
Gender equality in Education

How are UNICEF helping to develop practises in education around the world within the focus area of gender?



(UNICEF, 2021)

UNICEF

- UNICEF is an organisation that protects the rights of the child in over 190 countries world-wide, reaching out to all children, especially from the most deprived and disadvantaged countries.
- Their main aim is to advocate for children's education, health and nutrition, protection against abuse and violence and to provide children with their basic needs and equal opportunities to reach their full potential

(UNICEF, n.d.)



(Logos Worlds, 2024)

UNICEF FOCUS AREAS

Adolescent development	Child protection	Child rights	Children with disabilities
Climate change and environment	Early childhood development	Education	Gender
Health	Humanitarian emergencies	Immunization	Migrant and refugee children
Nutrition	Social and behaviour change	Social policy	Water, sanitation and hygiene

(UNICEF, n.d.)

Gender equality

UNICEF are in partnership with many organisations to promote gender equality across the world but especially targeting the most deprived countries where many young girls and boys are subjected to

Child marriage/brides

Child pregnancies

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Gender based violence (FBV)

Learning equalities

Gender norms

(UNICEF, n.d.)



(Suradreamz. n.d.)

UNCIEF Contribution

- **Partnerships**

Education sector to ensure all children are accessing learning to further their skills for future employment and pathways.

Health Organisations to promote women's roles in delivering water sanitation and hygiene services (WASH).

- **Skills building, vocational training and apprenticeships**

Investing in the empowerment of girls to gain skills in leadership, enterprise and innovation, at timings convenient for the individual.

- **Programmes and safe spaces**

UNICEF provide programmes to help end and support children who are targets for FGB, child marriages and FGM, along with support and care for menstrual health and HIV and AIDS.

(UNICEF, n.d.)

UNICEF report



Child to Child, n.d)

It is estimated that 'by 2030' 1 in 5 girls in 'crisis affected' countries will 'not be able to read a simple sentence'

The report by UNICEF into girls' education outlines the key issues that directly affect the education of young girls worldwide. These include;

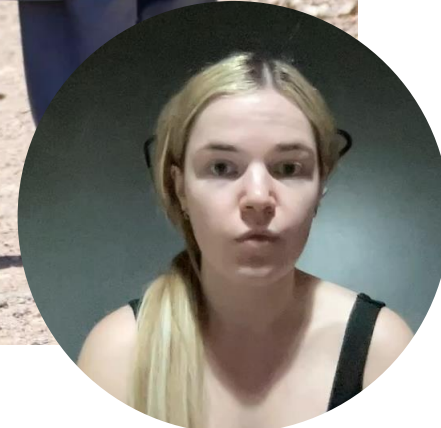
- 'Child Marriage'
- 'Gender norms'
- 'Gender based violence (GBV)'



Gender equality – Afghanistan Case study

- In 2025, at the beginning of the new school year in Afghanistan, 'almost 400,000' more girls were not receiving an education, bringing the total number of girls out of education in the country to '2.2 million' (UNICEF, 2025).
- 2025 marked 'three years since the ban on girls' secondary education' (UNICEF, 2025).
- With fewer girls receiving an education, 'girls face a higher risk of child marriage' (UNICEF, 2025).
- As a result, Afghanistan will experience a 'shortage' of qualified female health workers. 'This will endanger lives' (UNICEF, 2025).
- In response to the girls' education crisis in Afghanistan, UNICEF have provided access to education for '445,000 children through community-based learning'. 64% of these children are girls (UNICEF, 2025).

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Gender equality – MENA Case study

- 'MENA – Middle East and North Africa' (UNICEF, n.d).
- 'Among the slowest in the world' in terms of recognising and improving gender equality (UNICEF, n.d).
- Women are restricted by 'age' but also by 'gender norms' (UNICEF, n.d).
- Girls face barriers in their education due to 'their involvement in domestic work' (UNICEF, n.d).
- Older girls are at risk of 'early pregnancy and school dropout' (UNICEF, n.d).
- Girls in the region represent the 'highest risk groups' for 'gender-based violence' in the world (UNICEF, n.d).
- UNICEF action includes the Gender Action Plan and Adolescent Girl Strategy.

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Roya News

How effectively is **UNICEF** helping to develop sustainable education systems while addressing gender inequality?





(Sekainokokki.jp, 2026)



(Wallpaperaccess.com, 2026)



(Worldatlas.com, 2026)



Seren Elli Sleep

(PhotoPublicDomain.com, 2026)

Bangladesh

UNICEF has supported girls' access to secondary education through:

- Stipends
- Community engagement
- Improvements in secondary school infrastructure

However, deeper gender norms often persist, for example:

- Unpaid domestic labour
- Early marriage (UNICEF, 2022).

Nigeria

UNICEF has supported girls' access to secondary education through:

- Creating safe learning spaces
- Accelerated education programmes for girls displaced by violence
- Integration of psychosocial support and teacher training
- Gender-sensitive sanitation facilities (UNICEF, 2021).

However, barriers often persist, for example:

- Vulnerability to political shifts
- Donor fatigue (World Bank, 2020).

Jordan

UNICEF has supported girls' access to secondary education through:

- Double-shift schools and inclusive policies
- Strengthening national systems

However, barriers often persist, for example:

- Overcrowding
- Teacher workload (UNESCO, 2020).

Afghanistan

UNICEF has supported girls' access to secondary education through:

- Community-based education classes to reach girls who are excluded from formal schooling

However, there are risks, for example:

- Normalising limited access rather than challenging it
- Governments could potentially resist or block programmes (UNICEF, 2024).



(iStockphoto.com, 2026)



What are the critical themes in these countries?

UNICEF recognizes that gender inequality in education is multi-layered. It includes:

- Economic barriers
- Safety concerns
- Infrastructure gaps
- Discriminatory norms
- Policy exclusion

Interventions therefore combine:

- Financial support
- Community mobilization
- Curriculum reform
- Sanitation improvements
- Advocacy (UNICEF, 2019).

This holistic approach aligns strongly with Sustainable Development

- **Goal 4:** Quality education and sustainable development
- **Goal 5:** Gender equality (United Nations, 2015).

Sustainability depends on localization

UNICEF partners effectively with governments, local NGOs, and communities, however programmes remain donor-driven or emergency-focused, meaning that sustainability is more uncertain. Long term gender equality requires not just programming, but structural investment in national education systems.

Access and transformation

Increasing girls' enrolment is measurable and politically appealing. Transforming patriarchal norms, redistributing unpaid care work, and ensuring girls transition into decent employment are far more complex goals. UNICEF's education work contributes to empowerment, but education alone cannot dismantle systematic gender inequality. It must be accompanied by broader social and economic reforms (World Bank, 2020).

Critically, we must acknowledge the limitations. Funding constraints, political instability, cultural resistance, and global crises such as pandemics and climate change all threaten progress.

Despite these challenges, the evidence suggests that UNICEF plays a pivotal role in keeping gender equality central to global education policy. It leverages data to:

- Highlight disparities
- Advocates for girls' rights at international forums
- Channels resources towards the most marginalized communities





Conclusion

So, how effective is UNICEF in developing sustainable education through a gender lens?

The answer is nuanced. It is highly effective in:

- Expanding access
- Strengthening protective environments
- Embedding gender-sensitive strategies into education systems.

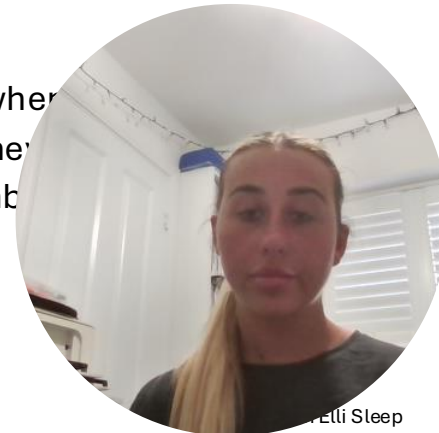
It is less able – on its own – to:

- Transform the deeper structural inequalities

UNICEF's work demonstrates that sustainable education is not simply about building schools. It is about building systems that are inclusive, resilient, and equitable.

The most important takeaway:

Sustainable education is not achieved when children enter classrooms. It is achieved when they are valued, able to learn, able to lead, and able to shape their future on equal terms (UNICEF, 2026).



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