UNESCO’s Atlas of Girls' and Women’s Right to Education

Methodology and sources

UNESCO has collected and analyzed constitutions, laws, regulations, circulars and decrees available online in national legal frameworks for the purpose of developing an Interactive Atlas on the status of girls’ and women’s right to education around the world. Twelve indicators were identified for the first phase of the project that demonstrate the factors that have been shown to either strengthen or act as a barrier to the right to education of girls and women.

Why these indicators?

Specific indicators were selected that could measure to what extent legal and regulatory provisions exist in the national framework that either protect or hinder the right to education of girls and women. The indicators have been divided into three categories:

1. The first purple category corresponds to the indicators on the ratification of international human rights instruments related to girls' and women's right to education.
2. The second blue category corresponds to the indicators on the right to education that are not specifically gender-related but have a direct impact on girls and women’s education. In fact, legal provisions that guarantee free or compulsory education at different stages for everyone can overcome financial or cultural barriers, which affect girls disproportionately, especially in regions where there is a large gender disparity in education.
3. The final orange category corresponds to indicators showing a clear connection to gender. Even if some of them are not always explicitly linked to education, they constitute important barriers to the right to education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Party to UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE)</td>
<td>CADE is the first legally binding instrument covering the right to education comprehensively and has been recognised as a cornerstone of Education 2030 (UNESCO, “Decision adopted by the Executive Board at its 197th session”, 2015, Doc: 197 EX/Decision). CADE prohibits discrimination in all forms, including by gender, and addresses discrimination both in access to and quality of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Party to UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)</td>
<td>CEDAW is the most specific and substantive treaty with regard to the rights of women, defining the normative content and legal obligations of states towards gender equality including in education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:

- CADE Convention
- CEDAW Convention
3. **Constitution enshrines the right to education for all girls and women**

Constitutional protection provides the possibility, when supplemented by judicial measures, for the highest domestic court to adjudicate on potential violations regarding the right to education. By offering constitutional protection, a more lasting protection is given than that of legislations, which are subject to political changes.

**Sources:**
- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 13, para. 34.
- CEDAW General Comment No 36 para. 24.
- CADE Art.1 and 6.

4. **Legislation enshrines the right to education for all girls and women**

National legislation implements constitutional provisions. When the right to education is absent from the Constitution, it acts as the primary legal means by which the right is recognized, if it is recognized as a legally enforceable right. Education legislations also gives full effect of the right to education at the domestic level.

**Sources:**
- CEDAW General Comment No 36 para. 24 c) and d)  
- ICCP General Comment 28 (paras 28 and 31)

5. **Legal framework guarantees compulsory education (9+ years)**

Lack of legislation on compulsory education or failure to enforce laws on compulsory education, are, among others, a barrier to girls’ education that has been considered to reinforce girls’ school non-attendance (UNESCO UIS and UNICEF, “Fixing the broken promise of education for all”, 2015).

**Sources:**
- CEDAW General Comment No 36 para. 39 a)  
- Framework for Action, SDG4, target 4.1  
- ICESCR Art.13

6. **Legal framework guarantees free education (12+ years)**

Lack of free education is a financial burden for poor families, who may be forced to select which of their children will go to school. In this case, boys are usually preferred over girls (CEDAW, General Recommendation No. 36, 2017, para. 37). Several studies show that once this financial barrier is removed, girls’ school attendance increases (K. Deininger, “Does cost of schooling affect enrollment by the poor? Universal primary education in Uganda.” Economics of Education review 22.3, 2003, pp. 291-305; J. Heymann, “Children's chances: how countries can move from surviving to thriving”, Harvard University Press, 2013; World Policy Analysis Center, “Facilitating girls’ access to quality education: global findings on tuition-free and compulsory education”, 2014, p. 2).

**Sources:**
- CEDAW General Comment No 36 para. 39 a)  
- Framework for Action, SDG4, target 4.1
### 7. Legal framework guarantees free and compulsory pre-primary education

“Early childhood care and education lays the foundation for children’s long-term development, well-being and health (Education 2030 – Framework for Action, 2015, para. 35). Numerous country-level studies show that students who complete pre-primary education are more likely to complete primary and secondary school, less likely to repeat grades and are more likely to be literate and numerate (UNICEF, “A World Ready to Learn: prioritizing quality early childhood education”, p. 12). Pre-primary education can therefore level the playing field and give girls a springboard to educational achievement in later years, especially in regions where there is a large gender disparity in education. Provision of early childhood education can also remove some of the barriers that prevent mothers from re-entering education and employment, and challenge stereotypes that child rearing is the primary responsibility of women.

**Sources:**
- Framework for Action, SDG 4, target 4.2
- CRC General Comment N°7, para. 28
- CEDAW General Comment N°36, para. 39

### 8. Legal framework guarantees equal access to post-secondary education

**Post-secondary** education, or tertiary education, “includes what is commonly understood as academic education but also includes advanced vocational or professional education”. (UNESCO UIS and UNESCO Right to education handbook, p.108).

“Opportunities for access to higher levels of education are often insufficient, particularly in least developed countries, resulting in a knowledge gap with serious consequences for social and economic development. [...] wide disparity in access to tertiary education, in particular at university level, with regard to gender, to social, regional and ethnic background, and to age and disability remain. Disadvantages for females occur particularly in low-income countries, and for males in high-income countries.” (SDG4-Education 2030 Framework for Action, 2015, para 38)

**Sources :**
- SDG 4, target 4.3
- CRC Art 28
- ICESCR Article 13 2 (c)

### 9. Legislation sets the minimum age of marriage for girls at 18 years

Child marriage is a discriminatory practice as often girls can marry at a younger age than boys. Their educational development is placed at greater risk than boys and violates their right to education as they are more likely to drop out of school and children who are not in school are more likely to get married. (UNESCO, “Right to education handbook”, 2019, p. 89)

**Sources :**
- CEDAW Convention, article 16 (2)
- CRC and CEDAW Joint Recommendation (2014), para. 20. For judicial dispensation see para. 20.
### 10. Minimum age of employment is aligned with the end of compulsory education

If the minimum age of employment is below that of compulsory education, the child is at risk of dropping-out of school to work and therefore not completing compulsory education. On the other hand, if compulsory education is lower than the minimum age of employment, once the child completed compulsory education, the door is opened to child exploitation and violation of labour laws. (A. Merchiorre and E. Atkins, “At what age?”, 2011, p. 21; ILO, “Child Labour and Education”, 2015). As such, minimum age labour laws and those of compulsory education laws are interdependent and mutually reinforce each other. Girls are particularly vulnerable to child labour, as education is often not considered a sound investment by parents. Employment patterns also tend to be gender-specific as girls predominantly work in the agricultural sector and carry out heavy domestic chores. When they are in school, they often bear the double burden of work inside and outside the home often with little or no time left for schooling. (ILO, “Give girls a chance”, 2009, p. 22).

**Sources:**
- The ILO Minimum Age Convention n°138, Article 2, see Article 7 for ‘light work’.
- CEDAW General Recommendation N°36, para. 55(i)

### 11. Legal framework protects from violence within educational institutions

“[School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)] violates children’s fundamental human rights and is a form of gender discrimination. Children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence, including in their school lives. Experiencing SRGBV can compromise children’s well-being, their physical and emotional health, as well as harming their cognitive and emotional development.”(UNESCO, Global Guidance on addressing SRGBV, 2016, p. 21).

**Sources:**
SRGBV is defined as “acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics” (UNESCO/UNGEI Policy paper 17, 2015).
See also:
- CEDAW General Recommendation N°19, para. 6.
- Education 2030 framework for Action para. 27
- SDG4 Target 4.5 and 4.a
- SDG5 target 5.2
- SDG16 Target 16.2

### 12. Right to education of girls

Like child marriage, pregnancy and motherhood causes girls to drop out of school, they also can be banned from school and from sitting exams and often lack access to
pregnant and parenting girls is legally protected

bridging programmes which allows girls to resume their education (UNESCO, “Right to Education handbook”, 2019, p. 89)

Sources:
- CEDAW General Recommendation No 36, para. 24 (g)
- SDG4, Target 4.5
- African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child, Article 11.

Collection of Data

The mapping builds upon the Observatory on the right to education, among other sources, and is informed by research carried out on the legal and regulatory provisions using the sources below.

Limitations to the collection of data:
- Indicators were scored based on the availability of primary legal sources online in the official UNESCO working languages or a language that the legal researchers could analyze with native understanding. As such, documents cannot always be located nor the existence of laws or regulations confirmed. Furthermore, unstable national political contexts may add another barrier to the full access of key documents and resources.
- If primary legal sources were unavailable in these languages, information was extracted from secondary sources listed below, but rather than providing a score, the provision would be considered not available (n/a).
- An exception has been made for the reported existence of regulations and circulars, where secondary reliable sources are accepted and scored due to the difficulty in obtaining these texts online.
- Where possible, links have been provided to each law and the most recent version of the national constitution.
- UNESCO welcomes the submission of legal texts and further information so that it is possible to confirm the existence of provisions and score each indicator appropriately. Contact details can be found here.

Date of analysis:
- Legal and regulatory texts up to April 2019 have been considered for the first phase, with the exception of constitutions, whereby the latest version is taken into account, as far as possible.
Main sources

International organizations

• UNESCO Observatory on the Right to Education:
• UNICEF: https://www.unicef.fr/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMiia7397L64gVhlbVCh2xiQd-EAAAYASAEgJVb_D_BwE
• UN Women:
  o Global Database on Violence against Women: http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en

Human Rights Treaty Bodies:

• Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:
• Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:
• Committee on the Rights of the Child:
• Universal Periodic Review:
  http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/Documentation.aspx

Reports of UN Specials Rapporteurs:

• on the Right to Education: Annual reports and Country visits
• thematic mandate:
• countries mandate:
  http://spinternet.ohchr.org/_Layouts/SpecialProceduresInternet/ViewAllCountryMandates.aspx

National framework

• Country reports reviewing the national legal framework relating to the right to education prepared by UNESCO
• Official websites of the Ministries of Education (and related national institutions) and legislative bodies for each country
• Constitution Finder Richmond (English): https://www.constituteproject.org/
• International Labour Organization (NATLEX)

Conventions’ ratification status:

• Status of ratification of International Human Rights Treaties: http://indicators.ohchr.org/
Reports Submitted by Member States:


Other

- End Corporal Punishment website: [https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/](https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/)
- World Policy Analysis Center: [https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/about/about-world](https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/about/about-world)

The Scoring Process

Each of the legal indicators was given a score system where 1 is the lowest score (i.e. the right to education of girls and women is the least protected), and 5 is the highest (i.e. the right to education of girls and women is the most protected). These scores were based on the analysis of existing legal provisions found in the first phase of the research and the confirmed existence of legal provisions that have achieved score 5. On the basis of these scores, the Atlas aims to provide this information in a quantitative, visual and readily understood format. The scoring process is the following:

- Legal researchers from the UNESCO Education Sector thoroughly compiled and analyzed all relevant existing legal provisions that were found online related to the indicators.
- Scoring was carried out independently by researchers and reviewed to standardize the scores and minimize human error.
- Note that the scores on the map reflect existing legislation, and at this stage they do not purport to judge the successful implementation of those provisions.

It is important to note the following aspects of the scoring system:

- Where there were conflicting provisions in a legal system without repeal of earlier provisions, the score reflects the poorest protection of the right to education
- In the case of federal states, the least protective provision will be taken into consideration.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About the scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score 5: Convention ratified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score 1: Convention not ratified.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scoring process:**
The instruments of "acceptance" or "approval" of a treaty have the same legal effect as ratification and consequently express the consent of a state to be bound by a treaty.¹

Therefore, acceptance, approval, succession and ratification give a score of 5.

CADE does not allow reservations.

| **Indicator 2:** |
| Score 5: Convention ratified without reservation(s). |
| Score 4: Convention ratified with reservation(s). |
| Score 2: Convention signed. |
| Score 1: Convention has not been ratified or signed |

**Scoring process:**
As for indicator 1, acceptance, approval, succession and ratification give a score of 5.

CEDAW allows reservations. "Reservation" means a unilateral statement, however phrased or named, made by a State, when signing, ratifying, accepting, approving or acceding to a treaty, whereby it purports to exclude or to modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the treaty in their application to that State.²

Therefore, when the Convention was ratified with reservations, the score is 4.

Where the signature is subject to ratification, acceptance or approval, the signature does not establish the consent to be bound. However, it is a means of authentication and expresses the willingness of the signatory state to continue the treaty-making process. The signature qualifies the signatory state to proceed to ratification, acceptance or approval. It also creates an obligation to refrain, in good faith, from acts that would defeat the object and the purpose of the treaty.³

Therefore, a signature alone gives a score of 2.

**Limitations:**
Unlike reservations, declarations merely clarify the state's position and do not purport to exclude or modify the legal effect of a treaty,⁴ therefore they won’t affect the score of a state.

¹ Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, Arts.2 (1) (b)
² Vienna Convention on the law of treaties, 1969, Art. 2
**Indicator 3:**

**Score 5:** Enshrines right to education for all within the territory without discrimination based on sex/gender, or enshrines right to education for all girls and women.

**Score 4:** Enshrines right to education without distinction based on sex/gender but it is limited to a group of persons.

**Score 3:** Enshrines right to education and contains a provision on non-discrimination or equality of rights.

**Score 2:** Enshrines right to education or provides for a limited protection of this right.

**Score 1:** Does not enshrine right to education.

**Scoring process:**

When analyzing the existence of constitutional provision that enshrines the right to education, certain formal deficiencies which could hinder its enforcement were taken into account by the scoring system. To this end, for a full and proper protection of the right to education (score 5), it is expected that it must be phrased as:

- **Universal.** Everyone should have the right to education, without discrimination. This includes not just children, but all ages. Similarly, the right to education cannot be afforded just to citizens, but as an inherent, universal right, it must extend to all within the territory.

- **Expansive.** The right to ‘access education’; to ‘equal opportunities in education’; to ‘learning’, or to a specific level of education only will be considered a limited right to education. The internationally agreed normative framework for education provides a wide range of standards that states must not fall beneath concerning the education of its citizens and non-citizens. By limiting this right to one specific aspect of education, the legal framework does not provide comprehensive protection. States not only need to ensure that education abides by the 4As framework, which elaborates essential features of the right to education (education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable) but also that the State abides by the human rights obligations to respect, protect and fulfil.

- **Immediate.** Legal provisions that assure the right to education of a progressive basis do not provide any mandatory demands on the State, nor legitimize the claims of right-holders to have their rights fulfilled.

If the Constitution has been amended and the text of the Constitution amended is available online, the link provides for the latest version. However, if amendments have been made but a unique document of the Constitution amended is not available, the link provides for the latest version available, and a link to the law amending the Constitution is provided only when it changed a provision linked to the right to education of girls and women.

**Indicator 4:**

**Score 5:** Enshrines right to education for all within the territory without discrimination based on sex or gender.

**Score 4:** Enshrines right to education without discrimination based on sex or gender.

**Score 3:** Enshrines right to education without discrimination or contains a provision on equal rights to education.

**Score 2:** Enshrines right to education or provides for a limited protection of this right.

**Score 1:** Does not enshrine right to education.
Scoring process:

When analyzing the existence of legal provision that enshrines the right to education, certain formal deficiencies which could hinder its enforcement were taken into account by the scoring system. To this end, for a full and proper protection of the right to education (score 5), it is expected that it must be phrased as universal, expansive and immediate (please see indicator 3).

**Indicator 5:**

| Score 5: | Guarantees compulsory primary and secondary education (≥ 9 years) and provides age at which compulsory school begins and/or ends. |
| Score 4: | Guarantees compulsory primary and secondary education (≥ 9 years) without specifying age at which compulsory education starts or ends. |
| Score 3: | Guarantees compulsory primary and secondary education (< 9 years). |
| Score 2: | Guarantees compulsory primary education. |
| Score 1: | Does not guarantee compulsory education. |

Scoring process:

Where education systems do not use the primary / secondary classification, the research team used the ISCED classification criteria to convert education systems which used levels such as ‘fundamental’ and ‘basic’ education to be scored appropriately.

**Indicator 6:**

| Score 5: | Guarantees free primary and secondary education (≥ 12 years). |
| Score 4: | Guarantees free primary and secondary education (< 12 years). |
| Score 3: | Guarantees free primary education but secondary education is progressively free. |
| Score 2: | Guarantees free primary education or duration is not specified |
| Score 1: | Does not guarantee free education, or guarantees progressively free education. |

Scoring process:

When analyzing the existence of legal provision on free education, wordings like “tuition free” were not consider sufficient enough for score 5, as other direct costs could exist apart from tuition fees.

The ICESCR stated in its General Comment 11 “The right is expressly formulated so as to ensure the availability of (…) education without charge to the child, parents or guardians. Fees imposed by the Government, the local authorities or the school, and other direct costs, constitute disincentives to the enjoyment of the right and may jeopardize its realization. (…)”

Where education systems do not use the primary / secondary classification, the research team used the ISCED classification criteria to convert education systems which used levels such as ‘fundamental’ and ‘basic’ education to be scored appropriately.

**Limitations:**

At this stage, potential indirect costs will not be taken into consideration.
**Indicator 7:**

**Score 5:** Guarantees 1+ year free and compulsory pre-primary education.

**Score 4:** Guarantees free and compulsory pre-primary education but its duration is not specified.

**Score 3:** Guarantees 1+ year of free OR compulsory pre-primary education.

**Score 2:** Guarantees free OR compulsory pre-primary education but its duration is not specified.

**Score 1:** Does not guarantee free or compulsory pre-primary education.

**Scoring process:**
When analyzing the existence of pre-primary education, alternative terms such as kindergarten or preschool were accepted, as were systems which have a clear preparatory level preceding primary education.

**Indicator 8:**

**Score 5:** Guarantees equal access to post-secondary education.

**Score 3:** Guarantees equal access to only post-secondary TVET OR only higher education.

**Score 2:** Guarantees a general principle of equal access to education but does not explicitly apply to post-secondary education.

**Score 1:** Does not guarantee equal access to post-secondary education.

**Scoring process:**
For score 5, wording such as “open in an equitable manner” or “open to all without discrimination” were considered similarly as to equal access.

**Indicator 9:**

**Score 5:** Minimum age of marriage for girls is 18 years (exceptions permitted where there is judicial consent and absolute minimum age over 16 years).

**Score 4:** Minimum age of marriage for girls is 18 years but exceptions permit marriage from 16 years (not including judicial consent).

**Score 2:** Minimum age of marriage for girls is 18 years but judicial or non-judicial exceptions permit marriage below 16 years or minimum age not specified.

**Score 1:** Minimum age of marriage for girls is below 18 years.

**Limitations:**
In the interest of consistency, customary or religious law shall not be considered in the review at this stage. Equally, free and full consent shall not be considered at this stage.

**Difference in minimum age of marriage** between girls and boys will not be considered at this stage.

**Indicator 10:**

**Score 5:** Minimum age of employment is aligned with end of compulsory education and does not fall below 15 years.

**Score 2:** Age at which compulsory education ends not defined OR minimum age of employment (≥ 15 years) not aligned with end of compulsory education (above or below).

**Score 1:** Minimum age of employment below 15 years or not clearly defined.
Limitations:

Light work will not be taken into consideration with regard to the minimum age of employment as it should not affect education. For further information: see ILO. Hazardous work (which should be fixed at the age of 18 years) will not be considered as it is not directly linked to compulsory education. Furthermore, even if the ILO Convention provides for the possibility of initially setting the general minimum age at 14 where the economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed, it will not be taken into account here, as no list of countries authorized to set a minimum age at 14 exists. In fact, the ILO Convention states that if the minimum age is 14, the State has to include in its reports on the application of the Convention 138 “(a) that its reason for doing so subsists; or (b) that it renounces its right to avail itself of the provisions in question as from a stated date.”

Indicator 11:

| Score 5: | Protection from corporal punishment and all gender-based violence, including psychological, physical and sexual violence, in educational institutions. |
| Score 4: | Protection from corporal punishment AND protection from all kinds of violence, including psychological, physical and sexual violence, in educational institutions. |
| Score 2: | Limited protection from violence in educational institutions. |
| Score 1: | No protection from violence in educational institutions. |

Scoring process:

For score 5, wording similar to “all forms of violence” were considered as covering psychological, physical and sexual violence. However, in the absence of words similar to “school”, or “educational establishment”, the given score was of 1. Where protection from violence was only provided from a specific individual such as “teacher” this would constitute a limited protection from violence, as it does not cover the entirety of the educational institution.

Limitations:

At this stage, SRGBV around school shall not be covered. Remedial action will not be considered at this stage.

Indicator 12:

| Score 5: | Legal framework prohibits restrictions to the right to education of pregnant and parenting girls, or, right to education of pregnant and parenting girls is protected. |
| Score 4: | Legal framework prohibits restrictions to the right to education of pregnant OR parenting girls, or, right to education of pregnant OR parenting girls is protected. |
| Score 2: | Legal framework does not prohibit restrictions to, nor contain any restrictive provisions in relation to, the right to education of pregnant and parenting girls. |
| Score 1: | Legal framework includes restrictive provisions in relation to the right to education of pregnant and/or parenting girls. |

Scoring process:
When analyzing legal dispositions on the right to education, if the duty to assure this right was placed on another individual such as the father of the baby or the girl’s parents, it would not achieve score 4 as the fulfilment of the right should be primarily the duty of the State.

**Why these countries?**

The countries that are included in the mapping are a combination of all UN and UNESCO Member States. UNESCO’s Associate Members are not included in the mapping.

The first phase of research spanned the national legal systems of 35 UNESCO Member States. These 35 countries were chosen according to:

- countries identified as part of the selection of examples of interventions on girls’ education in the context of the work of the Education and Development Working Group (EDWG) as part of the G7 Presidency in 2019
- countries that have very recently had their legal framework relating to the right to education reviewed by UNESCO

Ultimately, all States will be covered for the whole set of indicators.