



A young girl listens during class.  
Chad

Credit: Educate a Child

CHAPTER 2

# EQUITY, GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

in Access to Education

# RESULTS AT A GLANCE

## IMPACT

### GOAL 1

Improved and more equitable learning outcomes

#### #2

Percentage of children under age 5 developmentally on track.

—

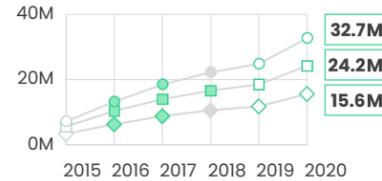
\*13 countries with data available.

### GOAL 2

Increased equity, gender equality, and inclusion

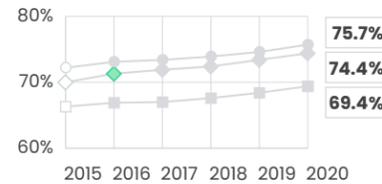
#### #3

GPE supported 32.7 million children since 2015.



#### #4a

75.7% of children completed primary education.



#### #4b

53% of children completed lower secondary education.



#### #5a

69% of partner countries were at or close to gender parity in primary completion.



#### #5b

56% of partner countries were at or close to gender parity in lower secondary completion.

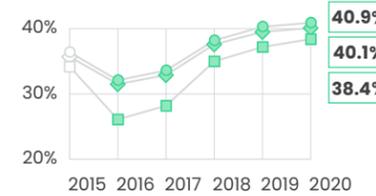


	Baseline	Milestone met	Milestone not met	No milestone	Insufficient data
Overall	○	●	●	○	—
PCFCs	□	■	■	□	—
Female	◇	◆	◆	◇	—

## IMPACT

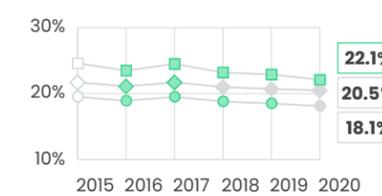
#### #6

40.9% of pre-primary-age children enrolled in pre-primary education.



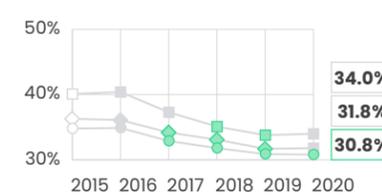
#### #7a

18.1% of primary-school-age children were out of school.



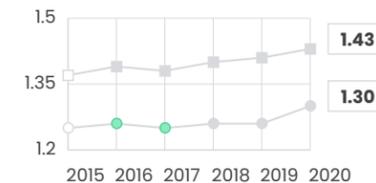
#### #7b

30.8% of lower-secondary-school-age children were out of school.



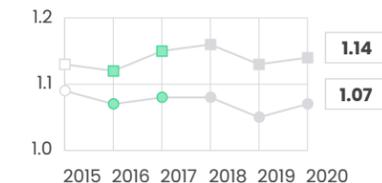
#### #8a

Primary-school-age girls were 1.3 times more likely than boys to be out of school.



#### #8b

Lower-secondary-school-age girls were 1.07 times more likely than boys to be out of school.



#### #9

53% of partner countries improved substantially on the equity index since 2010.



## KEY FINDINGS

- Completion rates have improved over the GPE 2020 period, though progress at the primary level has been challenged by population growth. Primary completion rates have risen from 72.2 percent to 75.7 percent, and lower secondary completion rates have risen from 48.6 percent to 53 percent.
- Girls' disadvantage in access to education has decreased at both primary and lower secondary levels, as the gap between boys' and girls' average completion rates has narrowed since the 2015 baseline. At the primary level, this gender gap reduced from 6.1 percent to 3.4 percent of overall completion rates since the baseline. At the lower secondary level, it reduced from 9.9 percent to 7.2 percent of overall rates since the baseline.
- More children are in school, but this progress has not been fast enough. The data show 18.1 percent of children are out of primary school, down from 19.5 percent at the 2015 baseline. And 30.8 percent of children are out of lower secondary school overall, and 34 percent in PCFCs. But these numbers have fallen by more than 4 percentage points overall since the baseline—and by more than 6 percentage points for PCFCs.
- Four out of every five girls who are out of primary school across GPE partner countries live in a PCFC, as do two out of every three girls who are out of lower secondary school.
- In addition to girls, children from rural areas and/or PCFCs, and children from the poorest households, other disadvantaged children are disproportionately likely to be out of school, such as children with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced children, children from nomadic communities, and other marginalized groups.
- Since the 2015 baseline, the percentage of young children enrolled in pre-primary education has grown from 36.4 percent to 40.9 percent. There is nearly gender parity in pre-primary enrollment, with girls only slightly disadvantaged.
- Between 2015 and 2020, GPE grants have supported the equivalent of 32.7 million students, including 24.2 million children in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.
- GPE implementation grants approved between 2016 and 2020 allocated 30 percent of funds, or \$640 million, to activities specifically promoting equity, gender equality and inclusion.

Equity, gender equality and inclusion are at the heart of GPE's work, as reflected in Goal 2 of the GPE 2020 strategic plan. This chapter reports on progress on a variety of facets of equity in access to education, including numbers of children in school and completing basic education, as well as early childhood care and education, with a special focus on gender equality and on partner countries affected by fragility and conflict (PCFCs).

It is important to note that the data discussed in this chapter do not yet reflect the impacts of COVID-19, since they were collected prior to the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> These access indicators, based on data published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), take two years to complete the process from collection to publication, so each year GPE reports on UIS data that had been collected two years prior. Discussion of how these challenges have affected equitable access to education, and the scope of GPE's response, can be found in the Special COVID-19 Chapter.

## 2.1. EQUITY IN COMPLETION OF BASIC EDUCATION

### COMPLETION RATES (Indicator 4)

Indicator 4 measures the proportion of children who complete (a) primary education and (b) lower secondary education.<sup>2</sup> Overall primary completion rates increased from 72.2 percent at baseline to 75.7 percent against the 2020 target, and increased each year in this period. However, revised data released in 2019 and confirmed in 2020 show that progress in primary completion has been weaker than previously estimated.<sup>3</sup> The milestones and 2020 targets for all indicators were selected based on projections at baseline, and the

revised data based on higher population estimates show primary completion rates below these—especially for PCFCs—as well as a slower rate of progress (figure 2.1a).<sup>4</sup> While primary completion rates are improving, they are struggling to keep pace with population growth. Lower secondary completion rates show good progress, surpassing the 2020 target overall and for PCFCs, and coming close enough to the target for girls to be considered “met within tolerance” (figure 2.1b).<sup>5</sup>

On average across GPE partner countries, girls are still disadvantaged in primary and lower secondary completion (figures 2.1a and 2.1b). Girls in PCFCs are especially disadvantaged: With a primary completion rate of 65.8 percent and a lower secondary completion rate of 41.6 percent, they fall

1. GPE uses UIS data from the 2017–18 academic year to report against the 2020 target for the results framework because of the standard two-year lag in UIS data publication.
2. For details on any indicator methodology, replace X with the number of the indicator in the following link: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/methodology-sheet-gpe-result-indicator-X>.
3. In 2019 and 2020, the UIS released revised retrospective data for completion rates, pre-primary enrollment rates and out-of-school rates (Indicators 4, 6 and 7, respectively) based on updated population data estimates from the United Nations Population Division. These data also inform gender parity indicators on completion rates and out-of-school rates (Indicators 5 and 8). Updated rates are shown for all years based on updated population data for Indicators 4, 5, 6 and 7. Indicator 8 is also presented with updated data. Since the milestones and 2020 targets for these indicators were selected based on prior estimates, their attainability was in some cases affected, either positively or negatively, once revised data came in. Original baselines, prior to data revisions, are marked where applicable on the graphs in this chapter, and together with the full original data in appendix A, they can convey where these early estimates were higher or lower than the subsequent revisions.
4. In figure 2.1a, these revisions reflect the fact that some partner countries have had higher populations of primary-school-age children than originally estimated, particularly in PCFCs. Since completion rates are taken as a percentage of all children of completion age in a country, higher populations mean lower completion rates, given the same number of children completing school.
5. As noted in appendix B, in the case of UIS-based, impact-level indicators that are reported in percentages, a 1 percentage point “tolerance” is applied to assessing achievement of milestones and targets. Therefore, if GPE achievement is within 1 percentage point of its milestone or target, this will be considered to have been met within tolerance.

**FIGURE 2.1.**

**A: PRIMARY COMPLETION RATES GREW STEADILY, THOUGH MORE SLOWLY THAN ORIGINALLY PROJECTED.**

Proportion of children who complete primary education



**B: LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATES INCREASED, THOUGH GAPS PERSIST.**

Proportion of children who complete lower secondary education



	Milestone	Actual	Original Baseline
Overall	●	●	●
PCFCs	■	■	■
Female	◆	◆	◆

Source: GPE compilation based on updated data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, <http://uis.unesco.org> (2020).

Note: GPE does not revise official baselines; these are represented above as "Original Baseline." Originally reported data for years 2016–19 can be found in appendix A.

dramatically below both the average for all children in PCFCs and the average for girls overall against the 2020 target.<sup>6</sup>

with gender parity indexes for completion rates that come within a set threshold of about 10 percent of the accepted range for gender parity.<sup>7</sup>

**GENDER PARITY IN COMPLETION RATES (Indicator 5)**

Another way to measure progress toward gender equality is through a gender parity index, which shows how girls are faring compared with boys on a given indicator, such as completion rates. Indicator 5 measures the proportion of countries

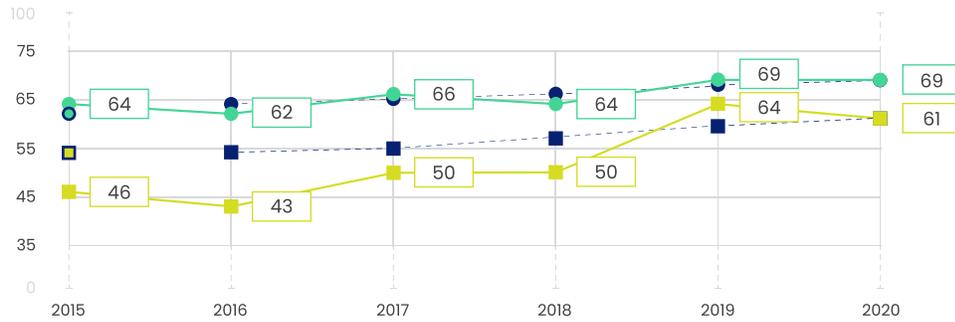
The proportion of partner countries near gender parity on completion of primary education met the 2020 targets both overall and for PCFCs, using both the original threshold (appendix H) and the corrected threshold (figure 2.2a)<sup>8</sup> Over the GPE 2020 period, a net of six countries entered the threshold from below, meaning that more girls are completing

6. GPE compilation based on updated data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, <http://uis.unesco.org> (2020).  
 7. A gender parity index divides girls' results by boys' results to get a ratio; the closer this ratio is to 1, the more even the results are across girls and boys. The original threshold set for Indicator 5 is 0.877–1.123, which represents coming within about 10 percent of the accepted range for gender parity of 0.97–1.03. Counting the number of countries within this wider range provides useful information about progress toward parity across the partnership.  
 8. As mentioned in GPE's *Results Report 2020*, the original set threshold for nearing gender parity for Indicator 5, 0.877–1.123, does not represent equivalent degrees of disadvantage for girls and boys. Because the gender parity indexes used here always divide girls' rates by boys, this represents a ratio of 877 girls to 1,000 boys on the lower end, and a ratio of over 890 boys to 1,000 girls on the higher end. In figure 2.2 and the associated discussion, the data presented employ a corrected threshold of 0.8845 to 1.1306, which represents equivalent degrees of disadvantage for girls and boys on the lower and upper bounds, while preserving the size of the original threshold (0.246). The data based on the original set threshold are presented in appendix H, as well as in the results framework in appendix A.

**FIGURE 2.2.**

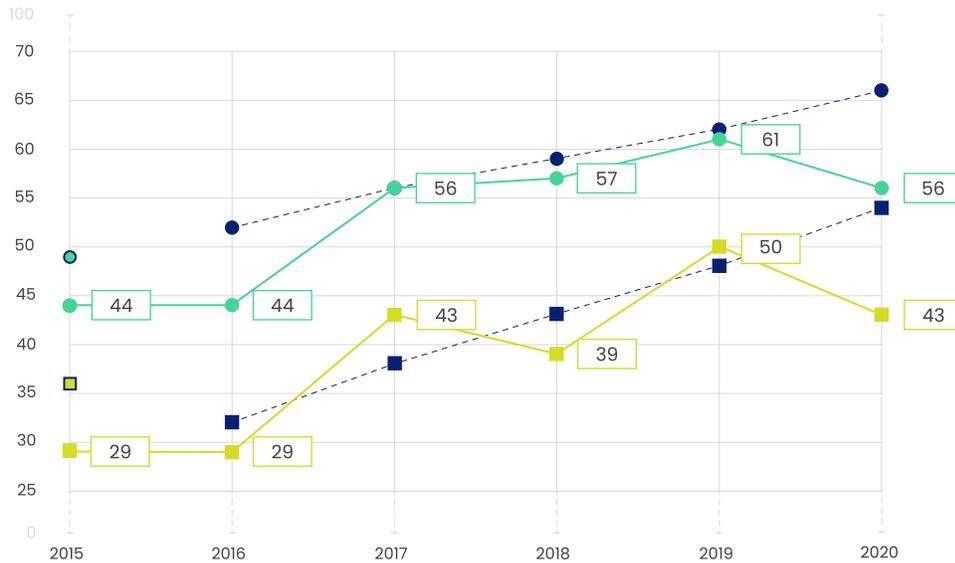
**A: GENDER PARITY IN PRIMARY COMPLETION MET TARGETS.**

Proportion of GPE partner countries within corrected threshold for gender parity index of completion rates for primary education



**B: GENDER PARITY IN LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION ROSE ERRATICALLY FROM BASELINE, AND MISSED FINAL TARGETS.**

Proportion of GPE partner countries within corrected threshold for gender parity index of completion rates for lower secondary education



	Milestone	Actual	Original Baseline
Overall	●	●	●
PCFCs	■	■	■
Female	◆	◆	◆

Source: GPE compilation based on updated data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, <http://uis.unesco.org> (latest data available 2018–14).

Note: GPE does not revise official baselines; these are represented above as “Original Baseline.” Originally reported data for years 2016–19 can be found in **appendix A**. These data are based on a corrected threshold; data based on the original threshold can be found in **appendix H**.

primary school than previously, and one additional country was projected to do so.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, two countries exited the threshold upward, meaning that fewer boys than

girls are now completing primary school, and two additional countries were projected to do so.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Benin, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Mali and Togo entered the threshold, and Nigeria was projected to do so as well. Following Indicator 5 methodology, when recent data is not available for a country, a linear projection is substituted, based on past trends. For instance, the most recent gender-disaggregated primary completion rates available for Nigeria were collected in 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Burundi and Senegal exited the threshold, and Bangladesh and the Republic of Congo were projected to do so as well. The most recent gender-disaggregated primary completion rates available for Bangladesh and the Republic of Congo were collected in 2010 and 2012, respectively.

## BOX 2.1. GPE SUPPORT TO EQUITY: KENYA

Kenya has achieved remarkable success in improving equitable access to education at the national level. However, poor and disadvantaged children from remote regions—especially girls—are notably less likely to complete primary school, or to score as well on exams. GPE’s two ongoing implementation grants totaling \$98.1 million include support for 4,000 schools to improve performance while also targeting improvements in girls’ enrollment and retention. Of these schools, 1,400 are located in the rural arid and semiarid regions in the north, where disparities are especially pronounced. Each school received a \$5,000 grant to implement their own improvement plan, developed by school board members in collaboration with the community, to address key barriers to education for their children. Examples include the construction of toilets, activities to raise community awareness about the importance of girls’ education and training of volunteers to keep girls safe on their way to school.

The success of these plans in improving access, especially for girls, and in improving learning outcomes led to adoption of the school improvement plan model for a national rollout. The Kenyan government developed a policy and guidelines in order to ensure the school capitation grants follow the school improvement plan model of management and implementation. This is an illustration of a GPE-supported project activity leading to sustainable system transformation, and contributing to improved access and learning outcomes. Girls’ enrollment in grade 1 has increased in all targeted schools in arid and semiarid regions, and girls’ learning outcomes are improving.

a. Read more at GPE, “Kenya: Investing for a Better Future,” Stories of Change, Global Partnership for Education, October 2020, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/results/stories-of-change/kenya-investing-education-better-future>.

Both 2020 milestones were missed for gender parity in lower secondary completion, using both the original threshold (appendix H) and the corrected threshold (figure 2.2b). Over the GPE 2020 period, nine countries entered the threshold: eight because girls’ disadvantage decreased, and one because boys’ disadvantage decreased. Four additional countries were projected to enter the threshold: two because girls’ disadvantage decreased, and two because boys’ disadvantage decreased. At the same time, four countries exited the threshold, all of which did so because more girls than boys are now completing lower secondary school, and two additional countries were projected to do the same.<sup>11</sup> One country, Burundi, rose into the threshold and then above it, with a sizeable increase in the proportion of girls completing lower secondary school over the course of the GPE 2020 period.

### THE EQUITY INDEX: LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATES BY GENDER, LOCATION AND WEALTH (Indicator 9)

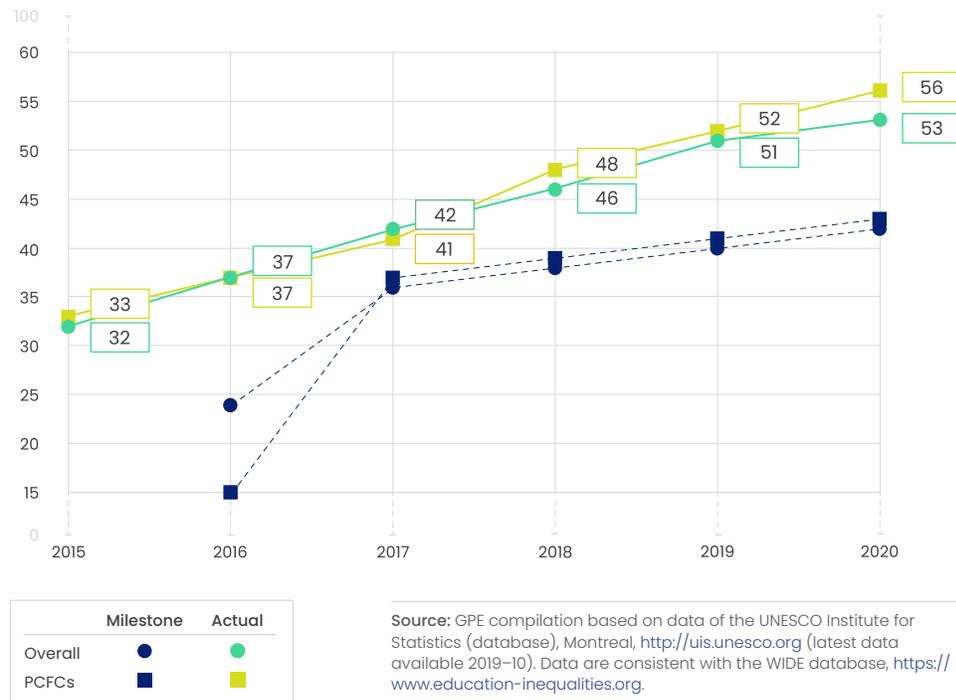
Indicator 9 tracks the performance of partner countries on the equity index each year and measures how many have improved at least 10 percent since 2010. The equity index provides a measure of equity in lower secondary completion rates in 59 partner countries with available data by averaging the three parity indexes: girls to boys, rural to urban, and the poorest 20 percent of households to the richest 20 percent.<sup>12</sup> In combining these three measures, the equity index provides a snapshot of how level the playing field may or may not be for all children within a given country to receive a full cycle of basic education.

11. Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Lao PDR, Liberia, Tanzania and Uganda entered the threshold because girls’ disadvantage decreased, and Comoros entered the threshold because boys’ disadvantage decreased. Somalia and Zambia were projected to enter the threshold because girls’ disadvantage decreased, and Guyana and Nicaragua were projected to the threshold because boys’ disadvantage decreased. The most recent gender-disaggregated primary completion rates available for Guyana, Nicaragua and Zambia were collected in 2010, 2010 and 2013, respectively, and no recent UIS data are available for Somalia.
12. Each component of the equity index always divides the rates of the more disadvantaged group by those of the advantaged group. In the relatively few countries where more girls complete lower secondary school than do boys, for example, boys’ rates are divided by girls’. This way, unlike with traditional gender parity indexes used elsewhere in this chapter, the parity index never exceeds 1. Of the 59 partner countries with available data since the baseline, none has reported the poorest children having higher lower secondary completion rates than the wealthiest, or higher rates for rural children, since 2006, with one exception: The Kyrgyz Republic reported lower secondary completion rates of 98.9 percent for the poorest quintile and 98.3 percent for the wealthiest quintile. GPE compilation based on data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, <http://uis.unesco.org>, and the WIDE database, <https://www.education-inequalities.org>.

**FIGURE 2.3.**

**PARTNER COUNTRIES MADE STRONG GAINS IN EQUITY.**

Proportion of GPE partner countries with an equity index that has increased at least 10 percent since 2010



New data for 2020 on all three component parity indexes combine to produce continued increases and the 2020 targets being surpassed both overall and for PCFCs (figure 2.3). Data on each component parity index is available in appendix I. Examining country-level data on the equity index and its component parity indexes reveals a dramatic and complex pattern of disparities in lower secondary completion rates for children based on whether they come from the richest or poorest households, whether they live in urban or rural areas, and whether they are boys or girls. Moreover, the ways these factors combine tend to be predictable on average—in that the poorest rural girls are usually left farthest behind—though the degree of disparity can vary greatly from one country to the next.<sup>13</sup> See box 2.1 for an example of GPE’s support to equity in light of these challenges. In terms of improvement over the course of GPE 2020, wealth parity performed best, with 37 countries improving and 11 backtracking, out of 48 partner countries with data available. Next was gender parity, with 39 countries improving and 16 worsening, out of 55 countries

with data available. On rural/urban parity, 29 countries improved and 19 did worse, out of 48 countries available.

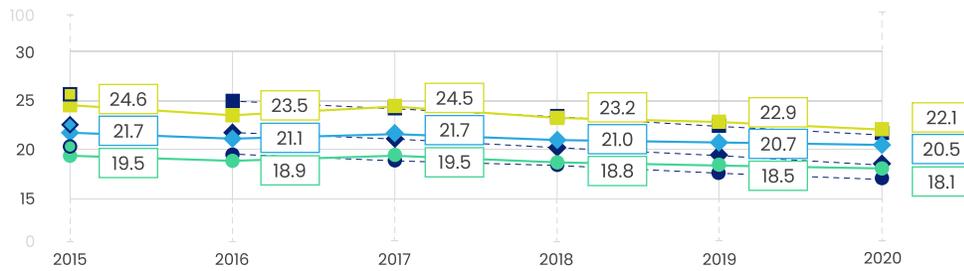
Looking across the indicators on completion rates, gender parity in completion rates and equity (gender, wealth and rural/urban parity) in lower secondary completion rates, a few patterns emerge regarding the progress of certain partner countries during the GPE 2020 period. Afghanistan, Comoros, Côte d’Ivoire, Honduras, Liberia, Niger, Sudan, Togo and Yemen improved on all five indicators with data available, and PCFCs and West African countries are overrepresented among these star performers. No country with data available on all five indicators worsened on all, but other patterns appeared: Benin, Chad, Lesotho and Mozambique improved on primary completion rates while losing ground on lower secondary completion rates, whereas the reverse was true for Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Lao PDR, Moldova, Senegal and Tajikistan. This suggests that more countries are experiencing challenges in accommodating the current primary-school-age population, as the next section will discuss.

13. More details on these dynamics can be found in *GPE’s Results Report 2019*, including in figure 2.6 of that report, illustrating the variance across countries in the disparity between completion rates for urban girls from the wealthiest quintile of the population and rural girls from the poorest quintile.

**FIGURE 2.4.**

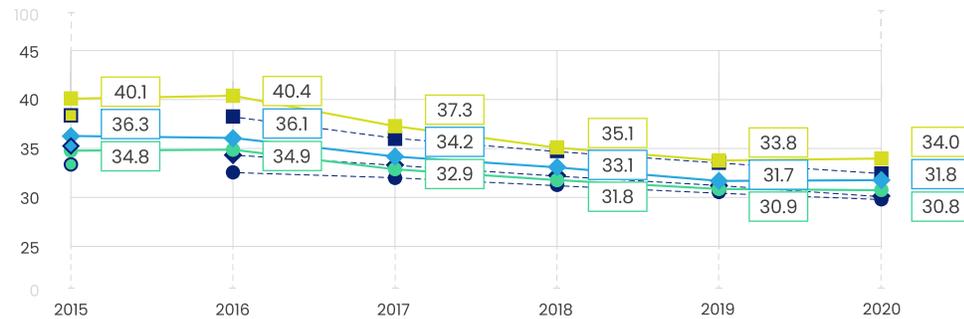
**A: PRIMARY OUT-OF-SCHOOL RATES FELL TOO SLOWLY.**

Out-of-school rate for children of primary school age



**B: LOWER SECONDARY OUT-OF-SCHOOL RATES FELL SHARPLY BUT THEN STAGNATED.**

Out-of-school rate for children of lower secondary school age



	Milestone	Actual	Original Baseline
Overall	●	●	●
PCFCs	■	■	■
Female	◆	◆	◆

Source: GPE compilation based on updated data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, <http://uis.unesco.org> (2020).

Note: GPE does not revise official baselines; these are represented above as "Original Baseline." Originally reported data for years 2016–19 can be found in appendix A.

**2.2. OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN**

**OUT-OF-SCHOOL RATES (Indicator 7)**

As many developing country populations continue to grow larger and become younger, their education systems struggle to keep pace, and additional social, economic and other barriers to access persist. Across GPE partner countries, 42.5 million children are still out of primary school and 36.3 million are out of lower secondary school. Of these, 76 percent and 66 percent respectively are in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict. While the proportion of children out of school has improved, the unsatisfactory progress in absolute numbers since the baseline—when 41.5 million children were out of primary school and 37.3 million were out of lower

secondary—illustrates this pressing challenge, especially at the primary level currently.

Indicator 7 tracks the proportion of (a) children of primary school age and (b) children of lower secondary school age who are out of school.<sup>14</sup> At the primary level, progress has been remarkably slow, apart from PCFCs over the past year: This target alone was met within tolerance, while the overall and girls' targets were missed (figure 2.4a). The newly revised data (see discussion in section 2.1) show that lower secondary out-of-school rates were higher at baseline than previously estimated—nonetheless, there was a substantial drop between 2016 and 2019 (figure 2.4b). However, these rates appear to be stagnating, and only the overall 2020 target was met within tolerance; the targets for girls and PCFCs were missed.

14. Out-of-school rates track the number of primary-school-age children who are not in primary school as a proportion of all primary-school-age children; the same principle applies for lower secondary.

Across GPE partner countries, on average, more girls than boys are still out of primary and lower secondary school, and girls in PCFCs are especially disadvantaged, particularly at the primary level. The most recent data show that 26.1 percent of girls in PCFCs were out of primary school and 36.3 percent out of lower secondary school. This means that a primary-school-age girl in a PCFC is 44 percent more likely to be out of school than is the average for all primary-school-age children across partner countries. At the lower secondary level, this number is 18 percent. Four out of every five girls who are out of primary school across GPE partner countries live in a PCFC, as do two out of every three girls who are out of lower secondary school.<sup>15</sup>

## GENDER PARITY IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN (Indicator 8)

Indicator 8 tracks the average gender parity index of out-of-school-rates: what proportion of girls are out of school versus what proportion of boys are out of school, on average across the partnership. The updated data show that girls' disadvantage in access to primary education has been worsening: Girls are now 30 percent more likely to be out of primary school across partner countries overall, and 43 percent more likely to be out of primary school in PCFCs, as opposed to 25 and 37 percent, respectively, at the baseline. Gender parity in access to lower secondary school has changed little, with girls 7 percent and 14 percent more likely to be out of school overall and in PCFCs, respectively, versus 9 percent and 13 percent, respectively, at baseline. The 2020 targets were missed for both groups at both levels of education. In addition, since taking an average of gender parity indexes across countries allows instances of girls' disadvantage to cancel out instances of boys' disadvantage, it can mask disparities.<sup>16</sup>

15. GPE Secretariat compilation based on data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, <http://uis.unesco.org> (2020): 18,824,556 girls out of primary school in PCFCs and 23,639,989 in partner countries overall; 12,555,566 girls out of lower secondary school in PCFCs and 18,429,820 in partner countries overall.
16. It is also worth keeping in mind that the gender parity index of out-of-school rates can be misleading if considered in isolation from the raw out-of-school rates. Indeed, the countries with the highest gender disparities in out-of-school rates are often those with the lowest overall out-of-school rates, because higher ratios are easier to come by between smaller numbers. For this reason, countries that have more out-of-school children are generally less likely to have the most alarming gender parity indexes for out-of-school rates. Especially when it comes to out-of-school rates, then, gender parity indexes must be considered in combination with the rates themselves in order to provide a full picture of where the needs are greatest. Note that this concern does not apply in the same way to completion rates, which are typically larger numbers and much more likely to have instances of gender disparity correspond with poor outcomes for children generally in the form of low completion rates.

### BOX 2.2. GENDER EQUALITY AS A CORE PRIORITY OF THE GPE 2025 STRATEGY AND OPERATING MODEL

As GPE embarks on a new strategic plan, GPE 2025, it continues to increase its commitment to gender equality in and through education. As a reflection of this commitment, gender equality is mainstreamed throughout GPE's model and operations, rather than a stand-alone gender equality strategy. Mainstreaming, or "hardwiring," gender equality across GPE's work means that gender equality is at the center of the partnership's goal to "accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century." Moreover, gender equality and inclusion have each been set as priority areas around which the new operating model is organized, and strengthening gender-responsive planning and policy development for systemwide impact is a strategic objective. GPE will focus on tackling the pervasive—and unique—barriers that prevent girls and boys in different contexts across partner countries from realizing their full potential through education, and in society.

At the country level, GPE 2025 will strengthen gender-responsive planning and policy development for systemwide impact. Hardwiring gender will mean that every level of the operating model should systematically identify and address gendered barriers to education. To complement this approach, GPE has created a thematic funding window for gender equality, the Girls' Education Accelerator (see pg 44). As this funding is secured, it can support targeted, transformational change for girls in countries where they lag the furthest behind, as to complement the overall hardwiring of gender equality across our work.



## IN FOCUS: GENDER EQUALITY IN BASIC EDUCATION

Gender equality remains a critical challenge in the pursuit of quality education for all children, and a key priority for GPE. Girls are still disadvantaged in most partner countries in access and learning. Some progress has been made as completion rates have improved and the gender gap narrowed since 2015, and the proportion of girls completing primary school in partner countries has met the 2020 target. However, too few girls complete their lower secondary education, and their disadvantage is more prominent there, especially in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict. Partner countries identify a range of overlapping barriers for girls, ranging from cultural attitudes, household labor, child marriage and early pregnancy to school-related gender-based violence, lack of facilities and concerns about safe passage to school. Barriers identified for boys include economic and cultural drivers such as the need for wage labor, traditional pastoralist roles or other socioeconomic pressures. During GPE 2020, more than \$147 million in implementation grant funding was allocated to activities exclusively promoting gender equality, which does not include major drivers of gender equality in access such as school construction or sanitation facilities.<sup>17</sup>

The public data available on access and completion do not yet reflect the impacts of COVID-19, which is likely to affect girls disproportionately in most cases. However, specific core indicators related to gender equality were included in the monitoring and evaluation guidance provided to partner countries benefitting from COVID-19 accelerated funding to support coordinated and country-driven responses.

As an example of one such response, \$11 million in COVID-19 accelerated funding supports a program, through UNICEF, to help the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan to prepare for a safe and equitable return to school. In addition to improved hygiene measures, the program supports the recruitment and training of 1,500 teachers (60 percent female) to provide child-centered instruction and a supportive learning environment. It will equip teachers in 1,250 schools to assess learning levels and identify appropriate grade placement and remedial planning, with particular attention to the inclusion of girls, linguistically and culturally marginalized children,

and children with disabilities. The program will also support a back-to-school campaign especially targeting girls and boys who may have been displaced, or pushed into child labor or child marriage, by the economic impacts of COVID-19.<sup>18</sup>

In 2020, GPE established a Gender Reference Group to support the Secretariat in embedding gender equality in the strategic planning process (see [box 2.2](#)). Their discussions were informed by a workshop on achieving gender-transformative education systems, coorganized by the Secretariat and the Brookings Center for Universal Education for over 100 attendees, and further consultations were held to gather inputs. GPE continues to partner with the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) in delivering gender-responsive education sector planning workshops; while the in-person workshops planned for 2020 were postponed, online workshops were held in January and February 2021. The two organizations have also worked together on the development of a rapid gender assessment tool. GPE's collaboration with both UNGEI and UNESCO-IIEP through the Gender at the Centre Initiative continues to grow, to include the design of a course on gender-responsive planning held in early 2021. In addition, GPE has joined the COVID-19 Education Coalition convened by UNESCO, and the Secretariat has been supporting advocacy efforts to ensure that gender equality is at the forefront of the education response.

In December 2020, GPE created the \$250 million Girls' Education Accelerator to support opportunities for girls to attend school and learn, leading to transformational change. Eligible countries that have identified gender equality as a focus area in their partnership compact can integrate a request for the Girls' Education Accelerator in their system transformation grant or Multiplier grant application, to support activities complementing and extending these grants' work on gender equality.

For more details on the impact of COVID-19 on equity, gender equality and inclusion, as well as GPE's response, see [appendix E](#).

17. This involves activities focused on promoting gender equality in a very clear and specific way, such as awareness campaigns, resources for menstrual hygiene management, gender-responsive education and so on. Activities (such as scholarships) that mention girls as part of a broader group of beneficiaries are additional to this category.

18. *Program Document for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding for Afghanistan, July 2020.*



**IN FOCUS:**  
**BASIC EDUCATION IN PARTNER COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY FRAGILITY AND CONFLICT**

As of August 2020, 29 of GPE’s 68 partner countries at the time were categorized as being affected by fragility and conflict. On average, these countries tend to have fewer children completing basic education, and more children out of school. The need to ensure consistent access to quality education for these children is urgent, and a central priority for GPE.

GPE weights its funding allocations toward countries affected by fragility and conflict to ensure these countries receive more support from the outset.<sup>19</sup> Between 2016 and 2020, 78.5 percent of all implementation grant funding approved was for PCFCs, totaling nearly \$1.7 billion for these countries. GPE also allows partner countries affected by a crisis<sup>20</sup> to access the equivalent of up to 20 percent of their maximum allocation in additional funding, up to \$250 million in total, for education needs. In addition, as of October 2020, more than \$255 million had been approved for PCFCs specifically for COVID-19 response in education systems.

In crisis situations, GPE grants can be restructured to meet crisis needs and deployed for direct service provision to ensure schools remain open, under the *Operational Framework for*

*Effective Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States.*<sup>21</sup> GPE can also provide financial and technical support to help countries emerging from a crisis to establish a transitional education plan, which sets up a coordinated approach by identifying priority actions in the medium term to maintain progress toward key educational goals and by linking development and humanitarian actors. In some countries, such as Afghanistan and Syria, GPE funds support programs developed by partners in alignment with the Multi-Year Resilience Programme developed there with Education Cannot Wait (ECW).

GPE promotes the inclusion of refugees and displaced children in national education systems and works with partners such as ECW, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Bank to meet the needs of these populations. For example, after the December 2019 joint pledge with ECW and the World Bank to support the Global Compact on Refugees, a joint action plan was published in October 2020 to implement this pledge through 2023.<sup>22</sup> GPE also made a separate pledge to ensure more and better financing to scale up quality learning for refugees. In addition to funding and advocacy, this includes strengthening incentives for host countries to include refugees in national education systems, and ensuring coordination of responses at the country level. Refugees and internally displaced children are also key beneficiaries of GPE grants (see box 2.3 for an example).

**BOX 2.3. GPE SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION IN PARTNER COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY FRAGILITY AND CONFLICT: NIGERIA**

In Nigeria, the states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe have been affected by violence and displacement caused by Boko Haram. An estimated 3.1 million children are impacted by the ongoing conflict in these states. GPE’s accelerated funding grant of \$20 million for 2020–22, through UNICEF, provides learning materials to 500,000 out-of-school children who are repatriated, displaced or from host communities. Up to 100,000 children will also receive psychosocial support, and 100 schools will be built or rehabilitated with separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys. This programming is aligned with Nigeria’s multiyear Education in Emergencies Strategy (2020–2023), annual Humanitarian Response Plan, and Joint Education Needs Assessment. It has also benefited from extensive consultations with the Nigeria Education Group, which provided endorsement.

**Source:** *Nigeria Accelerated Funding Quality Assurance Review – Phase 3, July 6, 2020.*

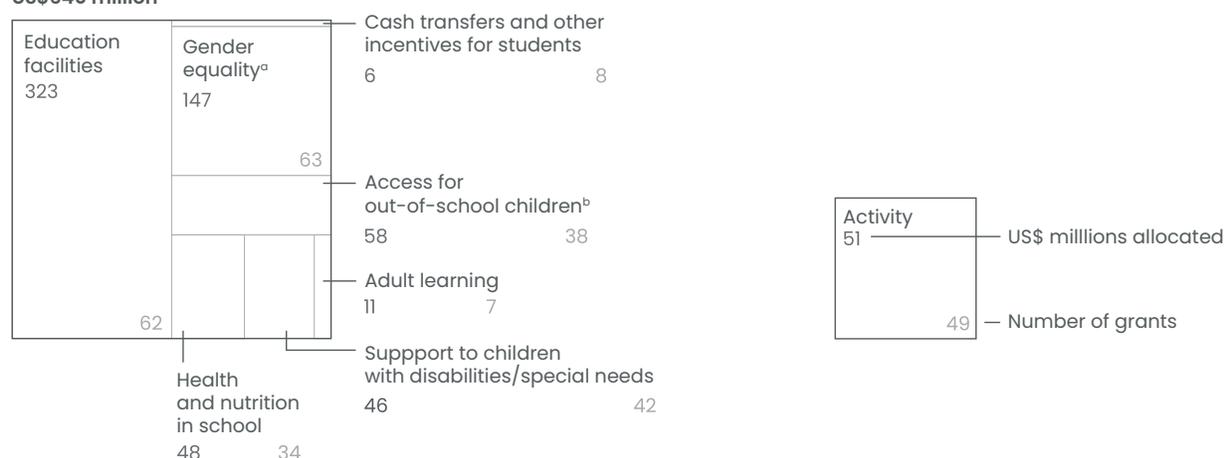
19. GPE, *GPE Funding Model: A Results-Based Approach for the Education Sector* (Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education, 2015), [https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2015-06-gpe-funding-model\\_0.pdf](https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2015-06-gpe-funding-model_0.pdf).  
 20. GPE, *Guidelines for Accelerated Support in Emergency and Early Recovery Situations* (Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education, 2015), <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/guidelines-accelerated-support-emergency-and-early-recovery-situations>; GPE, “Final Decisions” (Meeting of the Board of Directors, December 10–12, 2019, Nairobi, Kenya), <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/board-decisions-december-2019>.  
 21. GPE, *Operational Framework for Effective Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States* (Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education, 2018), <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/gpe-operational-framework-effective-support-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states>.  
 22. GPE, *Ensuring More Effective, Efficient and Aligned Education Assistance in Refugee-Hosting Countries*, ECW-GPE-WBG Joint Action Plan (Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education, 2020), <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/joint-action-plan-ensure-more-effective-efficient-and-aligned-education-assistance-refugee>.



## FUNDING FOCUS: EQUITY

### GPE FUNDING SUPPORT TO IMPROVE EQUITY, 2016–2020

Implementation grant funding allocations to improve equity, 2016–2020  
US\$640 million



a. This involves activities focused on promoting gender equality in a very clear and specific way, such as awareness campaigns, resources for menstrual hygiene management, gender-responsive education and so on. Activities (such as scholarships) that mention girls as part of a broader group of beneficiaries are additional to this category.

b. This category focuses primarily on nonformal education systems and interventions for refugees and displaced children; other activities that expand access to get more children into school, such as building schools and recruiting teachers, are counted in other categories.

## 2.3. GPE SUPPORT FOR EQUITY IN BASIC EDUCATION

### SUPPORTING BASIC EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN (Indicator 3)

Indicator 3 provides a rough equivalence of the number of additional children supported in basic education as a result of the disbursements of GPE grants in a particular year.<sup>23</sup> This number increased more dramatically in 2020 as a result of the significant surge in disbursements (figure 2.5), primarily through accelerated funding grants to help partner countries respond to COVID-19.<sup>24</sup>

### FUNDING FOCUS: EQUITY

Among the 79 implementation grants approved between 2016 and 2020 (for more details, see chapter 5), \$615.9 million in GPE funding supported activities to improve equity, ranging across seven categories (see Funding Focus: Equity). Education facilities are the largest expenditure for equity. They are key to expanding access to school especially for children in underserved areas, and for girls, who may be less likely to be sent to school if it is too long a journey. The facilities category also includes water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, which are likewise critical for equitable access.

23. This indicator is not intended as a formal count; it is only a proxy for the actual number of children reached by GPE. Specifically, depending on how a given GPE grant is used by a country and the nature of country-level projects implemented, GPE's impact may affect more or fewer children than estimated by the indicator. It is calculated by dividing country-level disbursements by country-specific public expenditures per child in basic education for each partner country that received a GPE grant in that year. The 2019 milestones and 2020 targets do not appear for this indicator for the following reason: The previous milestones were set in 2015 for the period 2016–18. These were calculated based on the grant allocations for 2016–18 (according to the 2015–18 GPE replenishment). Given the new grants approved under the new replenishment cycle (2018–20), it was not possible to compute comparable milestones or targets for 2019–20.

24. Girls make up less than half of the estimated children supported because these estimates are based on the children being served by the education systems across partner countries, and girls are still on average less likely to have access to education and therefore less likely to be grant beneficiaries.

**FIGURE 2.5.**

**MORE THAN 32 MILLION CHILDREN WERE SUPPORTED IN BASIC EDUCATION DURING THE 2015–20 PERIOD.**

Cumulative number of equivalent children supported in a year of basic education (primary and lower secondary) by GPE, in millions



**GPE SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

Expanding support for the inclusion of children with disabilities in quality education is an important priority for GPE. GPE provides a wide range of assistance toward this goal, including guidance, support and funding for interventions to include children with disabilities in countries’ education systems. During GPE 2020, \$45.5 million in implementation grant funding supported inclusive education for children with disabilities. GPE’s support includes tools and guidelines for education sector analysis and planning to support improved disability data, teacher training in inclusive education, and equipment and learning materials such as braille machines, eyeglasses and hearing aids (see **box 2.4** for an example from Zanzibar).

Inclusive education for children with disabilities was a key priority in GPE’s COVID-19 response. More than 81 percent of COVID-19 accelerated funding grants included inclusive measures for children with disabilities during school closings, such as accessible remote lessons, print materials in

Braille, assistive devices and the promotion of supplementary support programs. GPE also joined with the World Bank and other partners to produce the report *Pivoting to Inclusion: Leveraging Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities*, which makes recommendations about building and maintaining inclusive education during the crisis and in recovery.<sup>25</sup>

**2.4. EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION**

**PRE-PRIMARY ENROLLMENT (Indicator 6)**

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a critical investment, as it not only contributes powerfully to a child’s ability to stay and succeed in school down the road, but also reduces disparities in outcomes stemming from social inequality.<sup>26</sup> Indicator 6 tracks progress on access to pre-primary education through the pre-primary gross enrollment ratio,<sup>27</sup> and its 2020 targets were met for all groups (**figure 2.6**). While revised

25. C. V. McClain-Nhlapo et al., *Pivoting to Inclusion: Leveraging Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2020), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/777641595915675088/Pivoting-to-Inclusion-Leveraging-Lessons-from-the-COVID-19-Crisis-for-Learners-with-Disabilities>.

26. B. Daelmans et al., “Early Childhood Development: The Foundation of Sustainable Development,” *The Lancet* 389, no. 10064 (2017): 9–11.

27. The pre-primary gross enrollment ratio of a country measures the number of children enrolled in pre-primary education, as a percentage of the number of children of pre-primary school age living in that country.

## BOX 2.4. GPE SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: ZANZIBAR

Zanzibar received an implementation grant of \$6 million for the period 2018–22. The program it funds, through Sida, seeks to ensure that all disadvantaged children, including children with physical and learning difficulties, can access all levels of pre-primary, basic and secondary education. To ensure that inclusive education standards are met, the program involves improvements to inclusive education policy, curriculum and standards; expanded access to infrastructure, assistive devices and materials for learners with disabilities; and strengthening teacher training.

In addition to a \$9.24 million implementation and Multiplier grant approved in 2020, Zanzibar was approved for \$1.5 million in accelerated funding for a COVID-19 response plan that includes the distribution of large-print materials and materials in Braille to visually impaired students, as well as sign language interpretation for remote lessons.

Sources: Zanzibar ESPIG Program Document 2018–2021, September 2017; Application and Program Document for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding for Tanzania (Zanzibar), June 2020.

data suggest higher baselines than originally indicated, enrollments have been increasing since 2016, and rose by roughly 4 percentage points for all groups since the 2016 baseline. Children in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict are slightly disadvantaged, but the gap is narrowing.

GPE supports ECCE in a variety of ways, notably including implementation grants (see box 2.5 for an example). Of this financing, 6.6 percent went to ECCE during the 2016–20 period, for a total of \$158.2 million. The funds disbursed for ECCE

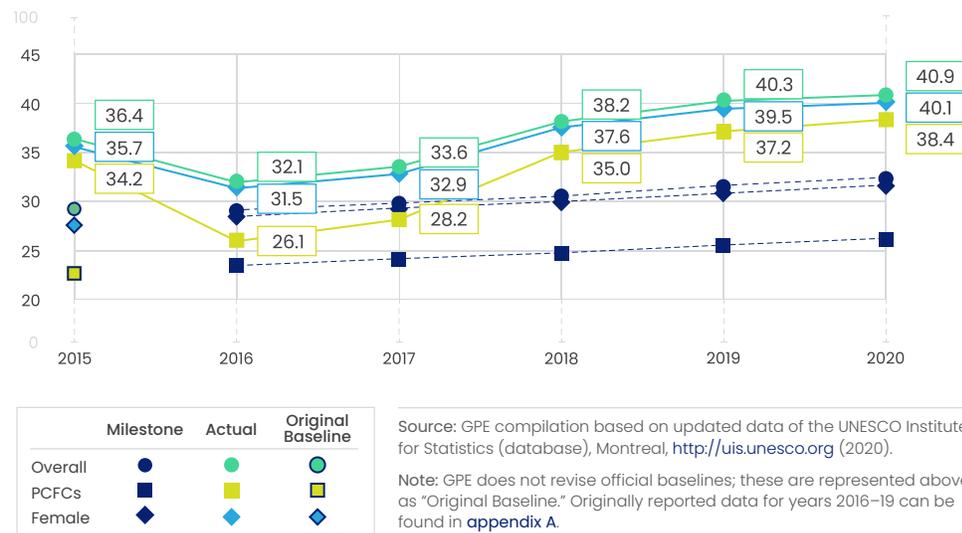
increased from \$21 million (5 percent) in 2016 to \$31 million (11 percent) in 2019, before finishing at \$27 million (7 percent) in 2020.

The Better Early Learning and Development at Scale (BELDS) initiative at GPE, which had spanned more than three years, ended in 2020. Funded equally by the Open Society Foundations, Comic Relief, Dubai Cares and the Hilton Foundation, the initiative devoted \$2 million to technical support on ECCE both within the GPE Secretariat and across the

FIGURE 2.6.

### PRE-PRIMARY GROSS ENROLLMENT RATIOS FAR EXCEEDED TARGETS.

Children enrolled in pre-primary education, as a percentage of children of pre-primary school age



partnership. Through the BELDS initiative, GPE partnered with UNICEF to develop and implement three components:

- › Partnerships at the national and global levels to strengthen the visibility of ECCE in sector plans
- › In-country capacity development for ECCE in sector planning in four pilot partner countries: Lesotho, Ghana, Kyrgyz Republic, and Sao Tome and Principe
- › Global toolkit of interactive resources to support the integration of ECCE in national sector planning processes, with complete illustrative country-level examples, available at [www.ece-accelerator.org](http://www.ece-accelerator.org)<sup>28</sup>

The development of the third component, the ECE Accelerator toolkit, through a year-long consultative process with dozens of stakeholders, occurred in 2020. The toolkit was also informed by the BELDS pilot country experiences as well as the expertise of global partners. An independent evaluation of BELDS was also conducted in 2020, confirming the overall success of the initiative in equipping ministries with the capacity, knowledge, and resources to mainstream ECCE, and in raising the profile of early childhood education in sector plans and policies.<sup>29</sup> The flexible design ensured responsiveness and relevance to countries, stakeholders felt that the project was well managed and efficient, and the mini-pooled funding mechanism was seen as a successful way to leverage foundation partnerships while reducing transaction costs. This evaluation will help inform the KIX-financed scale-up of BELDS, which will continue under a consortium led by UNICEF, the World Bank and the Early Childhood Development Action Network.

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (Indicator 2)**

Indicator 2 tracks the percentage of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being. Of the 22 countries in the baseline, 10 have new data since the baseline. Of these, six have new data since the last scheduled reporting in *Results Report 2019*.<sup>30</sup> The average among these 22 countries was 66 percent at baseline and has increased to 68 percent; however, this result should be interpreted with caution because of the small number of countries with updated data. Among the 10 countries with updated data since the baseline, the average

has improved from 62 percent at the 2011–14 baseline to 66 percent during the 2015–19 period. However, because of the paucity of countries with updated data available, the performance of this indicator could not be compared to the 2020 target.

### **TOWARD EQUITY, GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

Progress in partner countries on equity, gender equality and inclusion during GPE 2020 is undeniable, but it is now in peril. Published data on access to education, which do not yet reflect the impacts of COVID-19, show important gains prior to the pandemic. More children completed school: 75.7 percent at primary level compared with 72.2 percent at baseline, and 53 percent at lower secondary level compared with 48.6 percent at baseline. The gender gap in completion rates narrowed, as a larger proportion of girls completed school compared to overall rates at both levels. Equity in lower secondary completion rates, including by gender, location and wealth, also improved, with 53 percent of partner countries having improved substantially over 2010, compared with 32 percent at baseline. Out-of-school rates fell as well, most notably for partner countries affected by fragility and conflict, which saw rates fall to 34 percent at lower secondary level compared with 40.1 percent at baseline. More children enrolled in pre-primary education: 40.9 percent across partner countries in 2020 compared with 36.4 percent at baseline.

However, many indicators show progress too slow to achieve Sustainable Development Goals regarding universal access to education. Population growth poses an urgent challenge to education systems, as the absolute number of out-of-school children across partner countries is virtually unchanged from baseline even as rates decreased.<sup>31</sup> And both the educational and economic impacts of COVID-19 threaten to reverse this progress, as discussed in the Special COVID-19 Chapter. A new level of effort and focus will be needed from all partners to protect the right of all children to a quality education, and to support the innovations of GPE 2025 to be maximally effective toward this vision.

28. Details on the toolkit are available at <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/launching-ece-accelerator-toolkit-support-strengthening-early-childhood-education-systems>.

29. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/independent-evaluation-belds-initiative>.

30. GPE, *Results Report 2019* (Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education, 2019), <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/results-report-2019>. The scheduled reporting years for Indicator 2 after the baseline are 2018 and 2020.

31. GPE Secretariat compilation based on data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (database), Montreal, <http://uis.unesco.org> (2020): 78,738,457 children out of primary and lower secondary school across partner countries compared to 78,775,509 at baseline.



**BOX 2.5.****GPE SUPPORT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION: GUYANA**

Guyana chose to focus the entirety of its latest implementation grant (2015–18) on investing in early childhood education with a focus on reducing disparity.<sup>a</sup> The \$1.7 million grant, through the World Bank, went to improve emergent literacy and numeracy outcomes for children at the nursery and grade 1 level in hinterland regions and targeted remote riverine areas. Thanks to GPE's support, the program focused on change at all levels: capacity-building for teachers, new learning materials and training primary caregivers to help them better support their children's learning at home.

The project completion review notes that the results are palpable: Teachers now effectively tailor lessons to meet the children's needs and know how to create an environment that stimulates learning. Caregivers are more engaged in their children's learning, and, with new learning materials available, lessons have become easier for teachers to deliver and more interactive for students. With GPE's support, Guyana has made significant strides in early childhood education and reduced learning disparities between regions: Eighty-eight percent of vulnerable young children living in remote areas now master early reading and math skills by the end of preschool, similar to their peers in coastal regions. In 2020, an additional \$3.5 million in accelerated funding was approved for the COVID-19 response of Guyana's education system, which also focused on supporting learning in remote areas.

a. Read more at GPE, "Guyana: Closing the Learning Gap for the Most Vulnerable Students," Stories of Change, Global Partnership for Education, October 2020, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/results/stories-of-change/guyana-closing-learning-gap-most-vulnerable-students>.

**Source:** World Bank, *Implementation Completion and Results Report TF019053 on a Small Grant in the Amount of USD1.7 Million to the Co-Operative Republic of Guyana for the Guyana Early Childhood Education Project (P129555)*, March 2019 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2019).

