



# ISSUE DESCRIPTION

COMMITTEE United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women  
ISSUE Addressing Discrimination Against Women in Educational Institutions  
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## Introduction

For hundreds of years, women have been fighting for equal rights and to be treated in the same manner as men. Although attitudes have changed considerably for the better in the last decades, women and girls from all over the world are still experiencing discrimination solely because of their gender. Generally, women are disproportionately discriminated against during the schooling process in access, retention, completion, treatment, as well as in career choices resulting in disadvantage beyond schooling and the school environment. Education plays a pivotal role in promoting human rights values and is recognized as the pathway to gender equality and women's empowerment. Although the education of girls and women is considered to be one of the most effective investments for sustainable development, little progress has been made on the issue. Even where academic opportunities are available, discrimination problems arise and prevent women from fully taking advantage of these opportunities. The legal recognition of girls' and women's right to education remains critical and its effective implementation calls for further guidance and action.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Gender parity:** a statistical measure used to describe ratios between men and women, or boys and girls

**Gender gap:** the difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**Education for All (EFA):** a global movement led by UNESCO, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults.

**The Education 2030 Agenda:** a global commitment of the *Education for All* movement to ensure access to basic education to all by 2030.

**Millennium Development Goals:** eight international development goals for the year 2015, which included the following intentions:

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. To achieve universal primary education
3. To promote gender equality and empower women
4. To reduce child mortality
5. To improve maternal health
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. To ensure environmental sustainability
8. To develop a global partnership for development

**Sustainable Development Goal (SDG):** a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed in 2015 to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all"

**Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC):** a legally binding international agreement that recognises education as a legal right to every child on the basis of equal opportunity

**Title IX:** a federal law that guarantees the right to education free from sex discrimination

## General Overview

It is a gratifying fact that today more girls than ever go to school. In 2015 Member States resolved to ensure that children everywhere would be able to complete a full course of primary and secondary schooling, and that girls and boys would have equal access to all levels of education. While some progress has been made, the goal was not achieved as many women continue to face multiple barriers based on gender. A survey, made in 2012, showed that worldwide, 129 million girls were out of school; 31 million of those being between the ages of 6 and 12. Six out of those ten children were not acquiring any basic literacy and numeracy education in any form. These children grow up to be illiterate adults, which further fuels poverty and marginalization.

Although sex is an expressly prohibited grounds of discrimination under international human rights law, every woman and girl who attended school had likely encountered some form of discrimination in education at some point in her life. The Member States' legal commitment to CEDAW, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) - the four foremost treaties guaranteeing the right to education of women and girls - is relatively widespread. As of now, 189 states have ratified and acceded to CEDAW which

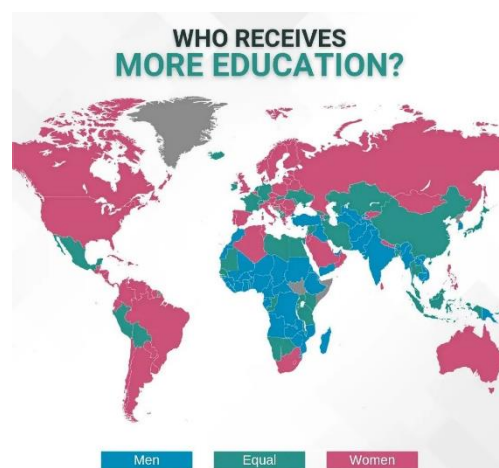
is 96% of UN Member States, CADE has 101 States parties, ICESCR has 166 States parties, and the CRC has 196 States parties.

Investing in girls' education transforms communities, countries, and the entire world. Girls who receive an education are less likely to marry young and more likely to lead healthy, productive lives. They earn higher incomes, participate in the decisions that most affect them, and build better futures for themselves and their families.

## Major Parties Involved

Whereas enrolments have been rising since 1970 for both sexes, girls' enrolments have been increasing faster than those of boys at both the primary and secondary levels. This progress can be seen in the number of countries that have achieved gender parity at the two levels. The patterns of success in reaching parity vary widely by region. Central and Eastern Europe is the top region in terms of achieving parity at both the primary and secondary level, with 18 of its 21 countries having done so. It is followed by three regions where a majority of countries have also achieved gender parity: Central Asia, North America and Western Europe. South and West Asia ranks last in the number of countries reaching parity at both levels. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest proportion of such countries: only 2 out of 35.

Of all regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion. Over one-fifth of children between the ages of about 6 and 11 are out of school, followed by one-third of youth between the ages of about 12 and 14.



**United States of America:** Nowadays, all kids living in the United States have the right to a free public primary school education. The Constitution requires that all kids be given equal educational opportunity no matter what their race, ethnic background, religion, or sex, or whether they are rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen. At the close of the 2020-21 academic year, women made up 59.5% of college students, an all-time high, and men 40.5%, according to enrolment data from the National Student Clearinghouse, a non-profit research group.

**United Kingdom:** In the United Kingdom education system schools are either state schools funded by the government and are free for all pupils, or they are independent and charge

fees to the parents of the pupils. However, in public schools parents may be asked to contribute towards extracurricular activities, such as school trips and excursions. The higher education participation level in the United Kingdom for young women has reached 56.6%, compared to only 44.1% for young men.

**France:** State-run primary schools in France are free, secular, and co-ed, and parents only need to pay for lunches, after-school care, and class outings. Education is compulsory for children between the ages of six to 16. Although studying at a French university is not free, people are only charged a small amount. However, if the student is not a citizen of an EEA country or Switzerland, or already a permanent resident, they will have to pay higher tuition fees. In 2020 92% of female students obtained baccalaureate graduation.

**Russia:** Nowadays, public primary schools are free to attend in Russia, but parents still need to pay for books, sportswear, school uniforms, and other necessities their children need. Education in state-owned secondary schools is free; first tertiary (university level) education is free with reservations: a substantial number of students enrol on full pay. In 2017 a survey highlighted that 37% of Russian women had a higher education degree, while only 29% of the men could say the same.

**China:** The nine-year compulsory education policy in China enables students over six years old nationwide to have free education at both primary schools (grade 1 to 6) and junior secondary schools (grade 7 to 9). The policy is funded by the government, tuition is free. Schools still charge miscellaneous fees. When the People's Republic of China was founded 71 years ago, 90 percent of the girls and women aged above 15 were illiterate. Recent surveys show that 99.9 percent of school-age girls are receiving formal education in China, thanks to decades of efforts by the government to ensure gender equality in education.

**Italy:** Nowadays, public education in Italy is free and is compulsory for children aged between 6 and 16 years. The Italian education system is divided into nursery, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and high school. University, which is usually undertaken at the age of 19, is not free or compulsory. In 1950 only 7% of girls between the ages of fourteen and seventeen went to school, while 12% of boys did. In 1998 84% of the girls and 81% of the boys attended high schools. At university level women outnumbered men by the late 1990s.

**Canada:** Public education is currently free for all students in the Canadian public school system. High school students must attend school until age 16 or 18, depending on the

province or territory. However, non-citizens are asked to pay additional fees for international students. Canadian women are now more educated than Canadian men for the first time in history: 55.9% of women aged 15 and over have a postsecondary degree or diploma compared to 54.5% of men.

**Japan:** Public primary and lower secondary schools do not charge tuition, and government tuition support makes public upper secondary school essentially free for families making below an annual income threshold. Families earning above this threshold pay tuition at the upper secondary level. Today, there is practically no gender gap in the opportunity for education in Japan.

**Germany:** Nowadays, public schools offer primary and secondary education for free. However, parents may be asked to contribute towards extracurricular activities, such as school trips and excursions. There are usually subsidies and bursaries for families on lower incomes. In 2014, Germany's 16 states abolished tuition fees for undergraduate students at all public German universities. This means that currently both domestic and international undergraduates at public universities in Germany can study for free, with just a small fee to cover administration and other costs per semester.

**Spain:** The Spanish education system is compulsory and free for all children aged between 6 and 16 years and is supported by the national government together with the governments of each of the country's 17 autonomous communities. Primary school and secondary school are considered obligatory education. The 1970 Education Act guaranteed a free education for all Spanish citizens, irrespective of gender. The General law of Education and Financing of the Educational Reform of 1970 provided greater opportunities to women, regardless of their social class across all levels of Spanish education.

**Netherlands:** Except for private schools, most Dutch primary and secondary schools are free. However, parents are usually asked to pay a small contribution to the schools. Some international schools are partly funded by the government, and others are private. According to a study, which used data gathered in 2012, more young Dutch women hold a post-secondary degree than their male counterparts.

**Hungary:** Primary and secondary education is free, but parents must pay for books, stationery and other equipment and school trips. If a family has three or more children, they can get the schoolbooks for free. Most Hungarian universities are public institutions, and students

traditionally study without fee payment. The general requirement for university is the Matura.

**Switzerland:** Education is compulsory for all children and young people from 9 to 11 years. Children start compulsory education when they are about four to six years old until about when they turn 15 years old. Public schools are free of charge. Women in Switzerland have made significant progress in the last 20 years, particularly in the field of higher education.

**Turkey:** In Turkey primary and secondary education is financed by the state and free of charge in public schools, between the ages of 6 and 19. Secondary or high school education is not mandatory but required in order to then progress to universities. Turkey is the second country in the world in access to higher education with a 94.2% schooling rate.

**Brazil:** School is free and compulsory for all students at the primary (ages 7–14) and secondary (ages 15–17) levels. The average rate of schooling among women is one year more than men and women are increasingly closing gender gaps in education. Despite that, roughly three-fifths of Brazilians have only four years of schooling or less, most of whom are women.

**Mexico:** Mexico mandates free primary and secondary education for children. After secondary school, students can choose between college and technical school. Women tend to outnumber men in technical schools. Despite the 98.5 percent literacy rate among girls 15 to 24, many female students in Mexico tend to leave school early.

**Australia:** Government schools are mostly free for all Australian citizens and permanent residents. Parents will need to pay for school uniforms, books, stationery, and any other items their child requires for school. There have been significant increases in female participation in secondary and higher education in Australia over the past 39 years. Women were three times more likely than men to have qualifications in Health, and nearly four times more likely to have qualifications in Education.

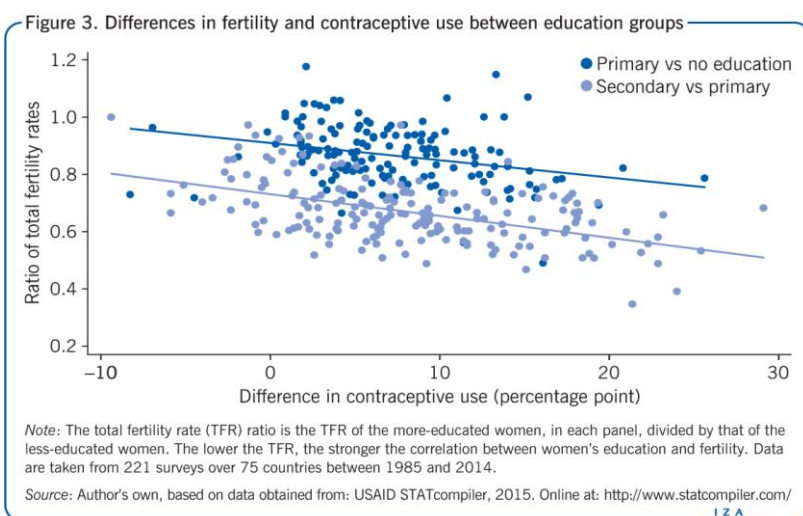
**India:** Education in India is compulsory for all children from ages 6 to 14 and provided free of charge at public schools under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report's Gender Review in 2011 in India, upper secondary completion rates of rich urban girls and boys averaged 70%. For poor rural males the average was 26% but the rate was much lower for poor rural females.

**Bangladesh:** As in many other developing countries, the core issue for education policy makers in Bangladesh has been to increase access to education and boost educational attainment rates. The government has recently built thousands of schools, notably in remote rural areas, and poured considerable resources into improving education. To further increase participation and improve learning outcomes, the Bangladeshi government in 2010 adopted an ambitious new national education policy that introduced one year of compulsory preschool education and extended the length of compulsory education from grade five to grade eight.

**Egypt:** Egypt's constitution stipulates free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6 and 15, although there are plans to eventually extend compulsory education to secondary education (12 years of schooling). On average, women have between seven and eight years of education. The gender gap between men and women is still great, but it is slowly closing,

**Ethiopia:** Although schooling in Ethiopia is neither free nor compulsory, the country has one of the highest enrolment rates on the African continent: 86% of males and 81% of females are enrolled in school. However, few children continue studying after primary school. In order to prevent that, the Ethiopian government has made several improvements in education, such as building new schools in rural areas and increasing the paygrade of teachers.

**Kenya:** Under the country's constitution, every child in Kenya has a right to free and compulsory basic education. It is mandatory for any parent who is a Kenyan or whose child resides in the country to enrol them for primary and secondary education. As a result of this legislation, enrolment rates increased to 84 percent, however, it was found that in some regions where poverty and gender inequality are particularly high, only 19 percent of girls were in school.





## Timeline of Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

**1948** - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**1972** - The enactment of Title IX

**1979** - The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

**1989** - Convention on the Rights of a Child

**1990** - The World Conference on Education for All

**2000** - Millennium Development Goals

**2015** - The Education 2030 Agenda

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### THE EDUCATION 2030 AGENDA

In 2015 the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda to build on the achievements and address the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The 2030 Agenda is broad and holistic in nature, covering systemic issues such as hunger, education, poverty, and inequality, as well as the broader governance issues of accountability, financing and corruption. It includes seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs) which every state has committed to achieving by 2030. SDG 4 is for education, and its main goal is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

### THE GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

The Gender-Responsive Pedagogy was initiated in 2005 and has been introduced in Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Its main goal is to create a learning environment for students and teachers alike by reversing gender-biased attitudes, behaviour and stereotyped assumptions that cause gender differentials in education.

## Possible Solutions and Approaches

### RAISING AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT

Human rights reflect basic human needs; they establish the basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. Human rights are about equality, respect, freedom, and justice. Education is one of the most important human rights. It states that every individual in society has the right to education regardless of gender, wealth, ethnicity, and religion. By promoting Human Rights, humanity takes a step in the direction of achieving equality between men and women.

### TRAINING TEACHERS ON GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGIES

In some places, teaching practices are not gender-responsive and result in gender gaps in learning and skills development. It is important to equip teachers with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to empower them to respond adequately to the learning needs of girls and boys through using gender-aware classroom processes and practices.

### MAKING PRIMARY AND SECNDARY SHOOLING FREE, COMPULSORY AN AVAILABLE EVERYWHERE

In some countries, families often cannot afford to send their children to school, leaving millions of school-age children deprived of education. When there is more than one child in a family, but only enough money to educate one, parents seem to favour boys over girls and given the choice, they send their sons to school and leave their daughters at home to help in everyday tasks, such as cooking and cleaning. Despite international obligations, some states keep on imposing fees to access primary and secondary education. In addition, there are often indirect costs associated with education, such as for schoolbooks, uniforms, or travel, that prevent children from low-income families accessing school. By making primary and secondary education free, poorer families would also be able to send their children to school.

### INVESTING IN SCHOOLS TO HAVE BETTER SANITARY CONDITIONS

In some places, schools do not meet the safety, hygiene or sanitation needs of girls. This is why they end up skipping class, because they cannot afford to buy sanitary products, or they do not have access to clean water and sanitation to keep themselves clean and prevent diseases. Menstruation is stigmatized around the world and the cultural shame attached to the natural process makes girls feel too embarrassed to fully participate in society. Improving access to sanitation contributes not only to achieving equality in education, but also to developing health and reducing poverty.

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