



## PRESS RELEASE

# New global education goals must prioritize girls

## 100 million young women unable to read a single sentence, concludes UNESCO report

A serious gender imbalance in global education has left over 100 million young women in low and lower middle income countries unable to read a single sentence, and will prevent half of the 31 million girls out of school from ever enrolling. These are among the main findings of the Gender Summary of the latest Education for All Global Monitoring Report, published by UNESCO.

The Gender Summary, launched for International Women's Day in partnership with the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), calls for equity to be at the heart of new global development goals after 2015 so that every child has an equal chance of learning through quality education.

Despite some progress, in 2011 equal numbers of girls and boys were attending school in only 60% of countries at primary level and only 38% of countries at secondary level. Among low income countries, just 20% had achieved gender parity at the primary level, 10% at the lower secondary level and 8% at the upper secondary level.

Girls living in the Arab States are at a greater disadvantage: the share of females in the out-of-school population is 60 %, compared with 57% in South and West Asia and 54 % in sub-Saharan Africa.

On current trends, it is projected that only 70% of countries will have achieved parity in primary education by 2015, and 56% will have achieved parity in lower secondary education. Unless improvements are made, the poorest girls will achieve universal primary completion sixty years later than the richest boys. The new summary reiterates the need for progress in education to be more evenly spread between girls and boys if global education goals are to be achieved.

*"It is simply intolerable that girls are being left behind. For poor girls, education is one of the most powerful routes to a better future, helping them escape from a vicious cycle of poverty. Governments must ensure that there is equal access to education to address this shocking imbalance,"* said Irina Bokova, Director General, UNESCO.

The 2013/4 EFA Global Monitoring Report, *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all*, underlines that it is not enough for children just to enroll in school, they need to learn while there. Due to low quality education over the years, 175 million young people in low and lower middle income countries are unable to read a single sentence, of whom 61% are female. In South and West Asia, two out of three young people who cannot read are young women.

The Gender Summary demonstrates the importance of investing in girls' and women's education, not just for the individual, but for the whole of society. If all women had a primary and secondary education, child marriages and child mortality could fall by 49 % and 64 % respectively. With just primary education for all women, maternal deaths could be reduced by two-thirds. Educating women can help protect them from falling into poverty as well by helping them find work and reducing the gender wage gap.

*“Poor, rural girls are far less likely to be taught by female teachers who can provide them with a role model for their future and help encourage them to stay in school. To address this, governments must consider providing safe housing or financial benefits to encourage more female teachers to work in remote areas. Alternatively, recruiting locally can help ensure teacher candidates reflect the diversity of the children they are teaching,”* Pauline Rose of the EFA Global Monitoring Report said.

Girls also need more female teachers, often for cultural reasons, and to provide a role model to keep them from dropping out of school. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, female teachers make up less than 40% of the total teaching workforce in all countries at the upper secondary level.

The 2013/4 EFA Global Monitoring Report makes the following recommendations to get girls' education back on track:

- 1. Girls' education must be at the forefront of new education goals after 2015.** Every girl should have an equal chance of going to school and learning while there. New goals need clear, measurable targets with indicators that will track the progress of the most disadvantaged, and girls in particular.
- 2. The best teachers must reach the learners who need them most.** National education plans must include an explicit commitment to reach out to girls and the marginalized. Female teachers, in particular, should be recruited locally. Incentives must be provided to ensure the best teachers work in remote, under-served areas.
- 3. Teachers need gender-sensitive teacher education:** Teachers, both female and male, need training to understand and recognize their own attitudes, perceptions and expectations regarding gender.
- 4. Curricula must be inclusive.** Teachers can only break down learning barriers effectively if they are supported by appropriate and inclusive curricula that pay particular attention to the needs of girls at risk of not learning.

**-ENDS-**

For interviews, photos, b-roll, videos, quotes of teachers or children, or for more information on the event in New York on March 10, please contact:

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

Developed by an independent team and published by UNESCO, the Education for All Global Monitoring Report is an authoritative reference that aims to inform, influence and sustain genuine commitment towards Education for All.

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