GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

GPE KIX Scoping Study Working Paper

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ACRONYMS

CEFM	child, early, and/or forced marriage
CSE	comprehensive sexuality education
CWD	children with disabilities
FCV	fragility, conflict and violence
FGD	focus group discussion
FGM	female genital mutilation
GBV	gender-based violence
GESI	gender equality and social inclusion
GRP	gender-responsive pedagogy
IDP	internally displaced person
LGBTQI+	Umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer youth
MHPSS	mental health and psycho-social support
PSS	Psycho-social support
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
SRGBV	school related gender-based violence
WASH	water, sanitation, and hygiene

1   INTRODUCTION

This paper is one of a series of scoping study working papers commissioned by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX), a joint endeavor with Canada's International Development Research Centre, to inform its applied research and knowledge exchange activities. The paper summarizes key priorities surfaced through consultations with relevant education stakeholders in GPE partner countries and the review of selected country documents and literature with respect to gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). The working paper complements two discussion papers—Achieving Gender Equality In and Through Education and Leaving No One Behind—that were commissioned by GPE at the start of KIX in 2019. In what follows, the paper begins by establishing the need for attention to gender equality and social inclusion to ensure fair, equitable experiences of education for all children. It then overviews the process used to collect data to surface thematic priorities and presents the findings of the conducted research. The paper focuses on two primary themes related to gender equality and social inclusion: education access and education quality. Within the first theme, the paper focuses on education access issues related to the marginalized status of learners and the infrastructure of education facilities. Within the second theme, the paper focuses on education quality via gender-responsive and inclusive curriculum and school management and leadership and education quality through school safety and the provision of psycho-social support. For each theme, the paper presents specificities across the four KIX regions and suggests themes for research, based on the collected data.

2   BACKGROUND

Across the world, the past thirty years have seen marked improvement in ensuring that all children can realize the right to education. International conferences in Jomtien, Salamanca, Dakar, and Incheon have elicited commitments to ensuring that the most marginalized—including girls, children with disabilities, and those living in poverty—can access, participate in, and complete their education. There have been great improvements worldwide with the global parity gap in enrolment being under 1% (UNESCO, 2022a). However, while we continue to see global attention focused on the "learning crisis" and increasing commitments to achieving gender equality in and through education, parity measures continue to mask ongoing, and often widening, inequalities for the most marginalized groups. As the recent KIX discussion paper Leaving No One Behind highlights, many of the most marginalized children are still out of school and millions more do not have access to secondary education (GPE KIX, 2019b).

Across diverse contexts, particular groups of children remain marginalized, with some more deeply impacted by the global shocks of the COVID-19 response, conflicts, or crises, including the Russian-Ukrainian war, and increasingly devastating climate-related disasters. Post-pandemic, the global rates of 10-year-olds unable to read a simple text have increased from 54% to 70% (World Bank, 2022b). UNESCO estimate that 244 million children are out-of-school, with 193 million located in sub-Saharan African and Central and Southern Asia.

Increasing acknowledgement of, and specific attention to, the intersecting disadvantages many groups face is needed in order to move beyond parity measures and focus on quality, safe, and inclusive education for all. Where gender intersects with other forms of disadvantage such as poverty, location, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, forced displacement, poor health, malnutrition or orphanhood (GPE KIX, 2019b), we can see the gender gap widening. Addressing multiple forms of disadvantage costs more, and requires more targeted interventions, but to achieve true equality in education this focus is needed.

Gender equality in and through education refers to the outcomes of equal rights and equal power between women and men in line with the human rights agenda, as highlighted in another KIX discussion paper, Achieving Gender Equality In and Through Education (GPE KIX, 2019a). While the move towards gender equality in and through education may require specific interventions to compensate for the disadvantages that girls have built up over time (GPE KIX, 2019a), gender equality focuses on the interests, needs and priorities of all genders and has the potential to benefit everyone. This focus requires transformational political commitment and system-wide institutional change, in the way policies and plans are developed, to ensure no one is left behind.

As with gender equality, social inclusion requires the design of inclusive laws, policies, and interventions to transform power relations and shift harmful and discriminatory social norms, attitudes, behaviours, and practices. Social inclusion ensures that everyone can enjoy and exercise their human rights and participate in, contribute to, and benefit from all aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural life.

Methodology note

The themes and sub-themes presented in this working paper were identified through a three-month research process conducted across the four KIX hubs (Africa 19, Africa 21, Europe, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean), comprising three data sources. The first data source is a survey to rank thematic priorities and identify sub-themes that was deployed in five languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic). It had responses from a total of 158 participants from 59 of the GPE partner countries. Following the survey, 18 focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted in collaboration with the regional hubs, with participants providing further depth and context for understanding thematic priorities. A total of 90 individuals from 51 countries participated. Finally, a review of key documents, published in 2019 or later, indicating national education priorities was also conducted for all 85 GPE partner country contexts. A total of 258 documents were reviewed for thematic priorities and key sub-themes within those priorities. For the document review, education sector plans and other government documents were prioritised as representing national priorities; these were supplemented by reports from United Nations agencies (e.g., UNESCO, UNICEF), multilateral organizations (e.g., World Bank), and non-government organisations, especially those with regional expertise, when government documents could not be located.

Qualitative data from the survey was coded twice: first, by the Education Development Trust (EDT) team member responsible for that region, and then by the team leader. The two code sets were compared and organized into emergent central sub-themes. The data from the focus groups

and literature was also coded and compared against the emergent themes, providing space for sub-theme expansion or revision. From that emergent list of sub-themes, the areas presented in this paper were selected due to their representation across all hub contexts and alignment with key gaps in the global knowledge base, making them suitable for future research under GPE KIX funding.

As such, from the full thematic mapping for GESI, there are several pressing challenges that are not presented in this paper. For instance, in the survey and focus group discussions, country representatives frequently highlighted the need for additional funding for infrastructure, which impacts both access to education and the quality of the experience therein. We recognize that especially for education access (Theme 1) there is an ongoing need for additional funds to support school construction and provision of additional materials to support inclusion. However, in the scope of the KIX calls for proposals, funds are not allocated for infrastructure enhancement projects.

Marginalized populations

Our data produced an extensive accounting of marginalized populations across the 85 GPE partner countries. From the survey, 97% of respondents agreed that equity and inclusion are relevant thematic areas for their national education contexts; 87% showed similar agreement for gender inequality. From across all data streams, the five most referenced marginalized groups were:

- **children with disabilities** (CWD; including physical and/or learning disabilities)
- **girls** (in general and overlapping with other identity markers)
- children living in **rural, remote, or other deprived geographic areas**
- children who are **migrants, refugees, or internally displaced people** (IDPs)
- children living in **poverty** (including both urban and rural forms of poverty)

Other marginalized groups include child labourers, ethnic or linguistic minorities, indigenous populations, nomadic and rural pastoralist communities, pregnant adolescents and adolescent parents, children in incarceration or detention, children impacted by HIV/AIDS, children who are single or double orphans, children impacted by legal and illegal substance abuse, over-aged learners, LGBTQI+, and children associated with armed forces and armed groups, among others. In each context, these identities are often overlapping.

Children with disabilities were the most referenced marginalized group across all of the data. In considering the challenges faced by children with disabilities, it is important to clarify the breadth of this identity. Participants referenced children with both physical—often 'visible'—and learning disabilities—sometimes 'invisible'. There was reference to the specific needs of children who use mobility devices such as wheelchairs and walking aids, and those who are blind or deaf and thus use Braille and different forms of sign language, in addition to more general statements about the broader needs of children who may experience developmental delays or have learning disabilities, which often go undiagnosed or underdiagnosed. Indeed, the lack of evidence on learners with disabilities is a prominent global evidence gap (UNICEF, 2021) and various scoping

study participants identified the need to strengthen disability-disaggregated data in EMIS systems and train teachers or other education personnel to screen and identify these learners. As with the identity groups referenced throughout the paper, children with disabilities subsume a diverse grouping of children with equally diverse abilities and needs. Within the data, participants and the literature demonstrated the continued differences worldwide in how children with disabilities are—or are not—included in mainstream schools. In some contexts, particularly in Africa 19 and Africa 21, there was continued reference to specialized schools to attend to their specific needs.[1] In other contexts, inclusion in mainstream schools was taken for granted. As such, there is great diversity across GPE KIX contexts in what 'inclusion' might look like.

Girls remain particularly disadvantaged across a majority of GPE country contexts. As evident from the lists above, girls' identities often intersect with other marginalized identities, compounding their exclusion and vulnerability. Girls—not boys—are prevented from re-enrolling after becoming parents; even where laws protect their right to continue their education, social biases and a lack of support often keep them at home (Miet Africa, 2021). In the absence of access to menstrual health hygiene or girls-only WASH facilities, girls may not go to school. Girls are also more likely than boys to be at risk of child early and forced marriage (CEFM) and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV), which can lead to their temporary or permanent disengagement. In rural areas where school access requires a long commute, girls continue to be kept in homes for fear of real or assumed dangers to their well-being and social standing. In countries impacted by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV),[2] girls are more than twice as likely to be out of school than their male counterparts (INEE, 2021). In camps for refugees and IDPs, girls with disabilities not only often lack access to private, sanitary WASH facilities but, as with other CWD, they also do not have ramps, accessibility devices, and adapted resources to facilitate their engagement within school.

While girls face multiple forms of marginalization, greater attention is being paid to the particular challenges faced by populations of boys. There is increasing evidence that across contexts boys are repeating grades, dropping out, and failing to transition to higher levels of education (UNESCO, 2022b). As with girls, there are multiple reasons as to why boys are disengaged and disadvantaged in education, with poverty, gendered expectations around work, harsh discipline, experiences of school-based violence, lack of male role models, and biased assumptions about their motivation being a few drivers. Boys represent about half of the global out-of-school population, concentrated at upper secondary. It is thus important that gender equality—and thus gender-responsiveness, as discussed later in the paper—is understood not only as girls' issues, but in ensuring that all children, regardless of gender, enjoy equitable access, participation, and completion of education. Some issues concerning boys are highlighted throughout this paper.

Children who are refugees, migrants, and IDPs, as the third most represented marginalized group in our research, face great difficulties in accessing quality education worldwide. Migration and

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[1] This represents the point of view of the country representatives, but we contend that continued use and construction of more segregated schools is not a recommended practice, as it makes it more difficult for countries to move towards a truly inclusive education system (Grimes et al., 2023).

[2] The World Bank's (2022a) FCV list includes 29 GPE partner countries.

displacement are often direct impacts of conflict or crisis. Recent estimates suggest that 224 million school-aged children and adolescents affected by crisis are in need of educational support (Education Cannot Wait, 2023) and that 36.5 million children below the age of 18 have been forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2022). UNHCR (2019) reports that just 50% of refugee children can access primary school, and the quality of those schools varies greatly depending on the refugee host context. Across GPE partner country contexts, there are examples of refugee children accessing education in camp settings; in others, they are able to enrol in national education system schools. Inclusion of these children in national education system schools, or in community schools which follow national education curricula, is essential for ensuring that they can continue and complete their education, even while displaced. The needs of displaced children often go far beyond the academic work of the classroom, however. In fleeing violence, persecution, conflict, and natural disasters, and adapting to new post-migration communities, where they risk discrimination and stress in adapting to a new environment, many children require additional mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS). A recent review of existing research (Vossoughi et al., 2018) found that approximately 87% of youth living in refugee camps demonstrated aspects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Schools—when available, accessible, and inclusive—can provide stabilizing, safe environments, but as indicated later in the paper, there is a lot of work to ensure that schools do in fact operate as safe spaces.

Further, children in poverty face numerous challenges in accessing quality education, and this group often overlaps with other identities, namely those in rural, remote, and other hard-to-reach areas and those from ethnic and linguistic minority populations. Despite many governments offering free basic education, invisible, and indirect costs of schooling—such as textbooks, uniforms, or transportation—create financial barriers for poor households (UNESCO, 2022a). In poor rural areas, schools often have a shortage of qualified teachers and students confront limited infrastructure, such as inadequate school facilities or long distances to schools. Because of distances between communities, as seen in some Pacific Island nations, there are great challenges for children in having access to schooling, either in-person or via distance modalities; in Vanuatu, for instance, education is not compulsory and in remote tribal areas, it can be difficult for children to access school. In urban areas, overcrowded classrooms, high student-to-teacher ratios, and a lack of personalized attention hinder student learning. In some contexts, urban violence and precarious situations create new risks for adolescents especially, who may be recruited to work in gangs, or may resort to selling or using illicit substances in the absence of formal work opportunities. Poverty affects education retention in particular, as financial constraints may force children to drop out of school in order to contribute to their family's income through paid or unpaid labour. This perpetuates the cycle of poverty and limits their opportunities for future success. Children from poorer households also have less access to educational support at home, including resources, such as books, computers, and internet access, which are essential for supplementing classroom education, and which have been particularly important to sustain learning during school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, children from poor households were disproportionately affected by the pandemic (UNESCO et al., 2021). These challenges are exacerbated by intersecting factors of gender, disability, ethnicity, language, and more.

Finally, it is important to specifically highlight the challenges faced by ethnic and linguistic minority groups across GPE partner countries. Children from minority groups are excluded from accessing and participating in education in multiple ways. As with other marginalized groups, especially those in rural and remote locations, they may be actively excluded due to social biases or infrastructure availability in their locations (UNESCO, 2023). They may lack access to citizenship in the countries where they reside (such as the Roma in various European contexts, or the Rohingya in Myanmar), impacting their ability to enrol and continue in nationally recognized education opportunities. They may suffer poor quality of experience in the classroom itself due to the language of instruction. In contexts where the right to mother tongue education is protected, 'ambiguous language policies' (Reilly et al. 2022) and poor management of teacher deployment mean that in practice, there may continue to be mismatches between student and teacher language, as seen in Ghana and Malawi, for example, with minority language speakers thus having their own language further marginalized and their access to quality education impinged. Further, many minority groups are effectively 'erased' from mainstream curricula, or their cultural or religious practices are actively demeaned or stigmatised. They may face discrimination in the school environment and poor treatment from administrators, teachers, and peers.

3   THEME: EDUCATION ACCESS

Children continue to be unable to access schooling at pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels across GPE partner countries. UNESCO (2022c) estimates that 244 million children between the ages of 6 and 18 are out-of-school worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to substantial increases in the number of children and adolescents at risk of not returning to school, with longer periods of school closures increasing the risk of disengagement (UNESCO, 2022b). Nigeria, for example, has 12.7 million out-of-school children, the largest in the world (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019) and in Afghanistan, the resurgence of Taliban rule has eliminated opportunities for girls to access secondary education and beyond. Across other contexts, children continue to be out of school, often marginalized due to cross-cutting issues of gender, refugee, migration, or economic status, religious and social norms, and exposure to conflict and violence. For many children, a lack of infrastructure continues to impede their right to enter education. Children in rural and remote regions may not have a school within a safe commute distance, and for others, existing schools have been damaged, destroyed, or repurposed due to conflict or climate emergencies. Children with disabilities continue to be marginalized across contexts, and when their disability status overlaps with other markers of marginalization—gender, rurality, and refugee status amongst them—they may be unable to access education when existing schools lack assistive infrastructure.

Issues of access were strongly featured across all three data streams. In the literature, attention to access for marginalized groups appeared across nearly all documents. In the survey, it comprised more than a quarter of all write-in GESI responses. Two sub-themes emerged around access: first, we examine access issues related to marginalized status, where children cannot access schooling due to having one or more marginalized identities. Second, we look at how infrastructure impacts access. It is important to note that these sub-themes are not exclusive: in

focus group discussions, the nuances of access challenges were discussed in depth, demonstrating that access barriers are often multiple and overlapping.

Sub-theme 1: Access issues related to marginalized status

Lack of access is often due to marginalized status. Social stigma keeps children with disabilities from being enrolled in school in the first place and impacts whether they transition to upper primary or secondary schooling. Challenges for children with disabilities were highlighted across all four KIX regions, with ongoing issues for inclusion highlighted even in higher-income country contexts. Gender also cuts across regions, often interacting with issues of disability, poverty, and rurality. Impoverished families may prioritise boys over girls for enrolment, especially when the cost of education is high. Conversely, in some contexts, boys may be engaged in labour to support family survival, while in others, they are out-of-school and not in employment or job training (UNESCO, 2022b). For pregnant adolescents, national laws may enshrine their right to remain in school and re-enrol after the birth of their children, but social biases and discrimination may prevent re-enrolment in practice. Adolescent parents may lack support structures, especially childcare, to facilitate their continuation with education.

As such, this sub-theme includes multiple forms of access, including initial and timely access to begin schooling, issues of retention and grade survival, transition to higher levels of education, re-enrolment following drop-out, and what incentives may facilitate these differing forms of access. Our research surfaced a variety of key access challenges according to each KIX region, with some of the most central issues featured below.

Regional specificities

Africa 19 and Africa 21. Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest number of out-of-school children: 98 million, representing almost 20% of children of primary age, 33% of lower secondary age, and 48% of upper secondary age (UNESCO, 2022c). Across the two regions, there are some similarities in which groups are being excluded. In both regions, girls continue to lack access to schooling. In Chad, Ethiopia, and Somalia, for example, FGD participants commented on how gender biases interact with issues of conflict, natural disasters, and rurality to see girls kept at home, ostensibly for their protection. Survey and focus group data highlighted girls' lack of access to secondary education as a key issue for both Africa 19 and Africa 21 contexts. While there are multiple reasons that girls do not continue onto secondary education, the data streams particularly highlighted the issues of early pregnancy, female genital mutilation (FGM), and CEFM. During COVID-19 school closures, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe reported record numbers of pregnancy, CEFM (see also Miet Africa, 2021), and FGM in Kenya and Somalia, among other contexts. CEFM was particularly highlighted by FGD participants from Niger, Mali, and Chad, along with other socio-cultural barriers present in rural villages for Guinea Bissau. For Lesotho, Rwanda, and refugee settlements in Uganda, FGD participants noted instances where boys are required to provide financial support for their families, and thus drop out or never enrol in school. UNESCO (2022b) further indicates that in Gambia, Niger, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, increasing numbers of boys are not in school, employment, or other training.

The challenges facing children from IDP or refugee families were also highlighted across both regions. In Cameroon and Central African Republic, children without necessary documents were unable to register for schools in their host communities. Promising strategies are evident in the literature on Burkina Faso and some parts of East Africa, where schools have eliminated the need for IDP children to show birth certifications and previous school records, thus facilitating access.

EAP. Across the broad and diverse EAP region, there are great differences in which marginalized groups lack access to education. According to UNESCO (2022c), Central and Southern Asia have the second largest out-of-school population, comprising an estimated 85 million children. In the EAP survey data, the two most referenced marginalized groups were those in remote/rural locations and children with disabilities. From the literature surveyed, access issues for children in rural, remote, and hard-to-reach areas were referenced for Albania, Bangladesh, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Moldova, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan, and Yemen, and especially for island states, including Maldives, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, and the Pacific States (Fiji, Kiribati, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu). In Maldives, an FGD participant commented on the challenges of maintaining a quality education system across remote islands to ensure that all children can access and participate in education. Within climate-vulnerable nations, there is risk that populations in rural and remote regions, especially those in low-lying atoll nations impacted by rising oceans (e.g. Kiribati, Maldives, and Marshall Islands), will suffer further marginalization (see also Germanwatch, 2021).

Children with disabilities, often referenced as children with special needs, were strongly highlighted throughout the EAP regional data. In the survey, they were referenced in write-in responses for 25% of respondents and they were the most referenced marginalized group from the literature review, mentioned in more than half of all documents for the region. While there was little time in FGDs allotted to discussion of the specific national challenges faced by CWD, access challenges were highlighted by participants from Vietnam and Nepal.

Minority groups across the region struggle with access due to multiple factors. From the literature and survey data, ethnic, and linguistic minorities were highlighted for Albania, Bangladesh, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Moldova, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, and Uzbekistan. Specific communities experiencing marginalization include nomadic communities in Bhutan, Roma children in Moldova, children from herder families in Mongolia, and Dalit children in Nepal. FGD participants from Vietnam and Kyrgyz Republic commented on the challenges of ensuring access for minority groups and migrants in particular. In Timor-Leste, a study participant reported on the challenge of inclusion due to different forms of Tetum and its dialects spoken in different villages and regions. Similarly, FGD participants from Nepal commented on the challenge of access for minority language speakers.

Gender issues, including challenges faced by both boys and girls, were highlighted in the data streams. Girls remain marginalized in multiple EAP contexts. From the survey data, participants highlighted the challenge of girls' access, enrolment, retention, and progression. From the FGDs, participants from Yemen discussed the ongoing challenges in getting girls into education, which are discussed further in the next sub-theme. In Kiribati and Laos PDR, large groups of boys are out-of-school and not in employment (UNESCO, 2022b). In an FGD, a participant from Laos PDR

indicated the challenge of getting boys into school, especially those in remote areas and those from low-income families.

LAC. In the LAC region, the scoping study participants called attention to the need to support out-of-school adolescents and youth and specifically address issues of dropout and retention. The phenomenon of "Ninis" (children not in education, employment nor training, or NEET for its acronym in English) was mentioned by a survey respondent in Honduras. In FGDs, representatives from Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua pointed to the challenge of out-of-school students as a priority area for their governments, who are using financial incentives, including school feeding programs and the provision of school materials (e.g., backpacks and educational resources), to encourage families to send their children to school. A World Bank (2020) project document in Guyana noted the use of communication campaigns to raise awareness about the returns to investing in education. Indeed, poverty and rurality were often associated with out-of-school students in these countries. A regional report by the World Bank (2023) highlighted the particular need to support adolescent boys due to high rates of child labor, and a Plan International (2023) survey of adolescent girls suggests that gender-based violence and early pregnancy or marriage can lead to displacement and the educational exclusion of girls, especially in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. In an interview, Haiti was identified as a unique context, given the high rates of poverty, fragility, and conflict which lead to most of the student population not having access to school. In all of these countries, remedial and accelerated learning programs and flexible pathways to transition back into the school system were identified as important practices to support students who dropout,repeat grades and/or are overaged (*sobreedad)* (as mentioned in several FGDs, literature related to Haiti and Nicaragua, and the regional World Bank report). Additional efforts seeking to address issues of access and retention include early warning systems in El Salvador (UNICEF, 2020a), Guyana (Buitrago-Hernandez et al., 2023), and in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, where truancy officers try to identify out-of-school students and encourage them to reinsert themselves in the education system, according to an FGD participant.

Lastly, access was also mentioned as a challenge particularly at the ECCE level for various countries (as noted in survey data from Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Nicaragua, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines and FGD data from Guyana). FGD participants from Guatemala and Nicaragua highlighted the need to improve access to ECCE to ensure students' successful transitions throughout the education system.

Sub-theme 2: Access issues related to infrastructure

Many children worldwide lack access to school because of infrastructure and necessary support mechanisms. This includes the lack of schools, especially in rural and remote areas, or areas impacted by conflict or environmental disasters where schools have been destroyed or repurposed, as well as the lack of access to existing schools especially for children with disabilities. As such, social barriers often interact with limited infrastructure offerings, and so there are overlaps between this sub-theme and issues of social exclusion.

Especially for children in rural and remote areas, or areas impacted by FCV, the closest school may require a long and sometimes dangerous commute. From our data across the country contexts, this challenge was highlighted for access to secondary schools. Further, in those areas, distance learning might provide a solution for education access, but there is often a lack of quality distance learning options, lack of access to the required technology, and lack of other infrastructure, such as access to power, Internet, or even phone signal. Even when schools do exist, they often lack safe, hygienic, and accessible WASH facilities, wheelchair ramps, adapted classroom furniture, Braille materials and those for children with different cognitive processing disabilities, and a lack of inclusive and gender-sensitive infrastructure to facilitate ongoing engagement with schooling. Crowded classrooms and limited classroom furniture can leave little space for children who need mobility devices or additional aids to assist. The section below highlights some of the key issues around infrastructure that emerged from our research.

Regional specificities

Africa 19 and Africa 21. As with the social barriers which impede enrolment, there are overlaps in the two regions around the kind of infrastructure challenges that prevent children from enrolling or re-enrolling in school. While children with disabilities were highlighted as a marginalized population often targeted by negative stereotypes and social stigma, study participants pointed out that infrastructure was a key barrier for their engagement with education. The lack of disability-friendly infrastructure and the ongoing problem of classroom overcrowding was mentioned in the literature for nearly all countries in each region and highlighted by participants for Benin, Burundi, Comoros, Gambia, Lesotho, Rwanda, and Somalia; for CWD in rural and remote areas, the challenge was further compounded. In Congo, participants highlighted the need for more special schools to be constructed to specifically educate CWD while in others, the focus is on mainstreaming, as in Burundi, where the provision of assistive equipment is a strategy for improving access for CWD.

Children in rural and remote areas of Africa 21 were categorised as marginalized in survey data from Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, and Niger due to the lack of schools in their areas. Indeed, across the continent, there is limited access to secondary schools due to the cost and availability of such institutions; the issue was particularly highlighted by FGD participants from Chad, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Somalia, and Togo. In Lesotho, multigrade classrooms in rural areas were seen to provide poor quality education. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, remote schools received less oversight and quality assurance. Girls in particular are impacted by poor quality or non-existent infrastructure. All data streams indicated the importance of clean, private WASH facilities to facilitate girls' enrolment and ongoing engagement.

For children in rural and remote parts of sub-Saharan Africa, a solution is often secondary schools with boarding facilities so that children do not need to commute to school. This strategy can improve girls' access, as noted by a study participant from Niger, where the creation of girls-only boarding schools is viewed as a lever for improving girls' secondary enrolment. However, even when boarding facilities are available, families may hesitate to send their children—

particularly girls—due to the rates of school-based violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, that may be present.

For IDP and refugee children, infrastructure continues to be a challenge, though there was limited data on this area emerging from the study. Countries across the continent have taken different strategies to education provisions in camp settings, which can include a mix of government schools and community and NGO offerings, with differing quality.

EAP. Across the diverse EAP contexts, there are some key similarities highlighted in the data streams. The impact of conflict and climate emergencies limit access across contexts as facilities are destroyed or made inaccessible. In Sudan, at the time of writing, a new conflict has sent the nation into a state of emergency, with an FGD participant reporting that many schools have closed since the crisis began in April 2023. Similarly, while Ukraine was only represented in the data via literature sources, ongoing reports of the conflict indicate an extensive refugee crisis with serious impacts on education access and quality. In Pakistan, natural disasters have especially impacted education access, with an FGD participant commenting on the impacts of recent flooding especially. Reference to conflict and displacement was found in literature on Bangladesh, Georgia, Maldives, Pakistan, Philippines, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

Poor or non-existent infrastructure continues to impact girls' access to education. In Yemen, there is already limited provision of girls-only secondary schools, and when those schools lack female teachers, especially in rural areas, girls drop out. In Cambodia, recent efforts have seen great improvements to girls' access and performance, but study participants note that a lack of WASH and other facilities continue to impede girls' access, which impacts girls more than boys. Similarly, in Kyrgyz Republic, an FGD participant reported that girls are dropping out of school around the age of 16, which was attributed in part to a lack of school changing rooms.

LAC. Various challenges were identified in relation to infrastructure and education access in LAC countries. In Dominica, a GPE KIX country review identified the lack of space in government pre-school centres and the high costs of attending private centres as key barriers to accessing ECCE (Knight et al., 2021). This was echoed by survey respondents and FGD participants from Dominica, who expressed a need to expand access to ECCE services, especially in rural areas. Likewise, an FGD participant from Guatemala identified infrastructural challenges in both rural and urban areas, where students have to travel long distances to get to the nearest school. The lack of accessible infrastructure for learners with disabilities was also mentioned by various scoping study participants including from Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Improved school WASH facilities—especially girls-only latrines and menstrual health hygiene—were identified as an area that needs improvement to encourage girls' access to schools in Guyana (UNICEF, 2020c), and Guatemala (FGD).

Crises, including climate change, COVID-19 and contexts of FCV, create additional infrastructural challenges in the region. For example, in an FGD, a participant from Honduras noted that over 4,000 schools were destroyed by hurricanes and extreme weather conditions, and that others have been closed to use as shelters for displaced families. In these communities, students no longer have access to school. Likewise, the need to better equip schools with health, MHPSS, and

WASH infrastructure in response to COVID-19 was unanimously identified across all ten LAC countries (in literature, surveys, and FGDs). In the literature about Haiti, as well as about Central American countries such as El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, violence in/and around schools and gangs' control over school infrastructure were also identified as a critical challenge.

Education access: Potential research areas

Education access has been a focus of international education funding and scholarship for more than thirty years now, but as the data for this theme indicates, it remains a pressing challenge. From the data, the following areas for research can provide context-driven approaches to improve access, address infrastructural issues, and mitigate dropout.

1) Facilitating transition of out-of-school children and youth into schools

As seen in the era following COVID-19 school closures, countries have adopted a variety of strategies to re-engage learners who have dropped out of school, with different approaches according to region, learner age, level of schooling, among others. There is an ongoing demand to understand the contextual needs and environments of specific marginalized populations, like those mentioned in Sub-Theme 1, with attention to how membership in multiple marginalized groups (e.g. refugee girls in Kenyan refugee camps, Dalit children with disabilities in Nepal, or displaced adolescent mothers in Honduras) impacts access and ongoing engagement with schooling, what effective and sustainable approaches to addressing the issues are, and how these approaches could be brought to scale.

2) Reducing the cost of access

Even in countries with free basic education, the literature demonstrates that education can still be an expensive investment due to the costs of stationery, uniforms, and additional fees for food and materials. For low-income families, these expenses can consume a high percentage of income, thus leaving parents with the decision of who to educate and who to keep out of education. Additional research is needed on how to reduce costs of access, especially at scale and for sustainable, long-term program planning.

3) The impact of incentives and interventions for early detection and prevention of drop-out

Worldwide, there are incentive programs, from tuition bursaries to uniform provision, which help to keep children in schools. There is increasing evidence surrounding 'what works' from metanalyses (e.g., Angrist et al., 2020; Evans & Yuan, 2019; Psaki et al., 2022), but as explained in those documents, it is still important that interventions are tailored to the context and the groups to be reached. Thus, ongoing research needs to examine contextualised incentives and could especially focus on early warning systems for detecting and preventing drop-out. In other words, research addressing the following questions is needed: What works to mitigate school dropout and ensure school retention and completion in the region? What are the gaps and shortcomings of these ongoing efforts? How can the impact of effective efforts be scaled?

4) Positive examples and analysis of inclusive, enabling education environments

For Sub-Theme 2, it may be important to conduct positive deviance research in order to identify what countries and communities are effectively creating enabling school environments, accessible and inclusive infrastructure, and understand the characteristics of such facilities, as well as how governments were able to create such enabling conditions. In addition, large scale scoping or diagnostic studies could take a pulse check of the current situation across schools within a country to identify needs and areas for improvement.

4 THEME: EDUCATION QUALITY

Across the world, recent attention has been on improving education quality and ensuring that children emerge from schooling with knowledge, skills, and competencies that prepare them for the 21st century world. This means ensuring that children have a better experience within school involving their socio-emotional well-being in addition to their academic development and thereby resulting in improved learning outcomes and increased transition rates to the upper levels of education. As such, Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for nations to not only "adopt a critical and engaged approach to learning" but also to ensure that education is inclusive and available to all.[3] Thus, there is an important connection between quality and inclusion: it is not enough that schools provide a 'good' education that only a few, well-supported students can enjoy, but governments need to critically consider how education engages, reaches, and benefits *all* groups of children.

Across our research in the 85 GPE partner country contexts, issues of education quality were strongly represented, and so we take a broad view of education quality as reaching beyond academic achievement. Education quality was linked with teacher training and support, curriculum and materials, school leadership and management, approaches to data collection and research, and various forms of monitoring and evaluation across the system. With a GESI lens, two key sub-themes for education quality emerged. First, research documents and participants highlighted the need for inclusive and gender-responsive approaches to ensure that all children can enjoy education quality. Inclusive and gender-responsive approaches include all aspects of the schooling experience, with implications for curriculum and school management and leadership in particular. The second sub-theme looks at the broader school environment to ensure that what happens in the classroom is supported and facilitated by a safe, welcoming school culture. It is thus focussed on issues of school safety and provision of psycho-social support to facilitate inclusion and address those harms which may otherwise impact marginalized groups' engagement and continuation in education.

Sub-theme 1: Inclusive and gender-responsive curriculum, school management, and leadership

As indicated in our findings, many GPE partner countries have been part of the worldwide shift toward a more learner-centred approach to education. As the name suggests, these curricula

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[3] See the language of SDG 4 here: https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/material/04

and pedagogy adapt to the different needs of learners, require their active participation, engage higher-order cognitive skills like critical thinking and creativity, and emphasize formative assessment to ensure that learning is an ongoing, individualized classroom practice (Bremner, 2021). Already built into these reforms then, is attention to individual differences and learning needs, and so, there is a window of opportunity to further advance the work around inclusive and gender-responsive curricula that has already been underway.

Inclusive and gender-responsive educational approaches are student-centred and have at their core respect and recognition for individual difference. Inclusive curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment reflect the diverse needs of learners and provide reasonable accommodation for children with different needs; this includes ensuring that teachers are trained and able to provide accessible, supportive classroom environments, and modifications (UNICEF, 2022a). Similarly, gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP), a term that is increasingly associated not only with classroom practice but school transformation, seeks to eliminate and address gender biases and provide a learning environment where all children can learn and thrive (Plan International et al., 2021). One popular approach to GRP, the Forum for African Women Educators' toolkit (FAWE, 2020), has been used in pre-service teacher training in numerous African contexts and beyond, albeit with limited research to indicate which areas of the approach have the most impact and on what measures.

Our dataset demonstrated widespread attention to embedding gender-responsive and inclusive approaches in initial teacher training, continuous professional development, and quality control measures across all four regions of KIX. In a wide variety of countries, these intentions are recorded in national education sector plans and the educational partnership compacts drafted for GPE funding.[4] From our survey data, responses highlighting the need for gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy, planning, materials, teacher training, curriculum, and leadership made up nearly a quarter of all write-in data related to GESI. In the focus group discussions, where participants could comment at length about the specific GESI challenges, many spoke of the problem of implementation: while existing policies call for gender-responsiveness and inclusion, it is not clear the extent to which it is happening in practice. Further, from the data available, it was also not always clear the extent to which inclusion and gender-responsivity go beyond 'surface' forms of integration: where children with different abilities are included in classroom environments, but their differentiated needs are not necessarily catered to, effectively excluding them from real learning and engagement.

Gender imbalance in the teaching profession was often referenced as a barrier for GESI. The data demonstrated extensive differences according to context: in some, there was reference to more

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[4] A variety of terms are used in different contexts, with some differences in meaning. In English, terms may include 'gender-responsive', 'gender mainstreaming', gender-transformative' (Spanish: *educación transformadora de género*), and 'gender-sensitive'. French directly translated many of those same terms. In Spanish, there is also often reference to '*pedagogía sensible al género*' and '*pedagogía de género con un enfoque de género'*. See examples from Cambodia (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2019), Nepal (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2022), Niger (République du Niger & IIPE-UNESCO Dakar, 2019), Sierra Leone (MoBSSE & MoTHE, 2022), Tanzania (MoEST, 2022), Uganda (Ministry of Education and Sport, 2022), and Uzbekistan (Sankar, 2021), among many others.

male teachers, especially at higher levels of schooling, and more males in leadership and management roles, particularly in rural and remote areas and more challenging school settings. Across many contexts, women dominate pre-primary and primary education. For both boys and girls, a lack of male or female teachers at the different stages of education means that they miss out on key role models of both genders. It is important to note the evidence on the role of the female teacher in promoting gender equality is not conclusive (Psaki et al., 2022). However, as demonstrated in our research, it can impact whether parents feel that it is safe and appropriate to send their girl children to school. More female teachers can lead to more female leaders: the literature demonstrates that challenges in recruiting, retaining, and promoting female teachers mean that there are even fewer women in positions of leadership. In emerging research, the role of female leaders for implementing gender-responsiveness, boosting gender parity, and improving learning outcomes for girls is becoming evident (UNICEF Innocenti, 2022).

Regional specificities

Africa 19. Across literature for Africa 19 countries, there is much attention given to inclusive and gender-responsive approaches. FAWE's work on GRP has been purportedly implemented in a wide variety of African nations, including nine from Africa 19 that appear in a 2016 case study of implementation of FAWE's handbook across sub-Saharan contexts (Wanjama & Njuguna, 2016). References to GRP and inclusive pedagogy also appear across education sector policies for the region. For example, commitments related to gender-responsive and inclusive teacher training, curricula, sector planning, policy, and monitoring appear in the GPE partnership compacts for Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zanzibar, and Zimbabwe.[5] However, as reported in the survey and focus group discussions, teachers and school administrators are still not well trained or supported to carry out GRP or inclusive approaches. In the survey, respondents from Uganda and Nigeria referenced the need for gender-responsive pedagogy and gender-responsive learning environments. In FGDs, study participants from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Malawi, Rwanda, and Somalia all commented that teachers, including those in early childhood education, are not prepared to integrate children with disabilities. There was a reference to how gender imbalance in the workforce can impact girls' access to schools and the role models that they will encounter, particularly in Somalia, rural Malawi and Kenya; in Uganda, there are few female science teachers. Particularly in rural, remote, and hard-to-reach areas, schools struggle to attract and keep female teachers due often to insecurity, harsh working conditions, and a lack of general infrastructure. Representatives from Eritrea linked the lack of female secondary school graduates with the male-dominated teaching profession, where there are few women represented.

In refugee settings in particular, study participants indicated that inclusive education would consider language needs, especially given that refugee children often speak a different language than government schoolteachers, as highlighted in Uganda and Kenya.

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[5] See the compacts for Sierra Leone (MoBSSE & MoTHE, 2022), Uganda (Ministry of Education and Sport, 2022), Tanzania (MoEST, 2022), Zanzibar (MoEVT, 2023), and Zimbabwe (MoPSE, 2022).

Africa 21. As with Africa 19 contexts, countries within Africa 21 demonstrated strong awareness and spoke of the need for more inclusive and gender-responsive policies and practices. In the survey, participants from Chad, Central African Republic, Madagascar, and Niger wrote in responses related to gender-responsive and differentiated teaching approaches. In the FGDs, study participants from Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger spoke of ongoing training for gender responsiveness; in Niger, the national education strategy now mainstreams gender issues in teacher training. For all of these contexts, monitoring and evaluation is needed to understand the impacts of existing training approaches. The data also demonstrated attention to the issue of female teachers, with FGD participants from Comoros and Guinea highlighting the lack of female teachers in their contexts.

In discussing the classroom needs of children with disabilities, FGD participants from Madagascar indicated that the country has set up some 'mixed' classes, where CWD are mainstreamed. However, they commented that the pedagogy has not been well adapted and teachers are not able to cope well with diverse learners. In Cameroon, some NGOs have developed modules for inclusive pedagogies, but the impact is not yet well studied.

EAP. In the literature from the EAP region, there is extensive reference to ensuring inclusive and gender-responsive environments in national policy. Reference to inclusion, gender-responsiveness, and gender equality were found in literature for nearly all EAP contexts. However, in the EAP survey results and FGD data, there was more limited discussion of inclusion and gender-responsive approaches. In Laos PDR, a participant noted that the country has largely reached parity, but there are disparities within schools which disadvantage girls, particularly with the perception of gender roles. In Kyrgyz Republic and Nepal, study participants noted that teachers still needed improved skills to reach diverse learners in the classroom.

Inclusive education is a priority in policy literature for multiple Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Mongolia.[6] In these documents, it appears mostly focused on children with disabilities or special educational needs, rather than inclusion for ethnic and linguistic minorities and other marginalized groups.

In FGDs, discussion centred on the question of female teachers and leaders. In Nepal, a participant noted the challenge of female representation on school management communities. A participant from Yemen commented on the challenges of recruiting female teachers to work in rural areas (common across African contexts as well) with a knock-on effect for girls' access and enrolment as they have a cultural preference for female teachers in all-girls schools. Conversely, in contexts like Kyrgyz Republic, Sudan, and Uzbekistan, there are shortages of male teachers.

LAC. Inclusivity and gender-responsiveness were addressed across all GPE partner countries in LAC, albeit in different ways. Data on GRP was especially strong in El Salvador, where an FGD participant described the need to train teachers so that they do not reproduce gender biases in

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[6] Documents referenced here include Uzbekistan (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022), Tajikistan (Republic of Tajikistan, 2020), Kyrgyz Republic (Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2021), and Mongolia (Ministry of Education and Science, 2021).

the classroom and remove gender stereotypes in textbooks and teaching and learning materials. The need to integrate comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in the curriculum and train teachers to adequately implement this curriculum where it already exists was also a critical point raised in the Guatemalan literature and amongst FGD participants in El Salvador and Honduras. In Anglophone Caribbean countries, on the other hand, the need to hire more male teachers who could serve as mentors and role models for boys (especially those coming from female-headed households) was a common topic that emerged in the FGD and survey in Dominica and St. Lucia and in the literature on St. Vincent and the Grenadines. GRP was also identified as an important sub-theme to gender in a survey response from Dominica; and gender-responsive *protection*, particularly for Venezuelan girls and adolescent girls facing multiple forms of discrimination, was mentioned in the literature on Guyana (UNICEF, 2022b). Haiti was the only country without a strong focus on inclusivity or gender-responsiveness, because—as an interviewee stated— "everybody in Haiti is vulnerable."

Inclusive pedagogy, specifically to support learners with disabilities or special education needs, emerged as a key priority in six of the ten LAC countries: Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Guatemala (especially for learners with disabilities and Indigenous learners), Honduras (also in relation to multi-grade classrooms), and Nicaragua.

Sub-theme 2: School safety and psycho-social support (PSS)

Access to safe learning environments is vital at every stage of a child's education, from pre-primary through to adolescence. Yet globally, approximately 1 in 3 students face bullying or physical violence at school (UNESCO, 2019), and more young people are experiencing anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2022). The ability to obtain a basic, quality education which will improve the life chances of individuals, especially girls and LGBTQI+ youth, is therefore being jeopardized for millions of children worldwide by a lack of safety and access to physical or psycho-social protection and care in and around school. School safety comprises a wide variety of risks and hazards: the Comprehensive School Safety Framework (GADRRRES, 2022) calls for learners, educators, and staff to be protected from all forms of harm, violence, injury, and death in educational spaces, plans for continuity of education and protection during learning disruptions, and promotion of knowledge and skills to reduce risk, build resilience, and continue to develop (p. 3). Thus, school safety can include safety related to infrastructure (e.g., built-to-code facilities and resilience to environmental disasters, clean WASH facilities, building maintenance, boundary walls); exposure to conflict and violence (e.g., peer-to-peer violence, violence from teachers and staff members, bullying, cyber-bullying, sexual and gender-based violence, physical and humiliating punishment, gang violence, attacks on schools, schools repurposed for military/militant groups); everyday dangers (e.g., accidents, alcohol and substance abuse, unsafe school commutes, displacement, migration), and hazards related to nature and health (e.g., climate-change induced, biological hazards, pandemics, vector-borne disease).

From our research, there was little reference to school safety in the survey and focus group data; this gap could be due to the sheer number of topics being covered within the discussions. There

was more coverage in official documentation, such as education sector policies, with 20% of documents surveyed providing coverage on COVID-19 response (often referencing COVID-related safety matters) and 19% referring to MHPSS and socio-emotional learning challenges. Commitments for support and existing programs included COVID-19 response and specialized response for some of the marginalized groups referenced in this research: refugees, girls, LGBTQI+ youth, and other adolescents who have experienced violence and trauma and need support for their health and well-being to be able to continue to engage with education. From the documentation, it was evident that while schools may have in place counselling departments and access to trained counsellors and the ability to refer learners to other services, often these teachers are not adequately equipped and trained to provide this support. Furthermore, they themselves, as teachers, will have their own experiences of violence and trauma, requiring investment in their own social and emotional needs. Schools are thus presented as having the *potential* to provide safe, healing spaces when mental health and psycho-social support services were made available, especially for victims of trauma, often conflict, abuse, and forms of neglect.

In the data, a clear gap around LGBTQI+ children was evident: due to in part ongoing social stigma, there was only limited mention of LGBTQI+ youth, even though the broader literature base indicates that this marginalized group faces ongoing threats of violence particularly in school settings (UNICEF, 2020b). Research from the KIX LAC hub (SUMMA & OECS, 2020) indicates that LGBTQI+ youth face homophobic bullying, including verbal abuse and instances of physical violence from peers and school personnel. As indicated in the section on Regional Specificities below, LGBTQI+ issues were only discussed in LAC focus groups and had very limited representation across official literature in the other regions.

When school safety was broached, particularly in the Africa 21 and LAC data streams, emphasis was on addressing MHPSS, GBV, and school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV). In many countries, there are either no official routes for reporting instances of GBV or these routes are poorly managed or seen to result in no action. While everyone is at risk of violence, GBV is most frequently directed at girls and whilst the evidence is limited, girls with disabilities are even more at risk of GBV both in schools and the communities. Girls, in all their diversity, are often at risk of physical, sexual, and psychological violence at school and on the journey to and from school. The violence they experience can range from corporal punishment to bullying to sexual coercion and exploitation, such as around sex for grades (Safe to Learn, 2022). The provision of life skills and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education can be critical in introducing messages on gender norms, social cohesion, and respectful relationships, as well as start to highlight a common understanding of social and gender norms that perpetuate SRGBV. While there is little research done to understand the direct correlation between the provision of life skills, SRHR education, and instances of GBV, many studies indicate its potential to contribute to GBV prevention when taught based on the principles of gender equality and explicitly recognizing the effects of gender and power on relationships.

Regional specificities

Africa 19. In the survey and focus group discussions, there was no reference to issues of school safety from Africa 19 country representatives. One survey respondent from Kenya listed "safe school learning environment" as a subtheme of equity and inclusion, and three respondents—two from Kenya and one from the Gambia—listed mental health or psycho-social support. From the literature reviewed, school safety is often referenced, but with limited detail. For example, in the current education sector strategic plan for Eswatini, the policy calls for "healthy, safe, and protective school environments" (Kingdom of Eswatini, 2022, p. 72). However, there is limited detail on how a safe school looks or performs, or what underpins unsafety. In others, such as a recent sector plan from Ethiopia, there is reference to school codes of conduct to address gender-based violence, discrimination, and school violence.

A variety of documents refenced the need for MHPSS services. In documents for Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe, there is reference to mainstreaming PSS into school cultures. Liberia, in pre-COVID policy documents, had plans to expand PSS as part of Ebola recovery. For Eswatini, PSS appears as a country commitment for GPE funding and their education sector plans demonstrate that PSS via distance learning platforms was deployed during COVID-19, reaching 70% of learners. In COVID response documents, other countries make commitments to increase PSS provision, as in Uganda.[7]

Africa 21. Across the Africa 21 data, there was some limited discussion of issues of school safety, with most of the focus on issues of SRGBV and PSS for victims of conflict. School safety was linked with the need for female teachers and access: without female teachers, FGD participants noted that some parents may keep their girls at home because of the perceived or actual insecurity of the school environment. In Congo, for example, an FGD participant commented on SRGBV, with male teachers assaulting and impregnating female students, and so there was need for more female teachers to ensure that school environments were safe and inclusive.

There is some evidence that training programs can have success in equipping teachers and staff to deal with complex student needs, as seen across some Africa 21 contexts. According to FGD participants, in Chad and Mali, teachers have been trained on dealing with distress among children – and even amongst their colleague groups. In Burkina Faso, guides are being developed to support teachers in providing psycho-social assistance and support. Further, as with the other regional groupings, there were references to MHPSS offerings especially around COVID-19 response, as seen in documentation from Congo and Comoros, where teachers are tasked with gaining PSS skills to support students and to account for their own needs.[8]

EAP. Across the EAP data, there was limited reference to safety and PSS. Neither were referenced in survey response data and they were not discussed in the focus groups. However, priorities around mental health, psycho-social support, and school safety were found in documents from

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[7] Documents referenced here include the following: Ethiopia (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021), Sierra Leone (MoBSSE & MoTHE, 2022), Zimbabwe (MoPSE, 2022), Eswatini (Kingdom of Eswatini, 2022), Liberia (UNICEF, 2019), and Uganda (UNHCR, 2019b).

[8] Documents referenced here include those for Congo (Ministère de l'enseignement primaire, secondaire et technique, 2020) and Comoros (Ministère de l'Education Nationale, de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche, 2020).

Bangladesh, George, Maldives, Moldova, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines, Kyrgyz Republic, Timor-Leste, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan, policy emphasized the need for a safe and enabling environment in both preschools and schools. Georgia's Prime Minister delivered a speech committing to prevention and response mechanisms to address all forms of violence at the school level. Comprehensive school safety, safe and effective school environments, and psychological well-being and assistance are key themes and sub-priorities for the current education strategies in Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Moldova, respectively. Similar references to addressing bullying and child protection and safeguarding were found in the education development plans for Laos, Micronesia, and Philippines.[9] PSS especially figured into COVID response documents, including those for Myanmar and Nepal, where there was also direct reference to PSS and counselling services being available for early childhood care contexts. In Moldova and Samoa, policy documents committed to PSS provision for students, teachers, and parents. In others, as with documents from Pakistan's Sindh province and Philippines, PSS was folded into broader disaster response frameworks.[10]

LAC. School safety emerged as a critical challenge in data from Central American countries and Haiti, especially due to gang violence. Both the literature and interview in Haiti revealed that 60% of the country is controlled by gangs, and that armed groups often attack or rob schools, which hinders student access. Violence in and around schools has also led to high rates of dropouts in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras: a regional report by Plan International (2023) found that in these countries, 2 in 5 adolescent girls (40%) describe schools as unsafe due to physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological violence. One in 5 adolescent girls indicate that violence was a key reason for dropping out of school (22%) or migrating (19%). In El Salvador, survey and FGD respondents noted GBV as a key issue, especially since there are no grievance mechanisms in place and given the "misogynistic and heteronormative schemes that perpetuate a violent, macho, and androcentric culture." Likewise, in Honduras, an FGD participant noted the urgency of addressing GBV since "there is no response from the government." The literature also points to the dire effects of experiencing violence on children's mental and physical health: a journal article (Bogin, 2022) argues that 17% of children under the years of 5 years old (and in the highest income quintile) in Guatemala are stunted due to chronic fear of violence and toxic stress as a result of social-economic-political-emotional inequality and insecurity. A regional report by the World Bank (2023) notes the importance of making youth friendly spaces, especially to mitigate boys dropping out of school. The need to provide mental health and psycho-social support to students and teachers was also a key theme across all countries in LAC, particularly due to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (as highlighted in the literature and in some FGDs). Lastly, teacher and student wellbeing was explicitly addressed in an FGD in Grenada and social-

[9] Documents referenced here include the following: Uzbekistan (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019), Georgia (Garibashvili, 2022), Tajikistan (Republic of Tajikistan, 2020), Kyrgyz Republic (Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2021), Moldova (Government of Moldova, 2018), Laos (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020), Micronesia (Federated States of Micronesia, 2020), and Philippines (DepEd, 2022).

[10] Documents referenced here include the following: Myanmar (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2021), Nepal (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2022), Moldova (Talev, 2020), Samoa (Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture, 2020), Pakistan (School Education & Literacy Department, 2019), and Philippines (DepEd, 2022).

emotional learning and support were identified as a priority by a survey respondent and the literature in Guyana.

Education quality: Potential research areas

The collected data has highlighted that we do not yet have the research or understanding around successful approaches to adapt, contextualize, and scale inclusive and gender-responsive curricula and approaches to school safety and PSS.

For Sub-Theme 1, in focusing on inclusive and gender-responsive curricula and leadership, large gaps still remain in the delivery of inclusive and gender-responsive approaches, such as an understanding of how it needs to be delivered and the content which needs to be included to improve gender equality and social inclusion in and through education. While the global research is clear that inclusive and gender-responsive approaches are important tools that can work to address exclusion, harmful gender norms, and stereotypes, leading to improved experiences in the classroom for all, there is not, at national level, a clear approach for training on and delivery and scaling of an impactful inclusive and gender-responsive curricula.

There are similar gaps for global research around Sub-Theme 2 on school safety and PSS. While research continues to demonstrate the impact violence at school has on an individual's well-being and educational outcomes, there continue to be gaps in the data around the frequency of violence, responses to violence, and the impact of violence on different sub-groups. Gaps remain, both globally and nationally, around what works to prevent violence in different contexts and for different groups. An improved understanding of which interventions are directly correlated with violence reduction is better is needed to understand the opportunities for scale. Violence prevention, supported by a culture of safeguarding within school environments, requires a whole school approach and a better understanding around how responsibility and accountability for the safety of students is needed at all levels.

Suggestions for research based on the data collected include:

1) **Examining the elements of a GRP curricula which address harmful gender norms and stereotypes in order to improve girls' learning experience and make progress towards gender equality**

Research could focus on the aspects of GRP which have the greatest impact on learning and transition outcomes for girls, boys, and LGBTQI+ students. A focus around understanding those topics which have started to address gender dynamics within the classroom, could lead to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This research could also explore the potential of GRP to unpack and address harmful masculinities which have previously exacerbated gender inequalities.

2) **The supporting structures, policies and training needed in order to effectively deliver, and scale, GRP**

This area would look at the experience of the individual, the teacher, and the school. Research could identify what support systems, training, and coaching need to be in place for successful

delivery of a GRP curricula with success being measured by the changes in attitudes, behaviours, and progress towards gender equality within the school and classroom. Research could look at what works to address teachers' own bias and stereotypes which impact on the delivery of, and support for, GRP content.

3) The changes that can be seen from effectively deployed inclusive and gender-responsive teaching

There is currently a gap in the data around the specific changes and improvements which are expected from the delivery of gender responsive and inclusive pedagogy. This area of research could look at the changes that can be seen from different areas of a GRP curricula: those which have the greatest potential for impact and those which are transformational in their delivery. From this, it could identify priorities for adapting and scaling at national level. Here, examples may isolate the impact of gender-neutral language and gender-neutral, inclusive textbook content, or the impact of gender-neutral, inclusive student roles, and leadership.

4) The impact female or male school leadership can have on supporting the implementation of gender responsive and inclusive education approaches

This research could look at how female school leaders have supported approaches which are gender transformational and lead to progress in gender equality at individual, classroom, and school level. This could explore the rates of change seen in response to the implementation of gender responsive and inclusive training and identify which areas of support lead to sustained change in attitudes, behaviours, and ultimately learning outcomes within the schools. Conversely, in contexts where there is less male representation as teachers and school leaders, research could focus on the impact of having male role models.

5) Support to teachers, school leadership, and management structures to change cultures in a school to one that prioritizes student safety and safeguarding systems

While context in every school matters, core trainings, support, and guidance are needed for school management and leadership to address violence in schools. This research could explore the essential areas of support needed and those which are successful in changing attitudes and cultures to one of safeguarding and inclusivity and the ways in which they could be brought to scale. This research could look at the changes school systems have made in order to highlight and prioritize student safety, as well as looking at the support which has had a direct impact on a reduction in cases of violence, while still prioritizing the reporting and increased transparency around these mechanisms.

6) Identifying elements of life skills and SRHR education that are most impactful in reducing instances of violence and addressing power dynamics which can lead to violence

While evidence suggests a correlation between the successful delivery of a CSE curriculum and a reduction in cases of GBV, this has not been adequately explored and remains a gap. This area of research could identify the focus of SRHR education, the content, and the delivery modalities which have the greatest impact on violence prevention. The adaptations needed in content for

different ages and genders should be explored to identify essential content which should be delivered at all levels to unpack harmful norms which lead to gender based violence. The support teachers need in the delivery of this content should also be explored to understand the success factors and to provide strategies for how an individuals' own biases are addressed in order to be able to deliver gender transformative content in the most impactful way possible.

7) Mechanisms that are most effective in providing PSS for marginalized groups (girls, boys, children with disabilities, LGBTQI+ community)

Children and young people who have experienced trauma require additional support within schools, including those who have experienced school-based violence and those who have experienced violence at home or due to impacts of conflict in their environments. Trained counsellors are needed for school settings, along with training and toolkits for teachers and other staff to help identify trauma and respond to the mental health needs – amongst students and amongst their own colleague groups.

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