Plan International

Inclusive, Quality Education

A snapshot of our evidence from 2024

Through our global strategy *All Girls Standing Strong*, Plan International works in over 80 countries and focuses programming in six priority thematic areas, as well as responding to humanitarian emergencies. At the end of 2024, we reviewed the evidence available from projects and countries working in each thematic area – covering evaluations and results, key internal and external research and annual reporting metrics. This short snapshot summarises some of the insights from our evidence this year in inclusive quality education and what we can learn from it.

Plan International's work in inclusive quality education centres on ensuring that children, particularly girls, have the quality education they need to succeed in life. Core focus areas include:

- Teaching and learning
- Out of school children and youth
- School governance
- School environment
- Curriculum and learning materials

Learn more about our work *here*.

Key insights

- **The scale of the issues facing the education sector is significant.** The number of out of school children globally remains significant, with 128 million boys and 122 million girls excluded from education. The overall financing challenge in education, especially in contexts affected by crisis, often translates into the deprioritisation of interventions promoting gender equality and inclusion.

- **Our programming shows the effectiveness of holistic models to ensure access to inclusive quality education**. Strategies include combining initiatives such as supporting teacher continuous professional development with awareness-raising and financial support to families. Approaches to tackling the root causes of challenges to accessing and staying in education, especially for girls, are a key enabler.

- **Where gender parity in enrolment has been achieved, it is often assumed that gender equality has been achieved, which can mask underlying inequalities.** Solutions to address the challenges must tackle structural inequalities, adopt an intersectional lens, provide contextually informed data, and support teachers' development as agents of transformation.

- **The most marginalised and hard-to-reach groups often need flexible and alternative quality education solutions.** Interventions must allow them to access or ease back into formal education, catch up with their education, or transition to the labour market. Alternative solutions must be designed to address identified challenges where standardised approaches are not appropriate.

- **Embedding principles of development and humanitarian programming is vital to ensure that quality education initiatives are able to flex responsively as contexts change.** Building resilience should not only be prioritised during crisis but also beforehand, facilitating a 'preparedness approach' and enabling systems to be 'crisis ready' to ensure education continuity. This necessitates preparing teachers and the learning environment, empowering communities to sustain gains after the intervention, and increasing women's and girls' participation in decision-making.
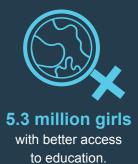
2024 figures at a glance

Our global footprint in education

17.8 million children and adults reached through inclusive quality education programming.

35 education in emergency programmes across 28 countries.

5.3 million girls with better access to education.

(Annual reporting, July 2023 to June 2024)

Learning-centred, gender responsive and inclusive teaching

93% of teachers observed this year were assessed as using learner-centred, gender-responsive, inclusive teaching approaches.

(Monitoring data from over 900 teachers participating in nine projects, in seven countries)

Access to education

85% of sponsored children are regularly attending formal education, including 84% of girls.

(Annual survey data from over 1.1 million sponsored children and families)

Advocacy for education

69 influencing successes reported in education, including:

28 changes related to laws, policies, regulations, or guidelines on girls' rights.

11 commitments on investment, budget, expenditure, systems or services which will contribute to girls' rights.

(Annual reporting against our Global Advocacy Strategy, July 2023 to June 2024)

What are some of the key issues? Selected findings from research

A wealth of evidence demonstrates the scale of the **issues facing the education sector**, which include 128 million boys and 122 million girls out of school , slow progress in increasing completion rates of primary and secondary education, and static rates of expenditure.[1,2] Increases in the number of crisis-affected children of school age have been driven by conflict and extreme weather events such as heatwaves, droughts, and floods intensified by climate change.[3] There has also been uneven progress in ensuring that teachers have minimum required qualifications and in leveraging the benefits offered by digital technologies.[4] Social norms and systemic barriers remain pervasive challenges to achieving gender equality in education.[5] Many countries are now experiencing a backlash and rejection of the global concepts of gender equality and the prioritization of gender equality in and through education.

> **"I want all my children to be educated, some are in science classes, and some are in art class, I want them to complete their education, but poverty is my major challenge."**
>
> Male, 54, Nigeria

From various Plan International's research studies this year, conducted in a range of settings including Nigeria, *Lebanon*, *Burkina Faso and Mali*, **economic stress** was prominent as the key reason for children and adolescents being out of school. Young people also told us about other barriers they face − often related to displacement or conflict − including challenges in registration due to missing documentation, school closures or destruction of infrastructure, lack of transport, teachers strikes or absenteeism, unsafe environments including violence or drugs.

Gender norms were discussed as a key barrier to girls accessing or completing education. For example, in Nigeria, during focus group discussions and interviews some research participants mentioned, that although no longer as prevalent, there remains a belief among some parents that girls' education may not be as worthy of the investment. In another study - *Adolescents between*

Siege and Hope - with Lebanese and Syrian refugee youth in Lebanon, girls talked about early marriage as a potential reason for dropping out of school. Girls in the *Real Choices, Real Lives* cohort observed that the impacts of livelihood losses on education are gendered – noting that boys have more opportunities to earn an income to support their school costs, while girls are more restricted in their opportunities.

> **"My mother works and I have to stay home to take care of my younger siblings and clean the house."**
>
> Lebanese adolescent female, Lebanon

Research this year also looked at the **impact of climate change on education**. The reports – including *research with girls and young women in the Pacific* and through a *study led by youth activists in Indonesia, Nepal and Australia* – emphasised that vulnerability to, and experience of, climate related events and crises are not uniform but are shaped by intersections of gender, age, education, income, location, and a range of socio-economic factors. Education is disrupted in multiple ways (for example, damage to infrastructure, journeys are made more hazardous, and resource scarcity grows while simultaneously they are needed for recovery efforts), and other risks are heightened, including child, early or forced marriage or unions, crime or unintended or unwanted pregnancy. In this context, whether due to reduced ability to pay for tuition or needing help within the home towards recovery or income generation activities, girls are more likely to be pulled from school.

> **The roofs of the classrooms were damaged by the wind. This meant that the classrooms had to be twinned in order to repair the damage."**
>
> Azia, 16, Togo

Despite this, *Real Choices, Real Lives* found that **girls across the cohort value and are committed to their education**; they see education as the pathway

to achieving their goals in the future. Across various studies this year, key enablers for returning to school included economic support, perceptions of the value of education, and support from parents.

> **I have missed classes because sometimes the streams are full of water."**
>
> Bessy, 17, El Salvador

Young people told us about the **importance of teachers for their learning and how they feel in school**, and highlighted the diversity of their experiences. Good teaching was often linked to teachers with appropriate qualifications, who offer consistent support to students' well-being and academic performance and display empathy and respect, as well as following a strong curriculum. They also advocated for interactive learning and a greater focus on subjects

such as digital literacy and entrepreneurship. However, conversely challenges were highlighted across reports, which also explored particular impacts on refugee populations. Negative experiences were linked to perceived gaps in quality of teaching, language barriers or experiencing disrespect or violence in school.

> **Girls' education is useful because girls also have the right to learn and find work in the future. And, as our parents didn't go to school, we have to go"**
>
> Essohana, 17, Togo

> **"There is a kind relationship between the teachers and the students which helps us learn better."**
>
> Lebanese adolescent male, Lebanon

> **"Teachers still use outdated methods and don't know how to explain. Beating is their language."**
>
> Syrian adolescent male, Lebanon

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[1]UNESCO, OECD and the Commonwealth Secretariat, 2024. The price of inaction: the global private, fiscal and social costs of children and youth not learning.
[2]UNESCO. 2023. SDG4 Mid Term-Progress Review.
[3]Education Cannot Wait. 2023. Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents in Need of Education Support: New Global Estimates and Thematic Deep Dives.
[4]UNESCO. 2024. 2023 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report.
[5]NORRAG. 2024. A Concerted Stride Towards Gender Equality in Education.

What have we learned? Selected findings from evaluations

We reviewed 23 evaluations of education programming this year, covering 15 countries in five regions.

Evaluations reported positive findings related to enrolment, attendance and retention of children and young people in school, which was often linked to holistic models of support to children, schools and families. In particular, projects are often combining interventions on teacher training with provision of material support in the form of facility refurbishment or equipment, as well as work with communities on awareness raising on the importance of education and in some cases direct support such as school supplies, cash transfers or linkages to income generating activities.

Approaches to tackling the root causes of challenges to accessing and staying in education, especially for girls, emerged as a key enabler. The engagement of religious and community leaders (for example, in relation to child marriage) was highlighted, as was the collaboration with parent-teacher associations for local ownership of monitoring and responding to absenteeism and possible drop-outs. Similarly, projects that integrated a focus on income generating activities were seen as particularly relevant in responding to the needs of families with children and mitigating barriers to staying in school. This reflects the themes from our research this year, which highlights economic stress as the key reason that children and adolescents are out of school, often particularly impacting girls. Among the minority of sponsored children that are not regularly attending formal education, needing to help the family and education not being considered as important also emerged as the most common reasons why.

Mentorship, training of trainers and peer learning programmes, as well as models of ongoing support, have been effective in creating a supportive learning environment for teachers. For example, in Vietnam, future trainers received multiple training courses, experience-sharing workshops, and study visits to other provinces. Subsequently, they conducted various training courses for teachers within and outside their own schools, with positive perceptions from school headteachers and teachers around their confidence in terms of abilities, knowledge and skills.

Alternative learning approaches, including technology-based solutions, responded to a need for significant shifts in delivery methods during the COVID-19 pandemic. Projects adapted by moving some classroom activities and club sessions to online models, particularly for children who were out of school and to support homework assistance and after school learning hours. These online tools and platforms allowed for broader geographic reach and successful engagement of participants.

Inclusion of career development in school curricula has helped prepare young people for entering the world of work. For example:

- In **Vietnam**, one of our projects supported the integration of a career-oriented education programme as part of the curriculum, to help students explore vocational options and develop life skills. Over time, the programme led to increases in students' understanding of the labour market and confidence in pursuing career paths. The success of this model stems from its student-centred approach, designed to respond to their needs and aspirations.

- In **El Salvador**, one of our projects focused on encouraging science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics careers for girls, incorporating a methodological guide and teacher training into the curriculum. The focus on hands-on learning and technology tours helped ignite interest in these fields among participating girls.

Advocacy for education saw some significant progresses this year, across a range of country and regional contexts. For example:

- In **West Africa**, after several years of waiting and efforts by Plan International and other stakeholders, the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration continues to win the political commitment of governments. For example, Burkina Faso set up a national inter-ministerial technical committee with an action plan for implementing the Declaration. Nigeria has set up an inter-ministerial committee chaired by the Ministry of Education to oversee implementation. The committee plans to conduct national training on the implementation of the National Policy on Safe and Violence-Free Schools. The government of Nigeria also adopted a national funding plan for safe schools in December 2022, and is considered a champion in the ECOWAS zone in terms of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration.

- The Human Rights Council adopted a landmark resolution establishing an open-ended intergovernmental working group on the development of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education. Along with other partner organisations, Plan International advocated for the adoption of the resolution, led by the **Dominican Republic, Luxembourg, and Sierra Leone**, especially in emphasising the importance of child participation in the elaboration and the multiplier impact it would have on girls' rights and their future. This resolution is a critical step towards addressing gaps in international law and ensuring that every child has access to comprehensive education from early years through secondary school.

Girl's at the leadership school in Guatemala which provides safe spaces for adolescent girls and young women to address issues affecting them ©Plan International

Where we need to keep going deeper...

The evidence available this year has informed insights which are relevant for Plan International but also the wider sector, in terms of how investment is targeted and how programmes are designed, to advance access to, and retention in, inclusive quality education:

- **We need to build our evidence base around socio-emotional learning outcomes.** This is a priority theme for Plan International and the wider education sector, but we had limited evidence from our evaluations this year. We need to target our efforts in this area, in terms of how we design our projects and how we measure success for children in terms of their learning and development.

- **We need to continue to advocate for ownership when it comes to infrastructure support.** In a crisis context, infrastructure support is often paramount and responds to a central barrier to maintaining access to education. In non-crisis settings, infrastructure support remains relevant and valued; however, it's also critical that it is paired with partnership and advocacy with governments and other duty bearers to take ownership of the improvements required, with a view to longer term sustainable change.

- **We need to continue to tackle the root causes.** Multi-faceted approaches to tackling barriers to education, are required. This includes engagement with communities and leaders on issues that adversely affect girls (such as child marriage), and holistic support to families, for example through income generating activities, to respond to economic barriers to children staying in school. Targeting boys and men provides the unique opportunity to work with young and adult men on how to challenge harmful gender attitudes and practices, to reflect on positive masculinity, and the role played by positive role models in and outside education.

Chhiring and her friend make a robotic vehicle in a makerspace in Nepal ©Plan International

Read more from this year:

Education Uninterrupted: Compendium of Promising Practices: A collection of promising practices to support continuous, gender-transformative, safe, resilient, and inclusive quality education for children, adolescents, and youth in all their diversity, with the aim of providing practitioners working across the education sector with a toolkit of evidence-based interventions.

The Girls' Pact for the Future: Adolescent girls and young people share their concerns, their vision of a positive future with gender equality at its heart, and recommendations for policy makers.

Climate Change Education: A capacity statement on our work on climate change education, including an overview of the conceptual framework, programming and advocacy approaches, and best practices through case studies from across Plan International.

Until we are all equal

About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal.

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Cover photo: Children enjoy practical lessons in the school learning garden in Cambodia ©Plan International

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