

Gender parity index of the gross enrolment ratios in primary, secondary and tertiary education



Key points

- At the global level, girls and boys are equally likely to be enrolled in primary education, although fewer girls than boys participate in primary education in Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) and Western Asia, and to a minor extent in sub-Saharan Africa; in Southern Asia more girls than boys participate in primary education.
- There has been substantial progress towards gender parity in regions with the widest gender disparities in favour of boys in 1990. Southern Asia, in particular, has recorded a significant increase in GPI (from 0.75 to 1.07).
- The gender gap in secondary education has closed in most regions over the period 1990–2018, although girls are still less likely than boys to enrol in secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa, Western Asia and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand).
- Gender disparities at the secondary level of education are wider than those at the primary level.
- Gender disparities in tertiary education have shifted from a male to a female advantage across the world and in most regions over the period 1990–2018.

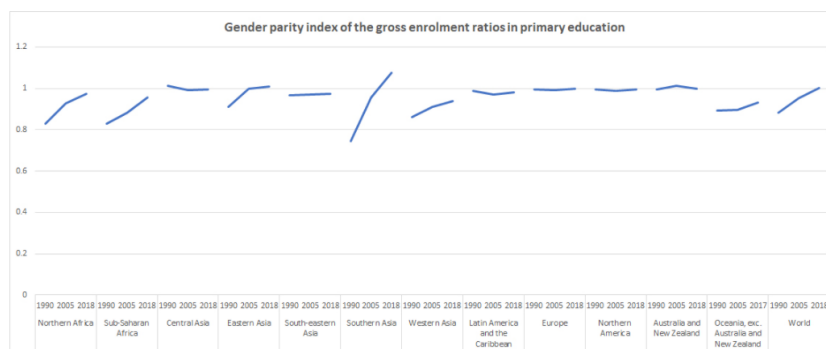
Gender parity index of gross enrolment ratios in primary education

Gender parity in primary education has been reached globally, although regional disparities persist

The global GPI of gross enrolment ratios (GER) in primary education was 1.00 in 2018, implying that, at the global level, girls and boys were equally likely to participate in primary education. This global average masks disparities among regions, however (see figure I).

As of 2018: (a) in Northern America and Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Northern Africa, Central Asia, Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean the GPI for each region was within the range of parity; (b) in sub-Saharan Africa (where the GPI was 0.96), Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) (0.93) and Western Asia (0.94), the GPI value was lower than the range of parity; and (c) in Southern Asia the GPI fell outside the range of parity (1.07), meaning that girls were more likely than boys to participate in primary education.

Figure I: Gender parity index of gross enrolment ratios in primary education globally and by region: 1990, 2005 and 2018



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNESCO Institute for Statistics database (accessed April 2020) (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/>).

Note: Gender parity is considered to have been attained when the GPI lies between 0.97 and 1.03.

Substantial progress towards gender parity occurred in those regions where boys had once vastly outnumbered girls in primary education

Since 1990, there has been a significant shift towards greater gender parity in primary education (see figure I). The global GPI of primary gross enrolment ratios rose from 0.88 in 1990 to 1.00 in 2018. GPI values improved substantially, particularly in Northern Africa (from 0.83 to 0.97), sub-Saharan Africa (from 0.83 to 0.96) and Southern Asia (from 0.75 to 1.07), all regions with the widest disparities in GPI in 1990. Remarkable gains were also registered in Eastern Asia over the period since 1990, with its regional GPI reaching a value of 1.00 in 2005, and parity has remained steady until the present time. Australia and New Zealand and countries in Northern America and Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and Central Asia and South-Eastern Asia maintained gender parity in primary education throughout the period 1990–2018.

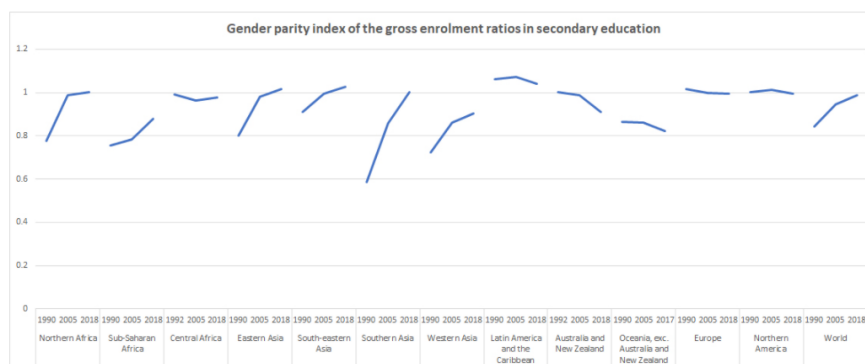
Gender parity index of the gross enrolment ratios in secondary education

The gender gap in secondary education has closed in most regions

The gender gap in the global gross enrolment ratios for girls and boys in **secondary education** has narrowed steadily during the period 1990–2018. The GPI based on gross enrolment ratios in secondary education rose from a value of 0.84 in 1990 to 0.99 in 2018, confirming that the gender gap at the secondary level of education has closed at the global level (see figure II).

Despite the gains made over the past three decades, girls are still less likely than boys to enrol in secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa (where GPI was 0.88 in 2018), Western Asia (0.90) and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) (0.82), all regions with low overall enrolment ratios for both girls and boys. In Southern Asia, where the GPI was low in 1990 (0.59), the gender gap has been closed at the fastest rate over the period 1990–2018 (the GPI in 2018 was 1.00). In regions with higher overall secondary enrolment ratios, such as Latin America and the Caribbean (where the GPI was 1.04 in 2018), gender-based disparities favour girls. Northern America and Europe and Central Asia are the only regions that have achieved and maintained equal access to secondary education for both girls and boys throughout the period 1990–2018.

Figure II: Gender parity index of gross enrolment ratios in secondary education globally and by region: 1990, 2005 and 2018



Source: UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Statistics database (accessed April 2020) (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/>).

Note: Gender parity is considered to have been attained when the GPI lies between 0.97 and 1.03.

Gender disparities at the secondary level are wider than those at the primary level

Although gender disparities in access to secondary education have been reduced in all regions, they remain more prevalent and wider than those at the primary level (see figures I and II). In sub-Saharan Africa, the GPI at the primary level was 0.96 in 2018, whereas the GPI was 0.88 at the secondary level. Similarly, in Western Asia, the primary level GPI was 0.94 versus the secondary level GPI of 0.90. In those countries where girls are severely disadvantaged, gender differences at the secondary level are partly a reflection of cumulative gender disparities at the primary level as well as disparities during the transition to the secondary level.¹

Gender parity index of the gross enrolment ratios in tertiary education

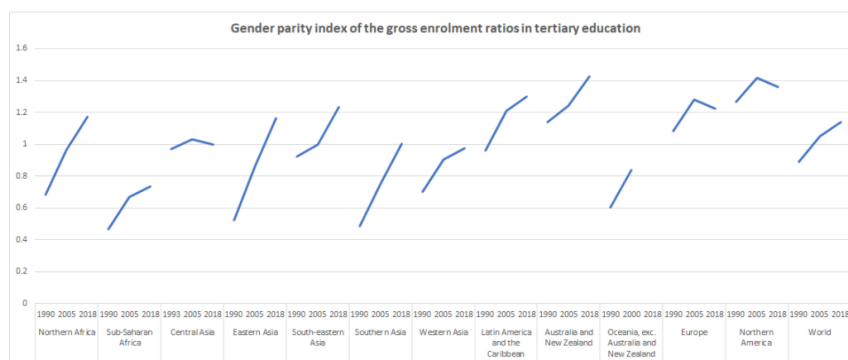
Gender disparities in tertiary education disproportionately favour women

During the period 1990–2018, gender disparities in **tertiary education** shifted from a male to female advantage both in the world and in most regions (see figure III). In 1990, men's participation in tertiary level education was higher than that of women, as reflected in a worldwide GPI of 0.89 (in sub-Saharan Africa the GPI was 0.47; in Southern Asia, 0.49; in Eastern Asia, 0.52; in Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), 0.60; in Northern Africa, 0.68; and in Western Asia 0.70).

Overall, because the global participation of women has increased at a faster rate than that of men, the tertiary enrolment ratios of men and women reached parity in the late 1990s and remained at parity until the early 2000s. The global participation of women in tertiary education has since exceeded that of men, shifting gender disparity from a male to female advantage. In 2018, the GPI of the global tertiary enrolment of women and men stood at 1.14, reflecting a gender disparity clearly in favour of women.

In most regions of the world, women outnumber men in tertiary education. In 2018, the GPI surpassed the parity range by a good measure in Northern America and Europe (GPI of 1.28), Australia and New Zealand (1.42), Northern Africa (1.17), Latin America and the Caribbean (1.30), Eastern Asia (1.16) and South-Eastern Asia (1.23). Nevertheless, a considerable disparity in favour of men persists in sub-Saharan Africa (0.74) and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) (0.84). Overall, there are almost as many women as men enrolled in tertiary education in Central Asia, Southern Asia and Western Asia, but the regional averages conceal a low participation rate among women in several countries within those regions.

Figure III: Gender parity index of gross enrolment ratios in tertiary education globally and by region: 1990, 2005 and 2018



Source: UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Statistics database (accessed April 2020) (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/>).

Note: Gender parity is considered to have been attained when the GPI lies between 0.97 and 1.03.

About the data

Definitions

- **Gender Parity Index (GPI):** Measure of the progress towards gender parity in education participation and/or learning opportunities available for girls in relation to those available to boys, and represents the ratio of the value of females to that of males, for a given indicator. A GPI value equal to one indicates parity. In general, a value less than one indicates disparity in favour of men/boys, whereas a value greater than one indicates disparity in favour of women/girls. Gender parity is considered to have been attained when the GPI lies between 0.97 and 1.03.

Coverage

(a) Girls and boys in primary education; (b) girls and boys in secondary education; (c) women and men in tertiary education.

Availability

Data for the period 1990–2018² are available for countries in all regions, organized by regional groupings under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators framework.³

Footnotes

1. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Global Education Digest 2005: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World, Montreal, 2005.
2. Data source is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNESCO Institute for Statistics database (accessed in April 2020).
3. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, regional groupings under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators framework.