

Assessing Global Progress on Girls' Access to Education



Over 65 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established that all people, regardless of sex, “are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” A series of treaties in the following decades—most notably the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women—created more specific guarantees for the world’s women and girls. In 1995, 189 nations reaffirmed their commitments to advancing women’s and girls’ civil, social, political, and economic rights through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark document that laid out a detailed strategy for addressing remaining gaps and barriers. To mark its 20th anniversary, this fact sheet series by the WORLD Policy Analysis Center examines countries’ progress toward enacting laws and policies to achieve gender equality.

Background

- By adopting the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, countries pledged to ensure “equal access to and treatment of” girls and boys in education. More specifically, the Platform urged governments to “close the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005.”
- However, an estimated 65 million girls around the world are out of school today. While the gender gap has almost disappeared at the primary level, enrollment disparities persist at the secondary level.
- Access to education is critical for girls’ and women’s opportunities. Education decreases the chances girls will be married as children and increases their economic prospects as adults. The risk of infant mortality is also reduced when girls go to school: a child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past the age of five.
- One proven strategy for increasing girls’ access to education is eliminating tuition. When families cannot afford to send all children to school, girls are more likely to miss out. Removing the cost barrier has been shown to increase girls’ enrollment rates considerably.
- Making school compulsory can also be an important tool for gender equality. Although the reasons why parents keep their daughters out of school are varied, requiring school attendance helps create an expectation that girls will go to school rather than labor at home or elsewhere, and that governments will provide safe, accessible schools.

Findings

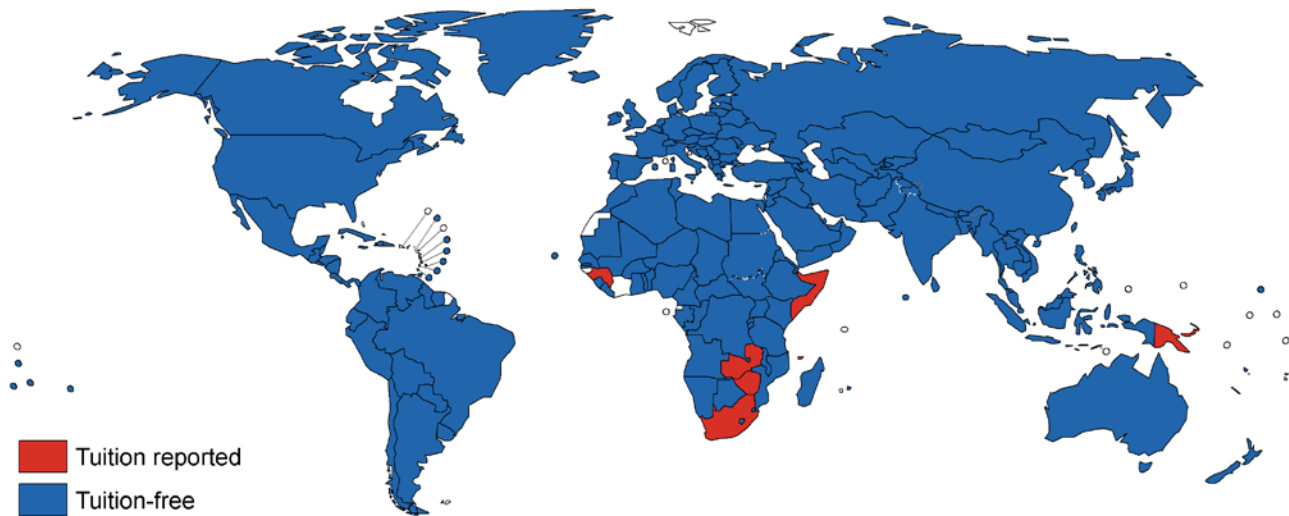
Progress in Primary Education

- The vast majority of countries have made significant progress in terms of making primary education financially accessible: 89% of low-income countries, 97% of middle-income countries, and 100% of high-income countries have made primary education tuition-free.
- In total, 89% of countries make primary education both free and compulsory. Only 4% of countries report charging tuition fees for primary education, while only 8% have not made primary school compulsory.

Gaps in Secondary Access

- Despite gains made in access to primary school, gaps remain at the secondary level.
 - 14% of countries charge tuition for the first year of secondary school, while 27% do not require students to begin secondary school.
 - Only 73% of countries make beginning secondary school tuition-free and compulsory, with 24% of countries charging tuition before the completion of secondary school.
 - Only 17% of countries provide tuition-free and compulsory education through completion of secondary school or until age 18.
- Many countries can afford to do more; among countries with available expenditures data, 43% that charge tuition before the completion of secondary school spend less than 4% of their GDP on education.
- The regions with the largest remaining gap in enrollment are also the regions that are most likely to charge fees:
 - 65% of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and half of countries in South Asia charge tuition before the completion of secondary school.
 - Less than one-third of girls in Sub-Saharan Africa and less than half of girls in South Asia are enrolled in secondary school.

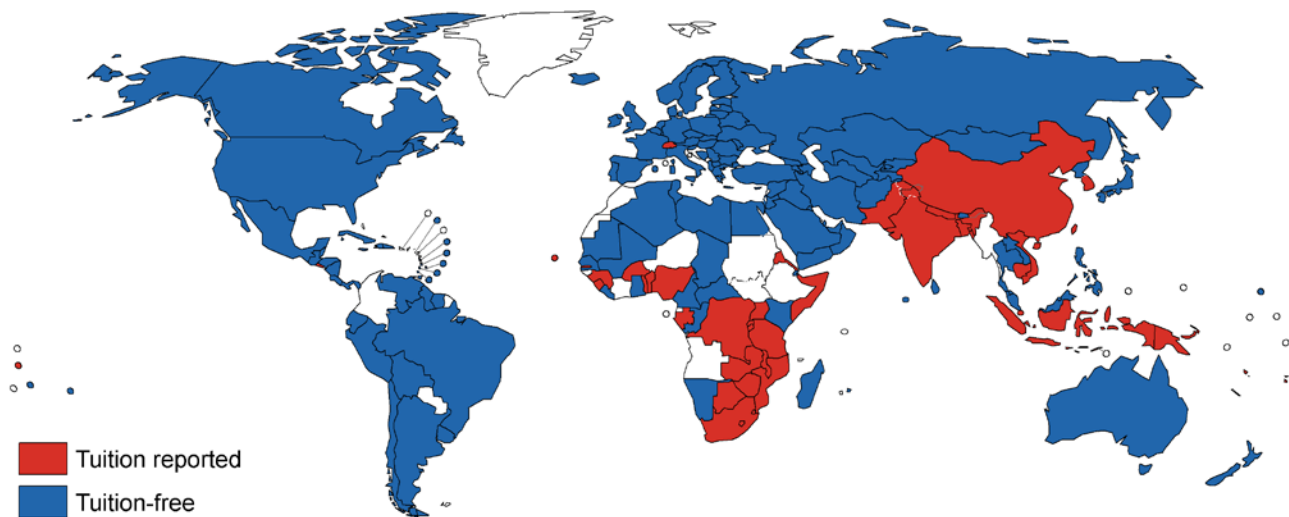
Map 1: Is primary education tuition-free?



Tuition-free includes cases where no tuition is charged. Other fees may be charged.
Global data to compare additional fees across countries is not available.

Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Education Database, 2014

Map 2: Is completing secondary education tuition-free?



Tuition-free includes cases where no tuition is charged. Other fees may be charged.
Global data to compare additional fees across countries is not available.

Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Education Database, 2014

For more information, see WORLD's policy brief, "Facilitating Girls' Access to Quality Education: Global Findings on Tuition-Free and Compulsory Education."

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