UN WOMEN
Planet 50-50 by 2030
Step It Up for Gender Equality

UNESCO
United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: A PRESENTATION OF THE KEY FINDINGS FROM UNESCO AND UN WOMEN REPORTS ON THE INTERSECTION OF SDG 4 (QUALITY EDUCATION) AND SDG 5 (GENDER EQUALITY)

Photo: GirlsGoIT

THE ISSUE: ACHIEVING QUALITY EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

Significant progress has been made in South-East Europe (SEE) in ensuring that all girls, boys, women, and men have access to inclusive and equitable quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning. Primary net enrollment is above 85 percent, gender parity is high, and females are highly represented in STEM. A closer look, however, reveals that who goes to school and who completes their education are different from whom enrolls; that location, wealth, and minority status play a role in whom benefits from education; and that cultural norms and stereotypes still affect career access. In each of these disparities, gender inequality plays a central role. Despite a history of policies and quotas that appeared to favor gender equality, sustainable and consistent progress remains to be achieved in South-East Europe. Thus, governments in the region have declared their commitment to gender equality, leading to important wins despite undeniable, persistent needs.

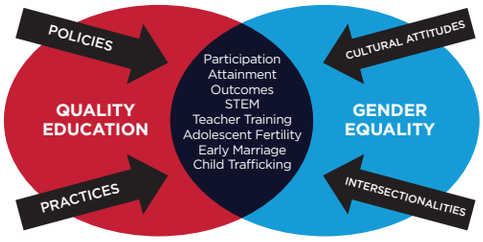
THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS UNDERSCORE THE INHERENT LINKS BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND EDUCATION

Within the Sustainable Development Agenda, gender equality is indispensable to achieving all other goals. For example, UN Women's report *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* shows how poverty reduction (SDG 1) relies on ensuring that women can access decent work and regular income, and violence against women and girls prevents the achievement of healthy lives and well-being for all (SDG 3). Unless progress toward gender equality is accelerated, the achievement of all other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be significantly slowed.

"WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE HALF OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION AND AS A RESULT HOLD HALF OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN POTENTIAL."

SDG 4 is no exception; gender equality in education has a positive impact on child well-being and development and contributes to women's employment and empowerment, as well as to economic growth. Contrarily, gender disparities in educational access, attainment, and outcomes have consequences for skills development, dropout, early marriage, employment, and economic independence. For example, global patterns show that women remain the primary caregivers and spend a significant amount of time on unpaid care and domestic work, which, along with persistent cultural norms in SEE, limits women's employment opportunities outside of the home. Gender disparities further interact with issues such as equal pay and maternity leave for teachers. However, education is not only affected by gender inequality but also has an important role to play in ensuring gender equality in society. Furthermore, just as gender issues intersect with all other SDGs, so too does education contribute to achieving the other goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda, both impacting and being affected by areas such as poverty, health and wellbeing, and economic growth.

UNDERSTANDING THE EDUCATION-GENDER NEXUS: KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM RESEARCH BY UNESCO AND UN WOMEN



UN Women's report *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* highlights the multifarious intersections between SDGs 4 (quality education) and 5 (gender equality) on a global scale. Similarly, UNESCO's report *The Intersection of Gender Equality and Education in South-East Europe* highlights related progress and persistent needs at this nexus. Most SEE countries have come close to gender parity in basic net enrollment. While UN Women's report shows that girls' primary enrollment is globally lower than boys', in SEE the rate of girls is slightly higher than that of boys. However, boys' attendance rates are generally higher than girls at the primary level, with gaps exacerbated by location and wealth quintile. Furthermore, both completion rates and educational attainment is lower for girls in basic education but higher among women for post-secondary education.

As UN Women highlights in its report *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,* most gender-specific SDG 4 indicators are Tier II or Tier III, presenting challenges for monitoring. In SEE, outdated and missing data make monitoring basic proficiency levels in primary school difficult, and while gender differences at the secondary level vary by subject and skill, they still fail to capture an accurate picture of the entire population. High female participation in STEM is concentrated in a few specific fields, and teaching shortages persist.

Photo: UN Women/Janarbek Amankulov

"WHILE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IS OFTEN HIGHER AMONG GIRLS AND SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES HIGHER AMONG BOYS...THESE PATTERNS ARE OFTEN REVERSED AMONG THE ROMA POPULATIONS [AND] INTERNALLY DISPLACED OR REFUGEE GROUPS."

Other issues affected by gender inequality include the underrepresentation of women at the tertiary level, gender disparities in adequate training, adolescent fertility and child marriage, compounded by a lack of comprehensive sexuality education. In all forms of educational inequality, gender intersects with other factors, such as poverty and minority status. UN Women report shows how women in poor households, especially from minority populations, are consistently the most disadvantaged globally. These patterns are found in SEE as well, where gender gaps in attendance rates are most pronounced among poor, rural populations, and where Roma girls and people with disabilities continue to feel the effects of historically rooted social exclusion.

BRIDGING THE GAPS: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

A series of key recommendations aims to provide direction for the region in improving gender equality in and through quality education. The availability of data must be improved through capacity strengthening for sufficient progress monitoring. Additionally, gender-responsive policies should promote girls' participation and retention, inclusive learning environments, comprehensive sexuality education, and services to prevent dropout and support reentry if girls do become pregnant. The pedagogy, curricula, classroom environment, and materials must all be designed to encourage girls' STEM participation, foster their interest and skills, and combat gender stereotypes. Both policies and practices in the workplace—especially regarding training, pay, and maternity leave—should ensure the professionalism and attractiveness of the teaching profession, job security, and gender equality in the workplace. Schools also can play a role in combating child trafficking by training teachers on the warning signs and risk factors, increasing students' awareness and safe practices, including online safety, and working to ensure that all children, especially the most marginalized, are in school.

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