

PRIORITÉ À L'ÉGALITÉ  
GENDER AT THE  
CENTRE

# GENDER AT THE CENTRE INITIATIVE (GCI) BRIEFING NOTE | 2021



## WHAT IS THE GENDER AT THE CENTRE INITIATIVE?

Launched in July 2019, the Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI) was developed by the G7 Ministers of Education and Development in collaboration with multilateral and civil society organizations committed to advancing gender equality in education. GCI champions the leadership of education ministries and other national actors to advance gender equality in education.

The GCI approach is rooted in gender-responsive education sector planning (GRESP), which has the goal of embedding gender equality in the DNA of national education systems. The GRESP method puts in place policies and strategies to tackle gender disparities and roadblocks in education and ensures the availability of the required resources, oversight and accountability to make this happen. Progress in this field helps countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5 and meet the gender targets of the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa.

Between 2020 and 2023, GCI is being implemented in eight pilot countries in Africa—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone—by a multi-stakeholder partnership known as the GCI Alliance. The GCI Alliance is composed of the ministries of education of the eight countries, a CSO consortium<sup>1</sup>, G7 donors<sup>2</sup> and multilateral agencies.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: map of the GCI countries**



1 The CSO consortium is composed of the Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and Plan International.

2 The European Union, France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.

3 The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), IIEP-UNESCO, UNESCO, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and UNICEF.

GCI mobilizes expertise and other resources for country-owned, gender-responsive education sector interventions, strategies and plans. GCI strives to provide opportunities for knowledge generation and for sharing between countries and partners around advancing gender equality in education to support learning and application in various settings.

### Objectives of GCI

- Implement systematic approaches to achieve gender-responsive education systems.
- Facilitate cross-sectoral policy dialogue and coordination among government ministries.
- Strengthen gender-responsive budgeting and policies in education.
- Build political and public support for policies and strategies to advance gender equality in education.
- Improve the quality, availability and use of gender-disaggregated data and evidence.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation frameworks to better track progress.



A girl raises her hand to answer her teacher's question during class in Kono district, Sierra Leone. ©UNICEF/UNI150767/Asselin



## THE STATUS OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN THE GCI PILOT COUNTRIES

Advancing gender equality in education is a priority in many regions, including sub-Saharan Africa. Issues of poverty, conflict, gender-based violence, disability and poor-quality education intersect with gender and create different disadvantages for girls and boys. Entrenched social and gender norms—which also affect boys and men—limit the expectations for and agency of women and girls in particular and impact both educational attainment and professional aspirations.<sup>4</sup> These norms continue to drive disparities in investments in education for girls, particularly after primary school, and perpetuate discriminatory practices in societies, schools and across education systems and education institutions. Closing gender gaps in education can unlock progress in gender equality more broadly, which will benefit not only women and girls, but all of society, including men and boys.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 2: Millions of girls (and boys) are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa**



An estimated **32.6 million girls** and **27.8 million boys** of primary and lower secondary school age are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa.

(UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019)

In sub-Saharan Africa, an estimated **9 million girls** between the ages of **6 and 11** will never attend school, compared to **6 million boys**.

(UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019)

Pedagogy in sub-Saharan Africa, as in other parts of the world, is often gender-blind, which because it disregards issues of gender can be damaging to girls as well as boys. Teachers and education support staff may not have sufficient or appropriate training, nor the resources and support, needed to actively transform gender norms in school settings. Teaching and learning materials can also themselves reinforce negative gender stereotypes.



Girls attending class in Dori, Burkina Faso, 2020.  
©UNICEF/UNI394539/Dejongh

**“PROMOTING GIRLS’  
EDUCATION DOESN’T JUST  
MEAN SCHOOLING. IT  
MEANS SCHOOLING AND  
EMPOWERMENT.”**

Houraye M. Anne, Forum for African Women Educationalists  
(FAWE)

4 Yotebieng, K. (Forthcoming). “What we know (and do not know) about persistent social norms that serve as barriers to girls’ access, participation and achievement in education in eight sub-Saharan African countries.”

5 Wodon, Q., C. Montenegro, H. Nguyen, and A. Onagoruwa, “Missed Opportunities: The High Cost of Not Educating Girls.” The Cost of Not Educating Girls Notes Series. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

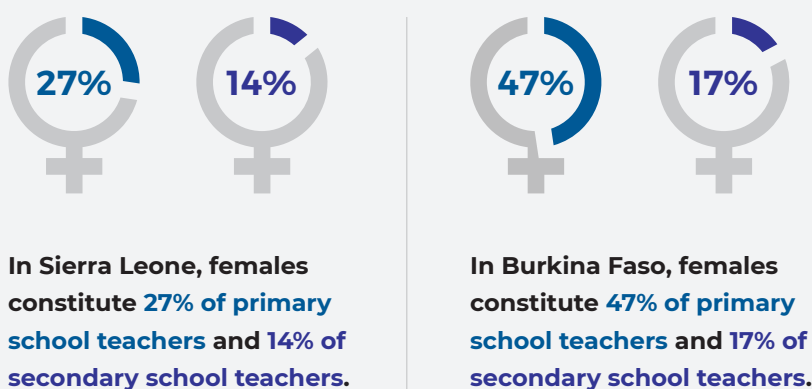
School environments may also fail to address gender-specific and inclusion needs. This includes non-segregated WASH facilities, lack of products and facilities for menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and poorly lit pathways and grounds. School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is a major obstacle to the advancement of gender equality. SRGBV has long-lasting consequences on the health and wellbeing of girls and boys and their ability to learn and thrive in school. Whilst school environments are too often the site of such violence, education also has a critical role in violence prevention and response.<sup>6</sup>

**“MENSTRUATION IS ANOTHER BARRIER THAT IS LIMITING GIRLS’ ACCESS TO EDUCATION. GIRLS ARE NOT BEING TAUGHT ABOUT THEIR MENSTRUAL CYCLE AND ARE NOT PROVIDED WITH MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS, AND BECAUSE OF THIS THEY TEND TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL.”**

-Hawa, Africa Girls Empathy and Plan International Youth Advocate, Sierra Leone

In numerous countries across the sub-Saharan region, there are fewer female teachers in comparison to male teachers, and this gender disparity widens at secondary and tertiary levels. Gender dynamics also play a role inside many ministries of education, where gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting are often not systematized.

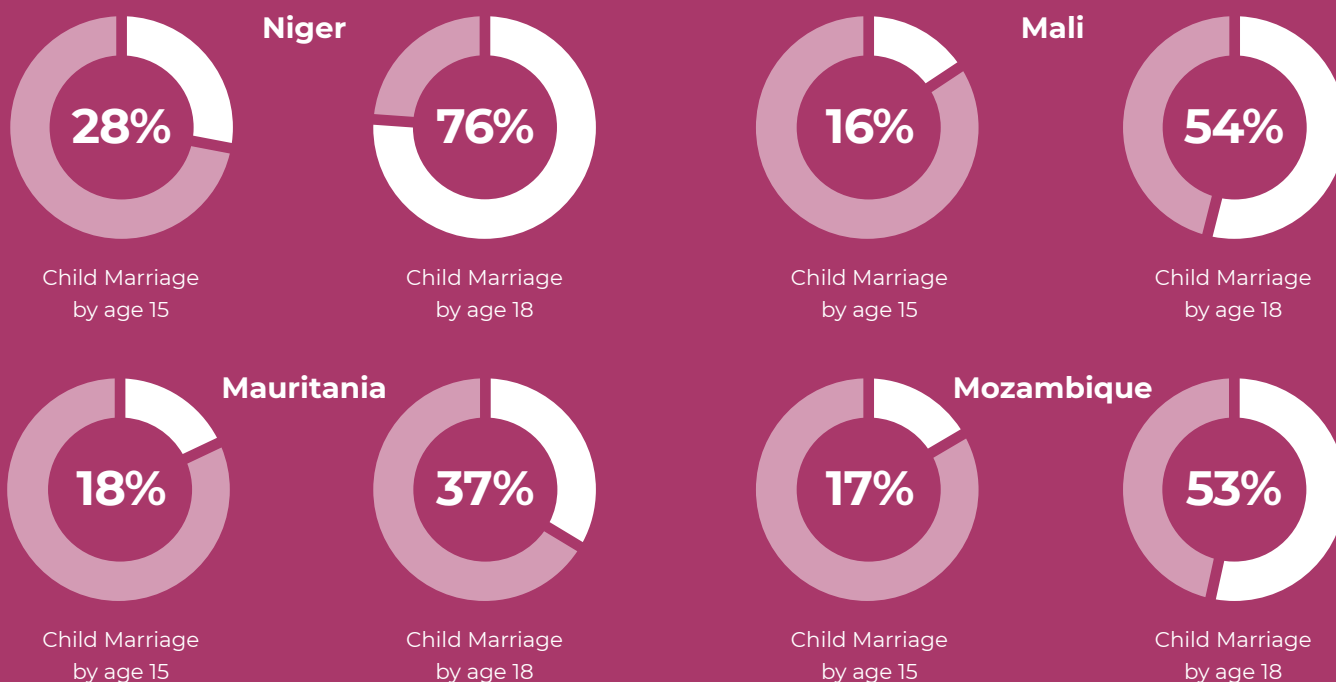
**Figure 3: Percentage of female teachers in primary schools vs. secondary schools in selected countries<sup>7</sup>**



While child marriage and early pregnancy remain persistent barriers to girls’ education in sub-Saharan Africa, research suggests that age of marriage is rising throughout the region.<sup>8</sup> In addition, 2020 has seen a wave of countries overturning bans on pregnant girls attending school.<sup>9</sup> This sets a new precedent for transforming the social and cultural norms that still often curtail girls’ education after marriage or pregnancy.<sup>10</sup>

6 [UNGEI \(2019\). “A whole school approach to prevent school related gender-based violence”](#). UNGEI, New York.  
 7 Yotebieng, K. (Forthcoming) “What we know (and do not know) about persistent social norms that serve as barriers to girls’ access, participation, and achievement in education in eight sub-Saharan African countries.” UNGEI, New York.  
 8 [Koski, A., S. Clark and A. Nandi \(2017\). “Has Child Marriage Declined in sub-Saharan Africa? An Analysis of Trends in 31 Countries.”](#) Population and Development Review.  
 9 [British Broadcasting Corporation \(2020\). “Sierra Leone overturns ban on pregnant schoolgirls.” Reuters \(2020\). “Zimbabwe makes it illegal for schools to expel pregnant girls.”](#)  
 10 Yotebieng, K., op. cit.

Figure 4: Child marriage prevalence rates in selected countries



Source: Girls Not Brides

Education is a fundamental human right. Across the sub-Saharan region, closing gender gaps in education will unlock progress in securing learners' individual rights. Achieving gender equality in education will also advance progress for health outcomes, peacebuilding, the economy and gender equality globally.<sup>11</sup> To achieve this goal, education systems must be gender-responsive by design. Education sector planning (ESP) presents a critical opportunity to ensure gender equality is at the heart of national education systems. Gender-responsive education sector planning (GRESP) is a vehicle to achieve this, laying the foundations for system-wide change and more gender-equal outcomes in and through education.<sup>12</sup>

**“[GRESP] IS REALLY ABOUT GETTING TO THE ROOT OF WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO CHANGE, UNPEELING THE DIFFERENT LAYERS OF GENDER INEQUALITY, AND THEN BUILDING BACK UP OUR STRATEGY FOR CHANGE.”**

-Yona Nestel, Plan International

<sup>11</sup> Wodon, Q., op. cit..

<sup>12</sup> UNGEI, GPE (2019). “Gender-Responsive Education Sector Planning: A pathway to gender equality in education.” UNGEI, New York.

# FLAGSHIP ACTIVITIES OF THE GENDER AT THE CENTRE INITIATIVE

## Covid-19 response

A considerable part of the inception and implementation phases of GCI to date took place against the backdrop of the global Covid-19 pandemic, which affected GCI and GCI Alliance members in multiple ways. Mitigation strategies included moving internal consultations and planned face-to-face events to online formats and postponing some programming activities to a later date. To help tailor the work of GCI learning exchanges, capacity development and technical support in the pandemic context, UNGEI surveyed GCI members to gather information on the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on gender in education. The results of the survey informed the development of several tools to assist and guide stakeholders during this period, including:

- ✓ a common messaging framework, [Putting Gender at the Forefront of the COVID-19 Education Response](#);
- ✓ an UNGEI policy brief, [Strengthening efforts to prevent and respond to school-related gender-based violence as schools reopen](#); and
- ✓ a guide, [Building back equal – Girls back to school guide](#) (also available in French and Spanish), prepared by GCI members (Plan International, UNESCO, UNGEI and UNICEF) together with the Malala Fund.

The GCI Alliance also conducted several Covid-related online events, including:

- ✓ IIEP-UNESCO hosted a 'Knowledge platform on planning and managing education in the context of Covid-19' to allow for reflections on how education systems responded, and are still responding, to disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in different areas, including [gender equality](#), and offering support and [responses](#) as close as possible to the realities experienced by UNESCO country members;
- ✓ UNGEI hosted a webinar on [Covid-19 and girls with disabilities: a safe, inclusive return to school](#) and co-organized a [pan-African launch event on the Build back equal: Girls back to school guide](#) (in English, French, Arabic and Portuguese); and
- ✓ UNGEI produced a [video amplifying the voices of youth activists](#) from the GCI pilot countries and civil society organizations, which was screened during the pan-African launch event on the Build back equal: Girls back to school guide.



## Training of Facilitators in Gender-Responsive Education Sector Planning

In collaboration with Gender at Work (G@W), UNGEI designed and delivered a 'Training of Facilitators in Gender-Responsive Education Sector Planning' course in December 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya. 25 participants (both men and women) attended the five-day workshop, including national staff from ANCEFA, FAWE and Plan International and from GCI's anglophone partner countries. Participants attended the workshop to learn about the Gender-Responsive Education Sector Planning (GRESP) approach and how to co-design and co-facilitate a GRESP workshop. The goal of a GRESP Workshop is to strengthen the commitment and capacity of Ministry of Education staff and members of the Local Education Group (LEG) to develop equitable and inclusive sector plans. The workshop is intended to clarify how to effectively integrate gender into Education Sector Analysis (ESA) and Planning (ESP).



Facilitators and participants of the Training of Facilitators in Gender-Responsive Education Sector Planning course in Nairobi, Kenya, 2019. ©UNGEI/Sarah Winfield

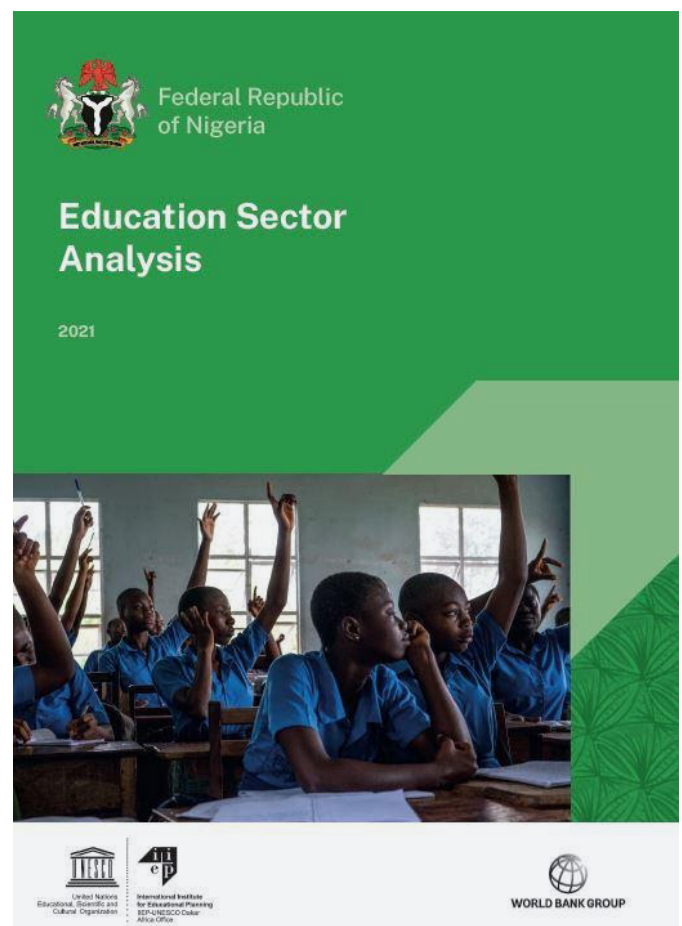
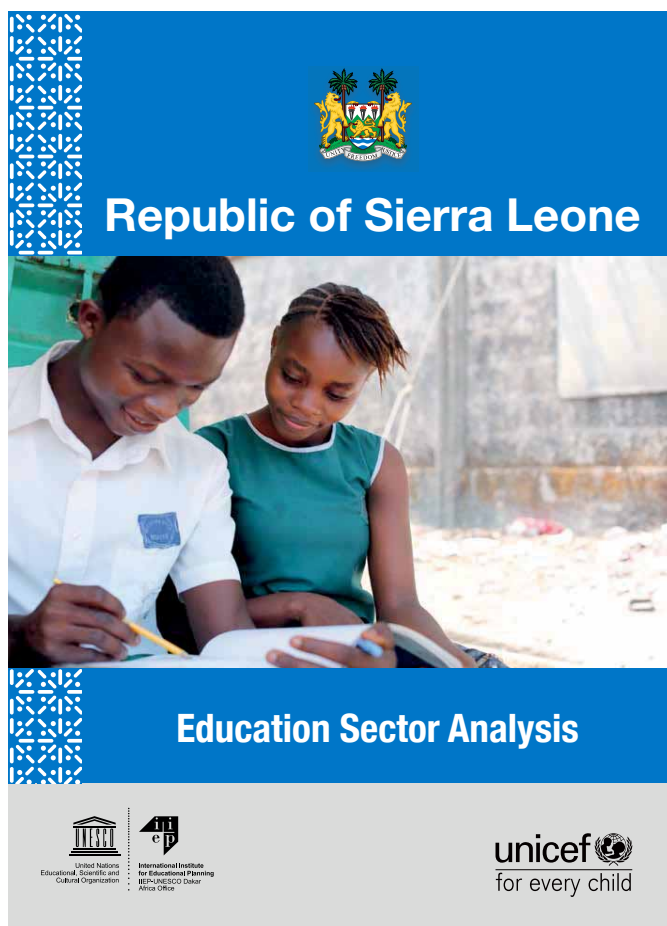
In December 2020, a series of online mentoring sessions for the workshop participants was launched, and UNGEI produced a comprehensive manual for facilitating GRESP workshops to support participants. In 2021, a 'Training of Facilitators in Gender-Responsive Education Sector Planning workshop' will be delivered to francophone members of GCI.



## Gender-responsive education sector analysis, education sector plans, operational plans and monitoring and evaluation processes

For IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2020 and beginning of 2021 were largely a period of preparatory dialogue with the GCI partner countries. This was to ensure that future support can be appropriately contextualized based on the specific priorities and needs of education ministries to mainstream gender equality in and through education in conjunction with other relevant ministries.

IIEP-UNESCO supported the Government of Sierra Leone to develop its [Education Sector Analysis](#) (ESA), which, for the first time, included a chapter devoted specifically to gender analysis. The analysis highlights where girls and boys do not share the same experience of and exposure to, or gain the same benefits from, education. The analysis further illustrates how girls and boys from different socio-economic backgrounds and along other key demographics do not equally have freedom to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. It looks at the multiple legal, social, economic and structural factors that impact which girls and which boys are the most marginalized and explores gender-equitable and gender-responsive measures being put in place in Sierra Leone.



In Nigeria, IIEP-UNESCO supported, in partnership with the World Bank, the federal government and three (decentralized level) states to analyse the education sector from a gender perspective. GCI experts formulated a gender analysis that was integrated into the ESA at federal and state levels. IIEP-UNESCO integrated gender as a cross-cutting theme throughout the ESA and dedicated a chapter to gender equality. The objective was to prepare an analysis of school and

non-school factors that impact gender equality, such as gender norms, the school and learning environment and the institutional and legal environment. In 2021, IIEP-UNESCO will support the Federal Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education in 36 states to strengthen their capacities on gender equality, support the implementation of sector and operational plans and respond to the priorities identified in the sector analyses at both the federal and state levels.

In 2021, IIEP will support Chad in its education planning process with a gender perspective. In Mauritania, IIEP will support the government to integrate gender equality in its education sector reform and the planning process. IIEP will strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of National Education of Mali in the planning and management of gender-sensitive education policies. In Niger, IIEP will support the Ministry of National Education to effectively implement the Education Sector Plan and the National Strategy for the Education and Training of Girls and Women. In Mozambique and Burkina Faso, policy dialogue with government and development partners will continue to support the governments to integrate gender in education policies and plans.

### **University on gender-responsive education sector planning**

From November 2020 to January 2021, IIEP-UNESCO Dakar launched the University on Gender Responsive Education Planning course online in French. The University equipped 38 education ministry executives and managers (including candidates from GCI's five francophone countries) with skills to better integrate gender into all stages of education planning. Education stakeholders were invited to assess the multidimensional factors that perpetuate gender inequalities in access to education, both in the classroom and after school. IIEP-UNESCO will deliver the Gender Responsive Education Planning course in English in 2021 and in Spanish and Portuguese in 2022.

**“GENDER EQUALITY IS IMPORTANT TO ME BECAUSE IT IS A WAY FOR A CHILD—A BOY OR A GIRL—TO GET OUT OF POVERTY. TO GIVE ALL CHILDREN PRIORITY, TO GIVE THEM EDUCATION, IS TO GIVE THEM A FUTURE. TO BLOCK A CHILD FROM THIS HAS NO LOGIC.”**

Issiaka M'bo Coulibaly, Head of Dioïla District School Planning and Statistics Unit, Mali

### **Community of practice for gender-responsive education planners and managers**

As a continuation of the University on Gender Responsive Education Planning online course in French, IIEP-UNESCO Dakar has planned a cohort project for the second semester of 2021. The Gender Responsive Education Planner project will strengthen the group dynamics created through the University and engage the alumni long-term, to create a tight-knit learning and networking community. The cohort project aims to address some of the challenges that training alone does not address, such as providing guidance on how to apply what has been learned in the workplace. The cohort project will focus on institutionalization of gender in education administrations (at the organizational and internal level) and the resistance that may arise from attempts to institutionalize gender in education policies.

## Policy and practice reports, guidance and events

In 2020, UNGEI commissioned a desk study to understand how persistent social norms serve as barriers to girls' education in GCI's eight pilot countries. The study is based on a review of recent reports by international organizations and a range of quantitative, mixed method and qualitative studies, mostly emanating from the eight countries.

In 2021, UNGEI, with Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE), published and [launched the EiE-GenKit](#), a core resource package on gender in education in emergencies. The EiE-GenKit provides education practitioners with practical guidance on how to make education in emergency interventions and programmes gender-responsive and inclusive.

**“INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY IN EIE PROGRAMMING IS JUST A QUESTION OF HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMMING. IT’S A QUESTION OF HIGH IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY, IT’S JUST THE SMART THING TO DO.”**

Nafissatou Faye, Senior Advisor Gender Equality, Plan International

In collaboration with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), UNGEI completed a new guide, titled “Gender-responsive Education Sector Planning in Situations Affected by Crisis.”<sup>13</sup> The guide supports education planners and practitioners to address gender issues systematically as they develop national education plans in situations affected by crisis.

IIEP-UNESCO Dakar is also conducting several research projects. Throughout these projects, resources and methodologies will be made available to actors to shed light on gender equality practices in education, facilitate understanding of the issues and challenges and assist in decision-making:

- a draft methodological guidebook for the integration of gender in analyses of education sectors;
- analyses on gender and education issues among displaced populations; and
- a research publication on gender norms, power dynamics and change management in partnership with FAWE and UNESCO.



A 6th grade teacher helps students during class in Nigeria, 2018. ©UNICEF/UN0269863/Knowles-Coursin

<sup>13</sup> The guide provides additional resources, information and thematic content on gender to complement the processes and approaches outlined in the [GPE-IIEP-UNESCO Guidelines for Transitional Education Plan Preparation](#) and the [GPE-UNGEI Guidance for Developing Gender-Responsive Education Sector Plans](#).



## Improved education sector enabling environment

As part of the efforts to improve coordination for gender equality in education through Local Education Groups (LEGs), UNGEI is working with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to integrate gender into GPE's Local Education Group (LEG) Self-Assessment Tool and to create a template for LEG Annual Reports.

As a first step towards supporting ministries of education in their leadership on cross-sectoral collaboration, UNGEI will provide them with an up-to-date mapping of cross-sectoral collaboration on gender equality in each country. UNGEI will then coordinate a reflection process with the Ministries of Education in the eight GCI pilot countries to design a cross-sectoral initiative in support of gender equality in education that will be implemented in 2022.

**For more news and updates on GCI:** In July 2021, UNGEI and IIEP-UNESCO Dakar will collaboratively compile and disseminate the first semi-annual GCI Newsletter. The newsletter will provide an overview of upcoming GCI programme activities and achievements, as well as updates from the GCI Alliance. To join the mailing list, contact: [gdiamond@ungei.org](mailto:gdiamond@ungei.org).



A teacher addresses girls during an English class in Borno State, Nigeria. ©UNICEF/UNI193723/Esiebo