

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sectoral context in which GPE works remains challenging, and partner countries must accelerate progress to meet their national targets for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. Children suffered learning losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the sector lacks sufficient data to assess progress. Nonetheless, despite slow overall progress on improving education outcomes, some areas show promising improvements. For example, gender gaps in out-of-school rates have declined steadily at all levels of education. The availability of qualified teachers at the pre-primary and primary levels has also improved, notwithstanding a continuing shortage of teachers.

In that difficult context, GPE has stepped up its support to partner countries and is operating more efficiently. Early evidence indicates that GPE is supporting partner countries to develop increasingly prioritized and evidence-based system reforms that aim to address education challenges at scale. Gender equality is integrated as a cross-cutting consideration in those reforms, and partner countries are undertaking key policy and institutional actions, especially in domestic financing, designed to enable successful reform implementation.

GPE grant approvals have nearly tripled over the last year with over \$1 billion in implementation grants approved. Disbursements from the GPE Fund also exceeded \$1 billion in fiscal year 2024.<sup>1</sup> That improvement in operational efficiency has been achieved through governance reforms, simplifying grant processes, strengthening grant monitoring and portfolio management by the GPE Secretariat, and increasing the pool of accredited grant agents. GPE grants have increasingly integrated interventions that address gender inequality, with almost two-thirds of all grant funds approved under GPE 2025 focusing on that aim. Grants remain on track to achieve their objectives related to inclusion, gender equality and data systems, among other outcomes. GPE's implementation grants have reached 252.7 million children since GPE 2025 started, accounting for 39 percent of all school-age children in the 76 countries with GPE grants. Alongside increased direct grant financing, almost \$4 billion in additional financing has been leveraged through GPE's innovative financing mechanisms since 2022, more than double the target for 2024.

### GOAL: LEARNING OUTCOMES, ACCESS AND EQUITY

**In brief:** *GPE works within the context of SDG 4. Progress with respect to the SDG 4 targets remains slow, constrained by the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing economic challenges over the period of this report.<sup>2</sup> Data on learning outcomes at the end of primary education are available for about 27 partner countries. In those countries, only about a quarter of children are achieving minimum learning levels in reading and mathematics at the end of primary education. Although improvements in access to education still need to accelerate, gender gaps in out-of-school rates have declined at all levels of education since 2015. Partner countries have also improved the availability of qualified teachers at the pre-primary and primary levels.*

Data on learning outcomes reported to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) continue to be sparse, and available data as of 2022 indicate that learning levels remain alarmingly low. In the 27 partner countries with available data, only 19 percent of children achieved the minimum proficiency level in mathematics at the end of primary education, 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. Consequently, although most countries with comparable data show some progress and some are making fast progress in specific subjects and grade

<sup>1</sup> This total includes \$983 million in country grants and about \$70 million in GPE Secretariat and trustee costs.

<sup>2</sup> The data on most goal indicators in this report come from 2022, the latest available from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, when partner countries continued to face an education crisis exacerbated by the lingering effects of the pandemic and economic challenges.

levels, only Benin is on track to achieve its national targets in reading and mathematics, both in the early grades and at the end of primary education.

The availability of qualified teachers is a critical enabler of improved learning. Eighty percent of teachers at the pre-primary level and 86 percent of teachers at the primary level met minimum qualification standards, and partner countries are on track to achieve their 2025 targets. Because the share of qualified teachers has stagnated at the lower-secondary level and decreased at the upper-secondary level, partner countries will not meet their national targets for those levels. Alongside the need to upgrade the qualifications of existing teachers, partner countries also face widespread teacher shortages.

Despite improvements in access-related indicators, partner countries are not on track to meet their national targets for 2025 and must accelerate their efforts to reach the most disadvantaged children.

The participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age is improving slowly. Among the countries that have set national targets, and that have data available, 22 percent progressed fast enough to be on track to meet their national targets.

Aggregate completion rates improved between 2015 and 2022, by about 5 percentage points in primary and lower-secondary education, and 3 percentage points in upper-secondary education. Still, in 2022, only 41 percent of partner countries were on track to achieve their 2025 benchmark for primary education completion. That share is 32 percent in lower-secondary education and 30 percent in upper-secondary education. In terms of national averages, gender gaps in completion rates trended in favor of girls. However, differences within countries based on gender, location, disability and other characteristics persist, with availability of data remaining a key issue.

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, at the aggregate level, gender gaps in out-of-school rates have declined at all levels of education.

## GPE'S COUNTRY-LEVEL AND ENABLING OBJECTIVES: SUPPORTING SYSTEM REFORMS

**In brief:** *GPE contributes to the achievement of SDG 4 by supporting partner countries in designing and implementing system reforms, described in partnership compacts. By June 2024, local education groups agreed to 57 partnership compacts. The system reforms described in partnership compacts are better prioritized than previous reform efforts, and most compacts integrate gender equality as a cross-cutting consideration in their reforms. All system reforms also incorporate interventions related to improving learning. Emerging evidence shows that partner countries are implementing key actions identified in their partnership compacts to reform education policies and strengthen institutions. Alongside the improved focus on gender equality in system reforms, almost two-thirds of grant funds approved under GPE 2025 focused on gender equality, compared to a third under GPE 2020. Completed GPE grants continue to meet their objectives, but on-time grant performance during implementation requires ongoing attention. Grant approvals have nearly tripled to more than \$1 billion, and disbursements from the GPE Fund also exceeded \$1 billion in 2024. The overall improvement in grant approvals and disbursements has been driven by reforms in GPE's governance structures and processes, simplification of GPE's operating model and better alignment with partner countries' policy cycles. As a result, the size of the active grant portfolio is at a record high of \$2.7 billion (excluding COVID-19 accelerated funding grants). GPE's grant financing has been complemented by the success of its innovative financing mechanisms that have far exceeded their target for 2024. Those mechanisms have cumulatively leveraged nearly \$4 billion in additional financing since 2022 through an increasingly diverse range of cofinanciers. Education Out Loud, the GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX), and technical assistance initiatives are exceeding their objectives in supporting civil society advocacy for education and informing education policies.*

GPE contributes to countries' system reforms to achieve at-scale impact on education outcomes through its operating model. The model comprises three interrelated stages: (1) system diagnosis and analysis of factors that support or impede the achievement of education outcomes (called enabling factors); (2) prioritization of system reforms, and the alignment of education stakeholders behind those reforms, through the development of partnership compacts; and (3) implementation, learning and adaptation, including support from GPE

grants. Those stages support three country-level objectives which are reinforced by mobilizing global and national partners and resources, the enabling objective for GPE 2025.

After the local education groups have identified a system reform in the partnership compact, GPE provides a grant focused on addressing that reform. GPE also incentivizes improvements in the four enabling factors by making up to 40 percent of the system grant allocation, called the top-up, contingent upon completing actions to address the most pressing challenges identified.

### **Country-Level Objective 1:** **Strengthen Gender-Responsive Planning and Policy Development for System-wide Impact**

In fiscal year 2024, 24 partner countries completed their compacts, bringing the total to 57 compacts. The recently completed thematic and country-level evaluations found that the reforms described in partnership compacts are better prioritized than previous reform efforts, due in part to a more systematic evidence-based approach to identifying challenges. The evaluations also found evidence of government-led inclusive dialogue in the compact development progress.

Gender equality is also increasingly integrated in system reforms. Almost all system reforms reviewed<sup>3</sup> are informed by a gender analysis and recent gender data and evidence, and gender equality is a cross-cutting consideration in three-fourths of those reforms. The thematic and country-level evaluations also found that, although gender equality requires continued attention and capacity development at the country level, the gender equality-related activities in system reforms go beyond gender equality in access to education, with instances of activities addressing gender within the education system and through education for enhancing gender equality in society at large.

Through the enabling factors analysis, 17 partner countries<sup>4</sup> rated gender-responsive sector planning and monitoring a high priority,<sup>5</sup> indicating that they identified significant gaps in this area. About half of the countries that reported progress on actions to improve gender-responsive sector planning and monitoring were on track. Actions include gender mainstreaming in education

sector analyses, strengthening operational planning and monitoring the implementation of education plans and policies.

KIX-supported knowledge and research have informed education policy development or delivery in 70 partner countries, with most of those cases related to gender equality, equity and social inclusion.

### **Country-Level Objective 2:** **Mobilize Coordinated Action and Financing to Enable Transformative Change**

GPE mobilizes coordinated financing for system reforms by improving domestic public financing, crowding in additional financing from sources such as the private sector and philanthropic foundations, and aligning external financing to national system reform priorities outlined in the compact.

Through the enabling factors analysis, 46 partner countries identified significant challenges in domestic financing rating it a high priority. Four-fifths of the countries reporting progress on actions to address those challenges were on track. The actions implemented commonly include policy changes to render the distribution of school grants, teachers or teaching and learning materials more equitable, studies to analyze expenditure bottlenecks and improvements to financial management systems.

Of the countries with top-ups approved by June 30, 2024, all have at least one action related to domestic finance. Domestic finance actions represent \$300 million, or 81 percent of the total top-up allocation approved so far. Teachers are at the center of many of those actions, with conditions such as increasing the availability of quality teachers and deploying them to areas of greatest need.

Countries' efforts to improve domestic financing, and the emphasis on domestic financing in the top-ups, have occurred in the broader context of the declining volume of domestic financing since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Average education spending as a share of total government expenditure decreased by 1.9 percentage points between 2019 and 2022 because of the pandemic but increased slightly by 0.1 percentage point to 18.2 percent in 2023. Almost 60 percent of partner

<sup>3</sup> The integration of gender equality considerations in system reforms was reviewed for 46 partner countries by June 2024.

<sup>4</sup> As of June 2024, 75 partner countries had completed enabling factors analyses, assigning high priority for action to one or more factors. Of those countries, the GPE Board approved the focus area for GPE grants for 17 countries by June 2023. The 17 countries were, therefore, due to assess and report one-year progress on the enabling factors-related actions identified in their partnership compacts by June 2024. Data for 15 of those 17 countries were available in time for this report.

<sup>5</sup> Not all enabling factors rated as a high priority are subject to top-up allocations. Top-ups are used in a subset of those cases, when a lack of progress would impede the system reform.

countries either maintained their education spending at or above the benchmark of 20 percent of overall public expenditure or increased their education expenditure in 2023, compared to 2020.

GPE's innovative financing mechanisms are showing promise in crowding in additional local financing for education. Examples include Ghana, Lesotho and Malawi, where local foundations and private sector entities have come together to unlock the countries' Multiplier allocations.

With respect to coordinated external financing, the share of GPE grant funds that align to national systems has remained at about 50 percent since fiscal year 2021. The share of GPE grant funds harmonized with other sources of external finance for education has risen steadily since fiscal year 2021, to 64 percent in fiscal year 2024. The increase in the use of harmonized modalities reflects in part the success of the GPE Multiplier, because Multiplier funds are often comingled with the funds of the cofinanciers that unlock the Multiplier.

GPE also supports system reforms by mobilizing coordinated action through local education groups, which are multi-stakeholder platforms for inclusive policy dialogue on education. The proportion of local education groups that included both civil society organizations and teachers associations declined slightly from 64 percent to 63 percent in fiscal year 2024. Overall, almost all local education groups included civil society organizations, but only 64 percent included teachers associations.

Through the enabling factors analysis, 11 partner countries rated sector coordination a high priority and nearly four-fifths of partner countries reporting progress were on track to complete actions to improve sector coordination. Actions include strengthening or establishing mechanisms for collaboration in the sector and strengthening budgeting and financial management processes to enable domestic and external financiers to coordinate their financing.

Education Out Loud is complementing those efforts by supporting civil society participation in education policy processes. From fiscal year 2021 to 2024, civil society organizations with Education Out Loud funding have influenced education planning, policy dialogue or monitoring in 48 countries, which exceeds the target of 37 countries over that period.



### Country-Level Objective 3: Strengthen Capacity, Adapt and Learn, to Implement and Drive Results at Scale

Progress on partner countries' system reforms will be assessed through midterm reviews of partnership compacts that have begun recently. The midterm reviews support evidence-based learning on, and improving, the implementation of system reforms. The next report will discuss the first set of data from those reviews.

Data and evidence underpin learning from evidence, and 32 partner countries rated this enabling factor a high priority. About half of the countries reporting progress with respect to data and evidence were on track. Some key actions completed include strengthening education management information systems, developing and implementing learning assessments, collecting sex-disaggregated data and enhancing data use for decision making. Those efforts may translate into improved international data reporting, which has stagnated. The proportion of partner countries reporting to UIS on at least 10 out of 12 key outcome, service delivery and financing indicators has fluctuated since 2015 and declined nearly 5 percentage points from 2022 to 44.3 percent in 2023.

GPE's financial support for system reforms is through country-level grants: the system transformation grant, the system capacity grant, the Girls' Education Accelerator and innovative financing mechanisms such as the Multiplier. Some education sector program implementation grants from GPE 2020 are also continuing implementation.

Grant approvals accelerated significantly in fiscal year 2024 and exceeded \$1 billion, recording an all-time high excluding COVID-19 accelerated funding grants. That total includes approval of 16 system transformation grants, seven Girls' Education Accelerators and 12 Multiplier grants, with momentum expected to continue in 2025. Disbursements from the GPE Fund also exceeded \$1 billion in fiscal year 2024. The acceleration in grant approvals and portfolio performance has been achieved because of governance reforms and streamlined approval processes, investments in the GPE Secretariat's portfolio management and grant performance monitoring functions, improved grant agent accreditation and increased numbers of accredited grant agents, and updated guidance on grant revisions for grant agents. Further improvements to grant agent selection and grant management are under way.



GPE's implementation grants continue to meet their specific objectives at completion, with 21 of the 24 grants that closed since the start of GPE 2025 meeting their objectives. Of the implementation grants that reported progress, 61 percent of grants were on track to meet their objectives in fiscal year 2024, a slight improvement from 57 percent in fiscal year 2023. Because of efforts by partner country governments, grant agents and the GPE Secretariat to remediate underperforming grants, 15 out of the 29 off-track grants in 2023 are back on track or fully implemented. However, 11 additional grants went off track in 2024, indicating the need for ongoing attention to ensure that implementation grants remain on schedule during implementation. The Secretariat has taken measures to increase attention to implementation. Those measures include the hiring of three senior managers to oversee regional portfolios and a comprehensive review and redesign of internal roles and processes that will be fully rolled out in January 2025.

GPE's implementation grants have reached 252.7 million children since GPE 2025 started. That number accounts for 39 percent of all school-age children in the 76 countries with GPE grants that reported the number of children reached. Of the almost 253 million children reached, 70 percent are in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict. Since 2021, GPE's implementation grants distributed 169 million textbooks, trained 1.9 million teachers and constructed or rehabilitated 36,135 classrooms. The results achieved in the four years of GPE 2025 thus far already exceed the numbers achieved in the five years of GPE 2020.

GPE's system capacity grants support partner countries in addressing capacity gaps identified through the enabling factors analysis. More than 80 percent of partner countries' system capacity grants have been approved, and 80 percent of these grants were on track to meet their objectives.

In fiscal year 2024, the GPE Secretariat introduced a gender marker, which builds on a methodology developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, to estimate the extent to which grants integrate gender equality into program design. Of the 119 grants active in fiscal year 2024 (including implementation and accelerated funding grants), 87 percent included at least one activity related to gender equality. Sixty-two percent of grant funds approved during GPE 2025 had gender equality as a specific objective, as compared with 34 percent approved during GPE 2020.

## **ENABLING OBJECTIVE: MOBILIZE GLOBAL AND NATIONAL PARTNERS AND RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE RESULTS**

GPE reinforces partner countries' efforts to implement system reforms at scale by mobilizing additional financing for education through its innovative financing mechanisms and through the three cross-national mechanisms—KIX, Education Out Loud and technical assistance initiatives—that complement its country-level grants.

GPE has successfully leveraged additional financing for education to complement its grant financing. As of June 30, 2024, GPE had approved \$940 million in GPE 2025 Multiplier expression of interest allocations in 49 partner countries. GPE 2025 innovative financing mechanisms accounted for \$470.23 million in grants to 29 partner countries. Those allocations are leveraging nearly \$4 billion in cofinancing through the GPE Multiplier. The amount of cofinancing far exceeds the target of \$1.56 billion and has been leveraged from an increasingly diverse range of sources, with 64 cofinanciers participating in GPE's innovative financing mechanisms.

KIX and Education Out Loud enable the design and implementation of system reforms. Both programs exceeded their targets in informing partner countries' education policies and supporting civil society advocacy for education. Early findings from an ongoing review of KIX show that it is unique in its scale, in terms of the breadth of research and the number of countries reached, and in marrying knowledge generation, knowledge mobilization and country support. A similar review of Education Out Loud finds that it has strong relevance for, and provides value to, civil society advocacy and social accountability, which is contributing to strengthening education policy and accountability at the country level.

Technical assistance initiatives, formerly GPE strategic capabilities, mobilize technical partners' expertise, resources and solutions to reinforce national government capacity for aligned and coordinated action across multiple ministries. These initiatives currently support partner countries on climate-smart education, school safety, school-based nutrition and technology for education, among other areas. In 2024, 14 partner countries drew on technical assistance initiatives, surpassing the target of 10 countries. The next results report will provide more information on how this work is proceeding.



## SPECIAL FOCUS: MEASURING CHILDREN'S LEARNING

**In brief:** *The world has 1.6 billion primary- and secondary-school-age children; for about 680 million of those children, most of whom live in GPE partner countries, the level of learning outcomes is unknown. The lack of regularly available and high-quality data on learning outcomes impedes the education community's understanding of the status of learning and the solutions it can deploy to make education systems more effective. The partnership has strategic opportunities to improve the availability of learning data. Countries with effective learning assessment systems tend to collect and report data on learning outcomes regularly. GPE's focus on learning assessment systems has strengthened under GPE 2025, and the priority reforms in all partnership compacts include measures to conduct learning assessments or to strengthen learning assessment systems. GPE grants supported learning assessment systems in 65 partner countries in 2024. If implemented successfully and sustained beyond the life of GPE grants, the investments can play a significant role in addressing the learning data gap. Alongside longer-term measures to improve learning assessment systems, existing national data can be better leveraged for international reporting. About half of the partner countries that conducted learning assessments between 2015 and 2022 did not report learning data to UIS.*

In a difficult environment for education financing, the lack of data on learning outcomes hampers the education sector's case for investing in education. Although the relative dearth of learning assessment data is a longstanding issue, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing widespread school closures made it more difficult for partner countries to administer learning assessments, with disruptions particularly for those assessments planned for 2020, 2021 and 2022. Consequently, the number of learning assessments in partner countries declined from 55 in 2019 to only five in 2022. Nevertheless, at least 185 large-scale learning assessments at the primary and secondary level were conducted in 63 GPE partner countries between 2015 and 2022. Of those countries, only 34 reported at least one learning data point to UIS in that period.

In most countries, comparing the cost of learning assessments to government education spending per student shows that cost does not represent a significant barrier to the availability of learning data. Instead, because learning assessments tend to be ad hoc rather than conducted regularly as part of an established system, partner countries find it difficult to sustain the practice of conducting learning assessments. In contrast,

countries with established learning assessment systems tend to conduct assessments and report data regularly.

All partnership compacts under GPE 2025 incorporate interventions related to learning assessment systems as part of their priority reforms. In two-thirds of the partnership compacts analyzed, the learning assessment-related interventions were developed as a direct response to gaps identified through the data availability and use component of the enabling factors analysis. In the remaining partnership compacts, the development of policies or frameworks related to learning assessments was embedded in broader system reforms.

GPE's funding model also directly incentivizes improvements in learning assessment systems. For instance, in Liberia, 5 percent of the system transformation grant allocation of \$19.5 million depends on completion of a national learning assessment at the primary level and dissemination of its results. GPE implementation grants continued to support learning assessments in 2024. Of the 119 grants active (implementation and accelerated funding grants) in fiscal year 2024, 77 supported learning assessments in 65 partner countries. Alongside that country-specific support for learning assessments, GPE implements a range of cross-national initiatives, such as support for citizen-led assessments and peer-learning programs for ministry officials, to strengthen learning assessments through KIX and Education Out Loud.

Although partner countries have made significant investments in learning assessments, challenges in the production, reporting and use of learning data persist. Ensuring data availability and comparability over time and across countries will require adequate financial and technical resources, incentives for alignment to international standards and harmonization of learning assessments.

As GPE leans into supporting partner countries' implementation of their system reforms to achieve education outcomes, the GPE 2030 strategy updates will consider how results, including learning outcomes, can be driven and measured more systematically and with greater precision.

