

# Eritrea

## Overcoming education challenges for the most disadvantaged children

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has been supporting Eritrea in expanding access to quality education in the country's four most vulnerable regions. As a result, around 19,000 children—of whom 42 percent are girls—from nomadic and disadvantaged communities are now attending school.



GPE/Fazle Rabhani

Located in the northeast of Africa, Eritrea is a multilingual and multicultural country with approximately 65 percent of the population living in rural areas. Eritrea's complex geographical terrain coupled with the population's nomadic lifestyle and austere economic conditions pose a challenge for the delivery of quality education.

For the Government of Eritrea, education is the foundation for all national development efforts and plays a vital role in economic growth and poverty reduction. Despite the government's efforts to enroll more children in school over the last decades, 37 percent of children between 5-13 years old were still out of school in 2016.<sup>1</sup> The majority of these children are from the most marginalized groups: girls, children living in remote or nomadic areas and children with disabilities.

Several challenges hindered their education, including long distances to school aggravated by severe temperatures or strong dusty winds. Schools in rural areas faced difficulties in securing teachers, especially female teachers, and lacked adequate learning materials for their students.

## Building a strong foundation for education

When Eritrea joined GPE in 2013, the country received a grant to support the development of the education sector plan for 2013-17. The funding also helped build capacity within the education ministry to improve data collection and analysis—essential elements to develop a strong and measurable plan.



**GPE partner:** Since 2013

**Challenges addressed:**

Low access to education, low education quality, adult education, lack of learning materials, lack of infrastructure

**Key interventions:** Classroom construction, provision of learning materials, mother tongue education, data systems, adult education

**GPE grants:** US\$25.3 million

**Grant agent:** UNICEF

**Coordinating agency:** UNICEF

1 2016 Out of school children study

GPE's approach brought together education partners in the local education group, which included development partners, civil society organizations and the private sector. This collaborative forum spearheaded an inclusive and transparent dialogue on Eritrea's education policies and strategies.

Once the plan was ready to be implemented, GPE along with UNICEF, the coordinating agency, supported the government's strategies focused on increasing access for out-of-school children, improving the quality of education and strengthening the capacity of the education system.

GPE funding is benefitting children, youth and adults from communities located in the four most disadvantaged regions of the country—Anseba, Gash Barka, Northern Red Sea and Southern Red Sea. By improving the management and monitoring capacity of the education ministry, GPE is helping strengthen the entire education sector, because education officials now have the right systems to inform policy decisions and can use the data to measure, monitor, and ultimately improve learning outcomes for all children.

## Overcoming education challenges

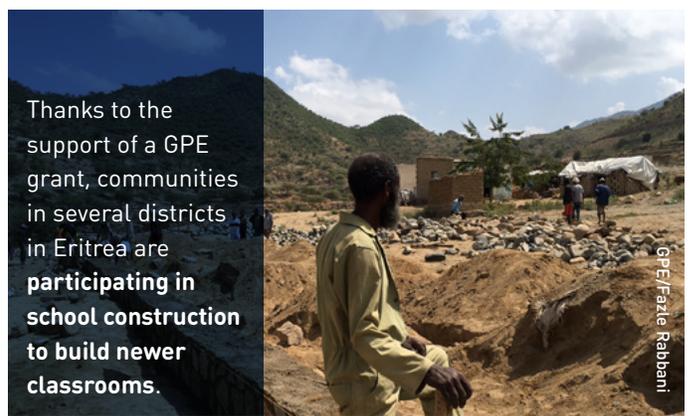
To enroll more children in school, the GPE program focuses on three pillars: classroom construction, teaching and learning materials, and adult education.

In early 2019, the construction of early childhood and primary and special needs education classrooms in the targeted regions began. To mitigate delays in school construction work, communities have provided temporary learning spaces while ensuring that underutilized classrooms are made available. The new classrooms are equipped with chalkboards, teacher desks, cupboards and benches. As a result of this initiative, around 19,000 children—of whom 42 percent are girls—are now in school. GPE has also been supporting adult education for those who have missed schooling opportunities.

## Improving the quality of education

Once children are enrolled in school, the next step is to ensure they learn. To achieve this goal, the GPE program focuses on equipping teachers with the skills and resources they need for effective teaching, as well as strengthening mother tongue education.

Teachers from minority groups have been trained for elementary school, middle school and early and special needs education and then deployed to the target regions. Teachers have attended professional development activities and preschool teachers and directors have received training on the new early childhood education curriculum supported by the GPE program.



With GPE support, over 3.4 million textbooks and teachers' guides for core subject areas such as math, science, English and nine Eritrean languages (considered the mother tongue) for early grades have been printed and distributed in an effort to maintain the 1:1 student-textbook ratio.

Evidence suggests that learning outcomes improve when students learn in the language with which they grow up. GPE supported the Eritrean government in ensuring all children in elementary school learn in their mother tongue. This included providing training cassettes in Eritrean languages as well as in-person training for teachers who will teach in their ethnic language.

## Better data to improve learning

Data are key for policymakers to make evidence-based decisions, to know where children with the biggest needs are and to know where teachers or materials are missing. Thanks to GPE, officials in the Ministry of Education received training in school record management as well as data collection, analysis, and reporting. This training was also delivered to school directors and supervisors in an effort to improve school-based data collection. GPE and partners are engaged with Eritrea to resolve other data issues in the country, which often are beyond the remit of the education sector.

Eritrea's education plan for 2018–22 guides the country's strategic priorities for the next five years. This plan has been informed by a comprehensive sector analysis funded by a new GPE education sector plan development grant. Eritrea is also eligible for a GPE implementation grant to help fund key elements of the plan.

GPE's continuous support over the past years has helped Eritrea make solid progress on enrolling all the country's children in school and ensuring that learning is taking place. In just four years, between 2013 and 2017, the number of children who completed primary school increased from 40 percent to 45 percent. For girls, it increased from 37 percent to 43 percent.

Additionally, the net enrollment rate for primary school increased from 76.8 percent in 2011/12 to 82.1 percent in 2015/16. However, this national average ratio hides severe regional disparities.