

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GPE's latest results framework indicators show that partner countries continue to be buffeted by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on access, learning and domestic education financing. The number of children out of school is on the rise and, for the majority of those children in school, data are not available to measure progress in learning outcomes. Against this backdrop, GPE's active grants continue to perform. The grants are financing programs that could potentially accelerate recovery from the pandemic's shocks while supporting GPE priority areas in partner country education systems.

GOAL: LEARNING OUTCOMES, ACCESS AND EQUITY

In brief: *Reflecting the legacies of the pandemic and economic headwinds, in the years covered by this results report, partner countries unsurprisingly experienced uneven progress in confronting what remained a severe crisis in education worldwide. Positives, such as a greater number of children entering the final year of primary school, were offset by the results in learning indicators. Gains in the proportion of qualified teachers at the primary level were offset by declines in the higher grades.*

Most learning and participation indicators continued to reflect the severe disruption inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic. That disruption deepened the severity of the preexisting learning crisis, especially the challenges with foundational learning in many partner countries. In 2021, on average, 19.8 percent of students achieved a minimum proficiency level in mathematics by the end of primary school, while across 23 of 24 countries with available data, less than 50 percent reached minimum proficiency in reading.

Based on current trends, only one out of 17 countries with data available is progressing fast enough to achieve its 2025 target for math. None of the 15 countries with data available that had set a national reading target for 2025 is expected to reach that target. Quality teaching could help accelerate progress in learning outcomes, but here again many countries have had to strive to reverse losses incurred during the pandemic. The proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications slightly increased to 80.7 percent in 2021 from 79.4 percent in 2020 in primary education but declined by 3.3 percentage points at the lower-secondary level.

Overall, partner countries remained on track to meet their 2025 targets for primary school completion; however, most were far from reaching their lower-secondary education targets. The gross intake rate (GIR) to the last grade of primary and lower-secondary education improved between 2015 and 2019 but slightly declined in 2020. In 2021, whereas the GIR to the last grade of primary education increased by nearly 5 percentage points compared to 2020, the GIR declined by 2 percentage points at the lower-secondary level.

The picture was similarly mixed for the gender gap, with girls at a disadvantage in terms of primary and lower-secondary education, and boys trailing on completion of lower-secondary school in about half of the partner countries with available data. The gender parity in school completion has been improving since 2015 even though early marriage remains a significant barrier to girls' access to education and to completion. In 2021, nearly one-third of girls across 50 partner countries were married or had entered a union before the age of 18.

Given current trends, 60 percent of partner countries with data available may not achieve their 2025 out-of-school rate targets. The number of out-of-school children of primary- and secondary-school age increased to 154 million in 2020 from 148 million in 2015, reflecting growth of the school-age population. Out-of-school rates showed a slight disadvantage for girls and were generally worse for children from lower-income areas and households.

Although partner countries have committed to raising the participation rate of early childhood education to 81 percent by 2025, progress has been stagnant at about 65 percent since 2015.

GPE grants continued to be directed to areas with the potential to revive and accelerate progress in access to

education and learning outcomes. Of the 84 implementation grants active between July 2022 and June 2023, 80 targeted direct support to learning. Of these, more than 78 percent supported learning assessment, 71 percent went to textbooks and learning materials and 55 percent aimed to enhance curriculum and learning standards. A total of 51 grants (62 percent) supported early childhood education, and 75 grants (68 percent) financed activities related to teachers. The area of teaching and learning remains a priority of imminent GPE grants, with several partner countries identifying it as part of their priority reforms in recent partnership compacts.

GPE'S COUNTRY-LEVEL OBJECTIVES

In brief: *Through the enabling factor analyses that underpin partnership compacts, countries stressed the need for far greater domestic financing for education, while also underlining the importance of dependable, better-quality data to ensure that funding commitments translate into higher spending where most needed. Harmonization of GPE grants improved; however, sector coordination remains hampered by the difficulties in fostering informed and broadly representative dialogue among partners. Fund utilization improved, and active grants were largely directed to teaching, learning and improving gender equity.*

Achieving GPE's 2025 goal requires identifying and addressing the barriers to transformation of education systems. GPE's operating model comprises three interrelated stages to support partner countries: (1) system diagnosis and analysis of enabling factors, (2) prioritization of reforms through the development of partnership compacts and (3) implementation, learning and adaptation through grants and other financing. These stages are reflected in three country-level objectives.

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

For identifying priority reforms in their compacts, partner countries first coordinate with their local education groups to analyze the status of four enabling factors that underpin education system transformation: domestic education financing, gender-responsive sector planning, data availability and use and effective sector coordination.

An Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) assesses the status of the enabling factors to assist partner countries in identifying key barriers to priority reforms. As of December 2022, ITAP had assessed enabling factors for 16 countries, as discussed in this report. An additional 37 countries and states completed an ITAP assessment by mid-November 2023 (not discussed in this report). Building on the enabling factors analyses, 33 partner countries had also completed their partnership compacts by mid-November 2023.

Enabling factors analyses confirmed that domestic financing remained among the most pressing challenges facing the education sector. For 12 out of 16 partner countries, ITAP assigned a high priority to equity, efficiency and volume of domestic financing.

For domestic financing, the proportion of partner countries that achieved the 20 percent benchmark or increased their share of education spending declined to 60 percent in 2022 from 64.8 percent in 2021. Average education spending as a share of total government expenditure in 2022 was 1.3 percentage points below its 2019 level, showing that public spending on education had yet to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic's shocks. At the same time, declining economic growth, high inflation and rising interest rates put further pressure on public finances.

Enabling factors analyses revealed that overall commitments to funding education often did not generate increased domestic financing. All 16 partner countries that conducted an enabling factor analysis showed gaps in funding their education plans. Causes of these gaps in financing included unrealistic budget projections, low education budget execution rates, unsustainable increases in government spending and weak capacity to mobilize revenue.

Insufficient government expenditure on education increases the financing burden on households, exacerbating equity issues, and inefficiencies in resource allocation or use might also hamper education outcomes even in those countries able to boost expenditure. High dropout and repetition rates, inequalities in student-teacher ratios across districts, teacher absenteeism and low morale were also among the major barriers to the efficient use of education resources.

ITAP assigned a high priority rating to the data and evidence enabling factor in seven partner countries and to the gender-responsive planning and monitoring enabling factor in four. It assigned a high priority to sector coordination in three countries.

With respect to data and evidence, the proportion of partner countries reporting to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics on at least 10 out of 12 key outcome, service delivery and financing indicators has declined since 2019. Enabling factors analyses pointed to weaknesses in statistical systems that constrained production of quality data as well as collection and analysis at the national and subnational levels.

All 16 partner countries that conducted an enabling factor analysis by December 2022 showed gaps in funding their education plans. Other challenges included issues of coordination in planning between central and local government entities, limited gender-responsive monitoring mechanisms and ineffective sector dialogue, which hampers sector coordination.

Despite the existence of formal coordination mechanisms, sector dialogue was constrained by the large number of partners operating in each area, as well as the irregularity of local education group meetings and the poor representation and engagement of certain local actors. The number of local education groups with representation of both civil society organizations and teachers associations remained stable in 2022. However, of the six countries that joined GPE in 2022, only one reported representation by teachers associations in its local education group.

Alignment of GPE grants to national systems and the use of harmonized modalities to deliver GPE support to partner countries improved in 2023. The proportion of aligned grants by volume of financing rose about 4 percentage points to 53.6 percent between 2022 and 2023. The proportion of aligned grant funding in 2023 bettered the average of 48 percent seen over the eight years from 2015. The proportion of GPE grants using harmonized modalities increased to 62.4 percent in 2023, up from 59 percent in 2022.

Through its multiple, special-purpose finance windows, GPE's system capacity grant continued to offer partner countries a tool to reduce system roadblocks, including the need for harmonized assistance. The implementation of the system capacity grant under all financing windows was on track.

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

GPE financial support to countries is built around five pillars: (1) the system transformation grant, (2) the system capacity grant, (3) the Girls' Education Accelerator,

(4) strategic capabilities and (5) innovative financing mechanisms, such as the GPE Multiplier. As of June 2023, GPE had approved two system transformation grants, one combined Multiplier/system transformation grant, one Multiplier/Girls' Education Accelerator, six Multiplier-only grants and 56 system capacity grants. Grant approvals under GPE 2025 are expected to accelerate with 22 system transformation grants likely in 2024, based on 33 compacts completed by mid-November 2023.

The overall size of the active grant portfolio (predominantly consisting of grants approved under GPE 2020) eased to \$2.7 billion in June 2023 from \$2.9 billion in June 2022. The decrease largely reflected the closure of 53 implementation grants, of which 33 were COVID-19-related accelerated funding grants. Fund utilization for the implementation grants continued its gradual increase of past years, climbing to \$521 million as of June 2023 from \$470 million the previous year.

Teaching and learning were the main investment areas for GPE active implementation grants, receiving \$834 million (or 33 percent of the volume of the implementation grants). Similarly, 33 percent of active implementation grant funding was allocated to activities mainstreaming gender equality. GPE grants also supported climate change mitigation and adaptation through \$224 million (or 9 percent) in grant allocations. Although learning is one of the focus areas of GPE grants, a review of the grant completion reports highlighted that data availability issues make it challenging to show measurable improvements in learning outcomes.

As of June 2023, implementation ratings across 67 grants showed that 38 grants (57 percent) were on track to meet their overall objectives, a decline from 64 percent the previous year. However, implementation is expected to accelerate because most of the off-track grants had either taken or were working on remedial measures. Nine out of 10 grants that submitted a completion report by June 2023 reached their objectives.

Between July 2022 and June 2023, active GPE implementation grants aided the distribution of 48 million textbooks, the training of 481,000 teachers and the construction or rehabilitation of 6,664 classrooms. Since the start of GPE 2025, GPE has reached 227 million children, representing 35 percent of all school-age children in the 68 countries with grants that reported this figure.

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

In brief: *GPE reaffirmed its dedication to knowledge sharing among partners as well as its support to civil society by committing nearly \$150 million in additional funding to the GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) and Education Out Loud initiatives. The strategic capabilities pilots in seven countries are on track to meet their objectives, and an additional \$4 million in funding has been approved. GPE also leveraged more than \$1.7 billion in cofinancing through the GPE Multiplier and other innovative financing instruments.*

GPE's enabling objective is to mobilize knowledge and capacity of the Partnership through the KIX, Education Out Loud and strategic capabilities programs, and to raise financing to support partner countries' system transformation.

Across 70 countries, KIX-supported knowledge and research products were used between 2021 and 2023 in 116 cases of education policy development or delivery, with 72 of those cases related to gender, equity and social inclusion. KIX has been extended through 2027 with an additional \$88 million to bring its budget to over US\$165 million.

Civil society organizations drew on Education Out Loud funding as they influenced education planning, policy dialogue or monitoring in 37 countries between 2021 and 2023. Education Out Loud was also extended through 2027 with an additional \$60 million, bringing its total funding to \$133 million.

In 2023, GPE's strategic capabilities initiatives provided technical support to seven partner countries, backed by an initial allocation of \$2 million in the areas of climate-smart education systems, education data leadership and monitoring, evaluation and learning. The GPE Board approved an additional \$4 million allocation to strategic capabilities initiatives.

Of the nearly \$4 billion that donors committed to the GPE Fund for 2021–25, 38.4 percent of financial pledges were fulfilled by end of June 2023. Overall, 24 donors disbursed a total of \$1.46 billion to the GPE Fund (\$802 million in 2022 and \$660 million in 2023).

GPE seeks to unlock additional external resources for education through a set of innovative financing instruments designed to attract cofinancing from a range of partners. As of June 2023, these mechanisms had accounted for a total of \$439.9 million in grants

to 27 partner countries, leveraging over \$1.7 billion in cofinancing through the GPE Multiplier (\$1.4 billion), GPE Match (\$48 million), Debt2Ed (\$77.1 million), SmartEd (\$160 million) and Enhanced Convening (\$27.5 million).

Official development assistance (ODA) to the education sector from GPE donors slightly increased in 2021 despite a decline in total education aid. In 2021, the volume of ODA to the sector declined by \$1.4 billion after five years of steady growth. GPE donors, however, increased their aid to the education sector by \$400 million between 2020 and 2021. GPE donors' education ODA as a share of total education ODA disbursements was 64.1 percent in 2021, up from 57.3 percent in 2020.