A teacher and her students drawing in class in Tajikistan.
GPE/Carine Durand

CHAPTER 1

THE WAY AHEAD: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES TOWARDS GPE 2025 AND SDG 4

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

1.

Proportion of countries with at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education guaranteed in legal frameworks
(based on SDG indicator 4.2.5)

Baseline	Target
34.8%	**n/a**
(CY2020)	

2.

Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age
(SDG indicator 4.2.2)

Baseline	Target
62.4%	**76%**
(CY2020)	

3.i.

Gross intake ratio to the last grade of
(SDG indicator 4.1.3)

(a) primary education

Baseline	Target
74.7%	**80%**
(CY2020)	

(b) lower secondary education

Baseline	Target
55.1%	**65%**
(CY2020)	

3.ii.

Out-of-school rate at
(SDG indicator 4.1.4)

(a) primary school age

Baseline	Target
20.3%	**9%**
(CY2020)	

(b) lower-secondary-school age

Baseline	Target
26%	**15%**
(CY2020)	

(c) upper-secondary-school age

Baseline	Target
45.8%	**35%**
(CY2020)	

5.i.

Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (SDG indicator 5.3.1)

Baseline	Year	Target
34%	**33.3%**	**n/a**
(CY2020)	(CY2021)	

6.

Proportion of children and young people (a) in grade 2 or 3, (b) at the end of primary education, and (c) at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics (SDG indicator 4.1.1)

(a) in grade 2 or 3 (i) in reading

Baseline	Target
34.8%	**n.a.**
(CY2020)	

(a) in grade 2 or 3 (ii) in mathematics

Baseline	Target
36.5%	**n.a.**
(CY2020)	

(b) at the end of primary education (i) in reading

Baseline	Target
27.1%	**45%**
(CY2020)	

(b) at the end of primary education (ii) in mathematics

Baseline	Target
24.7%	**46%**
(CY2020)	

(c) at the end of lower secondary education (i) in reading

Baseline	Target
n.e.d.	**n.a.**
(CY2020)	

(c) at the end of lower secondary education (ii) in mathematics

Baseline	Target
n.e.d.	**n.a.**
(CY2020)	

7.i.

Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications in
(SDG indicator 4.c.1)

(a) pre-primary education

Baseline	Target
59.3%	**80%**
(CY2020)	

(b) primary education

Baseline	Target
77.1%	**84%**
(CY2020)	

(c) lower secondary education

Baseline	Target
72.2%	**87%**
(CY2020)	

(d) upper secondary education

Baseline	Target
72.4%	**85%**
(CY2020)	

7.ii.

Proportion of countries where teaching quality is assessed

Baseline	Year	Target
n/a	**51.3%**	**n/a**
(CY2020)	(CY2021)	

Sources: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org, UNICEF Data Warehouse (database), New York, https://data.unicef.org/.

Note: For indicator 3i, no 2025 target has been explicitly set because countries committed to benchmarks for completion rates, not gross intake rate into the last grade. Analyses draw on CY2020 values for SDG 4 indicators; CY2021 values will be reported in the next iteration of GPE's Results Report. The indicator values and targets are computed using available country-level data. These data will be updated annually as more data become available. CY = calendar year; n/a = not applicable; n.a. = not available; n.e.d.= not enough data; SDG = Sustainable Development Goal.

KEY FINDINGS

- Just above a third of pupils in partner countries reach minimum proficiency levels in early grade reading. Proportions are lower at the end of primary education: only one out of every four children masters the basic skills in either reading or mathematics.
- At the end of primary education, girls outperform boys in reading in three-quarters of countries with available data, sometimes by a substantial margin. In mathematics, however, girls remain at a disadvantage in more than nearly two-thirds of partner countries.
- The lack of data on learning constitutes a particularly salient issue and could undermine robust monitoring of the GPE 2025 goal. Coverage is limited to a third of partner countries for any given learning indicator, level and year. For example, out of 76 partner countries, only 33 have available data to monitor early grade reading within the five most recent years up to 2021; that number goes down to only 10 countries with available data at the end of lower secondary for both reading and mathematics.
- On average, 77 percent of primary and 72 percent of secondary education teachers meet their national minimum qualification standards across partner countries and education levels. The teaching workforce at the pre-primary level exhibits the lowest level of training: only 59 percent of teachers have the minimum required qualification.
- Legal provisions to guarantee one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education remain limited: only slightly above a third of partner countries have one year of free or compulsory pre-primary education.
- One in five children of primary school age is still out of school in partner countries.
- Accelerating reduction in the number of children who lack access to primary and lower-secondary education will require significant efforts, because rates of reduction have stagnated in the past decade.
- Efforts to improve girls' access to and completion of education have yielded results, yet girls remain excluded from education in many partner countries affected by fragility and conflict. In those countries, nine girls for every 10 boys access the last grade of primary or secondary education. New concerns arise regarding boys' completion at the lower-secondary level. In more than half of the countries with data, boys are at a disadvantage in terms of access to the last grade at that level.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the new GPE strategic plan, GPE 2025, is to accelerate progress in access, learning and gender equality by supporting equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century. This goal aligns with the human rights–based vision set out in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda.[11] To reflect this alignment, GPE's results framework incorporates a set of seven SDG indicators to monitor progress toward the GPE 2025 goal.[12] GPE uses those indicators to monitor four areas that are central to the GPE 2025 goal: (1) progress in early childhood education; (2) levels of access to, and completion of, basic education; (3) improvements in children and youth learning; and (4) the development of an effective teaching workforce.[13] Given the need to address the stark inequalities in performance and experiences faced by children in partner countries, GPE also systematically monitors cross-cutting issues of gender equality, equity and inclusion.

The partnership has also taken a step forward in monitoring globally agreed benchmarks toward SDG 4 through its partnership with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) team. Both UIS and the GEMR team were consulted during the design of GPE 2025 results framework and will contribute to GPE results reports by producing the data and analyses pertaining to the seven SDG indicators. The collaboration agreement between GPE and UNESCO allows for a unified approach to monitoring education progress globally.

This chapter first looks at the minimum conditions for achieving the GPE 2025 goal: school readiness and access to and completion of the basic education cycle. School readiness has a critical impact on future learning trajectories. The chapter discusses partner countries' efforts to ensure universal access to at least one year of organized learning one year before children enter primary school. It also addresses the issues of access to, and completion of, primary and secondary education.

The chapter then reports on learning outcomes and teaching quality in partner countries. It discusses levels of learning in basic reading and mathematics competencies to provide an overall understanding of partner countries' progress in ensuring that all children reach minimum levels of proficiency in basic learning skills. Without those skills children in partner countries cannot achieve their aspirations, whether those aspirations include further education, getting a decent job or contributing to society. And, as the most important school factor to ensure that children learn, the quality of the teaching workforce in partner countries is assessed by looking at levels of teacher qualifications across partner countries. The final section of the chapter discusses implications in terms of priorities and strategies for the partnership and notably the major data challenges to adequately monitor progress toward GPE 2025.

Several of the GPE 2025 monitoring indicators are also SDG 4 indicators for which most GPE countries have set national targets for 2025. Those national targets have been incorporated in the text to show the level of partner countries' ambition and the collective targets that the partnership will have to achieve by 2025 (box 1.1). To assess the intensity of efforts that will need to be sustained throughout GPE 2025, the situation at the 2020 baseline year is contextualized, when possible, by showing the prior pace of progress and the targets that partner countries have committed to. Doing so allows a discussion of the prospects for accelerated progress based on the momentum at the onset of GPE 2025 and the challenges that the partnership expects to face as it strives to realize the GPE 2025 vision and mission.

11 United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (New York: United Nations, 2015), https://sdgs.un.org/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-17981.

12 The GPE 2025 results framework includes six SDG 4 indicators and one SDG 5 indicator: GPE Indicators 1 (SDG 4.2.5), 2 (SDG 4.2.2), 3i (SDG 4.1.3), 3ii (SDG 4.1.4), 5i (SDG 5.3.1), 6 (SDG 4.1.1) and 7i (SDG 4.c.1).

13 These areas also relate to five of the eight priority areas for GPE 2025: access, early learning, gender equality, learning and quality teaching.

BOX 1.1. Using SDG benchmarks as collective commitments of partner countries

Section 28 of the Education 2030 Framework for Action called on countries to set "intermediate benchmarks" to address the accountability deficit that accompanies long-term education targets.[a] In 2019, seven Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 indicators were selected for benchmarking; in 2021, countries began setting national SDG 4 benchmark values for 2025 and 2030 based on their education sector plans. The SDG 4 indicators coincide with five GPE 2025 indicators: early childhood education participation, out-of-school rate, completion rate, minimum proficiency level and trained teachers.

The benchmarking process recognizes the diversity of starting points and invites countries to consider past trends in order to set ambitious but feasible targets. By July 2022, 52, or 68 percent of, GPE partner countries had submitted at least some of their national benchmark values. Another 26 percent of partner countries did not submit benchmarks but have explicit targets for some of the benchmark indicators in their education sector plans. This chapter refers to the 2025 national SDG 4 benchmarks as a measure of GPE partner countries' individual and collective ambition. It also draws attention to the need for all partner countries to set benchmark values in the coming months—and to ensure that their targets are realistic and based on reliable data on levels and trends.

a. UNESCO, Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, (Paris: UNESCO, 2015), https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, SDG 4 Data Digest 2021. National SDG 4 Benchmarks: Fulfilling Our Neglected Commitment, (Montreal: UIS, 2021), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380387.

1.1. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
(Indicators 1 and 2)

Accelerating progress in access to education and improving levels of learning outcomes throughout the education cycle are critically linked to children's readiness to learn, which in turn hinges on their participation in early childhood education.[14] Under GPE 2025, the partnership committed to support accelerated progress toward universal access to at least one year of quality pre-primary education. Two indicators monitor achievements toward this central aspect of the GPE 2025 goal. Indicator 1 (based on SDG indicator 4.2.5) measures the proportion of partner countries whose legal frameworks guarantee at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education. It provides an understanding of countries' legal efforts to ensure that all children have access to affordable and quality early learning opportunities. Indicator 2 (SDG indicator 4.2.2), the participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age, measures levels of participation in early childhood education.

Legal Provision for Early Learning Opportunities

Legal provisions to guarantee free and compulsory pre-primary education remain nascent at best among GPE partner countries. Indicator 1 data show that, among all GPE partner countries with available data, only 35 percent guarantee at least one year of free and/or compulsory pre-primary education (figure 1.1). That proportion goes down to 19 percent among partner countries affected by fragility and conflict (PCFCs): only five of the 27 PCFCs with data have a legal framework that guarantees free and/or compulsory pre-primary education. In comparison, more than 60 percent of high-income countries guarantee at least one year of free pre-primary education and 20 percent have legal provisions that enforce three years or more of free pre-primary education (figure 1.2).

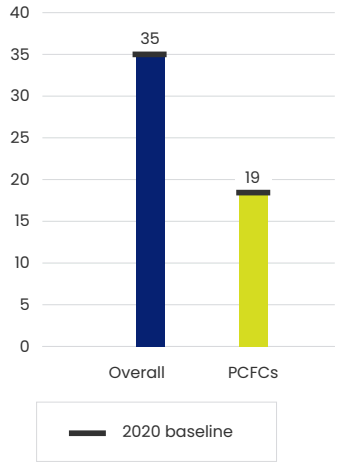
Although in the past decade a few countries have started to consider the importance of early learning, little change is observed in the regions where school readiness

14 D. Bundy et al., "Child and Adolescent Health and Development: Realizing Neglected Potential," in *Disease Control Priorities: Volume 8, Child and Adolescent Health and Development*, (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017); L. Pisani and A. J. Dowd, "Diversity and Equity in Education: Policy, Practice, and Options for Reaching Children at the Bottom of the Pyramid," in *Learning, Marginalization, and Improving the Quality of Education in Low-income Countries* (Vol. 2), (OpenBook Publishers, 2022).

FIGURE 1.1.

Too many partner countries still do not guarantee free and/or compulsory early childhood education.

Proportion of countries with at least one year of free pre-primary education guaranteed in legal frameworks (percent)

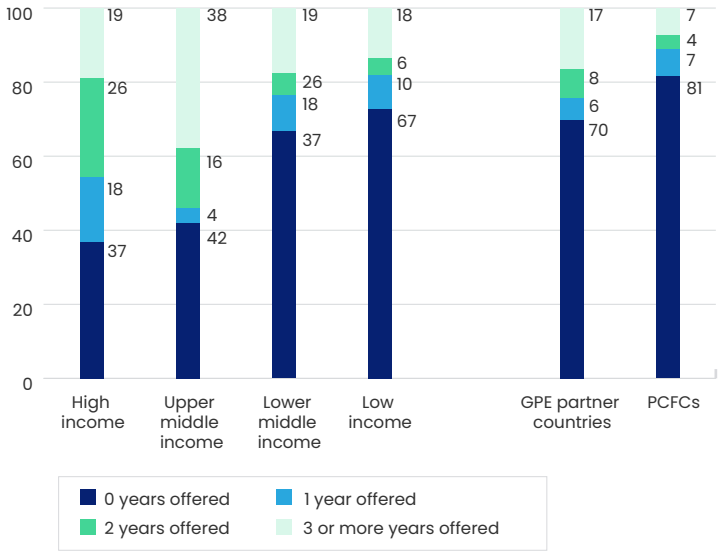


Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.
Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

FIGURE 1.2.

The proportion of partner countries guaranteeing free early childhood education varies by income group.

Proportion of countries offering or not offering free pre-primary education guaranteed in legal frameworks, 2020



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.
Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

yields the greatest benefits for future educational achievements. Out of 34 African partner countries with available data, only eight guarantee at least one year of free and/or compulsory pre-primary education, a figure that has remained unchanged since 2015 (appendix D).

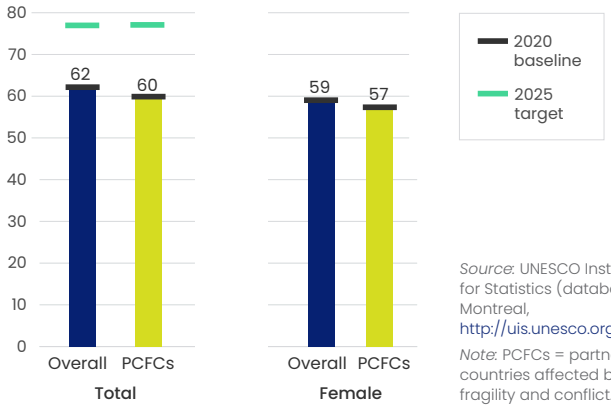
Access to Early Childhood Education

Participation in early childhood education is measured by Indicator 2, the adjusted net enrollment rate in organized learning programs among children who are one year younger than the official primary school entry age.[15] Most recent data indicate that, in 2020 on average across the 57 partner countries with available data, 62 percent of children were able to attend one year of organized learning before entering primary school (figure 1.3). This proportion falls slightly among PCFCs but remains at about 60 percent. And girls tend to have slightly less exposure to early childhood education, with an average

FIGURE 1.3.

Six in ten children in partner countries have access to at least one year of pre-primary education before entering primary.

Adjusted net enrollment rate, one year before the official primary entry age, 2020 baseline value and 2025 target (percent)



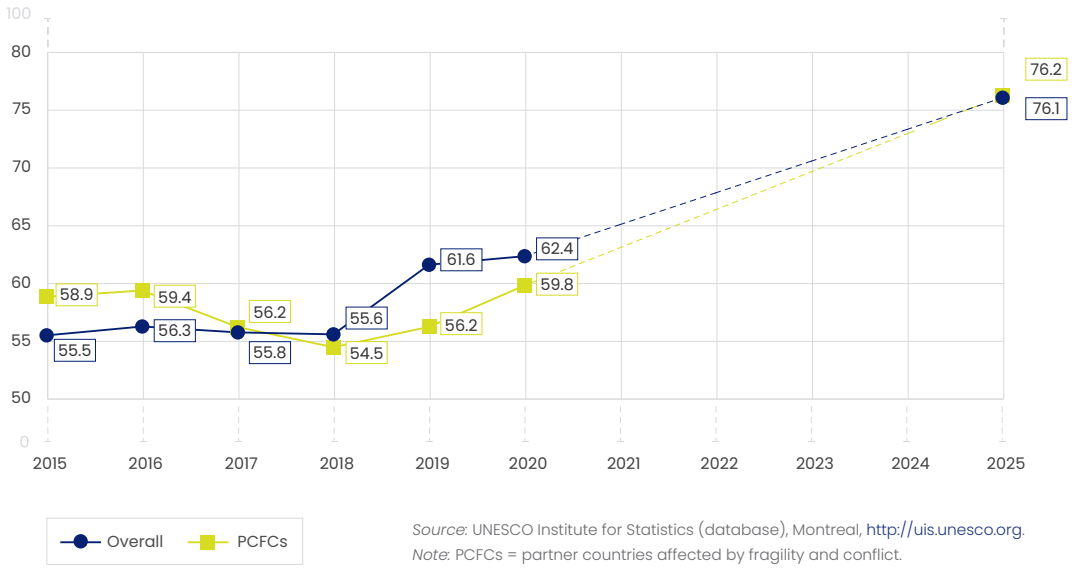
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.
Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

15 Organized early learning programs can include full- and part-time programs of varying degrees of learning quality and intensity. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), *Metadata for the Global and Thematic Indicators for the Follow-Up and Review of SDG 4 and Education 2030*, (Montreal: UIS, 2018), http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/metadata-global-thematic-indicators-sdg4-education2030-2017-en_1.pdf.

FIGURE 1.4.

Participation in organized early learning would need to improve at twice the rate in previous years to meet the 2025 target.

Adjusted net enrollment rate, one year before the official primary entry age, 2015-2020 and 2025 target (percent)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.
Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

adjusted net enrollment rate 3 percentage points below the overall and PFCF averages.

In recent years, partner countries have made progress in improving access to early childhood education (see box 1.2 for the example of Uzbekistan). The participation rate one year before entering primary education improved from 56 percent in 2015 to 62 percent in 2020, equivalent to a 1.3-percentage-point gain every year. Nevertheless, accelerating progress to reach the 2025 target would mean doubling this rate of progress: collectively, partner countries would need to increase the participation rate by 2.7 percentage points annually until 2025 (figure 1.4). And the collective target already falls short of universal access to one year of early childhood education.

Out of the 76 GPE partner countries, 53 (or 70 percent) have adopted a national target value for levels of participation in early childhood education by 2025. Among all countries with available data, 17 have already met their national target. In half of the remaining countries with data and targets, however, significant gaps exist between current progress and stated 2025 commitments (appendix E).[16]

Equity in Access to Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education opportunities in partner countries are distributed relatively equitably between girls and boys. For the 53 countries with available data, the gender parity index (GPI) stands at 0.96 (figure 1.5). However, girls living in PCFCs have consistently lower levels of access to early childhood education than boys do, with gender parity estimated at 0.92. Some partner countries face the double issue of low access to early childhood education and high gender inequality. In Chad and Djibouti, for instance, only 15 percent of children have access to early childhood education, and GPIs are below 0.86.[17]

A look at other dimensions of equity shows some significant gaps in access to early childhood education with respect to location (urban versus rural) and wealth (richest versus poorest). Of 22 partner countries with available data, all but two exhibit a wealth-related gap significantly larger than both the gender and the location gaps (appendix F). In Zambia, there is a 53-percentage-point difference in access to early childhood education between children from the richest households and children from the poorest households. That number

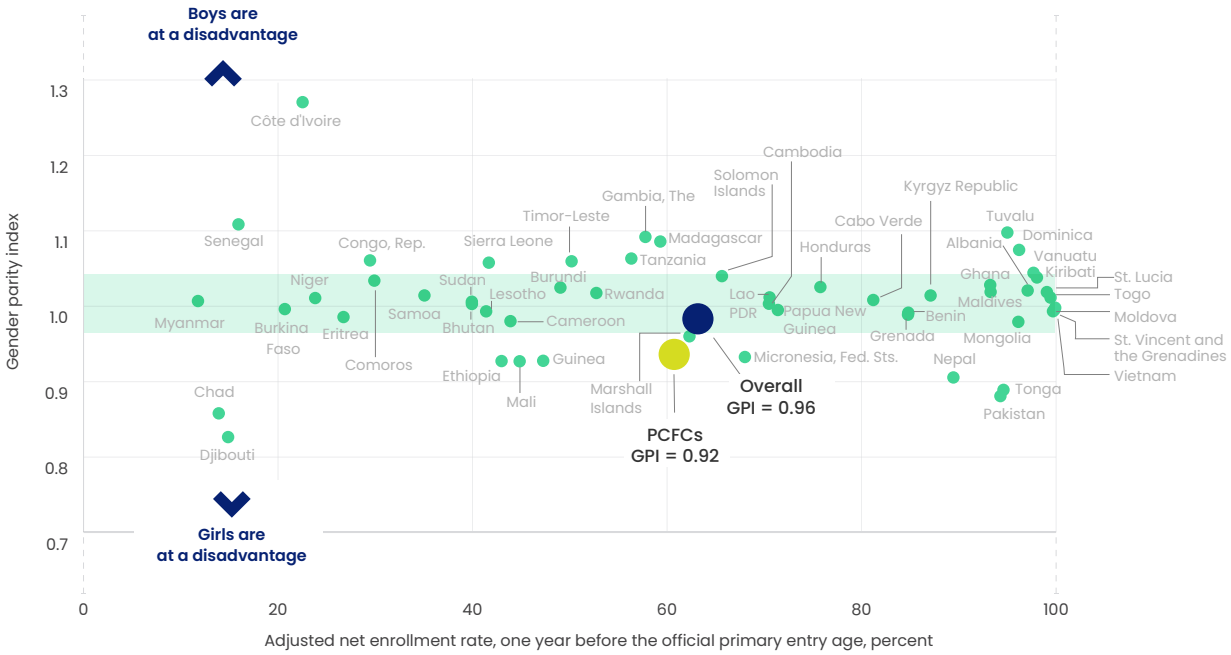
16 Indicator 2 does not capture the full story because it accounts only for children one year younger than the official entry age (which is typically 6 years old) rather than for children attending a full cycle of pre-primary education, for which levels of participation are much lower. Moreover, the indicator accounts for children at age 5 enrolled in organized early childhood education programs independently of the grade in which they are enrolled. Therefore, it does not distinguish between late and timely entry into early childhood education. Last, the indicator also includes 5-year-old children enrolled in primary education, and therefore can inflate true early childhood education attendance.

17 In countries with relatively high levels of participation in early childhood education, low levels of gender parity indicate that significant attention may be needed to improve girls' participation in early learning services. In Nepal and Pakistan, for instance, enrollment rates in organized early childhood education stand at 90 percent and 94 percent, respectively, yet GPIs are among the lowest, at 0.90 and 0.88.

FIGURE 1.5.

Girls living in PCFCs have fewer opportunities than boys to participate in early childhood education.

Adjusted net enrollment rate, one year before the official primary entry age and gender parity index, 2020 or most recent year



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.
Note: GPI = gender parity index; PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

BOX 1.2. Uzbekistan is spearheading efforts on early childhood education

In November 2022, Uzbekistan hosted the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education. Its position as host does not come as a surprise because, from low levels in the early 2010s, the country has focused its efforts toward guaranteeing pre-primary education for its children. In 2012, only about 23 percent of children attended preschool, with a much lower proportion (8.5 percent) in rural areas.

Efforts initiated in 2014 with a US$49 million grant allocated by GPE led to the design of the half-day year-round school readiness program that benefited 100,000 children in 2,420 rural pre-primary centers. The same pre-primary education centers had small libraries and delivered teacher training to more than 4,000 female preschool teachers. The investments also encouraged the country to engage further with early learning; in 2016, the president issued a decree to expand access to quality early childhood education.

Those efforts have contributed to improving participation in pre-primary education in rural areas, where participation increased to 28 percent in 2019. That year, Uzbekistan received a GPE Multiplier grant covering 2019-2024 to support the government's efforts to prioritize the expansion of equitable access to early childhood education.

and those for other countries illustrate the difficulties that partner countries face in developing affordable and quality early childhood education, which is rarely free and typically provided in large part by the private sector.

Overall, partner countries have made progress in reducing inequalities in access to early childhood education although some inequalities persist in PCFCs. Between 2015 and 2020, partner countries such as Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Mali and Nigeria experienced a relative increase in access to early childhood education. Even in those countries, however, wealth-related equity has either stagnated or deteriorated. Other PCFCs, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe, have experienced both a deterioration in access to early learning and worsening inequities at the expense of children from the poorest families.

1.2. ACCESS TO AND COMPLETION OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL

(Indicators 3i, 3ii and 5i)

Access to Primary and Secondary School

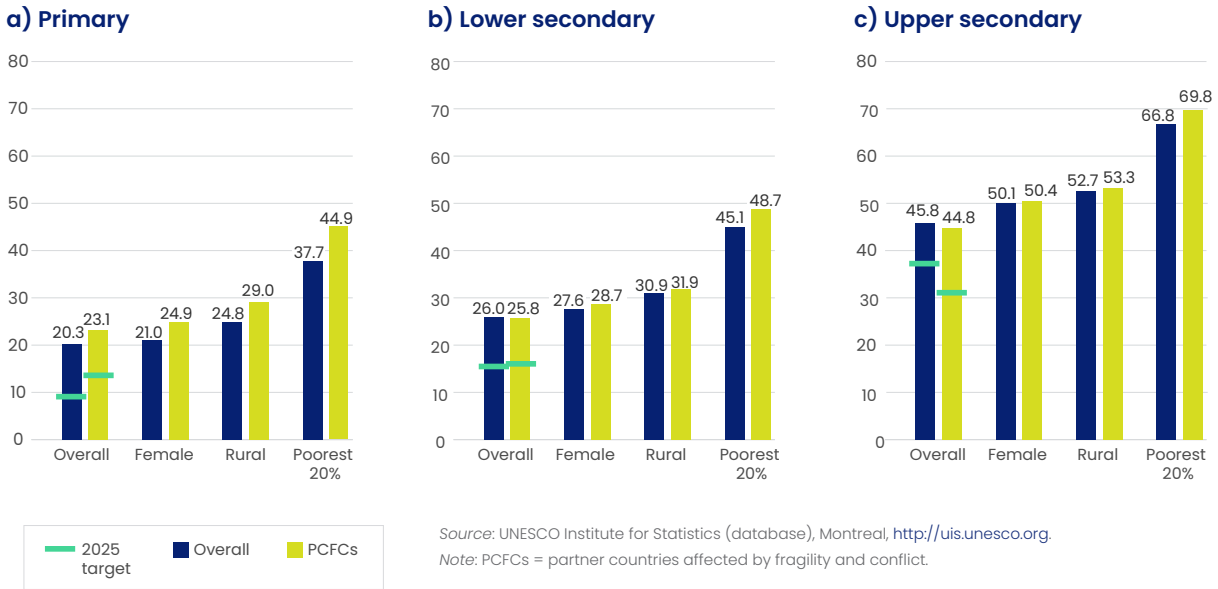
Guaranteeing children's right to learn implies guaranteeing them a seat in the classroom, and GPE 2025 aims to accelerate progress in access to education. Indicator 3ii (SDG indicator 4.1.4) measures progress in access to education by tracking the out-of-school rate at (a) primary school age, (b) lower-secondary-school age and (c) upper-secondary-school age. The indicator is calculated using household survey data to enable better monitoring of equity issues.

Data show that, in GPE partner countries, 20 percent of primary-school-age children are out of school (figure 1.6), and the proportion goes up to 23 percent in PCFCs. At the lower-secondary level, about 26 percent of children and adolescents are out of school; at the upper-secondary level the proportion increases to 46 percent. Moreover, the rates have not declined substantially in recent years, and estimates show that business-as-usual efforts will result in continuing large numbers of out-of-school children by 2025 (box 1.3).

FIGURE 1.6.

One in five children of primary school age is still out of school in partner countries.

Out-of-school rate for children of primary-, lower-secondary- and upper-secondary-school age (household survey data), 2020 baseline (percent)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.

Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

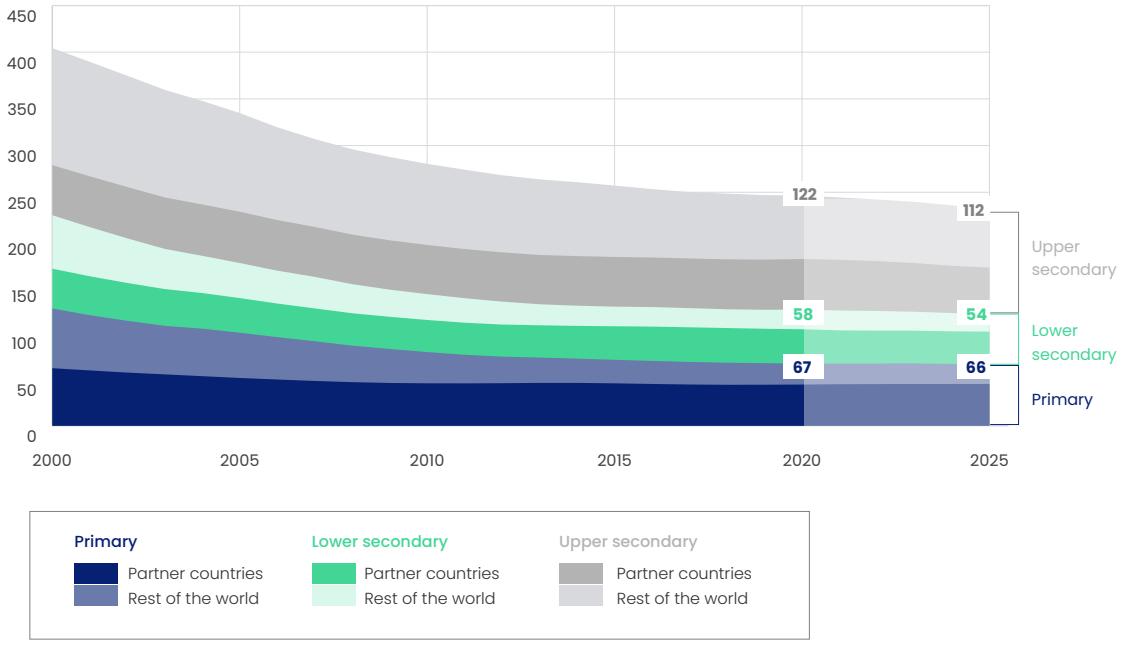
BOX 1.3. The size of the out-of-school challenge for the partnership: Estimating and projecting the number of out-of-school children in partner countries

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report have recently developed an estimation technique that combines administrative and survey data, and at the same time tries to correct for the possibility of large errors in administrative data and survey bias in household surveys. Using a cohort approach, the model allows for generation of estimates even when relatively little information exists. It also allows for short-term projections, although the consequences of COVID-19 are testing the reliability of such projections.

Assuming away the potential impact of COVID-19 on enrollment, the projections show that the number of out-of-school children may not decrease significantly by the end of GPE 2025 if drastic measures are not taken. The projections offer a wake-up call. On a business-as-usual assumption, 231 million children and adolescents will still be out of school globally by the end of GPE 2025. And 55 percent of those children, or 128 million, will be in GPE partner countries. At the primary level alone, GPE partner countries will account for two-thirds of all out-of-school children.

With business-as-usual rates of decline, 231 million children globally will be out of school by the end of GPE 2025, 55 percent of them in GPE partner countries.

Estimated and projected number of out-of-school children and adolescents, 2000-2025 (in millions)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Data Digest 2021. National SDG 4 Benchmarks: Fulfilling Our Neglected Commitment*, (Montreal: UIS, 2021), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380387.

Being born in a poor household remains one of the most important determinants for being out of school. At the primary level, the out-of-school rate is 17 percentage points higher for children from the poorest households compared to the average across all partner countries. And, at the lower- and upper-secondary levels, that difference goes above 19 percentage points.

Indicator 3ii data show very large disparities, including among countries from the same income groups. Chad, Mali, Rwanda, Togo and Uganda are all low-income countries. In Chad and Mali, however, 57 percent and 43 percent of primary-school-age children, respectively, are out of school (appendix G). By comparison, out-of-school rates of children in Rwanda, Togo and Uganda are all below 10 percent. Similarly, Tanzania's rate of out-of school youth is 58 percent at the lower-secondary level, well above the rate of other lower-middle-income countries like Bangladesh, Cameroon or Lesotho, all with rates at or below 17 percent.

While current projections indicate a slow reduction in out-of-school rates, the commitment made by partner countries is rather ambitious. If all partner countries meet their national targets, the primary out-of-school rate will halve and drop to 9 percent. Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Senegal and Tuvalu aim to reduce their primary out-of-school rate by 15 percentage points or more by 2025 (appendix G). Other countries, such as Guyana, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives and Rwanda, have nearly reached universal primary education and have committed to reduce their out-of-school rate to no more than 1 percent. Out-school rates will decrease by 10 percentage points for both lower and upper secondary. Guyana, the Maldives, Nepal and Samoa aim to reduce their lower secondary out-of-school rate to 1 percent or less by 2025.

Equity in Access to Primary and Secondary School

Partner countries have not always managed to improve access to education for the most vulnerable. In several countries, the out-of-school rate at the primary level among children from the poorest households increased between 2015 and 2020. This is the case for Benin, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Senegal and Zambia (appendix H). In PCFCs, children living in rural areas are also particularly at risk. With the exception of The Gambia, which achieved pro-poor and pro-rural progress between 2015 and 2020, the absolute gap between rural and urban areas in PCFCs has increased or stagnated at best.

Primary and Lower-Secondary Completion

If accessing education is the first step toward improving children's levels of learning, staying in school presents an equally difficult challenge in a number of partner countries. The GPE 2025 results framework uses Indicator 3i, the gross intake ratio (GIR) to the last grade, as a proxy for completion (see box 1.4).[18]

Of the entire population of children at the primary school graduation age, 75 percent of children are enrolled in the last grade across all partner countries (figure 1.7). That proportion decreases by a substantial margin in lower-secondary education, which had an overall GIR of 55 percent in 2020. PCFCs lag even farther behind, with GIRs of 68 percent and 43 percent in primary and lower-secondary education, respectively. GIR values are particularly low in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Burundi, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Niger and Uganda, less than 60 percent of children enter the last grade of primary education, with this proportion dropping to less than 40 percent at the lower-secondary level (appendix I).

Progress in primary and lower-secondary education completion is slow in GPE partner countries. At the primary level, GIRs in partner countries have, on average, mostly stagnated since 2015. Between 2015 and 2020, primary education completion has improved by only 3.7 percentage points, or barely a 0.7-percentage-point improvement annually (figure 1.8). At the lower-secondary level, the rate of improvement was slightly better at the equivalent of 1.1 percentage point per year.

If all countries meet their 2025 benchmarks at both primary and lower-secondary education levels, it would mean increases of 5 and 10 percentage points at the two levels, respectively, across partner countries for the GPE 2025 period.[19] This increase is the equivalent of improving by, respectively, 1 and 2 percentage points every year over five years—slightly faster than the rate observed during the previous period. At the primary level, countries

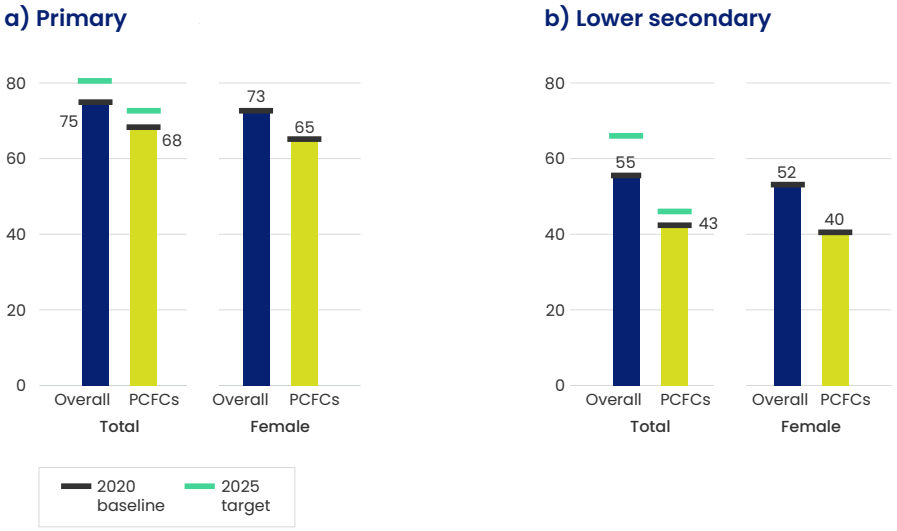
18 Education completion is the only indicator discussed in this chapter for which there is a difference between GPE results framework and international monitoring practices. As a proxy for completion, GIR captures the capacity of an education system to accommodate students in the last grade of the given level of education, putting students on the right path to completion. The SDG 4 monitoring framework measures completion by the completion rate. UIS, *Metadata for the Global and Thematic Indicators for the Follow-Up and Review of SDG 4 and Education 2030.*

19 National and collective targets for 2025 are provided in this section as reference points but should be compared with caution to GIR values because countries have adopted those targets in relation to completion rates. If both GIRs and national targets for completion rates are understood as measures of completion, several countries need to achieve sustained progress throughout 2025 to meet their objectives.

FIGURE 1.7.

Even if partner countries meet their targets, the partnership will remain far from achieving universal completion of lower-secondary education by 2025.

Gross intake ratio to the last grade of primary education, both sexes, 2020 baseline value, and 2025 target (percent)



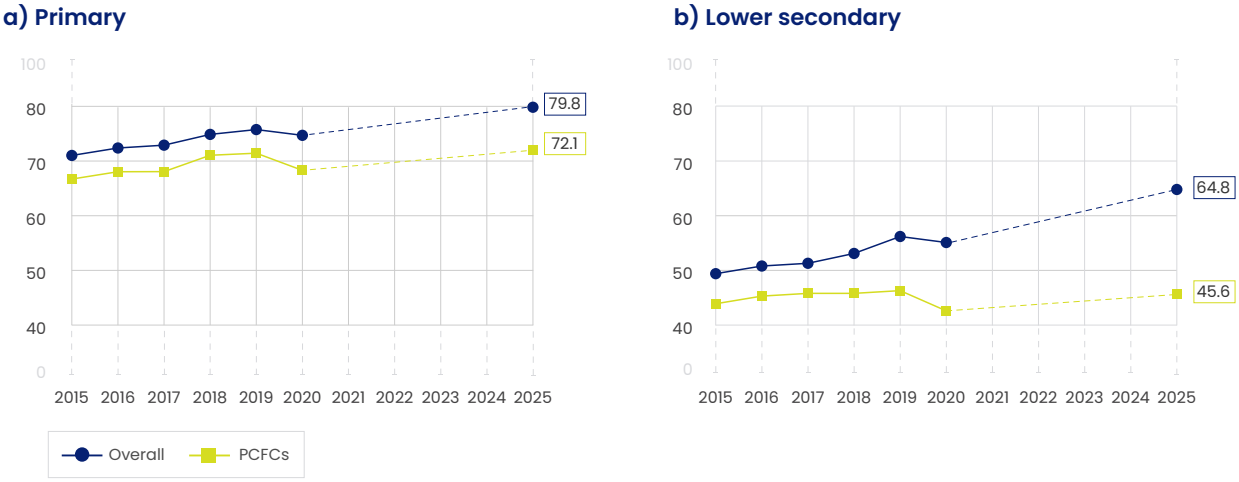
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.

Note: National targets set by countries are meant to represent values of primary completion rates as defined internationally in the Sustainable Development Goal agenda, not the gross intake ratio.
PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

FIGURE 1.8.

Completion of primary education has barely improved since 2015.

Gross intake ratio to the last grade of primary and lower-secondary education, 2015–2020, and 2025 targets (percent)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.

Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

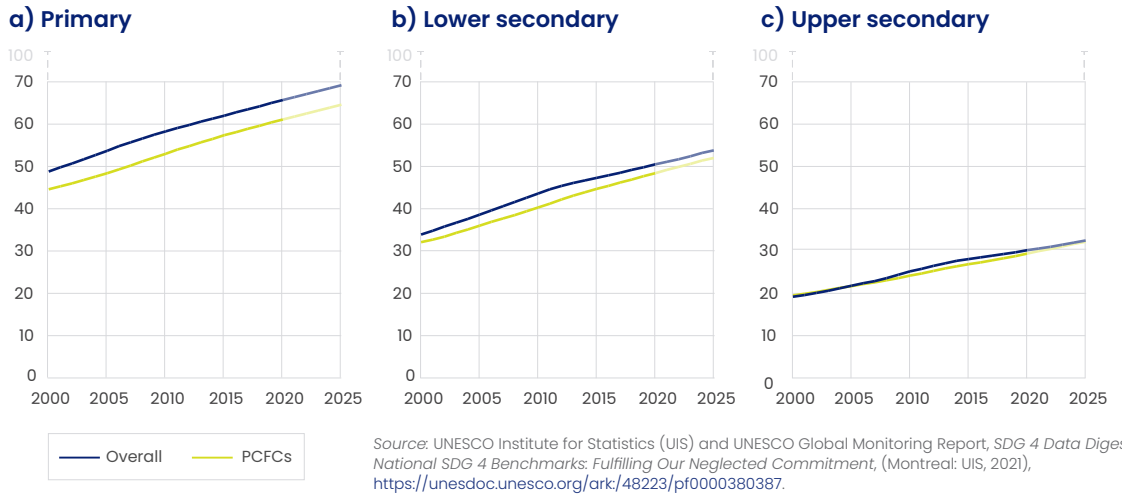
BOX 1.4. Improving data on completion

For Indicator 3i, the partnership uses the gross intake ratio into the last grade. This is inherited from earlier practices in the international education community when the gross intake ratio was seen as the best approach to approximate completion in the absence of better data.[a] Nevertheless, both the conceptual definition of the indicator and its empirical application suffer from limitations. Conceptually the indicator can exceed 100 percent, and it is the case for 9 percent of observation in Africa and 31 percent of observation globally, leading to inflated completion rates. More important, earlier uses of the indicator could have misled the global education community—as, for example, in the 2011 statement based on this indicator that the world was on track to achieving universal primary completion,[b] a target which in fact will not even be achieved by 2030 on current trends. Empirically, the quality of the indicator relies on the accuracy of single-year, single-age population estimates and is therefore sensitive to year-on-year fluctuations. For these reasons, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 monitoring framework has introduced the completion rate to replace the gross intake ratio into the last grade.

The completion rate measures the "percentage of a cohort of children or young people aged 3–5 years above the intended age for the last grade of each level of education who have completed that grade." A recent methodological development by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report team helps maximize survey data utilization to produce completion rates with similar or higher levels of coverage than the gross intake ratio while being conceptually more aligned with the notion of completion.[c] The use of survey data for the estimates opens the possibility to produce completion rates estimates by location and wealth. This new method also allows for short-term projections. Under current rates of progress, and without accounting for the potential impact of COVID-19, partner countries will still be 30 percentage points away from universal primary completion at the end of GPE 2025. However, if all partner countries achieve their targets by 2025, they will be 10 percentage points above the projected values.

Under current rates of progress partner countries will still be 30 percentage points away from universal primary completion at the end of GPE 2025.

Completion rate by level, 2000 to 2020 estimates and projections to 2025 (percent)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Data Digest 2021. National SDG 4 Benchmarks: Fulfilling Our Neglected Commitment*, (Montreal: UIS, 2021), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380387.

Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict; SDG = Sustainable Development Goal.

a. See, for example, UNESCO IIEP–Pôle de Dakar et al., *Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines. Sector-Wide Analysis with Emphasis on Primary and Secondary Education*, Vol. 1, (World Bank and UNICEF, 2014), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000230532/PDF/230532eng.pdf.multi.

b. World Bank and International Monetary Fund, *Global Monitoring Report 2011: Improving the Odds of Achieving the MDGs*, (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2293.

c. A. Dharamshi et al., (2022). "A Bayesian Model for Estimating Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 4.1.2: School Completion Rates," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series C (Applied Statistics)*, (2022), 1–43, https://doi.org/10.1111/rssc.12595.

BOX 1.5. Support to girls' education in Nepal using data to identify the most in need

Despite having reached gender parity in primary and lower-secondary education, Nepal still faces high girls' dropout rates in some of its most deprived areas. Identifying which of the country's 753 municipalities need support to enroll excluded populations has proven a complex challenge.

In Nepal, UNICEF has combined the deployment of its targeted interventions, such as the Girls' Access to Education (GATE) Program, with data from the Equity Index developed by the Data Must Speak Initiative and funded by GPE. The Equity Index allows for better understanding of the barriers faced by children across the country and for targeted interventions, notably to help girls who have dropped out or who never enrolled.

As a result of the approach, the GATE program has supported 10,000 girls in their journey to enroll or re-enroll between 2018 and 2020. Remedial classes, adapted curriculum and teaching, and community engagement have enabled girls to move from a nonformal education environment back into the formal education system.

like Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Guinea, Niger and Senegal would contribute substantially to the collective improvement if they meet their aim of improving levels of completion by 20 percentage points or more between 2020 and 2025 (appendix I). At the lower-secondary level, where general levels of completion are much lower, other countries with ambitious national benchmarks include The Gambia, Lesotho, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sudan, Togo and Tuvalu. All have a national benchmark that would require an increase of 20 percentage points or more by 2025.

Equity in Primary and Lower-Secondary Completion

In recent years, increasing girls' access to and completion of education has received heightened attention. Some donors, such as the United Kingdom, have pledged sustained support to girls' education for the next five years.[20] Under GPE 2025, the partnership commits to mainstream gender equality, focusing particularly on partner countries where girls' education lags behind. Many factors make girls' access to education and survival throughout the education cycle more difficult in comparison to boys. In low-income countries, those factors include safety concerns, parental choices, early marriage and pregnancy, school hygiene and sanitation and time spent on household chores. Such issues have particular significance in PCFCs, where girls are considered more vulnerable.

At the primary level, partner countries have not yet reached gender parity in terms of completion but have come very close, with GPIs averaging 0.96 (appendix J). Girls living in PCFCs, however, do not fare as well as their peers in other countries. Of the eight countries with data available and with a GPI below 0.9, only one, Guinea, is not a PCFC. All others—Afghanistan, Cameroon, Chad, Eritrea, Mozambique, Niger and Pakistan—are PCFCs and also exhibit low levels of completion. Overall, partner countries with GIRs exceeding 80 percent typically exhibit either parity or higher GIRs among girls than among boys. In lower secondary, of the 18 partner countries with data available and with GIRs above 80 percent at baseline, seven have reached gender parity and 10 have higher GIRs among girls than boys. Only Maldives has a high GIR value, 111 percent, and a high level of disparity at the expense of girls (with a GPI of 0.83).

Although gender gaps at the expense of girls remain an important issue in PCFCs, the situation of boys also requires attention. Boys are at a disadvantage in lower-secondary completion in more than half of all partner countries with data. In some countries, such as Bangladesh, Liberia, Nepal and Senegal, data from

20 Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), *Every Girl Goes to School, Stays Safe, and Learns: Five Years of Global Action 2021–26.* (London: FCDO, 2021), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/986027/FCDO-Girls-Education-Action-Plan.pdf.

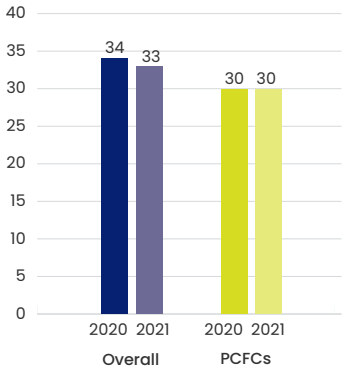
household surveys also indicate that the gender disadvantage has reversed or deteriorated at the expense of boys within the last five years. The data not only show the success of programs that have supported girls' access to education (box 1.5) but also highlight the need for renewed attention to the situation of boys.

Moreover, as with most indicators, inequalities in completion of primary and lower-secondary education are essentially driven by socioeconomic factors. Living in a rural area, or belonging to the least affluent families, imposes burdens on children at birth, which can be addressed only through proactive policies that target the most vulnerable. In Bangladesh, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and the Philippines, targeted efforts have started to pay off as levels of completion among children from the poorest households have accelerated faster than levels of completion among the richest households (appendixes K and L). Those countries have started to close the gap, sometimes by a substantial amount; for example, the Philippines reduced the absolute gap by a third between 2015 and 2020.

FIGURE 1.9.

Early marriage remains a reality for one-third of girls in partner countries.

Proportion of women aged 20–24 who were married or in a union before age 18, in 2020 and 2021 (percent)



Source: UNICEF Data Warehouse (database), New York, https://data.unicef.org/.

Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

Early Marriage: A Persistent and Important Barrier to Girls' Education

Early marriage is among the factors that prevent girls from enrolling or staying in school. It is estimated that the COVID-19 crisis has heightened the risk of child marriage and that worldwide up to 13 million additional girls could be at risk of child marriage between now and 2030.[21] Worsening financial insecurity and economic instability are now compounding the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.[22] Partial or national lockdowns have deprived girls of access to protection programs and increased their exposure to social and cultural pressures within their communities.

The determining role played by early marriage in girls' educational achievement is highlighted by GPE 2025 and Indicator 5i (SDG indicator 5.3.1), which monitors the proportion of women aged 20–24 who were married or in a union before age 18. In 2020, that proportion was 34 percent in GPE partner countries (30 percent in PCFCs) with data available (figure 1.9).

The incidence of early marriage varies across GPE partner countries. For instance, in Chad and the Central African Republic, six out of 10 young women were married before they reached 18 years of age. In Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali and Nigeria, about four out of 10 girls face early marriage. In those countries, girls are less likely than boys to complete lower-secondary education (appendix L). However, the focus on the age group of girls aged 20–24 weakens the association that can be made between progress observed in this indicator and activities aimed at tackling early marriage carried out during the implementation of GPE 2025. Teenage women aged 15–19 in 2020 will be aged 20–24 in 2025, which means that girls aged 20–24 monitored up to 2025 will have been affected by activities before the implementation of GPE 2025, whereas the effect on more vulnerable, younger teenagers who may be affected by GPE-funded activities will not be captured even by 2025.

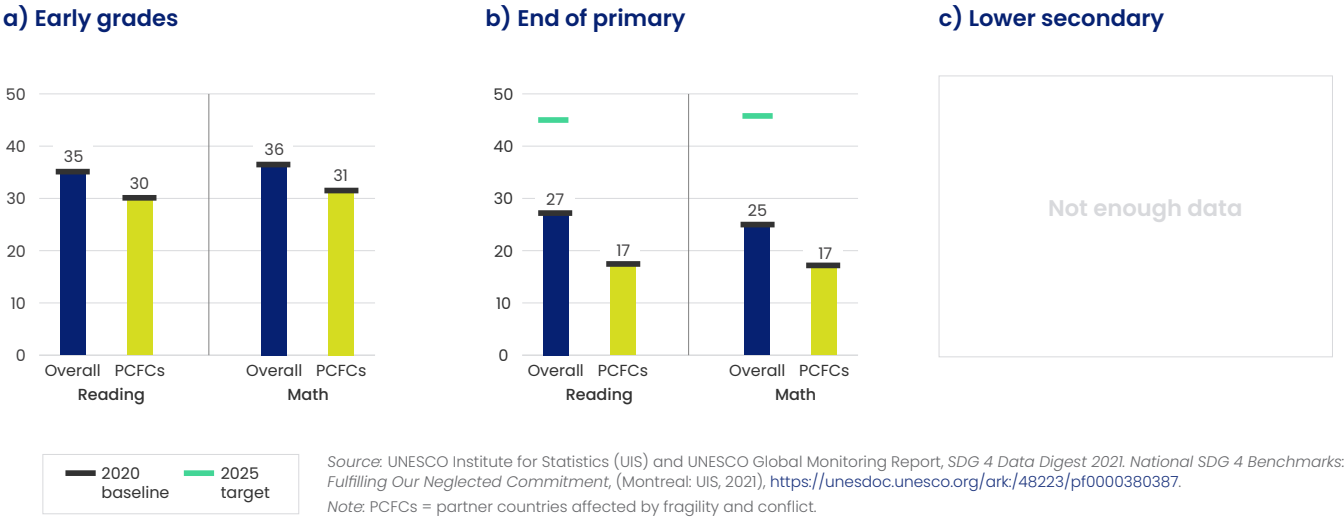
21 Global Education Monitoring Report Team. *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis; the latest facts on gender equality in education,* (UNESCO, 2021), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375707.

22 G. Szabo and J. Edwards, *The Global Girlhood Report 2020. How COVID-19 Is Putting Progress in Peril*, (Save the Children, 2020). G. Szabo and J. Edwards, *The Global Girlhood Report 2021. Girls Rights in Crisis*, (Save the Children, 2021).

FIGURE 1.10.

Partner countries will need to make unprecedented progress to meet 2025 learning targets.

Proportion of students achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics, by level, 2020 baseline values and 2025 targets (percent)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Data Digest 2021. National SDG 4 Benchmarks: Fulfilling Our Neglected Commitment*, (Montreal: UIS, 2021), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380387.

Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

1.3. LEARNING OUTCOMES AND TEACHING QUALITY

(Indicators 6, 7i and 7ii)

Given the importance of learning in the SDG 4 agenda and the centrality of accelerating progress in learning in the GPE 2025 goal, the results framework tracks trends in pupils' learning outcomes using available learning data. It does so alongside the monitoring of teaching quality—because of the critical role played by teachers in improving learning.

Learning Outcomes in Primary and Lower-Secondary Education

Indicator 6 (SDG 4.1.1) assesses partner countries' progress toward the GPE 2025 learning objective. It measures the proportion of children and young people who reach minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, at three points in the education cycle: early grades of primary (grade 2 or 3), the end of primary and the end of lower-secondary education.

For each measurement point, minimum proficiency levels have been defined and countries are assessed by using the proportion of children who meet those standards. One limitation of the approach is the difficulty in producing comparisons over time and across countries.

UIS and its partners have developed several methodologies to ensure comparability. Yet data coverage for this indicator remains low, with barely enough data to provide an assessment of the situation at baseline or of progress needed to meet the 2025 national and collective targets. At most, one-third of countries have a 2020 baseline value and availability drops dramatically at the lower-secondary level: barely 10 percent of partner countries have data on levels of learning in reading and mathematics (appendix Q).

Available data nevertheless indicate that achieving the partnership's goal will require sizeable efforts (figure 1.10). At baseline in 2020, just above a third of pupils in GPE partner countries achieved minimum proficiency in early grade reading; that proportion fell just below 30 percent in PCFCs. Similar levels were observed in mathematics. In extreme cases, as with the example of the Central African Republic and Madagascar (appendix M), less than 15 percent of children reached minimum proficiency, both in reading and mathematics, after having spent two to three years in primary school.

Smaller proportions of children achieve minimum proficiency at the end of primary than in early grades. Overall, at baseline in 2020, a quarter of pupils in partner countries met minimum proficiency standards at the end of primary in either reading or mathematics. In PCFCs, the proportion stood at 17 percent in both reading and mathematics.

Critically low levels of learning outcomes are one of the longstanding challenges facing GPE partner countries. The severe disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have compounded this challenge. Before the crisis, an estimated five out of 10 children in low- and middle-income countries could not read or understand a simple story.[23] School closures and disruptions resulting from the pandemic have likely deepened the learning crisis and risk being compounded by the looming financial and economic crisis as food, energy and commodity prices reach levels unprecedented since 2008. Initial UIS analyses do not indicate learning loss in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2021 compared to precrisis levels.[24] Nevertheless, it is too early to observe the final impact of the pandemic on children's learning outcomes, and recent simulations indicate that the share of children in low- and middle-income countries who complete and learn can fall by as much as 13 percentage points.[25]

At the lower-secondary level, partner countries usually do not participate in large-scale learning assessments, making it more difficult to produce group averages. For the few countries with available data, typically those countries who participated in the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) for Development program, the picture does not differ substantially. In Cambodia, Ethiopia, Senegal and Zambia, for instance, one out of every 10 young people, or fewer, reaches minimum proficiency in reading or mathematics at the end of lower secondary (appendix M).

Given the low levels of data availability, understanding trends in the proportion of children who achieve minimum proficiency levels is difficult, if not impossible. Only 12 partner countries have data on reading proficiency at grades 2 and 3 for both 2015 and 2020, and only 17 have such data for the end of primary. Of those countries, four with data on early grades have seen levels of reading proficiency deteriorate between 2015 and 2020. For reading proficiency at the end of primary, eight countries—almost half of countries with available data—have lower proportions of students reaching minimum proficiency in 2020 than in 2015.[26] Analyses of results from the CONFEMEN Program for Analysis of Education Systems indicate that for francophone African countries such trends might be driven by the deterioration or stagnation of learning levels among the lowest-performing pupils. In Cameroon, for instance, the average score in early grade reading did not improve between 2014 and 2019; however, the performance of the 10 percent of pupils performing at the lowest level deteriorated by 0.4 standard deviation whereas scores among the 10 percent of pupils performing at the highest level improved by 2 standard deviations.[27]

Partner countries have nevertheless committed to accelerate progress by 2025. The collective 2025 target value for all GPE countries with available data currently stands at about 45 percent for reading and mathematics at the end of primary. The levels of effort and support required to ensure that each country meets its national target differ. Several countries have set some of the 2025 national targets at 90 percent or above: for instance, Honduras and Tonga have done so for early grade mathematics, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and Vietnam have done so for reading at the end of primary.

Yet the distance for each country to cover between 2020 and 2025 indicates that some countries might face difficulties setting realistic targets, because they lack either reliable data or experience in setting targets on learning. In Vietnam, 82 percent of children achieved minimum reading proficiency in 2020 at the end of primary. To reach its 2025 target the country requires an 18-percentage-point increase over five years. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, only 9 percent of children met the same minimum proficiency standards at the end of primary in 2020. Reaching the country's 2025 national benchmark of 90 percent implies an increase of 81 percentage points in five years, or more than five times the progress required in Vietnam.

23 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Data Digest 2021. National SDG 4 Benchmarks: Fulfilling Our Neglected Commitment*, (Montreal: UIS, 2021), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380387.

24 Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), *COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa: Monitoring Impacts on Learning Outcomes*, (Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022), https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1054&context=monitoring_learning.

25 ACER, *COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa: Monitoring Impacts on Learning Outcomes;* World Bank, *Benin Global Partnership for Education Project Phase 3. Implementation Status & Results Report*, (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2022), https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/265251637150472747/pdf/Disclosable-Version-of-the-ISR-Benin-Global-Partnership-for-Education-Project-Phase-3-P167432-Sequence-No-05.pdf.

26 The GPE 2020 results framework included one indicator to measure progress in learning outcomes. That earlier indicator measured the proportion of partner countries showing improvements in learning outcomes in basic education and had several critical differences from the current Indicator 6. Whereas Indicator 6 focuses on minimum proficiency levels defined by international standards, the previous indicator looked at differences in average scores using national, regional and international learning assessments. And, whereas Indicator 6 distinguishes between three measurement points (early grades, end of primary, end of lower secondary), the previous indicator referred only to "basic education" broadly, thus summarizing changes at all three levels into one measure. Against those caveats, the previous results report indicated that 70 percent of partner countries with available data saw improvements in learning outcomes between 2010–15 and 2016–19. See Global Partnership for Education (GPE), *Results Report 2021: Final Results Report on GPE's 2016–2020 Strategy*, (Washington, DC: GPE, 2021).

27 CONFEMEN, *PASEC 2019. Qualité des Systèmes Educatifs en Afrique sub-Saharienne Francophone. Performance et Environment de l'Enseignement-Apprentissage au Primaire*, (Dakar: CONFEMEN, 2019), https://paseccconfemen.lmc-dev.fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/08/RapportPasec2019_Rev2022_WebOK.pdf.

BOX 1.6. Improving foundational literacy in Benin.

Levels of learning in Benin at the outset of GPE 2025 represented the average situation in early grade reading among GPE partner countries. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, using data from the CONFEMEN Program for Analysis of Education Systems, only four out of 10 pupils in grade 2 had reached minimum proficiency in reading in 2019.

To address the issue, in 2019, Benin began a curriculum reform to improve foundational learning supported by GPE and the World Bank. For the period 2019–23, the program targets about 12,000 public and private primary schools across the country, characterized by low levels of resources, with a focus on grades 1 and 2. With the support from GPE and other partners, the national team received training on explicit pedagogy and scaffolding methods to develop lessons plans, teacher guides, training modules and coaching systems. The team produced decodable textbooks and teacher guides with well-structured lesson plans, and regular support was provided to teachers using learning assessments for formative feedback.

The effectiveness of the intervention will be monitored by regular assessments of learning outcomes with the aim to improve the proportion of grade 2 students who achieve minimum national reading standards by at least 6 percentage points in the span of four years.[a]

a. World Bank, *Benin Global Partnership for Education Project Phase 3. Implementation Status & Results Report,* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2022), https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/265251637150472747/pdf/Disclosable-Version-of-the-ISR-Benin-Global-Partnership-for-Education-Project-Phase-3-P167432-Sequence-No-05.pdf.

At the other end of the spectrum, some countries have set national benchmark values at levels that will require a minimal increase in the proportion of pupils reaching reading and mathematics proficiency. In 2020, 40 percent of pupils in Kyrgyz Republic had achieved minimum reading and mathematics skills at the end of primary. With its 2025 national benchmark values set at 43 and 42 percent, respectively, the country needs to increase the proportion of children who achieve minimum proficiency by 3 percentage points at most over the next five years. Similarly, Madagascar, where in 2020 only 6 percent of children met the minimum proficiency level in reading at the end of primary, aims to increase the proportion of children who achieve basic reading skills at this level by only 4 percentage points over five years.

Nevertheless, recognizing the challenge faced by countries that lag the farthest behind, GPE is supporting several countries to accelerate efforts, notably through support to curricular reform in early grade literacy as in Benin (box 1.6).

Gender Parity in Learning Outcomes

In GPE partner countries, girls perform better overall than boys in early grade reading. At the end of primary education, girls do better than boys in reading in three-quarters of partner countries with available data, sometimes by a substantial margin. In the most extreme cases—such as Cambodia, Honduras, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Myanmar and Senegal—the proportion of girls achieving the minimum proficiency level in reading is more than 25 percent higher than that of boys.

As noted earlier, gender disparities are typically measured by the GPI (SDG indicator 4.5.1). The average GPI in GPE partner countries stands at 1.08 in reading (appendix N).[28] By contrast, a GPI value of 0.95 for early grade mathematics in partner countries reveals an advantage for boys, with similar patterns observed at the end of primary education. However, GPI values should be understood in conjunction with overall levels of learning.

28 A GPI value above 1.03 means that girls are advantaged compared to boys, and a value below 0.97 implies that boys are advantaged in comparison to girls.

Countries with high learning levels tend to have smaller gender gaps than do countries with low learning levels that can exhibit important variations. Among countries with higher shares of pupils reaching minimum proficiency in reading (above 40 percent), the GPI standard deviation is 0.06; it reaches 0.19 among the 18 countries with less than 40 percent of pupils reaching minimum reading proficiency at the same level. The situations vary, however, with nine countries exhibiting disparities at the expense of boys, five countries with disparities at the expense of girls and four countries at gender parity. In early grades mathematics the pattern is more pronounced, with a standard deviation of 0.07 among the countries with higher shares of pupils reaching minimum proficiency and 0.42 for the 13 countries with less than 40 percent of pupils achieving minimum levels of proficiency. In some countries, disparities at the expense of girls remain particularly important: in Benin, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Guinea-Bissau, about 40 percent or less of pupils reach minimum proficiency levels in early grade reading, and the GPI in those countries stands at or below 0.91.

Teaching Quality

Teachers are the most important school-based determinant of children's learning outcomes.[29] However, education systems in low- and lower-middle-income countries have not kept pace with increased enrollment, with the result that many countries have overcrowded classes and unqualified teachers.[30] In several Sub-Saharan African countries, for instance, pupil-teacher ratios are worse than in 1990. Likewise, the percentage of trained teachers in the region fell from 84 percent to 67 percent in the past two decades.[31] Those patterns highlight how policy issues are interconnected with the surge in primary school enrollment, which puts pressure on pupil-teacher ratios and limits progress in completion at the lower- and upper-secondary levels. Countries' difficulties in increasing their number of trained teachers can be compounded by the difficulty in rapidly expanding national capacities to train teachers. In developing regions both the number of teachers and their level of training remain too low to guarantee an effective learning experience for children who have the opportunity to sit in the classroom.

The GPE 2025 results framework includes Indicator 7ii to track the proportion of partner countries where teaching quality is assessed. This indicator is measured through a desk-based review, and it is a proxy for the quality of the systems in place to assess teaching quality. A partner country's teacher quality assessment system can be advanced, established or emerging depending on its scores against four criteria. Preliminary data show that, at baseline in 2021, 51 percent (39 out of 76) of partner countries had teaching assessments marked as established or advanced. In PCFCs, the proportion was 50 percent (18 out of 36).

Indicator 7i (SDG indicator 4.c.1) highlights the importance of teachers in GPE 2025. It measures the proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications at each level of education and assesses the extent to which teachers have sufficient training and qualification for the level at which they teach. The reliance on nationally defined minimum qualification requirements, however, limits comparability across countries. UIS has started to engage with the development of an International Standard Classification of Teacher Training Programmes, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in November 2021, and is currently working with partners toward implementing the standards in international education data collection[32].

At the primary and secondary level, respectively, 76 percent and 72 percent of teachers meet their national minimum qualification standards across partner countries (figure 1.11), with little to no difference by gender. PCFCs have similar levels of training.

The importance of teachers is often recognized in partner countries' policies and strategies. If all countries meet their 2025 national targets, more than 80 percent of primary teachers will reach national qualification standards by 2025.

29 M. Barber and M. Mourshed, "How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top," McKinsey, *Our Insights*, September 1, 2007, https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/how-the-worlds-best-performing-school-systems-come-out-on-top; T. Béteille and D. K. Evans, "Successful Teachers, Successful Students: Recruiting and Supporting Society's Most Crucial Profession," *Development Impact* (blog), January 30, 2019, https://blogs.worldbank.org/impactevaluations/successful-teachers-successful-students-new-approach-paper-teachers; UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4. *Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2014), http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002256/225660e.pdf.

30 UNESCO, *Non-state Actors in Education. Who Chooses? Who Loses?* Global Education Monitoring Report, (Paris: UNESCO, 2022).

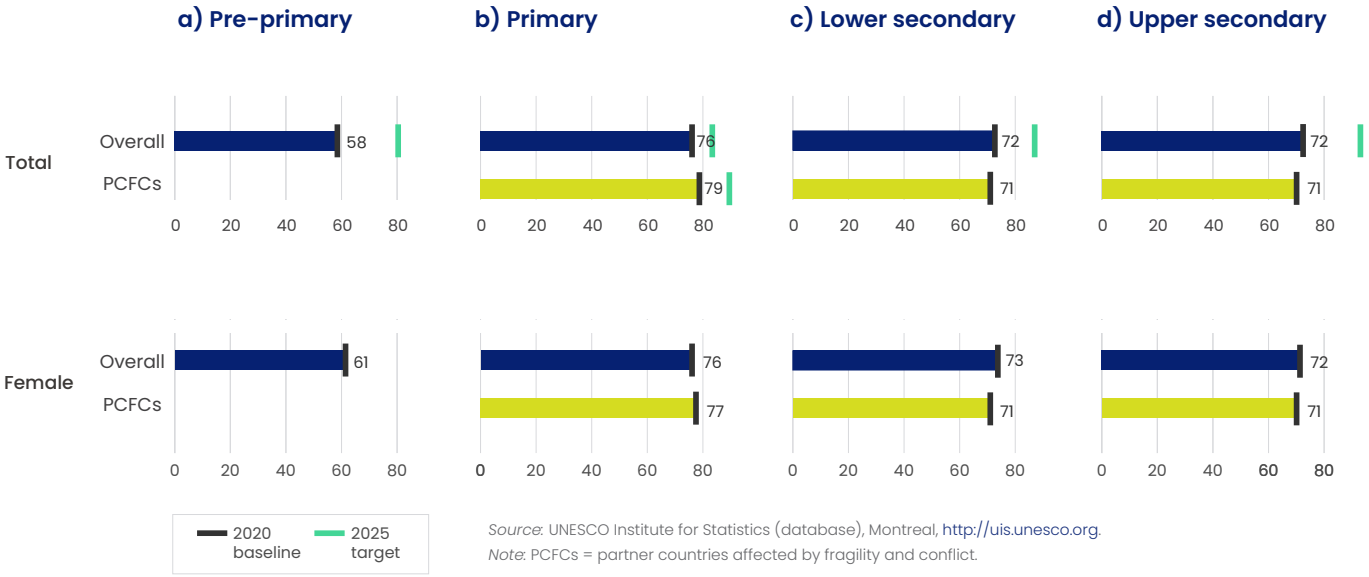
31 UNESCO, *SCOPE: Quality*. Global Education Monitoring Report (Paris: UNESCO, 2022).

32 UNESCO, *Records of the General Conference. 41st session* (Volume 1), (Paris: UNESCO, 2021); UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), *International Standard Classification of Teacher Training Programmes*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2021), https://tcg.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/10/TCG-WG-T-2_EN-ISCED-T_draft_EN.pdf.

FIGURE 1.11.

Many teachers will need training to meet national standard qualifications by 2025.

Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, by level, 2020 baseline values and 2025 benchmarks (percent)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.
Note: PCFCs = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

Large variations exist among partner countries. For example, Madagascar has only a handful of teachers qualified across all levels (appendix O). At the primary education level, only 15 percent of Malagasy teachers meet the minimum qualification standards; at the lower- and upper-secondary levels, only 22 percent and 16 percent of teachers, respectively, are qualified. By contrast, Cambodia reports 100 percent of teachers with the minimum required qualifications to teach in pre-primary and primary education.

Many countries have the objective of reaching 100 percent of qualified teachers by 2025, or by 2030 at the latest.[33] At the primary level, 13 partner countries have made explicit commitments to achieve this benchmark by 2025. Countries—for example, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Moldova and Uzbekistan—usually repeat this commitment for the lower- and upper-secondary levels.

As with learning outcomes benchmarks, levels of ambition and feasibility differ. In São Tomé and Príncipe, which aims to have 100 percent of teachers meeting national qualification standards by 2025, only 27 percent of teachers are currently considered qualified by national standards. In Madagascar, by contrast, 2025 target values and available data suggest that the country will have to increase its proportion of qualified teachers by only a small amount, from 15 percent in 2020 to 19 percent in 2025. Madagascar's benchmark might be more realistic, especially when considering the long-lasting difficulties the country has faced in raising the level of qualification of its teachers.[34]

Having a large proportion of trained teachers does not necessarily translate into improved learning. At the primary level, among the countries that report a high proportion of teachers with minimum qualifications, Vietnam is the only country with an equally high proportion of pupils achieving minimum proficiency in reading (figure 1.12). In partner countries like Burundi, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Zambia, only 10 percent of pupils achieve minimum proficiency despite reporting that 100 percent of teachers are qualified. That discrepancy notably justifies the need for the International Standard Classification of Teacher Training Programmes developed by the UIS. Further, it indicates that, in addition to recruiting and training more teachers, partner countries need to look at the quality of their teacher training programs and ensure that they use qualified teachers effectively to support progress in learning outcomes.

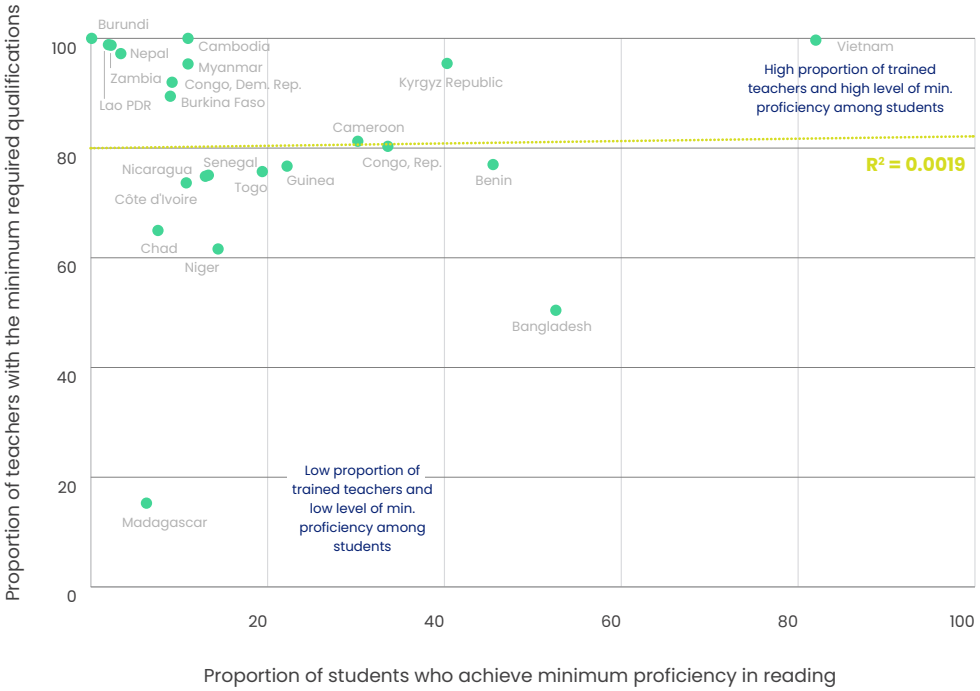
33 (UIS) and UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Data Digest 2021. National SDG 4 Benchmarks: Fulfilling Our Neglected Commitment*.

34 International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (TTF), *Madagascar Adopts National Teacher Policy*, (Paris: TTF, 2020). https://teachertaskforce.org/news/madagascar-adopts-national-teacher-policy.

FIGURE 1.12.

A higher proportion of teachers with minimum required qualifications does not guarantee that children are learning.

Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications to teach in primary education and proportion of students who achieve minimum proficiency in reading at the end of primary education, 2020 or most recent year (percent)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, http://uis.unesco.org.

1.4. MONITORING THE GPE 2025 GOAL: THE CRITICAL ISSUE OF DATA AVAILABILITY

The indicators used to monitor progress against the GPE 2025 goal provide an understanding of the challenges that the partnership is expected to address by 2025. GPE partner countries have not been spared by the COVID-19 crisis, the biggest shock to education systems worldwide since the two world wars. The data used in this chapter describe the situation of partner countries at the onset of the pandemic, which is also the baseline year of GPE 2025; those data indicate that partner countries cannot afford to stay at a business-as-usual rate of progress. Even before accounting for the potential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that accelerating progress in learning and early childhood education, as well as access to and completion of primary and lower-secondary education, will be a complex task.

Moreover, the statistical picture provided here is critically incomplete. For most indicators, with the exception of indicators pertaining to early childhood education, data availability is below 50 percent across all partner countries in any given year (appendix P). And, for the past five years, only about a third of the necessary data to monitor access and completion, learning outcomes and teaching quality are available across partner countries.

There is a visible lack of progress in data availability observed in the data reported to UIS, the main source of data used to monitor the GPE 2025 goal. The important efforts of development partners and the stagnating or declining levels of data availability raise the question of effectiveness. It will be important for the partnership to ensure that current efforts to improve statistical capacity in partner countries translate into actual outcomes at the country level and ultimately in international data collection. In this regard, avenues to explore could include

considering data submission to UIS and dissemination at the international level as key results necessary for access to the variable part of system transformation grants or involving grant implementation agents as facilitators between UIS and partner countries.

Effective support to statistical capacity is paramount for the partnership to clearly identify needs and priorities. Currently, decisions for investments are made, and monitoring exercises carried out, when half or more of the data needed for appropriate decision-making are missing.