



Promoting universal access to education for girls

Commission on the Status of Women



Empowering Future Generations: Cultivating Global
Literacy and Enlightenment



Forum: CSW

Issue: Promoting universal access to education for girls

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Introduction

“Everyone has the right to education.” This is what Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states. Sadly, not everyone in the world is currently able to access that education. Due to socio-economic issues, famine and sickness, children are sometimes withheld from going to school. Minority groups and women are more heavily impacted by these difficulties. According to UNESCO estimates, there are 119 million girls across the globe that do not attend school, including thirty-four million primary-school aged girls, twenty-eight million of lower-secondary age and fifty-eight million of upper-secondary school age. While there has been an increase in the equality between girls and boys attending primary school in recent years, secondary- and higher education levels tend to show a starker contrast between girls and boys attending school. Factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic and oppressive regimes have only exacerbated these differences. This research report will briefly outline the history of universal access to education, and how education is still affected by gender- inequality to this day.

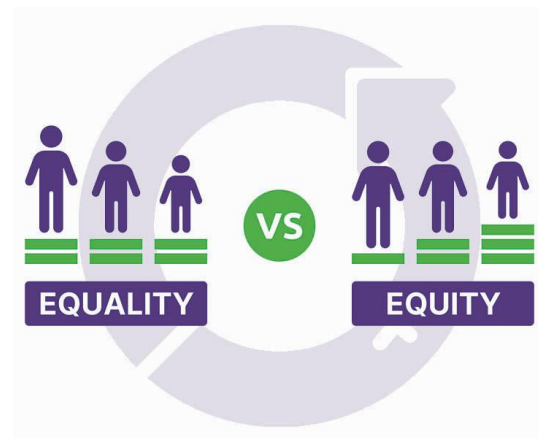
Definition of Key Terms

Gender equality

A gender-equal situation is when rights and opportunities are unaffected by gender.

Gender equity

To strive for gender-equity is to help women to achieve the same rights and opportunities as men, to ensure that not only are those rights and opportunities available to all but that they are also accessible to all.



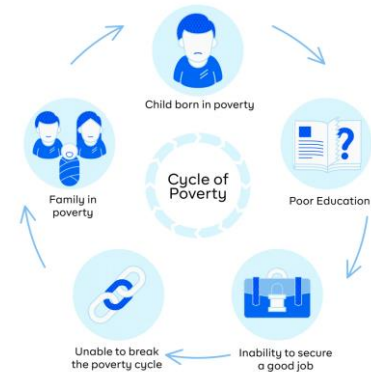
Gender bias

Favouritism towards, or discrimination against a particular gender



The cycle of poverty

The cycle of poverty is when poor families remain impoverished for at least three generations. This causes children to grow up poor, thus slowing their academic achievements and lowering their chances in the job market. This causes the next generation to remain poor, and so the cycle continues.



General Overview

Women's education throughout history

Women's education has varied throughout history, with evident differences between different civilisations. While in some situations girls and boys were treated in the same way, it was far more common for girls to be educated in either a different curriculum, or not at all. Women from wealthy families tended to be better educated. They were taught to read and right in school, and in Ancient Egypt they were even allowed to have jobs. Later, in most countries, the only way for women to be properly educated was by joining the church. For well-off girls it remained common to be educated at home by a tutor. Secondary and higher education facilities would only be opened to women from the 17th century, and it was not until the second half of the 19th century that movements advocating for universal access to primary education started up in Europe and America, with mixed results. Even after the official acceptance of women's education, women seeking education were publicly shamed for doing so. An example of this is to be seen in the Girton College at Cambridge, an all-female college that would only be acknowledged by Cambridge over a decade after its foundation. Universal legislation on the topic of girls' education would only arrive in the second half of the 20th century.

Benefits of girls' education

Not only is education a universal human right, as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1984, but it is also hugely beneficial to communities. In a country that invests in education for women and girls, lifetime earnings of women drastically increase. This leads to a rise in the National Growth Rate. Educated women are less likely to subject their children to child marriage and are more likely to encourage their children to attend school, thus reinforcing the positive effects of education. Due to the greater comprehension of health and nourishment among more educated women, education causes a drop in infant mortality rates, in maternal mortality rates and in child stunting. Finally, educated girls and women contribute significantly to social, economic, and political facets of society by enhancing inclusivity, adding perspective, and enhancing the general work force of a country. According to estimations, some countries lose more than one billion dollars a year by failing to properly educate women.



Issues still faced today

Poverty, child marriage and early pregnancy

One of the main reasons for keeping girls out of school is poverty. Families that are unable to earn enough money, or that do not earn enough to provide care for their children, keep girls away from school to work or to take care of their siblings. When choosing which of their children they will send to school, parents tend to prioritise boys over girls, as boys have more prospects in the job market, and a higher chance of finishing their education. Another reason that girls are kept home more often than boys is that girls can be married off at an early age, thus relieving economical strain on their parents. Child marriage is hugely damaging to a child's development, as it brutally ends childhoods and takes away all forms of choice. It can also lead to early pregnancy. UNESCO data shows that women and girls are substantially more likely to leave school early, when the right to education is legally restricted for pregnant and parenting girls.

Gender norms and expectations

While education for women might have become a basic human right, cultural norms and expectations have not adapted to accommodate that right. This means that girls are expected to do more chores around the house, that young women are expected to start a family and that women, once settled, are expected to take care of the home environment. In many cultures, men are seen as the breadwinners, while women are seen as the caregivers. This cultural bias causes a disparity in education between girls and boys. Burkina Faso, Yemen and Somalia, show the most disparity between girls' and boys' household chores. Encouraging girls and women to attend school and to work will not work, if they are not aided in doing the tasks they are expected to fulfil.

This is especially the case in certain religious communities. For example, in Gambia, societal norms are deeply influenced by religion. Certain interpretations of religious texts discourage co-educational institutions, thus hindering girls' access to higher education. In addition to this, religious prioritisation of Child Marriage leads to girls leaving school earlier, as they are expected to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers.

Menstruation

Schools and other learning institutions do not always have sanitary facilities, thus obstructing girls from attending school during their menstruation. This issue is exacerbated by the stigma surrounding menstruation in some societies, which leads to girls feeling embarrassed or scared to attend school while on their period. An example of this is to be seen in Nepal, where menstruating women are seen as impure, and are thus banished to huts during their cycle.

Gender-based violence

According to estimations, 246 million girls and boys are harassed on their way to school every year, with girls being disproportionately targeted. 1 in 4 girls who reported sexual violence in Tanzania experienced the incident while travelling to school. Parents are less likely to send



their children to school, when the road there is long and dangerous, and girls are less willing to attend school when there is a constant danger of gender-based violence.

Major Parties Involved

UNESCO

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. By promoting international cooperation in the fields of education, culture, science and communication, UNESCO aims to contribute to peace and security on a global level. UNESCO works to reduce gender-inequality and continues to work on numerous projects to achieve its goals.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan stands out as the only country where education for girls over the age of twelve is prohibited. According to UNESCO data, 1.4 million girls in Afghanistan are currently being deprived of schooling. Due to the mounting teacher shortage and increasing socio-economic difficulty, there is also a sharp decline in girls and boys attending primary school. In total, 80% of Afghan school-aged girls are being deprived of education.

UN Women

UN Women works on initiatives to empower women and girls through education.

UNICEF

Advocates for universal primary education, especially for marginalised girls.

Timeline of Events

1884	The Seneca Falls Convention in the U.S. advocates for women's rights, including access to education.
1850s-1890s	Progressive movements in Europe and the Americas push for universal primary education, with mixed success in including girls.
1960	UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education
1966	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
1975	The first UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City



emphasises education as key to achieving gender equality.

- 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- 1981 African Charter on Human and People's Rights
- 1984 Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), affirming the right for education for all
- 1989 The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ensures children's rights to free and compulsory primary education, irrespective of gender.
- 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and The World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, sets global goals for universal primary education.
- 1995 The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women sets strategic objectives to eliminate gender disparities in education.
- 2000 Adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) including Goal 2 (achieve universal primary education) and Goal 3 (promote gender equality and empower women).
- 2001 The Inter-American Democratic Charter decides that girls and women should have access to quality education.
- 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.
- 2004 The Arab Charter on Human Rights, article 41, states that



everyone should have a right to education

2011

ASEAN Human Rights Declaration elevates states education as a human right.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

High-profile campaigns led by figures like Malala Yousafzai, who survived an attack by the Taliban for advocating girls' education, have brought global attention to the issue of girls' access to education in Afghanistan.

UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) initiative highlighted the importance of women's education.

Organisations like the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and local women's groups worked to provide education opportunities tailored to women's needs.

Possible solutions

Workaround forms of education

Patriarchal regimes, cultural norms and stigmatisation make decisive measures more difficult to achieve. It can be useful to look towards less direct forms of education, in order to attain at least a basic level of education for women and girls in those situations. Through educational radio shows, the development of teaching frameworks and community-based literacy classes, education can be provided in a less formal way, thus circumventing nations policies.

Protecting pregnant and parenting girls' right to education

While there are only a few countries with legislation actively prohibiting pregnant and parenting girls' access to education, only 33% of countries have legislation actively aiding and protecting those girls. By incorporating pregnant and parenting girls' needs and rights into national laws, pregnant and parenting girls retain the ability to achieve in educational settings.

Economic Incentives

For many girls, a core reason for not being able to attend school is economic difficulty. Economic incentives would not only support a family and so enable them to send their children to school, but they would also encourage families that are less willing due to cultural norms, to change their ways.

Useful documents

Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace, and Security:



- Adopted by the UN Security Council, it highlights the importance of women's participation in peace processes and the need to protect their rights, including access to education, during and after conflicts.

Resolution 64/290 (2010) on the Right to Education in Emergencies:

- Adopted by the UN General Assembly, this resolution emphasizes the right to education for all, including girls, in emergencies and conflict-affected areas.

Resolution 70/1 (2015) on Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

- This resolution includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with Goal 4 focusing on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, and Goal 5 targeting gender equality, including the elimination of disparities in education.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948):

- Article 26 recognizes education as a fundamental right for all, emphasising that it shall be equally accessible to everyone, irrespective of gender.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979):

- Article 10 specifically obligates state parties to eliminate discrimination against women in education and ensure equal access at all levels.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989):

- Articles 28 and 29 outline every child's right to education and promote gender equality in access to educational opportunities.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966):

- Article 13 recognizes the right to education and urges states to ensure access for marginalised groups, including girls.

Education for All (EFA) Framework (1990):

- Launched in Jomtien, Thailand, the EFA initiative aimed to achieve universal primary education and reduce gender disparities by 2015, reinforced at the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), emphasising girls' education as a priority.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995):

- A landmark framework from the Fourth World Conference on Women, which set strategic objectives for eliminating gender disparities in education.

Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2015):



- Adopted during the World Education Forum, it aligns with SDG 4, committing to inclusive and equitable education, with special focus on marginalised groups like girls.

UNICEF's Gender and Education Program:

- Works globally to reduce gender disparities in education and ensure that girls can access and complete schooling.

UNESCO's Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education (2011):

- Focuses on improving education opportunities for girls, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) (2012):

- Launched by the UN Secretary-General to promote universal education, with a strong emphasis on girls' education.

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