

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building on lessons from its previous strategic plan and current evidence about education system reform, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) introduced a new strategic plan (GPE 2025), covering the period 2021–25. The goal of GPE 2025 is to accelerate progress in access, learning and gender equality by transforming education systems in partner countries. GPE 2025 aims to mobilize global and national partners and resources (the enabling objective) to improve gender-responsive sector planning and monitoring (country-level objective 1), promote coordination among donors and improve education financing (country-level objective 2) and strengthen the capacity of partner countries to implement innovative interventions and drive results at scale (country-level objective 3).

In May 2021, the GPE Board of Directors approved a results framework for measuring progress toward the GPE 2025 goal and objectives. This first results report of GPE 2025 discusses findings against the results framework indicators with data available in calendar years 2020 and 2021 and fiscal year 2022 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022). Overall, the data show severe effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on partner countries' access, learning and domestic education financing. GPE extended the duration of 54 of the 66 accelerated funding grants approved during the pandemic, ensuring partner countries were able to continue their recovery and mitigation efforts. The US\$467 million in accelerated funding grants supported distance learning activities benefitting 76 million children and enabled training for 229,887 teachers.

Accelerating the rollout of the GPE 2025 operating model and addressing delays in GPE grant implementation will be important to support partner countries' recovery from the pandemic's impacts.

GOAL: LEARNING OUTCOMES, ACCESS AND EQUITY

In brief: Out-of-school rates have been declining but not at a sufficient pace, while the incidence has been increasing among children from the poorest households. The pandemic is estimated to have had a significant impact on proficiency levels and girls are also at far greater risk of childhood marriage.

GPE partner countries currently face the effects of pandemic-related disruptions in the education sector. As of December 2020, schools were closed in a third of partner countries—and in approximately half of partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.¹ The World Bank estimates that progress made for children and youth in other domains has stagnated or reversed because of school closures related to the pandemic. Simulations of the learning poverty rate, already at 57 percent before the pandemic, climbed to 70 percent in low- and middle-income countries.

Meeting the 2025 targets set by GPE partner countries for learning outcomes will require unprecedented progress. In 2020, only about a third of students in early grades and a quarter of those at the end of primary education achieved minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. Partner countries' achievement in student learning at the end of primary education is 18 and 22 percentage points below their 2025 national targets for reading and mathematics, respectively. Whereas girls outperform boys in reading both in early grades and at the end of primary school, boys tend to perform better than girls in mathematics.

¹ See Global Partnership for Education (GPE), *Results Report 2021*, (Washington, DC: GPE, 2021), <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/results-report-2021>.



Addressing the barriers to quality teaching could play a role in accelerating progress in learning. In 2020, at the primary and secondary levels, respectively, 77 percent and 72 percent of teachers met their national minimum qualification standards across partner countries. Having teachers who meet minimum standards, however, does not necessarily translate into improved learning: partner countries with a high proportion of qualified teachers still lag behind in terms of learning outcomes. That discrepancy illustrates the need to strengthen teacher training programs and to use qualified teachers more effectively in order to better support progress in learning outcomes.

Completion of primary and lower-secondary education improved slightly between 2015 and 2019 but declined in 2020. In 2020, GPE partner countries had completion rates of 5 and 10 percentage points below the average national target for 2025 in primary and lower-secondary education, respectively. Overall, the gender gap in primary and lower secondary disadvantages girls; however, in about half of GPE partner countries with data available, boys tend to be disadvantaged in lower secondary completion.

Out-of-school rates have slightly declined in recent years, but the number of out-of-school children of primary and secondary age stagnated at 135 million between 2015 and 2020 in partner countries because of demographic pressures. Projections show that the number of out-of-school children would decline by only about 5 million children by 2025, assuming the current pace of progress. The gender gap in out-of-school rates shows a slight disadvantage for girls. Boys and girls from the poorest households are particularly affected. In several partner countries, the out-of-school rate at the primary level among children from the poorest households increased between 2015 and 2020.

Many girls in partner countries face early marriage, which is among the key barriers to girls' education. In 2020, in partner countries with data available, 34 percent of women aged 20–24 were married or in a union before they turned 18. It is estimated that the pandemic has increased the risk of child marriage and that up to 13 million additional girls are at risk of child marriage by 2030.²

GPE'S COUNTRY-LEVEL OBJECTIVES

In brief: The rollout of GPE2025 is supporting countries in identifying system bottlenecks, including the need for more and better gender-disaggregated data, and improved monitoring and training activities that also adequately encompass gender considerations. More partner countries reported success in aligning grants to national systems and harmonizing funding modalities. Domestic spending on education was recovering but had not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Despite the challenging conditions, around two-thirds of all active grants were rated as on track in their implementation.

GPE 2025 aims to accelerate access and learning outcomes for all children by transforming education systems. To support partner countries' education system transformation,³ the GPE 2025 operating model comprises three interrelated stages that support countries as they move from analysis and diagnosis to prioritization and alignment and finally to implementation, learning and adaptation. These stages are captured under GPE's three country-level objectives.

Country-Level Objectives 1 and 2: Gender-Responsive Sector Planning and Monitoring, and Coordinated Action and Financing

During the first stage of the operating model, a country-level assessment is completed on four enabling factors that support education system transformation: (1) gender-responsive sector planning, policy and monitoring; (2) availability and use of data and evidence; (3) sector coordination and (4) equity, efficiency and volume of domestic financing for education.

In 2021, GPE's Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) assessed three countries—the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Tajikistan. It assessed an additional three countries in the first half of 2022—El Salvador, Nepal and Uganda. The assessments indicate the recommended level of priority for addressing each enabling factor in order to support system transformation.

One of the ways GPE aims to achieve gender equality in education is by supporting gender-responsive sector planning, policy and monitoring. As part of its assessment, the ITAP conducts a review to verify the existence

² Global Education Monitoring Report Team. #HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis; the latest facts on gender equality in education, (UNESCO, 2021), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375707>.

³ Global Partnership for Education (GPE), GPE: Operationalizing a System Transformation, (Washington, DC: GPE, 2022), <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/gpe-2025-operationalizing-system-transformation-approach>.

of laws guaranteeing access to education for all children regardless of gender. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Tajikistan all have legislative frameworks ensuring the right to education for all children regardless of gender. Despite the existence of those laws, ITAP assessments noted several challenges, including a lack of timely and accurate gender-disaggregated data, limited gender-responsive monitoring mechanisms and a lack of gender-related training for government officials. The ITAP recommended that this enabling factor be considered a high-priority area in Democratic Republic of Congo and El Salvador and a medium-priority area in the other four countries, relative to the other enabling factors.

Data reporting to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) has been on a declining trend since 2018, and the proportion of partner countries reporting key data to UIS fell to 38 percent (29 out of 76) in 2021 from 45 percent (34 out of 76) in 2020. That decline illustrates the persistent challenges partner countries encounter in collecting quality data that meet international standards and in reporting those data to UIS. The ITAP assessed the data and evidence enabling factor area in six partner countries, giving it a high-priority rating in five countries and a low-priority area in only one country, Nepal. ITAP assessments of the data and evidence enabling factor show gaps in the coverage and use of data collected by countries' education management information systems. The data systems face issues related to compliance with international standards and do not collect key data necessary for policy, planning and monitoring. Learning assessment systems also face challenges related to the availability, comparability and reliability of learning data.

The inclusiveness of local education groups improved in 2021, which is expected to contribute to inclusive policy dialogue at the country level. The participation of civil society and teacher organizations in local education groups helps ensure that citizens' and educators' concerns are heard. In 2021, the proportion of local education groups that included both civil society organizations and teacher associations was 69 percent—up from 66 percent in 2020.

Partner countries made some progress in aligning GPE grants to national systems and in using harmonized modalities. The proportion of aligned grants by volume of financing hovered around 50 percent in 2020–22, which was not the case before 2018. The proportion of grant funding using pooled funding mechanisms increased significantly from 43 percent in 2020 to 60 percent in

2022. According to the ITAP assessment of the sector coordination enabling factor, alignment and harmonization are among the most important barriers to sector coordination. The ITAP recommended that this enabling factor be a high-priority area in Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador and Kenya and a medium-priority area in the other three countries.

Transforming education systems in partner countries requires financial resources, and partner countries made some progress in domestic financing. In 2021, 71 percent (44 out of 62) of the partner countries with data available achieved the 20 percent benchmark or increased their share of education spending from 2020. Domestic education financing seems to have rebounded after the decline in 2020, which followed the economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 disruptions. The average share of education spending dropped by 1.2 percentage points in 2020 followed by a 0.2-percentage-point increase in 2021—meaning that education financing has not yet fully recovered from the pandemic's impacts. Following the Call to Action on Education Financing led by President Kenyatta in 2021, GPE partner countries committed to spending at least 20 percent of national budgets on education, which would generate up to US\$196 billion in education financing by 2025.⁴

The volume of education expenditure increased over the last decade in the 76 partner countries. Estimations based on UIS data show that government education spending in partner countries increased by \$19.4 billion from 2010 to 2015 and by \$14.4 billion from 2015 to 2020, showing a declining pace of progress. Despite growth of the school-age population in partner countries, the average annual spending per child increased from \$96 in 2010 to \$129 in 2015 and to \$159 in 2020. However, the current global economic slowdown marked by high inflation rates and increased interest rates, combined with rising debt levels, would potentially increase pressures on government finance. This situation could result in reduced available resources to finance education.

Domestic financing faces various challenges, according to ITAP assessments of the domestic financing enabling factor. Those challenges include low shares of education spending in total government spending, low execution rates of the education budget and high reliance on debt to finance government spending. As a result, the sector relies heavily on households to finance education, which poses an affordability issue for the poorest households, and on high-cost loans, which poses sustainability issues,

⁴ See GPE, "Heads of State Declaration on Education Financing," Announcement, July 6, 2021. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/news/heads-state-declaration-education-financing>.

especially in countries already facing high debt service levels. ITAP assessments of the domestic financing enabling factor suggested that domestic financing should be a high priority in Democratic Republic of Congo, Tajikistan, and Uganda and a medium priority in the three other countries.

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

To strengthen the capacity of partner countries and support system transformation, GPE 2025 offers various grant mechanisms: (1) the system transformation grant, (2) the system capacity grant, (3) the Girls' Education Accelerator, (4) strategic capabilities and (5) innovative financing mechanisms. As of June 2022, GPE had approved 13 system capacity grants and two Multipliers (one of which includes financing from the Girls' Education Accelerator) under the GPE 2025 operating model. Because the GPE 2025 operating model is still being rolled out, the active grant portfolio predominantly consists of grants approved under GPE 2020.

Ongoing implementation grants support objectives related to the eight priority areas under GPE 2025. Eighty implementation grants were active at some point during fiscal year 2022, with a total volume of \$2.9 billion. About 20 percent of the total amount of these grants was allocated to organizational capacity,⁵ 19 percent to teachers and teaching, 12 percent to learning, 10 percent to inclusion, 10 percent to early learning, 8 percent to access, 8 percent to gender and 6 percent to volume, equity and efficiency of domestic finance. The remaining 7 percent of total funding went to other expenses, such as program management, and grant agents' implementation support cost.

About 64 percent of GPE's active grants at the end of fiscal year 2022 were on track with implementation. Of 74 grants that remained active until the end of fiscal year 2022 (six of those grants closed by June 2022), a progress rating was available in 61 cases. Of those 61 grants, 39 were assessed to be on track with implementation. That share of on-track grants is 16 percentage points below the results framework benchmark of 80 percent. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic's ongoing effects, political crisis, shifts in government top leadership and natural disasters contributed to delays in grant implementation. Other reasons include delays in procurement and in setting

up project management, and implementation capacity issues. Only two grants submitted completion reports in fiscal year 2022, and both met their overall objectives. A summary review of all grants completed between 2018 and 2022 is planned for the second half of 2024.

In terms of grants' achievements, in fiscal year 2022, grant agents reported that a total of 106,766,151 students benefited from GPE grants, to varying extents. Using GPE grant funding, partner countries distributed 56,189,846 textbooks (twice the number of textbooks distributed in 2021), trained 675,522 teachers (132 percent increase from 2021) and constructed or rehabilitated 8,505 classrooms (45 percent increase from 2021). A large share of those achievements is due to COVID-19 accelerated grants, which are expected to close in fiscal year 2023. Thus, grants' achievements in those areas are likely to be smaller in coming years, unless impediments in off-track grants are quickly addressed and grants under the GPE 2025 operating model become active without delay.

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

In brief: GPE catalyzed an additional \$1 billion in co-financing for education through the GPE Multiplier and GPE Match grants. Official development assistance to education rose in dollar terms in 2020 but its share of total assistance continued to decline. Support to knowledge exchange and civil society participation in key education activities improved system transformation across dozens of GPE partner countries.

GPE successfully mobilized knowledge to support system transformation in partner countries. The GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange connects and supports 70 partner countries and funds 36 projects across 53 countries. By fiscal year 2022, there were 46 cases in which the initiative contributed to strengthening knowledge and skills in partner countries. In addition, projects funded through Education Out Loud contributed to education planning, policy dialogue and monitoring through more than 70 grants in 63 countries and states. As a result of those projects, civil society was able to make such contributions to the education sector in a total of 30 countries. After the completion of midterm evaluations for both programs, recommendations for improvement are being implemented.

⁵ Organizational capacity is defined as efforts to strengthen system capacity, which includes data and diagnostics, analysis, policy development, planning, monitoring and sector coordination and alignment.

As of June 2022, donors had contributed \$802 million to the GPE Fund and fulfilled about 21 percent of their \$4 billion pledge for the period 2021–25. Although some donors have not yet started disbursing to GPE, others have already fulfilled their pledges. GPE mobilized an additional \$1 billion in co-financing through its innovative financing mechanisms (the GPE Multiplier and GPE Match).

GPE donors also financed the education sector through their contribution to education aid. In 2020, GPE donors increased their official development assistance (ODA) to the education sector by nearly \$1 billion from the previous year, despite the economic slowdown in many donor countries caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, GPE donors' education ODA as a share of total education ODA disbursements declined from 75 percent in 2015 to 73 percent in 2019, and to 68 percent in 2020.

As part of the rollout of GPE 2025, the Secretariat has instituted an agile learning framework to mobilize ongoing evidence-based learning and better understand the functioning of the different parts of the operating model. So far, the learning has been used for quicker and ongoing operational adaptations, balancing the operating model's technical aspects with the need to manage transaction costs. Early learnings have highlighted two key lessons. First, the enabling factors analysis has promoted policy dialogue and encouraged examination of key challenges through a gender lens. Second, reducing transaction costs will require improvement in streamlining the processes and better adaptation to context. The Secretariat is reviewing how various aspects of the operating model can be refined.