging from the IDIs and FGDs were analysed to identify similarities and differences, contradictions and synergies in views, perceptions and understandings by various levels and stakeholders. Secondary analysis was conducted to capture trends and the present situation related to boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education in Fiji.

Kuwait Case Study

In ***Kuwait,*** the methods of study included a desk review of the literature including research, statistical data and documentation of educational policies, schemes and programmes, and interviews, observations and focus group discussions.

Study sites selection

Three study sites were chosen from the three major groups of Kuwait's population: Kuwaiti urban, Kuwaiti Bedouin and non-Kuwaiti expatriates who come from other countries to work in Kuwait. Criteria were used in terms of geographical location, social norms and customs related to gender issues, lifestyle and preferred type of schools for children. In order to represent the three groups in the study sample, the study sites were chosen as illustrated in the table below.

Site 1 represents the Kuwaiti urban community. Most of the population belonging to this community lives in Al-Asema (the Capital) Governorate; 12 students participated in the study from this site, 4 of them from public schools and 8 from foreign private schools.

Site 2 represents the Kuwaiti Bedouin (tribes) community. Most of the population belonging to this community lives in Al-Jahra Governorate. Two public secondary schools were selected in this site, one for boys and one for girls.

Site 3 represents the non-Kuwaiti Arabian community. Most of the population belonging to this community lives in Al-Farwaniya Governorate. All the nine students participated from this site are from Arab countries, five from public schools and four from Arab private schools.

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
Name of locality (region)	Al-Asema (the Capital) Governorate	Al-Jahra Governorate	Al-Farwaniya Governorate
Social background of population	Urban	Bedouin (tribes)	Urban
Nationality of the majority of population	Kuwaitis	Kuwaitis	Arab expatriates
Social norms, customs and traditions	Having supportive perspectives for gender equality, a liberal lifestyle	Having traditional perspectives on gender equality, a conservative lifestyle	Social norms vary according to the country of origin and social background
Students by sex	Boys	Boys and girls	Boys
Students by nationality	Urban Kuwaitis	Bedouin Kuwaitis	Arab non-Kuwaitis
School type	Public and private	Public	Public and private
Students' grade levels	10–12	10–12	10–12

Original data collection

Original data were collected from secondary schools from various stakeholders including boys, girls, teachers, parents and caregivers to enable the understanding of relationships and processes and how these actions and interactions influence boys' engagement or disengagement from education.

The original data collection tools were designed to collect qualitative data through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. In addition to the FGDs and the IDIs, profiles of the community and the school were created to understand the broad nature and more specific details of the community and the school. These profiles were created originally in English, and then translated into Arabic, so that they could be checked by study participants whose mother tongue is Arabic.

Quantitative data were also collected from the desk review, which consisted of a literature review, an analysis of statistical data, a review of government laws and policies and a review of good practice, to provide a macrolevel understanding of boys' education in Kuwait.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were organized and analysed using tables of analysis. The findings from the secondary and the primary data were matched, to create a composite picture of the current situation and the underlying factors of boys' disadvantage in and disengagement from education in Kuwait, as well as good practices and programmes.

Lesotho Case Study

In ***Lesotho***, the case study used an ecological approach to identify and study three sites in detail, looking at the institutions of family, peers, school and community and their interrelationships to understand the problem of boys' disadvantage in and disengagement from education. Data for the study were collected through various instruments. The instruments included two unique questionnaires for creating a community profile and a school profile; three interview formats for key informants, school principals and community leaders; and five interview formats for focus group discussions with parents, peers, teachers, boys and girls.

Study sites selection

Three out of four regions were selected for this study. In selecting regions and schools/communities, purposive sampling was used. At a study site, the school principal was asked to select parents, community members, teachers and learners to provide relevant data for the study. The table below gives a summary of the participants in the three research sites, excluding key informant interviews.

Study Sample	Site 1: Urban Primary and High School	Site 2: Highlands primary and Secondary School	Site 3: Senqu Valley Primary and Secondary School
Individual interviews – Community members	4	5	3
FGDs – Peers	0	9	8
FGDs – Teachers	8	7	7
FGDs – Parents	8	9	5
FGDs – Boys	5	8	10
FGDs – Girls	5	9	10
Individual interviews – Principals	2 (Primary and Secondary)	1 (Secondary)	2 (Primary and Secondary)

Original data collection

The sample for the study consists of 130 participants in total in in-depth interviews and 6 focus group discussions. For the individual interviews, five people participated in key informant interviews (KII) as representatives of organizations and institutions that collaborate with the Ministry of Education and Training to facilitate access to education for all.

A group of teachers took part in three focus group discussions, one per school. A total of 22 teachers (excluding 5 principals) took part in the study. There were 12 female and 10 male who participated in the study. Only 3 of the 22 teachers had previously participated in a gender equality training.

A group of five principals participated in individual interviews, two from the urban region, one from the Lesotho Highlands and two from the Senqu Valley region.

A total of 64 learners participated in focus group discussions as boys only, girls and peers. The ages of the learner participants ranged from 9 (a Grade 3 pupil in the Highlands) to 21 (a Grade 9 learner in the Highlands).

12 community members were interviewed and 22 parents.

Individual interviews took approximately 60 minutes each while focus group discussions took about 120 minutes. Data were analysed qualitatively.

All data for this study were audio-recorded with permission from all participants. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and the interview in which a respondent spoke Sesotho was transcribed in Sesotho, then translated into English and to do so, the Sesotho version was read several times comparing it with the audio to evaluate if the translation captured the words conveyed by the participant.

Peru Case Study

In ***Peru***, quantitative data were collected by different methods to answer the questions posed by this study. This study was mostly limited to a desk review, but also included interviews with a few selected stakeholders. This included a review of literature, statistical information and analysed interventions. The following education policy interventions were also analysed: 1) Full Day School; 2) Rural Secondary School Pedagogical Support (RSPS) and 3) Horizons Program.

Full Day School is a large-scale programme which is aimed at improving the quality and relevance of public secondary education. The analysis of this intervention is indispensable within the context of this study given its dimensions, the changes it proposes in the setup of Peruvian secondary education, and its likely positive impacts on the rates of male school disengagement. On the other hand, the RSPS and Horizons programmes are focused on rural areas and have a limited scope.

Original qualitative data were also collected through interviews with experts and programme officers on educational issues with a gender perspective. The table below gives a summary of list of interviewees.

List of interviewees

Name	Position
Patricia Ames	Professor, Catholic University of Peru Researcher, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos
Verónica Villarán	Researcher, Grupo de Análisis para el desarrollo Coordinator of the Project Strengthening Education Management in Peru
Robin Cavagnaud	Professor, Catholic University of Peru
María Angélica Pease	Professor, Catholic University of Peru
Killasumac Miranda	Head of the Direction of Education of Lima´s Government
María Gloria Barreiro	Head of Desarrollo y Autogestión
Ángela Bravo	Head of Secondary Education, Minister of Education Peru
Carmen Trelles	Co-founder and member of the NGO Pro Rural, Peru

United Arab Emirates Case Study

Study sites selection

In the ***United Arab Emirates***, the selection of study sites was organized in three ways. First, interviews with principals of public and private schools were conducted. Five school principals were selected based on their location (urban or suburban/rural), as well as their type (public/private; gender-segregated or mixed) to reflect the United Arab Emirates' private–public system characteristic. Three of them came from public schools (two boys' and one girls'), and two came from private schools (one was gender segregated and one was boys-only that caters to low- and middle-income families, including stateless boys). Their principals also have very heterogeneous professional backgrounds, representing the various experiences and qualifications of female and male principals in the country.

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5
Location	Suburban	Suburban/ rural	Urban	Suburban/ rural	Urban
Other noticeable Characteristics about the site	This school mostly has boys from the suburbs, in a neighbourhood of houses from the government housing programme. These boys generally have fewer family challenges than the other boys' school (Site 2).	This school has students from the city, the suburbs and rural areas. Captures students who are low SES and who have family challenges at home.	This school has the largest proportion of Emiratis in a private school. Attracts people from all areas: urban, suburban, and rural.	Mix of students from various areas and socioeconomic backgrounds, and has some of the brightest, highest performing students in the area.	A boys-only private school that serves low- and middle-income families. Has the highest proportion of stateless students in an official private school, paid for by a scholarship programme.
Grade levels	9–12	9–12	All	9–12	9–12
Type of school	Public – Boys	Public – Boys	Private – mixed, gender-segregated at Grade 5	Public – Girls	Private – Boys
Additional information	Male, Emirati Principal, always worked in the government sector. At current school over four years. Was originally a teacher.	Female principal, one the first females to head a boys' school in the UAE. Originally a teacher in a girls' schools, over 20 years of experience.	Part of a network of semi-government schools with campuses in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. Male American Principal who worked in the GCC for some time, background in both public and private schools.	Female, Emirati Principal, worked there for over four years and had worked her way up from a teacher, then vice-principal.	Male Lebanese-American Principal from Houston, was a principal in Abu Dhabi for over four years.

Second, to reflect the diversity of the student population in the United Arab Emirates, five focus groups were conducted with: 1) Boys from a public school, with a mix of low-performing and high-performing students; 2) Girls from various public schools with a mix of middle- and high-performing students; 3) Co-ed peers from various public schools with a mix of middle- and high-performing students; 4) Parents with children in various public schools; and 5) Male and female teachers from various public schools. Sampling methods used for the selection of focus group participants were either convenience sampling —such as participants recommended by a school principal— or snowballing (see the table below).

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Focus Group 5
Participants	Students (Girls)	Students (Boys)	Students (Mixed)	Parents	Teachers
Date conducted	29 Oct 2019	30 Oct 2019	28 Oct 2019	7 Nov 2019	5 Nov 2019
Language used	English	English and Arabic	English and Arabic	English and Arabic	English and Arabic
Participants' characteristics	Participants were from a mix of public schools, and met at an after-school programme.	Participants were a mix of high- and low-performing students from one government boys' school	Participants were from a mix of public schools and achievement levels, some high achieving and some low.	All Emirati, 7 mothers and 1 father. Had both boys and girls.	Teachers are from a mix of government schools, males and females
Cycle	Cycle 3	Cycle 3	Cycle 3	N/A	N/A
Ethnicity	Emirati	Emirati	Emirati	Emirati	Emirati
Locality	Ras Al Khaimah	Ras Al Khaimah	Ras Al Khaimah	UAE	UAE
Type of school	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public
Sampling method	Convenience	Convenience (recommended by school principal)	Convenience	Snowball	Snowball

Third, to capture a diverse set of voices that reflect the complexity of the larger educational system, 10 additional key informants were interviewed: individuals from ministries, individuals who oversee private schools, individuals who work in higher education – including those who train teachers, and individuals from the community, such as a successful Chief Executive Officer and managers at a prison and women's shelter.

Original data collection

All interviews and focus groups were conducted by at least two investigators. One interviewer typed up the notes following the interview and the other interviewer reviewed the notes. Important quotes were immediately noted and organized into themes when possible. The interviews were conducted in English and Arabic. Notes were then translated and discussed to ensure clarity, and at least one of the principal investigators was always present.

Quantitative data were also collected by the researchers involved in this project including additional sources, documents and policies based on government databases, as well as website searches. This step included a thorough review of relevant literature, including academic publications (e.g. journal articles, book chapters and working papers), existing research conducted by The Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research, and a systematic database search and subsequent review of government policies (federal and national-level policies). All data collected were managed using Microsoft Office software, while the data were stored on the Foundation's local, protected servers to which can only be accessed by Foundation staff.

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Leave no child behind

Global report on boys' disengagement from education

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development makes the promise to leave no one behind. While improving educational opportunities for girls globally continues to be of paramount importance to achieve gender equality in and through education, this focus on achieving gender parity and equality must not ignore boys. No less than 132 million boys of primary and secondary school age are out of school.

To leave no child behind, UNESCO developed the first global report of this scope on boys' disengagement from education, bringing together qualitative and quantitative evidence from over 140 countries. As this report shows, addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education is not a zero-sum game. Supporting boys does not mean that girls lose out and vice versa. Addressing boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education not only benefits boys' learning, employment opportunities, income and well-being, but it also benefits girls and the broader society.

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Sustainable Development Goals