

## **INEE Thematic Issue Brief: Gender**

### **Definition**

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, responsibilities and identities for women and men and how these are valued in society. They are culture-specific and they can change over time. Gender identities define how women and men are expected to think and act and these behaviours are learned in the family, schools, religious teaching and the media. We may grow up as girls and boys, but we are taught to be women and men with appropriate behaviour, values attitudes, roles and activities pertaining to each sex. Since gender roles, responsibilities and identities are socially learned, they can also be changed. Gender is a main aspect of an individual's wider identity, along with other aspects such as race, age, sexuality, religion and social status.

### **Gender as a Thematic Issue**

Crises have serious and different impacts on the lives of women, girls, boys and men. While education is both a human right and an indispensable means of realising other human rights, for too long, those affected by humanitarian emergencies have been deprived of education. To ensure that all male and female learners benefit equally from education in emergencies, it is critical to understand the social and gender dynamics that might affect or place constraints on them.

The differing constraints facing girls and boys are apparent on both the supply and the demand side of education. While girls are usually more disadvantaged, this should not blind us to the specific disadvantages that boys may face. On the supply side, there are many factors affecting enrolment and attendance. For example, schools which are far away may not be accessible to female learners, as in some instances, being in school, or travelling to and from school, places girls at considerable risk of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation. Going to school may also place boys at risk from different dangers, such as forced recruitment. Furthermore, minimal or no sanitation facilities can result in low attendance and high dropout rates among adolescent girls who are menstruating.

On the demand side, impoverished families may prioritise boys' education and not have the money to pay for girls' school fees, uniforms and other supplies. On the other hand, families may require boys to take up work outside of the home, or rely on girls to do household chores, care for siblings and generate family income, all which prevents boys and girls from attending school. Early marriage and pregnancy are additional barriers to girls taking up or continuing their schooling. Even where girls are enrolled in high numbers, dropout rates towards the end of primary school are usually high.

While such factors exist in normal situations, they are further exacerbated during emergencies; therefore, in emergencies, the right to gender-sensitive education is critical and should be fulfilled without discrimination of any kind. In emergency situations, providing educational facilities and opportunities contributes immensely to a range of short- and long-term issues of critical importance for girls and boys. Where this *window of opportunity* for gender-responsive education in emergencies is seized, it can also result in long-term changes in educational systems, in relationships and in power- and opportunity-sharing between women, girls, boys and men.

### **Addressing Gender in the INEE Minimum Standards**

Examples of how gender issues are mainstreamed throughout the INEE Minimum Standards Handbook include the following:

- **Foundational Standards** emphasise the gender-balanced participation of girls and women, boys and men from all diverse groups within the community in education decision-making processes and actions, and stresses that, Insofar as is possible, all data must be disaggregated by sex and age in order to inform gender-sensitive education programming.
- **Access and Learning Environment Domain** highlights the need to reduce gender discrimination and barriers hindering both male and female learners from accessing and equally participating in education, while addressing the different concerns of safety and well-being which affect male and female learners both in on the way to school.
- **Teaching and Learning Domain** calls for the creation of learning environment, which promotes gender equality and reduces gender stereotypes in educational materials and curriculum, teaching methodologies and educator’s behaviour and attitudes towards all learners.
- **Teachers and Other Education Personnel Domain** promotes gender balance in the recruitment of qualified male and female teachers and education personnel in order to meet the gender-specific circumstances and context of the school and to ensure the presence of positive role models for male and female learners.
- **Education Policy Domain** stresses the need to promote education policies and laws that protect against discrimination based on sex and ensure commitment from education partners to utilise standards on gender-sensitive project implementation and management.

### **Additional Guidance**

Education in emergencies helps address many critical issues of importance for boys and girls. Addressing such issues also helps to address many gender-related concerns. For example, education can address gender issues through:

- **Providing Safety:** Educational facilities can provide a safe physical space for children and youth, sheltering them from violence, including — especially for girls — sexual and gender-based violence.
- **Promoting well-being and normalcy:** Schooling provides structure and stability which is particularly important for children and youth who may be traumatised by displacement. Girls and boys have different experiences of the emergency to cope with; they may also have different coping strategies, and these should be acknowledged and built on in schools.
- **Conveying health and survival messages:** Education in emergencies provides a channel for conveying health and survival messages and for teaching new skills and values, such as the value of respecting women, girls, boys and men equally in society.
- **Building the future:** Ensuring children and youth access to education during times of humanitarian emergencies provides the essential foundation for successful economic, social and political systems and is vital to the reconstruction of the economic basis of family, local and national life and for sustainable development and peace building. Ensuring girls’ access to quality education prepares them to play significant roles in reconstruction efforts in their communities and beyond.
- **Building community capacity:** Community participation can be enhanced through capacity-building activities that engage women, girls, boys and men, and are mindful of the differing perspectives and approaches that these groups may have. Capacity-building and training programmes are also a venue to highlight issues of gender inequality in education

so that trainees are more sensitive to the issues and are assisted in trying to overcome them.