

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) mobilizes global and national efforts to contribute to the achievement of equitable, quality education and learning for all. This is the final annual results report on the Strategic Plan 2016–2020 (GPE 2020). It provides an overview of trends between 2016 and 2020, presents progress against the GPE 2020 results framework and highlights the work of the partnership in 2020. The Results at a Glance on page 6 illustrates progress on the 37 indicators against the 2020 targets, while this summary focuses on the trends.

The COVID-19 crisis triggered an education emergency of unprecedented scale. Within two weeks of the declaration of the global pandemic, GPE announced new grants to help countries plan their education response and execute urgent early measures. This was followed up with US\$500 million in accelerated funding support to help countries sustain learning and prepare for safe school reopening. A \$25 million global grant promoted collaborative partnerships and knowledge sharing focused on promoting continuity of learning and building preparedness for future crises. Because of reporting lags, much of the indicator data at impact and outcome levels discussed in this report does not yet reflect the effects of the pandemic.

### IMPACT LEVEL: LEARNING, ACCESS AND EQUITY

Ensuring that more children, especially those who are disadvantaged, can go to school and learn constituted GPE 2020's impact-level goals. Over the course of GPE 2020, progress was made against all impact-level indicators. The quality of learning assessment systems, the proportion of children completing lower secondary school, and the equity of lower secondary completion across gender, wealth and rural or urban location all improved steadily and met targets. The proportion of children completing primary school improved steadily but not quickly enough, while pre-primary enrollment showed robust improvement after an initial dip.

Improved and more equitable learning outcomes are at the heart of GPE's mission, and \$775 million in implementation

grant funding approved during the 2016–20 period was allocated to activities designed primarily to improve learning. Learning outcomes improved in 70 percent of the 27 partner countries with data available between the periods 2010–15 and 2016–19, and learning scores increased by 2.4 percent on average annually over the last decade, though the data do not yet reflect the impacts of COVID-19. However, more progress is needed in these areas. Three out of five students cannot read by the end of primary school across the 32 partner countries with data available. Including out-of-school children, three out of four 10-year-olds cannot read across the 28 partner countries with data available. Moreover, vast disparities in learning outcomes remain both between and within countries, with children from poor households or in rural areas more likely to be disadvantaged.

Strong learning assessment systems are critical for improving both learning outcomes and learning equity, and these have improved: Forty-eight percent of learning assessment systems met quality standards in 2020, up from 40 percent in 2015. Overall, this improvement was realized between 2015 and 2018, but progress has continued since in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict (PCFCs). The proportion of implementation grants supporting learning assessment systems increased from 67 percent in 2016 to 83 percent in 2020.

To deliver quality learning for all, it is crucial that more children, especially the most marginalized, can attend school and complete their education. The proportion of children completing basic education improved steadily over the course of the GPE 2020 period, according to the most recent data available from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, which are for 2018. The proportion of children completing school across partner countries increased from 72 percent to 76 percent at the primary level, and from 49 percent to 53 percent at the lower secondary level.

Equity in access to education will be achieved when a child's chances of completing school are the same no matter their circumstances. More than \$615 million in implementation grant funding approved during the 2016–20 period was for activities specifically promoting equity, gender equality

and inclusion. While wealthier children, urban children and boys are still more likely on average to complete lower secondary school, these disparities reduced over the course of GPE 2020. On average across the partnership, rural children are 50 percent as likely to complete lower secondary school as urban children, up from 47 percent at the 2015 baseline. Children from the poorest families are 30 percent as likely to complete lower secondary school as children from the richest families, up from 25 percent at baseline. And gender parity has improved by 3 percentage points since the baseline. The only disparity that did not improve significantly was the rural/urban disparity in PCFCs; in contrast, progress on gender and wealth parity was stronger in PCFCs than in partner countries overall. Across COVID-19 accelerated funding grants, 98 percent funded activities to help marginalized children in the mitigation phase, and 83 percent did so in the recovery phase.

In most partner countries, girls are still less likely to finish school, but the gender gap has been slowly narrowing. The gender gap is especially pronounced in PCFCs, but it has narrowed more rapidly in these countries, particularly at the primary level, in recent years: Sixty-one percent of PCFCs are nearing gender parity in primary completion compared with 46 percent at baseline. In comparison, partner countries overall made a more modest gain, from 64 percent to 69 percent nearing parity. Moreover, the vast majority of the partner countries that improved across the board on both access and equity over the course of GPE 2020 were PCFCs.<sup>1</sup> Across COVID-19 accelerated funding grants, 64 percent funded activities specifically addressing barriers to girls' education in the mitigation phase, and 77 percent did so in the recovery phase.<sup>2</sup>

GPE places a high priority on supporting partner countries affected by fragility and conflict and weights its funding allocations toward PCFCs so that these countries get more support from the outset. Between 2016 and 2020, 78.5 percent of all implementation grant funding approved, totaling nearly \$1.7 billion, was for PCFCs. GPE promotes the inclusion of refugees and displaced children in national education systems and works with partners, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Education Cannot Wait, UNICEF and the World Bank, to meet the needs of these populations. Across COVID-19 accelerated funding grants, 20 percent funded activities specifically for refugees and internally displaced children in the mitigation phase, and 11 percent did so in the recovery phase.

Early childhood care and education is a crucial investment to improve not only outcomes for children but equity, as it reduces the impact of social inequality on educational outcomes. Pre-primary enrollment rose from 36 percent to 41 percent in the 2016–20 period, with nearly as many girls as boys enrolling. In addition to the \$158.2 million in implementation grant funding over this period dedicated to early childhood care and education, as well as direct technical assistance to partner countries, the Better Early Learning and Development at Scale (BELDS) initiative provided support to early childhood care and education at both the country and global levels. More than 66 percent of COVID-19 accelerated funding grants included funding for pre-primary education.

GPE prioritizes expanding support for the inclusion of children with disabilities in quality education, by means of guidance, technical support and funding for inclusive interventions. During the GPE 2020 period, \$45.5 million in implementation grant funding supported inclusive education for children with disabilities. In addition, 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.

## OUTCOME LEVEL: EFFICIENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Strengthening education systems is crucial to sustainable improvements in equity and learning. A strong education system has accurate and timely data to inform sound policy. It also requires sufficient financial and human resources, efficiently used, to ensure effective policy implementation. The implementation grants approved between 2016 and 2020 dedicated \$653.2 million to support activities aimed at strengthening systems, including technical assistance, school grants, teacher training and data systems.

The indicator on the ratio of students per trained teacher in primary education across partner countries has improved. Of partner countries with data available, 39 percent had fewer than 40 students per trained teacher in 2020, up from 25 percent in 2015. Despite these improvements, the number of countries with data available on this indicator declined from 55 in 2015 to 41 in 2020, showing the need for stronger data systems, particularly in PCFCs.

1. Based on five indicators: both primary and lower secondary completion rates, gender parity of both primary and lower secondary completion rates, and the equity index (of lower secondary completion rates). Of the original 61 partner countries in the baseline cohort, the countries with data available that improved on all five indicators were Afghanistan, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Liberia, Niger, Sudan, Togo and Yemen. Of these nine, seven were classified as PCFCs.

2. Activities to promote gender equality more broadly were captured in the activities to help marginalized children, above.

Overall, data reporting to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) stagnated, signaling the need for more effective strategies to strengthen data systems. Between 2015 and 2020, the percentage of partner countries reporting at least 10 out of 12 key indicators to the UIS hovered around 30 percent most years since the baseline, reaching 33 percent in 2020, although several partner countries have data available at the country level. However, countries where a larger proportion of GPE funding is dedicated to strengthening data systems recorded some progress in data reporting to the UIS. For instance, the average number of key indicators reported to the UIS increased from seven in 2015 to nine in 2020 in the countries that dedicated more than 5 percent of their implementation grants to data systems, but it stagnated at seven indicators in the other countries (those that spent less than 5 percent on data and countries that did not receive GPE implementation grants).

Data from 26 partner countries suggest that on average 41 percent of all education spending was related to the costs of repetition and dropout. However, efficiency improved from 2015 to 2019: The same level of education outcomes was achieved with approximately 1.29 percent fewer resources each year during that period.<sup>3</sup> The GPE 2025 strategy will pay particular attention to efficiency in domestic financing.

Robust domestic financing is indispensable for a strong and sustainable education system, and GPE's implementation grants required partner countries to commit to maintaining the share of their expenditure on education at or above 20 percent, or to increase education spending toward the 20 percent benchmark. In 2020, 68 percent of partner countries with available data met these criteria compared with 64 percent at the 2015 baseline. Domestic financing became a stronger focus of Secretariat staff visits to partner countries during this period, addressed in 92 percent of visits in 2020, up from 47 percent in 2015.

### **COUNTRY-LEVEL OBJECTIVES: SECTOR PLANNING, MONITORING AND POLICY DIALOGUE**

The quality of education plans was a key focus of GPE 2020, and 90 percent of education sector plans met the minimum of five out of seven quality standards at the end of the period, up from 58 percent at baseline. The average quality of plans endorsed after March 2020 declined, suggesting that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted countries' ability to focus on education sector plan development. The proportion of plans meeting the GPE benchmarks for quality teaching and

learning, efficiency and equity strategies peaked during the 2016–18 period in particular, though all indicators showed improvement between the baseline and 2020. Over the GPE 2020 period, GPE granted more than \$30.6 million to 59 partner countries to support education sector plan development.

Joint sector reviews are critical to the monitoring of plan implementation, and the average quality of sector reviews rose substantially, if erratically, between 2015 and 2020, with 88 percent meeting quality standards compared with 29 percent in 2015. However, only 15 joint sector reviews were held in 2020 compared with an average of 26 over the previous five years, limiting the inferences that can be made. Still, joint sector reviews conducted in the later years of the GPE strategy exhibited higher quality along all dimensions over the GPE 2020 period, especially regarding their evidentiary basis and their use as a policy making instrument.

Local education groups showed improvement on the inclusion of civil society and teachers' organizations during the GPE 2020 period. In 2020, 66 percent of countries included both civil society organizations and teachers' organizations in their education groups, up from 44 percent at the 2016 baseline. Teachers' organizations are on average less likely to be represented, as 68 percent of countries include them in education groups, while 94 percent include civil society organizations; nonetheless, the inclusion of both groups has risen steadily from the baseline.

### **GLOBAL-LEVEL OBJECTIVES: FINANCING AND PARTNERSHIP**

GPE 2020 global objectives comprised mobilizing more and better financing for education and building a stronger partnership. During this period, GPE approved 145 major implementation grants worth \$2.6 billion, of which 64 percent was allocated to PCFCs. In 2020, GPE approved 104 major implementation grants worth \$1.47 billion and disbursed \$818 million, reaching the highest level since GPE's inception. These numbers include 66 COVID-19 accelerated funding grants worth \$467 million, in addition to traditional education sector program implementation grants.

Countries can access Multiplier funding by mobilizing at least \$3 in new and additional external financing for every \$1 from the Multiplier. Between 2018, when the Multiplier was introduced, and December 2020, 17 countries were approved for \$136.6 million in Multiplier funding, which is expected to mobilize \$552.4 million in cofinancing from 20 development partners.

3. Based on a stochastic frontier model; see chapter 3, box 3.1 for details.

The overall performance of implementation grants has been erratic since the baseline, with 81 percent rated on track with implementation in 2020 compared with 80 percent in 2016. Evidence from partner countries suggests that COVID-19 is affecting implementation of planned activities for almost all grants. The most common causes for delays are external risks outside the control of the program, such as political instability and teacher strikes, which were exacerbated by COVID-19.

The proportion of grants aligned to national systems grew from 34 percent in 2015 to 44 percent in 2020, with the majority of this progress taking place after the introduction of an alignment road map in 2017. However, the proportion of grants that were cofinanced or used sector-pooled funding has decreased slightly since the baseline, especially for PCFCs. Across partner countries, this proportion was 36 percent in 2020, down from 40 percent in 2015 but up from 31 percent in 2019.

In 2020, donors contributed nearly \$882 million to GPE, recording the highest annual contribution since GPE's inception in 2002, and an increase of 46 percent over the average annual contribution during the 2016–19 period. The cumulative contribution from nontraditional donors, such as foundations or nonmembers of OECD-DAC, increased more than tenfold during GPE 2020, from \$5 million to \$51.3 million.

Overall, these GPE 2020 results point to substantial progress, with gains in access, equity and efficiency, as well as a variety of improved tools for sector planning and monitoring, harmonized financing and other key inputs to the provision of quality education. These efforts must be redoubled to preserve these gains despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and then to accelerate them in order to make Sustainable Development Goal 4 achievable by 2030. This will be the focus of the partnership in the coming years.

