

REGIONAL BUREAU FOR EAST, HORN OF AFRICA AND GREAT LAKES APRIL-JUNE 2024



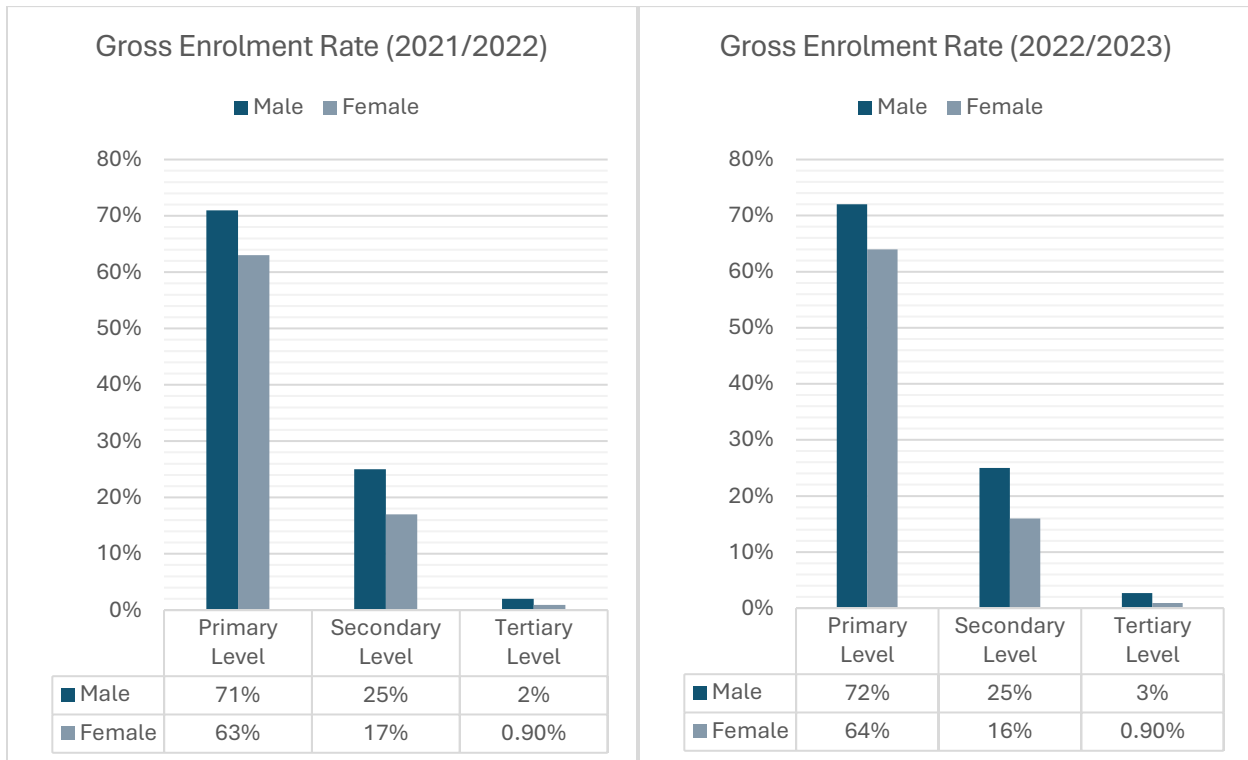
12-year-old Nyechoth holding one of her drawings. She aspires to be a famous artist. Education cannot Wait, UNHCR and UNHCR's Primary School education partner, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) were able to renovate schools and construct latrines in the recently reopened Ifo2 integrated settlement, Kenya, to accommodate new arrivals from Somalia and South Sudan. ©UNHCR/Mohamed Maalim

Investing in Refugee Girls' Education: Why it Matters

It is [estimated](#) that globally, 129 million girls are out of school and only 49 per cent of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education. Parity is even worse in secondary school, as 42 per cent of countries have achieved gender parity in lower secondary education and only 24 per cent have achieved parity in upper secondary education.

The situation is worse for girls living in crisis affected contexts as 54 per cent of those who are not in formal education worldwide are living in crisis-affected countries. The latest available [data](#) on refugee education shows that for the countries that provided gender disaggregated data, the average primary enrolment rates for males stood at 63 per cent, while the rate for females was at 61 per cent. At secondary level, the

corresponding figures were 36 per cent and 35 per cent. While these figures suggest an overall gender parity at the global level, in the East and Horn of Africa, Great Lakes (EHAGL) region, gender disparity is evident from the primary education level onwards.



Country	Primary			Secondary			Tertiary		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Burundi	73%	73%	73%	61%	56%	59%	1.5%	0.8%	1.2%
Djibouti	64%	62%	63%	51%	41%	46%	3.3%	1.0%	2.3%
Ethiopia	58%	44%	51%	21%	7%	15%	3.6%	0.3%	2.2%
Kenya	95%	78%	87%	70%	47%	59%	9.9%	2.7%	6.6%
Rwanda	118%	120%	119%	75%	66%	70%	4.0%	3.1%	8.3%
Somalia	84%	83%	83%	35%	29%	32%	5%	2.3%	3.6%
South Sudan	60%	54%	57%	22%	13%	18%	1.1%	0.7%	0.9%
Sudan*	30%	28%	29%	-	-	-	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%
Tanzania	141%	136%	138%	46%	36%	41%	0.8%	0.3%	0.6%
Uganda	100%	91%	96%	13%	7%	10%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%
Total	72%	64%	68%	25%	16%	21%	2.6%	1.0%	2.1%

* Given the ongoing crisis, enrolment data for secondary education is not available

While the gender gap remained unchanged at the primary level from the 2021/2022 to the 2022/2023 academic year, it has widened at the secondary and tertiary levels. The gap is particularly stark in Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan. There are multiple reasons for this gender gap. For instance, harmful gender norms limit girls and young women to domestic and reproductive roles. Additionally, conflict and instability affect more girls than boys, as they exacerbate pre-existing patterns of discrimination against women and girls, exposing them to heightened risks of violations of their human rights, including the right to education. A major obstacle faced by both refugee boys and girls attending school is cost, with refugee girls often at an even greater disadvantage in terms of “opportunity costs” – losses in income and domestic duties. In the event a refugee family has limited resources and must choose which siblings can continue with their education, boys are often prioritized as they are perceived to have greater future earning potential. This dynamic is highlighted in the 2018 UNHCR Education Report, “[Her turn](#)” focusing on girls' education.

Enabling refugee girls to gain access to quality education requires action right across the board – from households and communities to national education ministries and development/humanitarian actors.

Education enhances refugee girls' self-reliance and resilience, creating durable long-lasting solutions and it is associated with greater economic, social, and political benefits. We can achieve the greatest protection and social equity results for women and girls through education. If every girl worldwide received 12 years of quality education, the lifetime [earnings](#) of women could increase by \$15 trillion to \$30 trillion globally. Women with primary education only earn 14 percent to 19 percent more than women with no education at all while those with secondary education earn almost twice as much.

Education is also protective. It reduces girls' vulnerability to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, and child marriage. Girls' education has positive intergenerational effects as it increases the likelihood of schooling for the next generation. Furthermore, it equips them with knowledge, skills and confidence. It empowers girls to make informed decisions about their lives, health and future. When refugee girls receive an education, they gain agency and a voice in their communities.

Unfortunately, limited funding and crisis affecting the region may disproportionately affect girls' education, putting the hard-won gains achieved over the past few years at risk. Education for girls needs to be adequately protected.

COUNTRY UPDATES

KENYA: Unlocking the Potential of Refugee Girls Through Education

Promoting equitable access to education for refugee girls in Kenya continues to be a significant challenge, particularly at secondary and post-secondary education levels. In UNHCR managed schools in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps, there are some 145,000 refugee students enrolled in Basic Education institutions, of which 56 per cent are boys and 44 per cent are girls.

Whilst the percentage of girls' enrolment stands at 42 per cent at the primary level, it drops sharply to 34 per cent at the secondary education level. The low transition rate of girls from primary to secondary education was also evident in a new scholarship programme (launched in 2023) for refugee student to attend public secondary schools in Kenya this year, among the selected beneficiaries, girls made up only 36 per cent.

Access to post-secondary education for girls narrows even further – among 612 DAFI refugee scholarship students studying at Kenyan universities, only 27 per cent are women.



Nyater, plans to pursue further studies and a career as a doctor when she completes her secondary education. She studies at the laboratory during her spare time to catch up on her classes ©UNHCR/Pauline Omagwa

A recent Gender Responsive Education Assessment in Kakuma by UNHCR's secondary education implementing partner, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) ([Breaking Down Barriers: Increasing Girls' Access to and Completion of Secondary Education in Kakuma Refugee Camp](#)), noted that among many benefits, secondary education is fundamentally protective for girls, leading to increase in health, nutrition and wellbeing and decreasing the risk of early marriage and pregnancy. The report highlights several demand side barriers, including poverty and opportunity cost of secondary education, early marriage and unplanned pregnancies, household chores, low prioritisation of girls' education and limited role models of educated women in the community.

However, as the JRS report finds, insufficient investment in quality secondary education services is also a critical factor in supporting girls to complete basic education and continue to post-secondary opportunities. Reflecting the asymmetrical prioritisation of primary over secondary education, Kakuma camp has 21 primary schools and only seven secondary schools, which are extremely overcrowded with an average teacher-pupil ratio of 1:120.

Insufficient teaching and learning materials, as well as limited supply of qualified teachers results in attrition and low learning outcomes for both girls and boys. Only 2.7 per cent of secondary examination candidates in 2023 scored a C+ or above, the minimum score for entry to Kenyan university programmes.

Whilst continued sensitization of the community on the value and importance of girls' education is needed to address demand side barriers, a focus on advocacy among donors, partners, and government authorities on the need for higher levels of investment in secondary education for refugees and other marginalised children is essential. Additional support in this area will be even more relevant for the Kenya operation as we adjust to demanding education reforms in junior and senior secondary education in the coming years.

ETHIOPIA: Baby Care Unit Facilities to Enhance Refugee Girls' Enrolment and Retention in Secondary Education in Gambella

As of June 2024, Ethiopia was home to 1,064,587 refugees and asylum seekers. Among them, Gambella Regional State hosts the largest refugee population in the country, with approximately 36 per cent (387,211) of refugees and asylum seekers residing in this region.

Secondary education for refugees plays a pivotal role in safeguarding refugee youth, particularly adolescent girls. By equipping them with relevant knowledge and skills, it empowers them to be self-reliant, build resilience for lasting solutions and foster social cohesion within their communities and with the host communities. However, girls' participation in education, especially in upper primary and secondary schools, faces significant challenges. These obstacles include early marriage, economic vulnerabilities within families, lack of targeted support, and the absence of safe and appropriate care for teenage mothers and their children while attending classes. Efforts to address these barriers are crucial in ensuring equitable access to education for all, regardless of their circumstances.

In August 2022, a study revealed that a significant number of refugee girls in Gambella were unable to proceed with their secondary education due to the challenges of early motherhood. To address this, UNHCR initiated a project to establish baby care centres aimed at improving the enrolment and continuation of education for these young mothers.

The project began at a secondary school in the Kule refugee camp and was later extended to Tierkidi, Ngunyyiel, and Jewi camps. The investment facilitated the construction of new centres, provision of stimulating play materials for the children, and hiring of dedicated caregivers from within the refugee community. These centres have become havens ensuring the safety and well-being of the children and granting their mothers the peace of mind to focus on their studies.

In the refugee camps equipped with baby care units, the re-enrolment of teenage mothers has witnessed a significant increase. This positive trend has had a ripple effect on overall girls' school enrolment and attendance. Notably, the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for girls has risen from 6.8 per cent in the 2021/2022 academic year to 7.4 per cent in the 2022/2023 academic year.

Beyond the numbers, this initiative has acted as a catalyst for change in reshaping the narrative surrounding girls' education within these communities. To further enhance this commendable practice, robust awareness campaigns are actively fostering a shift in community attitudes toward girls' education and promoting gender equity in educational opportunities. These campaigns emphasize child rights and protection, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all students.

Moreover, targeted interventions, such as providing dignity kits to female students and training teachers in gender-sensitive pedagogy, contribute to a multi-faceted approach. This holistic strategy ensures that girls, including teenage mothers, can access education and paves the way for a more inclusive and equitable future for refugee children.

RWANDA: Schools of Excellence Transforming Life



Desange Umutoni, 19, currently in her last year of high school. ©UNHCR/Eric Didier Karinganire

Born in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Desange Umutoni was just a young child when she and her family were forced to flee the violence and instability in their home country in 2013. They sought refuge at Mugombwa refugee camp in Rwanda where they have been living ever since.

Desange is now 19 and is currently in her last year of high school studying Physics, Chemistry and Biology. She was among the best-performing students in the ordinary level of secondary education thus was admitted to one of the schools of excellence in Rwanda.

She is one of several refugee children who are pursuing their dreams through invaluable support from Usine Foundation. Through this partnership, UNHCR worked with World Vision International to cover the costs of fees through scholarships to schools of excellence.

In addition, educational support has involved the provision of scholastic materials, school uniforms and support to refugee children, ensuring their access to schools tailored to accommodate those with special needs and disabilities.

“My friend got pregnant at a young age, dropped out of school, and struggled to raise her baby,” Desange recalls. “Something kept bouncing back into my mind that my friend would have a better future if she continued her studies. This pushed me to be responsible and stick to my studies.” Desange is grateful for the support that keeps her in school not only to prepare for a brighter future but also to become an inspiration to others. She believes that she is now on the right course.

However, as funding declines, UNHCR is unable to support more refugee children to attend schools of excellence. This academic year, for instance, 803 refugee students were identified as eligible to attend national schools of excellence. Unfortunately, only 250 scholarship places – around 31 percent – were available through Impact Hope, a national non-governmental organization (NGO). The remaining 553 refugee students continued their education in schools near camps due to lack of funding to attend the schools of excellence.

Currently, females constitute 49 per cent of the 43,806 refugees attending schools at different levels. An estimated 550 (255 female) refugees are studying at universities in Rwanda being sponsored by various organizations. Of these, 144 are supported by UNHCR’s DAFI Scholarship programme – largely funded by German Government – to continue their tertiary education. Other organizations and universities including Kepler, University of Rwanda/Mastercard Foundation, Impact Hope, Mondiant Initiative Maison Shalom and GIZ are supporting higher education and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA) scholarships programme.

Desange's journey is a testament to the power of education and resilience of refugees. At her school of excellence, every student who graduated last year gained admission to a university. Desange is optimistic about following a similar path with aspiration to attend university and pursue a degree in medicine.

Sudan: Expanding Access to Education to Mitigate Gender-based Violence (GBV).

As of June 2024, 7.1 million persons had been displaced within Sudan due to the conflict that started in April 2023. Of these, 219,503 were refugees and asylum seekers in Sudan of various nationalities including South Sudanese, Ethiopians and Eritreans. Some 2 million refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees have fled to Egypt, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Chad, Libya, South Sudan, and Uganda. 78 per cent of refugees are women and children and as highlighted in the recent [UNHCR Protection brief on Gender-based violence \(GBV\)](#) risks of GBV have severely increased for forcibly displaced women and girls primarily in Sudan as well as in neighbouring host countries.

The security situation in Sudan remains highly volatile, characterized by ongoing armed conflict, criminal activities and communal tensions. Reports of numerous incidents of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by parties to the conflict, sexual slavery and trafficking, child and forced marriage, and the recruitment of boys by armed forces have increased since the onset of the violence. Furthermore, the rainy season has exacerbated the conditions for those displaced by the conflict.



A group of women carry their belongings across muddy ground at a gathering site for internally displaced people near Kassala, Sudan. The rainy season is now causing severe flooding in Sudan, worsening conditions for those displaced by the war. ©UNHCR/Aymen Alfadil

Conflict and food insecurity coupled with diminished livelihood options have dramatic consequences on women and girls, heightening the risks of intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking in person and resorting to harmful coping mechanisms. These coping mechanisms include selling household assets, reducing the quantity and nutritional value of meals, begging, resorting to the sale or exchange of sex, child and forced marriage, borrowing accrual of debt from traders, and withdrawing children from school to engage in child labour to support income-generating activities for the family.

Access to education plays a pivotal role in preventing GBV in emergency contexts. Education serves as a powerful tool for empowerment, providing individuals, especially women and girls, with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand their rights and advocate for themselves. In crises, the structures that protect against GBV can be weakened or lost. Educational programs help rebuild these protective structures by promoting gender equality and offering a safe space for children and young people, shielding them from the risks of exploitation and abuse that are heightened during emergencies.

The severe underfunding across sectors of the refugee response continues creating gaps in assistance and service delivery. Currently, the Refugee Response Plan for the Sudan Situation is funded at 20 per cent. Despite limited resources, UNHCR continues to ensure that coordination mechanisms and referral pathways for GBV are in place in refugee settings and work with partners toward expanding access to education both in Sudan and neighboring countries.

UGANDA: Empowering Girls Through Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)



A Senior Woman Teacher (SWT) leading a training session on Menstruation Hygiene Management (MHM) at Palorinya Refugee Settlement. ©Windle International Uganda (WIU)/Otim Richard.

In Obongi district, Uganda, inadequate information around menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and limited availability of sanitary pads for girls adversely affect their educational opportunities.

Upon reaching puberty, girls face societal pressures related to marriage and childbearing.

Meanwhile, schools exacerbate the situation by isolating menstruating girls from their peers. Unfortunately, many girls drop out of school due to the shame and discomfort associated with menstruation.

In some instances, this cycle of marginalization and missed opportunities also leads to sexual exploitation and forced marriages. However, this is changing with the support of UNHCR and [Windle International Uganda](#). The project gathered Senior Women Teachers (SWT) and selected adolescent girls from the schools for training on Menstruation Hygiene Management. Boys were actively engaged in the process, challenging traditional gender norms and fostering a more inclusive environment.

During the sessions, participants learned about menstrual hygiene practices and were taught how to make reusable sanitary pads using locally available materials. The project also distributed materials such as hand needles, pins, rulers, leak proof materials and pair of scissors to enable the SWTs to train adolescent girls and female youth as well as boys on MHM including making reusable sanitary pads.

“From our school, 15 girls and 5 boys were first trained and then later more groups were brought

in until majority of the school population was taken through MHM training,” Alioru Berta, one of the senior woman teachers involved in the project revealed. As awareness spread, parents also began supporting their daughters, encouraging them to prioritize their health and education.

“The impact has been transformative. Teenage pregnancies and early marriages have greatly declined in the community, while school retention rates have soared. Girls feel empowered to openly discuss menstruation and support one another, breaking the silence that had once masked their experiences. Even beyond the classroom, the knowledge has spread, reaching communities and refugee settlements, which

have become a catalyst for change,” Berta noted. She added, “I appreciate the collaborative efforts of UNHCR, and Windle International Uganda. Menstrual Hygiene Management is now a priority in schools and communities. The School Management Committee and Parent Teachers’ Association have allocated a budget to cater for the Menstruation Hygiene Management and issues that pertain to the welfare of the girls and female youth creating a ripple effect of positive change.”

In Palorinya Refugee settlement, 17,429 girls benefited from the MHM training subsequently escalating the knowledge to other youth in schools and community.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Mastercard Foundation: \$25M to Support Sudanese Women and Girls

On 20 June, World Refugee Day, Mastercard Foundation announced a \$25M donation to UNHCR to support education, livelihoods, and economic inclusion activities targeting Sudanese youth affected by the conflict that erupted in April 2023. The donation will support the following activities in Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda with a target to benefit 70 per cent girls and women:

- Accelerate access to secondary and higher education, particularly for girls and young women by re-opening schools, providing educational materials, training, and support for teachers. The programme will help young people to re-enter higher education and strengthens UNHCR’s education coordination and advocacy to include refugees and displaced students in national education systems.
- Deliver livelihood and economic inclusion programs by supporting livelihood assessment needs, tertiary and vocational skills training.
- Strengthen safeguarding and protect women and girls from gender-based violence.
- Promote entrepreneurship through access to finance, mentorship, and grants for youth and women-led enterprises.



This significant donation is part of the wider Mastercard Foundation’s [Young Africa Works strategy](#) that seeks to enable 30 million young people, including 2.5 million refugees and displaced persons, to access dignified and fulfilling work by 2030. Mastercard Foundation is deploying more than \$360 million across all its programmes to support refugees.

Refugee Education Discussed During The 1st African Union Pan-African Conference on Girls' Education

Between 2-5 July, the African Union Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, through its specialized Office, the [African Union CIEFFA](#), convened all key stakeholders working at the intersections of gender equality, education, and social protection in Addis Ababa for the **1st African Union Pan-African Conference “Prioritizing Girls and Women’s Education: A strategy for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa”**.

The conference was organized in the wake of the UN Transforming Education Summit, the AU Theme of Year 2024 [“Educate an African fit for the 21st Century – Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa”](#), as well as the [Dakar Declaration](#) under the theme “Assessing Learning Losses to Embrace Learning Recovery for African Girls” adopted in Senegal in June 2022.

The conference was attended by over 400 participants, including ministers and high-level government officials, representatives from UN agencies, INGOs, CBOs and development partners. Over the four days they discussed and collectively evaluated the status of girls’ and women’s education in Africa, galvanizing support for financing, and strengthening advocacy towards high-level adoption of gender transformative and inclusive policies and frameworks.

The needs of refugee education were discussed during the dedicated side event “Resilience and Learning: addressing the educational needs of refugee girls in emergency settings and climate change” co-organised by the African Union Commission, Bakhita Partnership for Education, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Plan International and the Secondary Education Working Group (SEWG).

The side event explored and advocated for effective educational strategies and policies that address the specific needs of refugee girls in emergency and climate-vulnerable areas. The event also highlighted the challenges adolescent girls face in accessing education in refugee and displacements contexts, raised awareness of the Sudan crisis, and resulting impacts on the region and on girls’ education, and discussed interventions that work to support girls’ access to inclusive, quality, gender responsive, and relevant education in refugee and displacement contexts.

At the side event we were joined by Aker Chan Deng (female refugee teacher from South Sudan), Wudasie Tilahun (Youth Advisory Panel Board Member and Secretariat, Plan International Ethiopia), Misrak Mohammed (Head of Women and Children Service, Refugee and Returnee Service Ethiopia), Mekdelawit Tadesse (Child Protection Case Worker, JRS Ethiopia), Parfait Fouda (Regional Education Coordinator, JRS West Africa and the Great Lakes Region), Hiwotie Simachew (Deputy Country Director - Humanitarian, Plan International Ethiopia), Abdulahi Adem (Education in Emergencies Specialist, Plan International Sudan) and Lynn Chinene (Regional Program Manager, Plan International Zambia).

FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

Documentary: Her Education, Our Future: International Women’s Day 2024, produced by CGTN and UNESCO (watch full video [here](#) – approx. 50 min)

Global Education Monitoring Report Team, UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, #HerEducationOurFuture: Investing in girls’ and women’s education: a smart investment to accelerate development; the latest facts on gender equality in education, March 2024 ([here](#))

Global report on teachers: addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession, UNESCO – International Task Force on Teacher for Education, February 2024 ([here](#))

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, Mind the Gap 3: Equity and Inclusion in and through Girls' Education in Crisis. INEE, August 2023 ([here](#))

J: Concina, G. Drzewiecki, J. & the JRS Kenya & Eastern African Regional office teams, Breaking Down Barriers: Increasing Girls' Access to and Completion of Secondary Education in Kakuma Refugee Camp. Jesuit Refugee Service – JRS, March 2024 ([here](#))

Learning Brief – March 2024 Good Practices on Gender & Gender-Based Violence Risk Mitigation Integration by Education Clusters, Global Education Cluster and Education Cannot Wait, March 2024 ([here](#))
Nicolai, S., Sarwar, M.B. and Kosbar, Y. Digitally powered 'learning to earning' for displaced young people and adolescent girls and young women, London: ODI, 2023 ([here](#))

Plan International, Education Uninterrupted, Compendium of promising practices supporting gender transformative, inclusive, quality education in all contexts, May 2024 ([here](#))

Plan International, Real Choices, Real Choices Real Lives: Climate Change and Girls' Education, Insights from Benin, Togo and Uganda, 2024 ([here](#))

Raja Bentaouet Kattan, Myra Murad Khan, Girls' education in conflict is most at risk: Here's how to reach them, World Bank Blogs, March 2024 ([here](#))

Salem, H. Drzewiecki, J. & Concina, G., Accelerate with Care: Towards Gender-Responsive Secondary Accelerated Education, Jesuit Refugee Service and Secondary Education Working Group, December 2023 ([here](#))

UNICEF, Delivering with and for adolescent girls, Five game-changing priorities, March 2024 ([here](#))

Wodon, Q., C. Male, and A. Onagoruwa, Educating Girls, and Ending Child Marriage in Africa: Investment Case and the Role of Teachers and School Leaders, IICBA Study 2024-2. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa, January 2024 ([here](#))

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