

Malika, 3 years old, participates in a lesson at the 'Early Learning Hub' supported by GPE in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.
GPE/Federico Scoppa

CHAPTER 1

SECTOR CONTEXT: PARTNER COUNTRIES' PROGRESS TOWARD GPE 2025

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The sectoral context in which GPE operates remains challenging, and partner countries must accelerate progress on education access, equity, completion and learning outcomes to meet their national targets for Sustainable Development Goal 4.
- In 2022, among partner countries that have set national targets and have data available for the participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age, on average 22 percent had progressed fast enough to be on track to meet their national targets.
- Sixteen percent of primary-school-age children, about 20 percent of lower-secondary-school-age adolescents and 26 percent of upper-secondary-school-age youth were out of school in partner countries. Except among upper-secondary-school-age youth, out-of-school rates have not decreased fast enough since 2015, and partner countries are falling behind their targets for 2025. However, gender gaps in out-of-school rates have declined at all levels of education.
- Completion rates improved between 2015 and 2022, by approximately 5 percentage points in primary and lower-secondary education, and by about 3 percentage points in upper-secondary education. Gender gaps in completion rates have trended in favor of girls. In 2022, 41 percent of partner countries were on track to achieve their 2025 benchmark for primary education completion; that share was 32 percent in lower-secondary education and 30 percent in upper-secondary education.
- The number of countries with data on learning outcomes available remains low, especially in early grades. In the 27 partner countries with data on mathematics at the end of primary, 19 percent of children achieved minimum proficiency, with similar shares for girls and boys. In the 28 partner countries with data available on reading, 28 percent of children (27 percent of boys and 30 percent of girls) achieved the minimum proficiency level at the end of primary education.
- Eighty percent of teachers at the pre-primary level and 86 percent of teachers at the primary level meet minimum qualification standards, and partner countries are on track to achieve their 2025 targets. However, partner countries will not meet their national targets for lower- and upper-secondary education because shares of qualified teachers have stagnated at the lower-secondary level and decreased at the upper-secondary level.



INTRODUCTION

Operating in the context of each GPE partner country and its commitments, GPE supports countries in achieving the GPE 2025 strategic goal of accelerating “access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century.” This chapter provides information on partner countries’ trajectory toward meeting their 2025 commitments through national targets.⁶ Progress toward national targets, or benchmarks, set as part of the national Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 benchmarking process (appendix D), is assessed by looking at how likely it is that partner countries will meet their commitments for 2025. Because the GPE 2025 vision of “a quality education for every child” places great importance on addressing inequality in education, this chapter also reviews results from an equity perspective, disaggregating indicators—when possible and relevant—by gender, location, wealth and fragility or conflict.

1.1. TAKING STOCK OF SECTOR PROGRESS IN EDUCATION ACCESS, COMPLETION AND EQUITY

Progress in Access to Early Childhood Education Needs to Accelerate (Indicators 1 and 2)

Evidence shows that early childhood education is crucial. It improves learning outcomes in primary school and helps young children develop social skills and emotional well-being. High-quality early learning can promote equity by improving learning outcomes among the most disadvantaged children.⁷ Therefore, GPE is committed to supporting partner countries’ efforts on universal access to at least one year of quality pre-primary education. Two indicators in the GPE results framework monitor progress toward universal access to pre-primary education. 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/or compulsory pre-primary education. Indicator 2 (SDG indicator 4.2.2) measures the participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age.

Since 2015, three countries—Tajikistan in 2016, Uzbekistan in 2017 and Mongolia in 2018—have introduced new legislation in this area, bringing the number of countries guaranteeing at least one year of free and/or compulsory pre-primary education to 27 out of the 77 GPE partner countries with data available (35 percent) as of the end of 2022. Among the 25 partner countries affected by fragility and conflict (PCFCs) with available data, that share is 24 percent. After Mongolia enacted its new legislation to boost access, the share of children attending pre-primary education in the country increased from 83 percent in 2015 to 89 percent in 2022. Uzbekistan saw a much larger increase in pre-primary education attendance, from 30 percent in 2015 to 67 percent in 2022. Lack of data prevented a trend analysis for Tajikistan. More partner countries need to make progress in introducing such legislation.

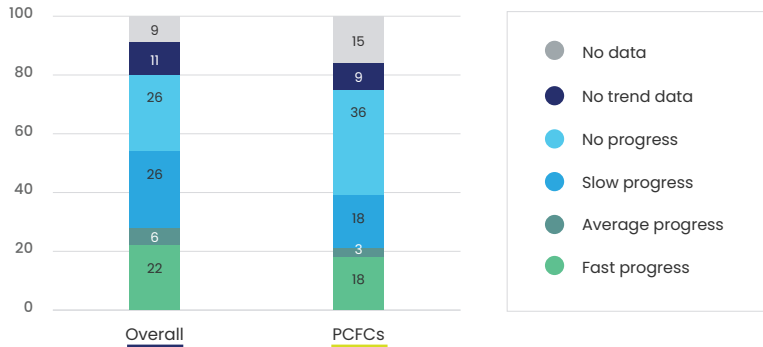
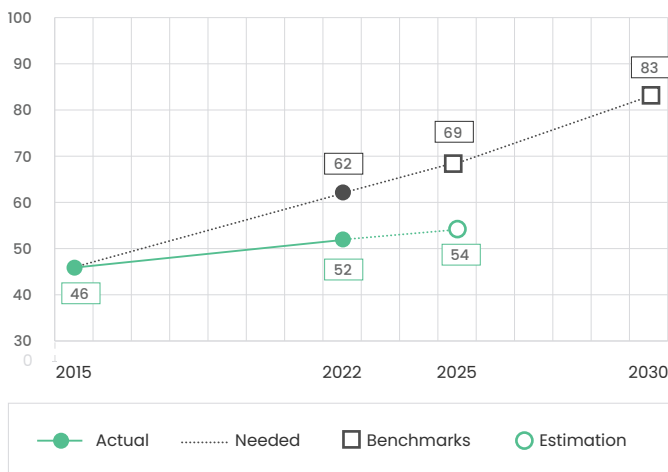
The participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age (Indicator 2) has improved but too slowly for countries to meet their 2025 targets. Among countries that have set national targets, and that have data available, 22 percent (and 18 percent of PCFCs) progressed fast enough to be on track to meet their national targets (figure 1.1, panel a). According to

⁶ The results framework indicators are collected for 88 partner countries; however, because of data availability issues, the number of countries covered varies by indicator.

⁷ UNESCO, *The Right to a Strong Foundation: Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2024), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390215>.

FIGURE 1.1.**Countries need to accelerate progress on pre-primary education targets.**

Participation in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age, country distribution and participation rates (percent)

a) Distribution of countries, by rate of progress**b) Observed vs. needed participation rates, 2015–2030**

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Scorecard Progress Report on National Benchmarks: Focus on Teachers* (Montreal: UIS and Paris: Global Education Monitoring Report, 2024), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf000038841>; and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Benchmarks Database* (Montreal: UIS and Paris: Global Education Monitoring Report, 2024). Data dashboard available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/sdg4scorecard-dashboard>.

Note: 'Fast progress' signifies countries have either already achieved or have a high probability to achieve their 2025 benchmark. 'Average progress' and 'Slow progress' signify countries that are off track and only have a moderate or low probability to achieve their 2025 benchmark. 'No progress' means countries have been moving away from their 2025 benchmark. 'No trend data' and 'No data' categories refer to countries with no data to track progress against their national target.

currently available data, an estimated 54 percent of children in GPE partner countries will attend pre-primary education by 2025, 15 percentage points below the 69 percent target set by countries (figure 1.1, panel b). The successful implementation of reforms related to early learning prioritized in partner countries' compacts can contribute to addressing that slow rate of progress (box 1.1).

The aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis partly accounts for that slow progress. For instance, Belize and Grenada had stable participation since 2015, with rates of 86 percent and 75 percent, respectively, in 2020. In both countries, the share of children attending pre-primary education dropped to just below 50 percent in 2022.

Progress in Access and Completion Needs to Accelerate to Meet Partner Countries' Targets; but the Gender Gap Has Declined (Indicators 3ii and 3i)

The GPE 2025 results framework monitors progress in out-of-school rates (Indicator 3ii, or SDG indicator 4.1.4) and completion rates (Indicator 3i, or SDG indicator 4.1.2) among primary-, lower-secondary- and upper-secondary-school-age children and youth.⁸ As of 2022, about 16 percent of primary-school-age children, 20 percent of lower-secondary-school-age adolescents and 36 percent of upper-secondary-school-age youth were out of school (figure 1.2). Out-of-school rates have improved (that is, declined) since 2015 but need to do so at a faster rate.

8 The completion rate measures the percentage of a cohort three to five years older than the official graduation age that has reached the last grade of primary school.

BOX 1.1. Extent to which countries consider early learning in their priority reforms

Forty-five percent of partner countries with a partnership compact finalized by June 2024^a have included early learning among their priority reforms, either as a specific focus or within a broader approach to foundational learning. For instance, El Salvador's priority reform focuses specifically on early learning and gender, with components on reducing learning gaps in early childhood, reducing gender gaps in access to early childhood education and strengthening institutions for early childhood care. Bhutan's reform prioritizes early learning through four components: ensuring equitable, universal access to early childhood care and development (ECCD) programs for all children; professionalizing the ECCD system, including teachers and facilitators; strengthening the curriculum, learning resources standards and guides to enhance learning outcomes of children in ECCD centers; and enhancing gender equality and inclusion in ECCD.

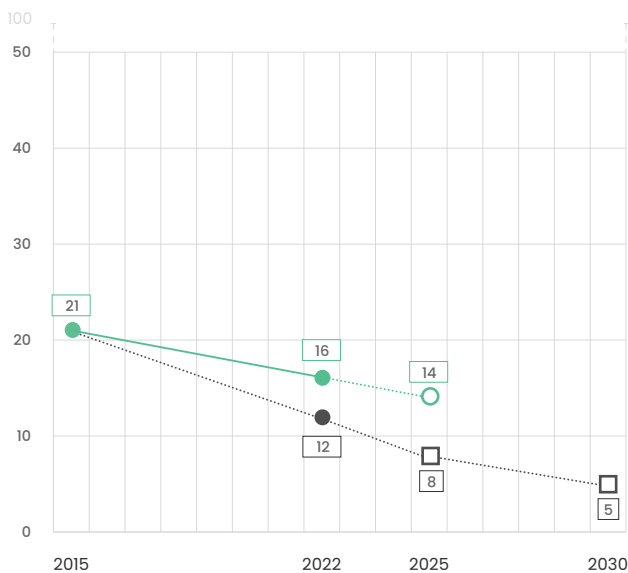
GPE is also committed to helping partner countries with knowledge and financial resources to improve access to pre-primary education and early childhood education. For instance, in partnership with the LEGO Foundation, GPE has funded the development of an ECE Accelerator Toolkit to support early learning.^b In addition, GPE implementation grants active in fiscal year 2024 also committed \$274 million (9 percent of the overall volume of grants) to funding activities aiming at promoting early childhood education.

a. Benin, Bhutan, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Eritrea, Fiji, The Gambia, Ghana, Kyrgyz Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Maldives, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan (Balochistan), Pakistan (Punjab), Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia (Somaliland), Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda and Uzbekistan (out of 56 partnership compacts analyzed).
 b. For more information, refer to the ECE Accelerator website, <https://www.ece-accelerator.org/>.

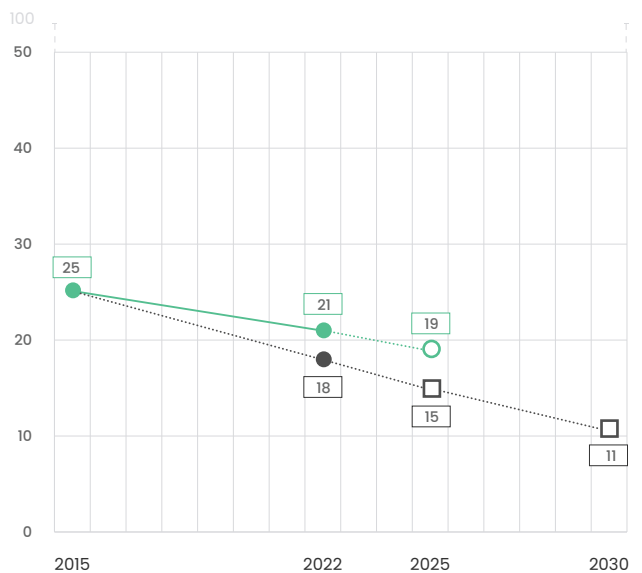
FIGURE 1.2.

Countries have made limited progress on primary- and lower-secondary-level out-of-school rates since 2015.
Out-of-school rates, observed progress and needed progress to achieve 2025 targets, by age group (percent)

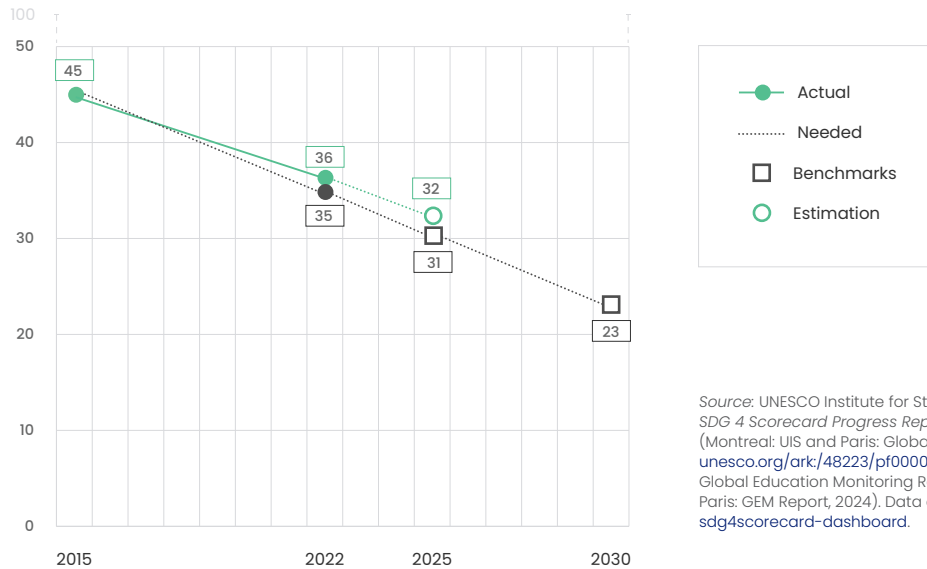
a) Primary-school-age children



b) Lower-secondary-school-age adolescents



c) Upper-secondary-school-age youth



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Scorecard Progress Report on National Benchmarks: Focus on Teachers* (Montreal: UIS and Paris: Global Education Monitoring Report, 2024), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf000038841>; and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Benchmarks Database* (Montreal: UIS and Paris: GEM Report, 2024). Data dashboard available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/sdg4scorecard-dashboard>.

Except among upper-secondary-school-age youth, out-of-school rates have not decreased fast enough since 2015, and partner countries are falling behind their targets for 2025 (figure 1.2).

In line with these trends, the number of out-of-school children remains alarmingly high globally, particularly in middle-income countries. In 2022, an estimated 244 million primary- and secondary-school-age children were out of school worldwide, in both GPE partner countries and others. Of those children, about 59 percent resided in lower-middle-income countries, 28 percent in low-income countries and 11 percent in upper-middle-income countries.

Since 2015, gender gaps in out-of-school rates have also declined—to negligible in primary, less than 2 percentage points in lower-secondary and 3 percentage points in upper-secondary education (figure 1.3, panel a). PCFCs show a similar dynamic, even if the gender gap remains slightly larger, especially among upper-secondary-school-age youth (figure 1.3, panel b).

Nevertheless, completion rates improved between 2015 and 2022, by approximately 5 percentage points in primary and lower-secondary education, and by about 3 percentage points in upper-secondary education (appendix E, figure E.2). Gender gaps in completion rates have generally trended in favor of girls. In primary education, the gender gap in favor of girls rose from 2 percentage points in 2015 to 4 percentage points in 2022.

The 1-percentage-point gender gap in favor of boys in lower-secondary completion in 2015 had reversed by 2022 (figure 1.4, panel a). The results follow the evolution of out-of-school rates, which have decreased faster for girls than for boys. PCFCs have followed the same trends, although girls' secondary completion rates remain slightly behind those for boys (figure 1.4, panel b). Completion rates measure graduation by the age group three to five years above the official graduation age; when the measurements include those who graduate even later, boys continue to have an advantage over girls in lower- and upper-secondary completion, with a gender parity index of 0.94 in GPE partner countries and 0.88 in PCFCs. Early child marriage remains an important impediment to girls' participation in and completion of secondary education (box 1.2).

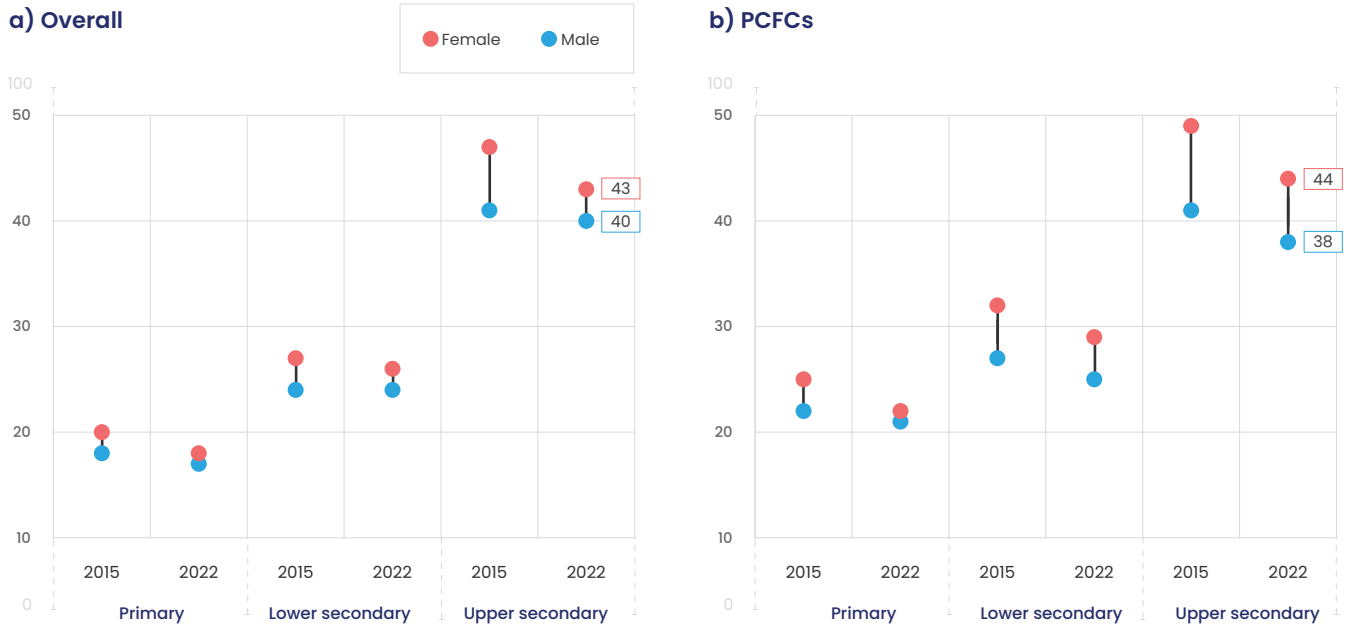
Despite the progress in completion rates, countries are still falling behind their targets (figure 1.5). Only 41 percent of the countries with data (29 out of 71 countries) are on track⁹ to achieve their 2025 benchmark for primary education completion, and that share decreases to 32 percent in lower-secondary education (23 out of 71 countries) and 30 percent in upper-secondary education (21 out of 71 countries)—appendix F, figure F.1. In PCFCs, only 31 percent of countries are on track at the primary level (eight out of 26 countries), 19 percent at the lower-secondary level (five out of 26 countries), and 12 percent at the upper-secondary level (three out of 26 countries).

⁹ Refer to appendix D for methodology details.

FIGURE 1.3.

The gender gap in out-of-school rates has fallen since 2015 but remains high among upper-secondary-school-age youth.

Out-of-school rates, overall and PCFCs, by age group and gender, 2015 and 2022 (percent)

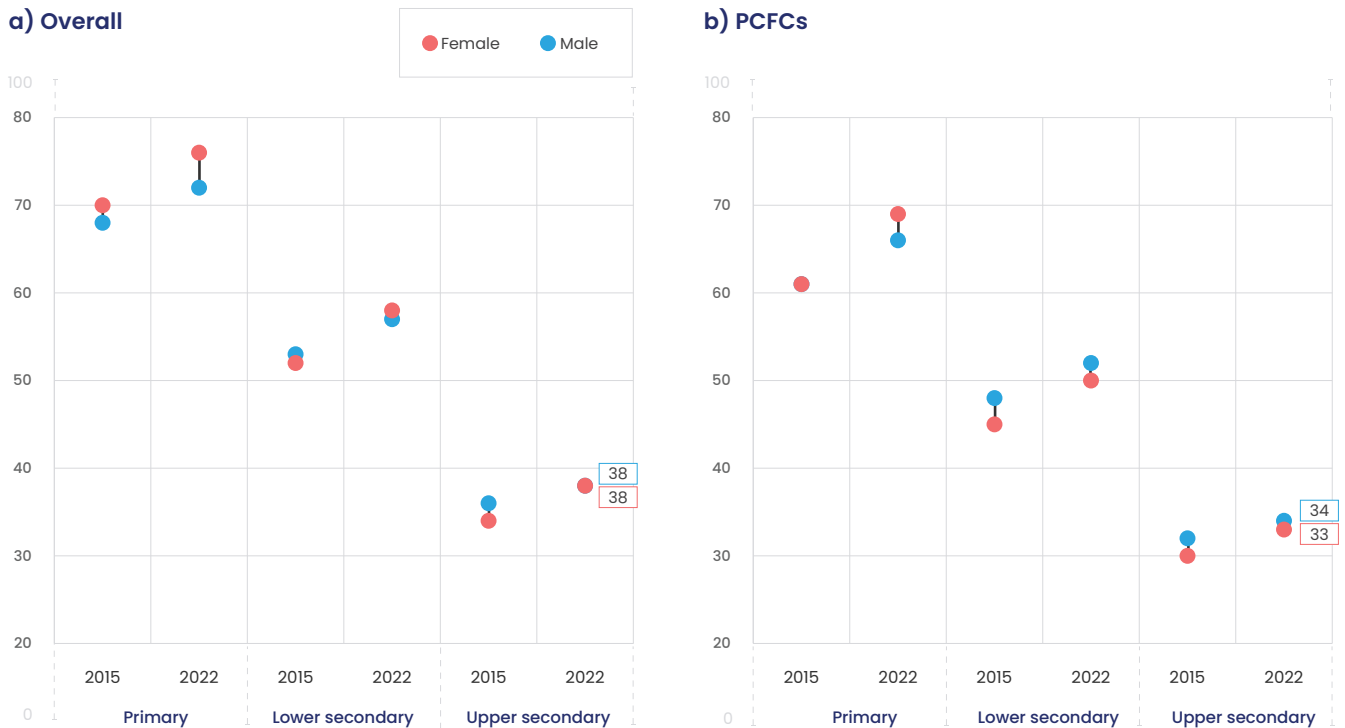


Source: Authors' estimates based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report, "A Bayesian Cohort Model for Estimating SDG Indicator 4.1.4: Out-of-School Rates," (Montreal: UIS and Paris: Global Education Monitoring Report, 2022), https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2022/08/OOS_Proposal.pdf.

FIGURE 1.4.

Gender gaps in completion rates have trended in favor of girls.

Completion rates, overall and PCFCs, by education level and gender, 2015 and 2022 (percent)



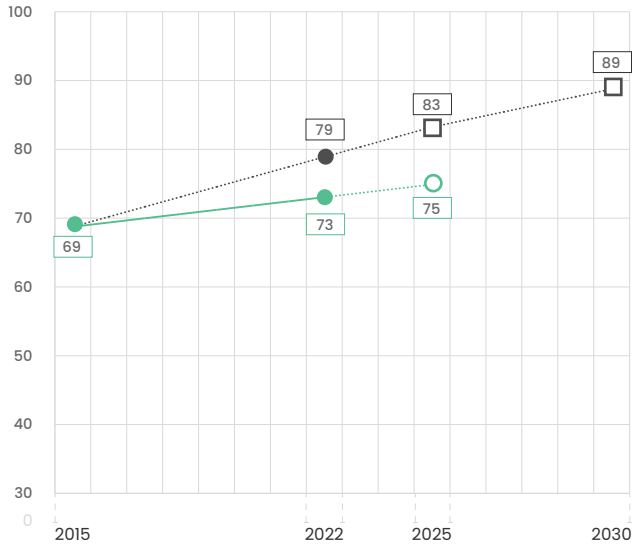
Source: Authors' estimates based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report.

FIGURE 1.5.

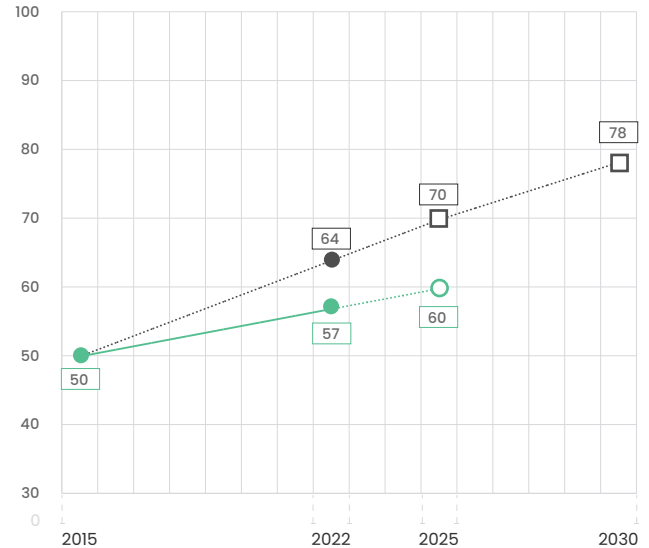
GPE partner countries need to boost their completion rates to meet 2025 benchmarks.

Completion rates, observed progress and needed progress to achieve 2025 benchmarks, by education level (percent)

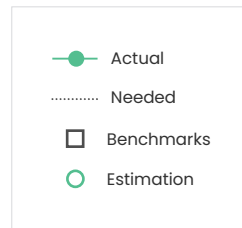
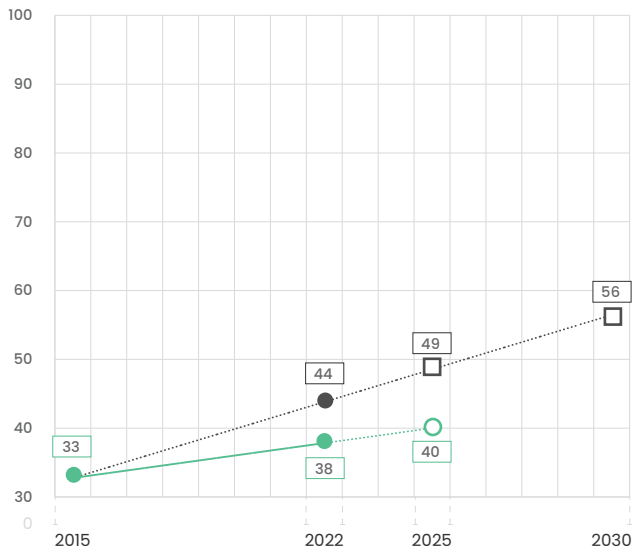
a) Primary



b) Lower Secondary



c) Upper secondary



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Scorecard Progress Report on National Benchmarks: Focus on Teachers* (Montreal: UIS and Paris: Global Education Monitoring Report, 2024), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388411>; and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Benchmarks Database* (Montreal: UIS and Paris: GEM Report, 2024). Data dashboard available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/sdg4scorecard-dashboard>.

Socioeconomic status remains a critical determining factor for school completion. In partner countries, children from the top income quintile have a completion rate 38 percentage points higher than children from the bottom quintile in primary and 50 percentage points higher, on average, in lower- and upper-secondary education. Despite decreasing gaps in primary (from 43 to 38 percentage points) and lower-secondary education (from 53 to 47 percentage points), the gap

has not changed in upper-secondary education. Completion rates differ by 20 percentage points between urban and rural areas at all levels, in favor of urban areas, although those gaps declined by 4 percentage points between 2015 and 2022. Addressing the disparities requires strong attention to the hardest-to-reach children by focusing on equity and inclusion in partner countries' priority reforms (box 1.3).

BOX 1.2. How pressures to marry early continue to threaten the education of disadvantaged young women (Indicator 5i)

Child marriage is a violation of human rights and an important barrier to education. Early marriage and early pregnancy are among the main reasons girls leave school. At the same time, out-of-school girls have a higher risk of getting married before age 18. Partner countries with higher proportions of women (aged 20–24 years) married or in a union before age 18 generally have higher out-of-school rates for upper-secondary-school-age girls (appendix G). In 2023, 27 percent of women aged 20–24 years in partner countries were married or in a union before age 18 (Indicator 5i of the results framework).

Combatting child marriage appears a complex task, because the practice often originates from social, cultural and religious norms. In Chad, where early marriage remains one of the main causes of girls dropping out of school, the parliament ratified in 2015 an ordinance to raise the minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18. To dissuade parents from withdrawing their daughters from school to marry them off, the ordinance imposed imprisonment and a fine for anyone who forces a minor into marriage; however, customary marriages of girls over age 13 remained legal under the 2010 Penal Code. The 2017 revision of the Penal Code aimed to entrench the deterring effect of the ordinance, but progress has been slow. In 2019, 61 percent of women aged 20–24 had married before the age of 18 in Chad, the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world.^a

In Pakistan, the factors that contribute to girls marrying early and dropping out of school include a lack of access to education, particularly at the middle school level, the poor quality of education that contributes to girls' dropout, poverty and social norms that encourage early marriage.

All provinces in Pakistan have included measures to improve girls' access to education in their partnership compacts. Those measures address the sociocultural root causes of low enrollment and early marriage. For instance, the Sindh province's partnership compact, and the system transformation grant that supports its implementation, include interventions to do the following:

- Improve girls' transition to middle school by rehabilitating and upgrading existing schools to accommodate more girls, providing after-school programs and remedial learning, scaling up a system to identify and track the girls at greatest risk of dropping out from school, engaging local committees through school management councils to influence social norms and providing gender-sensitive teacher training and teaching materials.
- At the system level, strengthen the gender unit within the Ministry of Education and develop an education-specific gender policy. That policy will adopt an intersectoral approach with the aim to ensure that girls and boys receive equal education opportunities, and that the education system catalyzes sustainable social change. The Gender Policy in Education will be accompanied by a Gender Action Plan that targets gender-specific barriers to education.

a. P. Gouédard, C. Ramos and B. Tameza, *Women in Learning Leadership (WiLL): Le leadership des femmes dans les apprentissages au Tchad*, (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, 2024), <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3681/file/WiLL-Chad-Report.pdf>.

BOX 1.3. Extent to which countries consider equity and inclusion in their priority reforms

Countries have prioritized equity and inclusion in their reform efforts, as evident in an analysis of partnership compacts. About 60 percent of compacts reviewed explicitly support out-of-school learners—for example, Tanzania (Zanzibar) and Zimbabwe focus on the issue, with the latter using an early warning system. Furthermore, more than 80 percent of compacts include support for other marginalized groups, such as learners with disabilities, refugees or ethnic and linguistic minorities, with 47 percent addressing the needs of ethnic, linguistic or racial minorities, and 31 percent mentioning girls with disabilities. Notably, nearly 67 percent of compacts address improving access for children with disabilities, with half focusing on teaching and learning for those children. For example, Ethiopia's compact includes incentives to increase enrollment and participation among girls and children with disabilities, alongside the expansion of inclusive education resource centers and training for teachers and school leaders in inclusive education.

Note: For equity and inclusion, the number of compacts reviewed is 45.

1.2. PROGRESS IN LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EDUCATION QUALITY

The Status of Foundational Learning in Partner Countries Needs Continued Attention (Indicator 6)

The GPE results framework monitors partner country progress on learning with Indicator 6 (SDG indicator 4.1.1), which tracks the proportion of students achieving minimum proficiency levels in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, at three levels of education: (a) early grades of primary (grade 2 or 3), (b) at the end of primary and (c) at the end of lower-secondary education.

The number of countries with available learning data remains low, especially in early grades (appendix H). Since the publication of the 2023 results report,¹⁰ data on reading and mathematics proficiency became available only for two additional countries in early grades (The Gambia and Zambia) and for one additional country at the end of primary (Lesotho) through the Assessment for Minimum Proficiency Level (box 1.4). Over the period 2019–23, 30 out of 88 partner countries had data available in reading and 29 countries in mathematics, either at early grades or at the end of primary education.

Despite the lack of available data, there is broad consensus that learning levels are low. Most children

go through primary education without achieving the minimum proficiency level in literacy or numeracy. That situation highlights the urgency for measuring and reporting data on learning to monitor and improve the effectiveness of education systems.

In the 27 partner countries with available data on mathematics at the end of primary, only 19 percent of children achieved the minimum proficiency level, with similar shares for girls and boys. In the 28 partner countries with data available on reading, 28 percent of children (27 percent of boys and 30 percent of girls) achieved the minimum proficiency level at the end of primary education. The 2023 results report provides a detailed analysis by country.

Although most countries with comparable data available show at least some progress, Benin is the only partner country on track to achieve its national targets in reading and mathematics, both in early grades and at the end of primary education. Chad, the Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger have made significant progress in the share of children reaching minimum proficiency levels in early grades, but those countries do not yet have the same results at the end of primary, with less than 10 percent of children reaching minimum proficiency levels in mathematics.

Even in some countries with relatively higher shares of children reaching minimum proficiency levels, progress

¹⁰ Global Partnership for Education (GPE), *Results Report 2023*, (Washington, DC: GPE, 2023), <https://assets.globalpartnership.org/s3fs-public/document/file/gpe-results-report-2023-1208.pdf>.

toward the national target has been slow. For example, in Burkina Faso and Cameroon, where more than half of children reached the minimum proficiency level in mathematics by grade 3, smaller shares of children (less than 25 percent) reached minimum proficiency at the end of primary education. Despite improvement—and their greater room for improvement—those countries still did not make significant progress toward their national targets.

The Proportion of Qualified Teachers Is Increasing in Pre-primary and Primary Education (Indicator 7i)

Following SDG target 4.c, countries have committed to increasing substantially the supply of qualified teachers by 2030. Indicator 7i of the GPE results framework (SDG indicator 4.c.1) tracks the proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications at each level of education. On average, GPE partner countries have been increasing the share of qualified teachers in pre-primary and primary education and are on track to achieve their national targets for 2025 at those levels (figure 1.6 and appendix I). The latest data show that 80 percent of teachers at the pre-primary level and 86 percent of teachers at the primary level meet the minimum qualification standards. Nevertheless, countries will not meet their national targets for lower- and upper-secondary education because shares of qualified teachers have stagnated at the lower-secondary level and decreased at the upper-secondary level (figure 1.6).

Many countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, face a dual challenge regarding the teaching profession. On the one hand, teacher shortages still undermine learning in many countries because of high student-teacher ratios and/or the implementation of alternative classroom arrangements associated with lower learning outcomes, such as double-shift or multigrade teaching. On the other hand, to cope with rapidly increasing student populations, countries have resorted to flexible hiring strategies that have contributed to the hiring of less qualified teachers by relaxing the minimum qualifications required for teachers.¹¹ Box 1.5 presents other country strategies to increase the supply of qualified teachers.

The proportion of female qualified teachers is higher than the proportion of male qualified teachers only at the pre-primary level (+4 percentage points). The low share of female qualified teachers shrinks the pool of potential female candidates for leadership positions, whereas evidence from French-speaking Africa¹² and Southeast Asia¹³ suggests that having female school leaders may improve learning outcomes. Female teachers and school leaders are not only important role models for girls but also more likely to fight child marriage and gender-based violence in schools, including harassment and sexual assault by male teachers and students—all of which contribute to a threatening environment for girls and higher dropout risks.¹⁴

¹¹ UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, *A Review of the Use of Contract Teachers in sub-Saharan Africa*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2020), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374581>.

¹² C. Alban Conto, N. Guibert and F. Devignes, *The Role of Women School Principals in Improving Learning in French-Speaking Africa*, (Dakar: IIEP-UNESCO, 2023), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387192>.

¹³ P. Gouédard and R. Ninomiya, *Women in Learning Leadership: Evidence on Female School Leaders from the Southeast Asia Learning Metrics Program*, (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, 2024), <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/9306/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-SEA-PLM-Report-2024.pdf>.

¹⁴ United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO), *Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI) Annual Report 2023*, (New York: UNGEI, 2023), https://www.ungei.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/GCI_Annual%20Report_2023_EN_0.pdf; Q. Wodon, C. Male and A. Onagoruwa, *Educating Girls and Ending Child Marriage in Africa: Investment Case and the Role of Teachers and School Leaders*, (Addis Ababa: UNESCO IICBA, 2024), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390382>.

BOX 1.4. A new assessment tool to help countries assess disparities in learning outcomes and report against SDG indicator 4.1.1

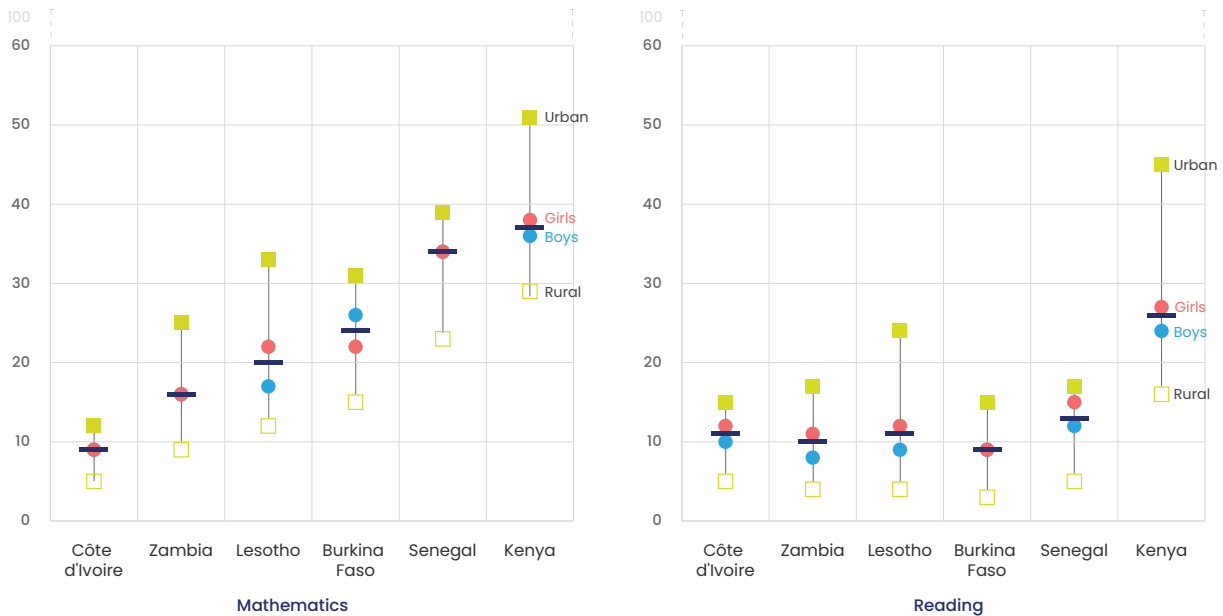
To assist education systems in monitoring progress on SDG indicator 4.1.1, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics developed the Assessment for Minimum Proficiency Level (AMPL) in 2021. Assessments were administered in English and French at the end of primary education (AMPL-b) in six sub-Saharan African countries: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Senegal and Zambia. AMPL-b assessments took place in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal in 2021 and in Kenya, Lesotho and Zambia in 2023. AMPL-a (measuring proficiency in early grades) assessments were administered in The Gambia and Zambia in 2023.

The AMPL-b assessments show that less than 20 percent of children in Côte d'Ivoire, Lesotho and Zambia reached minimum proficiency levels in mathematics and reading at the end of primary. In Kenya and Senegal, about 35 percent of children reached minimum proficiency in mathematics, whereas only 26 percent in Kenya and 13 percent in Senegal did so in reading. Gender gaps differ by subject. In mathematics, four of the six countries show parity; in reading, although girls have an advantage, differences in the early grades do not exceed 3 percentage points. Of the six countries, only in Burkina Faso do girls lag behind boys in both subjects, although the gap is noticeable only in mathematics (4 percentage points).

The urban-rural gap in learning outcomes is very large. In reading, no more than 5 percent of students from rural schools achieved minimum proficiency in five of the six countries. In all countries, students from urban schools were at least three times more likely to read with comprehension; in Burkina Faso and Lesotho, they were six times more likely. In mathematics, the urban-rural gap was 7 percentage points in Côte d'Ivoire; 16 percentage points in Burkina Faso, Senegal and Zambia; and 22 percentage points in Kenya and Lesotho. In Kenya, students in urban schools were the only population group in which the majority (51 percent) achieved minimum proficiency.

By the end of primary school, only about 1 in 10 children in low- and lower-middle-income African countries can read with comprehension.

Students achieving minimum learning proficiency in mathematics and reading at the end of primary school, by sex and location, selected African countries, 2021–23 (percent)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), *Assessments for Minimum Proficiency Levels a and b (AMPL-ab), International Report*, (Montreal: UIS, 2022), https://ampl.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2024/02/International-Report_-_AMPLab_WEB.pdf.

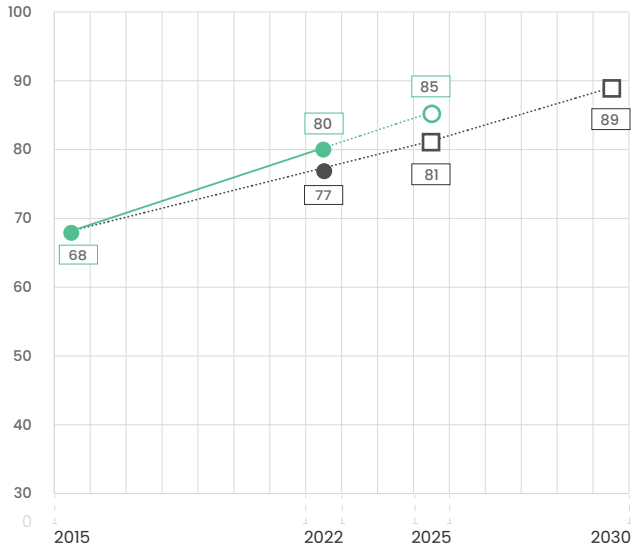
Note: AMPL-b assessments took place in 2021 in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, and in 2023 in Kenya, Lesotho and Zambia.

FIGURE 1.6.

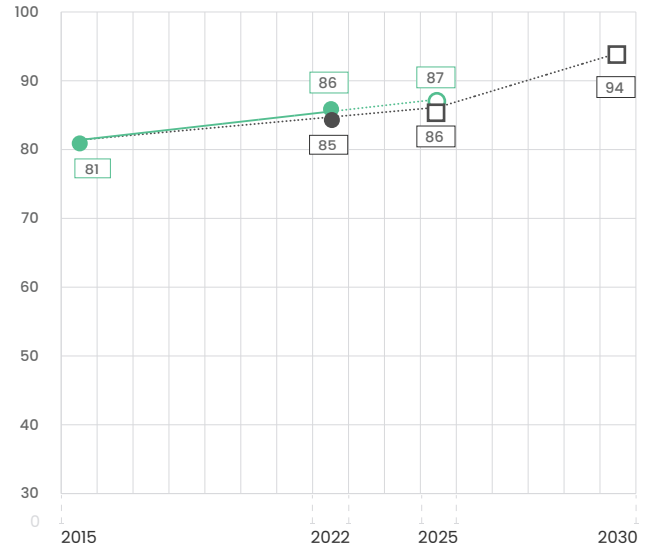
Countries have been progressing on the targets for trained teachers in pre-primary and primary but not in secondary education.

Teachers with the minimum qualifications, observed progress and needed progress to achieve 2025 benchmarks, by education level (percent)

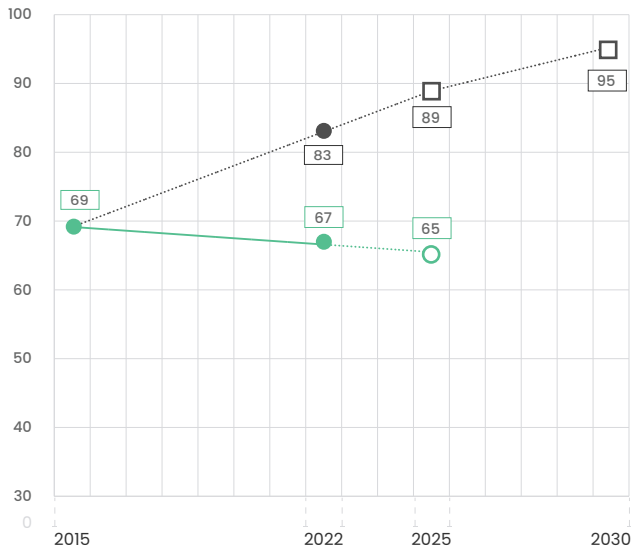
a) Pre-primary



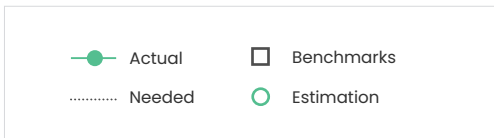
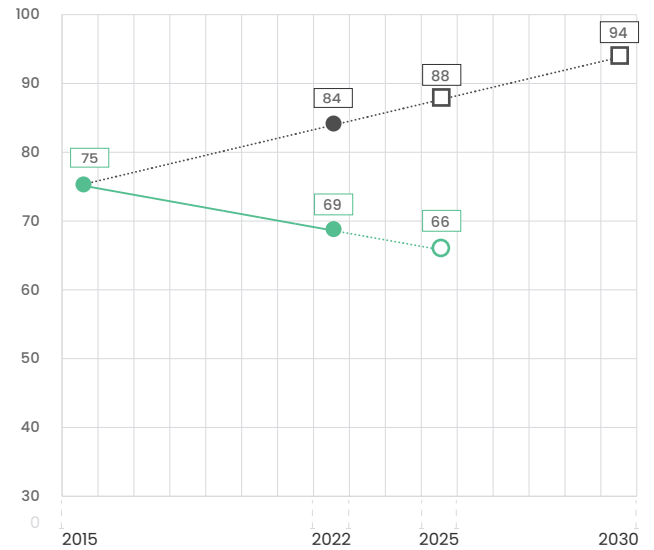
b) Primary



c) Lower secondary



d) Upper secondary



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Scorecard Progress Report on National Benchmarks: Focus on Teachers* (Montreal: UIS and Paris: Global Education Monitoring Report, 2024), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388411>; and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring Report, *SDG 4 Benchmarks Database* (Montreal: UIS and Paris: GEM Report, 2024). Data dashboard available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/sdg4scorecard-dashboard>.

BOX 1.5. Teaching and learning in partnership compacts

An analysis of existing partnership compacts reveals that 89 percent of compacts emphasize strategies aimed at enhancing teaching and learning practices. Notably, every country has prioritized some aspect of teacher training, capacity building and professional development. Of those compacts, 66 percent specifically address challenges related to the recruitment and deployment of qualified teachers. Common strategies include attracting more qualified candidates and retaining the current workforce by improving teacher motivation, career development opportunities, remuneration and working conditions.

For example, in the Solomon Islands, the partnership compact aims to “improve teaching and learning” through three key strategies: (1) enhanced teacher management systems, including revised teaching standards and teacher career advancement; (2) strengthened school leadership and management; and (3) teacher professional development efforts that concentrate on Teaching at the Right Level and other pedagogical approaches. The initiatives will receive support from partnerships with tertiary institutions and informal teacher professional development opportunities that also emphasize gender and inclusion.

Additionally, a few countries, such as Kiribati and the Marshall Islands, are beginning to incorporate information and communication technology training for teachers to equip educators with digital skills. Finally, in 58 percent of countries with system transformation grants approved as of June 30, 2024, the top-up triggers focus on enhancing teaching quality. Those triggers include introducing an equity-based formula for teacher allocation (Mali), developing a teacher deployment monitoring and reporting system (Malawi), and recruiting and training teachers to instruct in children’s mother tongue to improve equity and education quality (Eritrea).

Note: For teaching and learning, the number of compacts reviewed is 53.

CONCLUSION

The data reveal that participation rates in organized early learning have improved but remain below target. To address this issue, several partner countries have made a clear commitment to place pre-primary education at the top of their reform agenda, as evidenced by the large number of compacts that include early learning within their priority reforms. Nevertheless, partner countries need to accelerate their efforts to compensate for the setback caused by preschool closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, including by introducing legislation and implementing policies to ensure free and compulsory pre-primary education for a larger share of children.

Countries have made some progress in reducing out-of-school rates and increasing completion rates. Despite declining gender gaps that indicate the success of global efforts to promote gender equality, overall progress is too slow: countries are off track to achieve the national targets they set as part of the national SDG 4 benchmarking exercise for 2025 and 2030. They need to do more to ensure that school-age children not only attend school but also progress across grades and complete primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education cycles on time. An examination of countries' partnership compacts reveals that almost 66 percent of priority reforms include interventions aimed at reaching out-of-school children, such as early warning systems for potential dropouts, particularly marginalized groups such as refugees and those with disabilities.

The low levels of learning outcomes are deeply concerning. Countries should commit to accelerate efforts so that more children going through primary education achieve minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy. To address the lack of sufficient data in

this area, countries must also commit to measuring and reporting data on learning and using those data to guide their efforts.

For learning to happen in schools, children and youth need qualified teachers. Countries have committed to increasing substantially the share of qualified teachers by 2030 and are on track to achieve that objective in pre-primary and primary education. In lower- and upper-secondary education, however, shares of qualified teachers are slowly decreasing.

Overall, countries need to accelerate progress in access to education and learning to meet their targets set for 2025. They should quickly address the bottlenecks facing data availability to ensure proper monitoring of their progress toward the GPE 2025 goal. Without quality and timely data, identifying critical areas for improvement becomes a daunting task. Countries have much to gain by sustaining their efforts in data systems development and capacity building, especially with respect to data on learning, to inform decision making and effectively steer the education sector toward the achievement of national SDG 4 targets.

GPE supports partner countries to develop and implement priority reforms to enhance learning outcomes. Those reforms include improving the recruitment, training, deployment and management of teachers; providing children with better learning environments and materials; and helping countries strengthen their ability to monitor learning outcomes. Stronger GPE support is needed to accelerate progress toward partner countries' national targets.

