



# Inclusive Quality Education

A snapshot of our evidence from 2025

Through our global strategy **All Girls Standing Strong**, Plan International works in over 80 countries and focuses programming in six priority thematic areas, as well as responding to humanitarian emergencies. We stand with girls to tear down barriers, save lives and build a world where equality for girls leads to progress for all.

At the end of 2025, we reviewed the evidence available from projects and countries working in each thematic area covering evaluations and results, key internal research and annual reporting metrics. We also scanned some of the external evidence, to situate our work in the global context. This short snapshot summarises some of the insights from this year in inclusive quality education and what we can learn from it.



A 15-year-old, learning in class at her school in Cambodia.

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**Plan International's work in inclusive quality education focuses on ensuring that children, particularly girls, have the quality education they need to succeed in life.** Core areas of our work include:

- Ensuring **high quality, learner-centred teaching** that drives gender equality and is essential for all children to thrive and learn in school.
- Supporting **out-of-school children and youth** to access education that meets their needs.
- Working on **school governance**, including advocating with governments and encouraging the involvement of children, parents, communities in decision-making.
- Supporting **safe, resilient and inclusive school environments**.
- Strengthening **curriculum and learning materials**.

Learn more about our education work [here](#).

# Key insights:

## Our programming and the global context

**01** Globally, education has seen historic enrolment gains since 2015, yet deep inequalities persist.

Over 272 million children and youth – including 133 million girls – remain out of school, with low-income countries facing severe gaps in early childhood education, literacy, and basic learning outcomes. Crisis-affected regions are particularly vulnerable, and attacks on education and climate-related disruptions have surged, compounding barriers to access and safety.

**02** Financing shortfalls are critical.

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030 will require closing a US \$97 billion annual funding gap; however, geopolitical trends, coupled with major reductions to aid flows, have led to devastating cuts to education financing in some of the lowest resourced settings.

**03** Our research this year highlights persistent barriers to inclusive, quality education – particularly for girls and marginalised learners.

Language barriers and gaps in trauma-sensitive responses, as well as lack of access to safe infrastructure and materials, hamper learning. Young people call for change to ensure that curricula respond to their needs, including in relation to sexual and reproductive health and climate resilience and preparedness.

**04** Our programming operated at scale this year, reaching 14 million children and adults, including 5.1 million girls, with education interventions.

This included support to children and families to enter and stay in school, delivering flexible and alternative learning so that children can access education that meets their needs, supporting children to get back into school and progress as well as support to teachers and schools to deliver teaching that helps children thrive and learn in school.

**05** We saw positive impacts across a range of areas of our education work this year, ranging from supporting teachers to use approaches that help children progress in school to influencing for changes in the policy environment.

Projects supported over 550,000 children and young people (including 260,000 girls) in 20 countries to progress to the next stage of their education, and across just ten projects, over 49,000 children achieved improved learning outcomes. Over 90 per cent of teachers observed in our projects this year were using learner-centred and inclusive teaching approaches that promote gender equality and respond to the needs of all learners. We also delivered flexible and alternative education programmes for over 320,000 children and young people, to maintain learning continuity including in crisis.

# 2025 figures at a glance



## Our global reach footprint in education<sup>1</sup>

**14 million** children and adults reached with inclusive, quality education programming.

**5.1 million** girls with better access to education.

**94%** of sponsored children aged 6+ regularly attend formal education, including 94% of girls.

## Examples of our results across projects<sup>2,3</sup>

### Driving high quality teaching

**42,512** teachers, head teachers and school staff

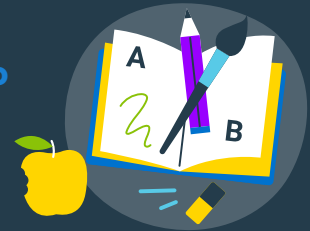
in 27 countries were trained on learner-centred and gender-responsive teaching to allow children to thrive and learn in school.



### Supporting families and children to help them enter and stay in school



**53,000+** children, including 34,305 girls, received scholarships, bursaries and fees to help them stay in school.



**323,652** children, including 160,058 girls, received school kits, textbooks and other materials to support their learning.

### Helping children access education that meets their needs

**91%** of teachers

observed in our projects this year were using learner-centred, inclusive teaching approaches that support gender equality and respond to the needs of all students. All projects except one met or went beyond their goal, with an average achievement of 140% of the targeted improvement in teaching practices.<sup>4</sup>



Plan delivered flexible and alternative education programmes for

**323,936** children and young people in 24 countries, including over 154,000 girls.

**226,000+** children, including 108,279 girls, enrolled in school through Plan-supported projects in 25 countries



140%

## Ensuring children progress and achieve

In 20 countries, our programming has supported over

**550,000**

**children and young people**

(including 260,000 girls) to progress to the next stage of their education



Across just 10 projects

**49,262**  
**children**

(including 23,000 girls) achieved improved learning outcomes.

## Ensuring children are safe and comfortable in school

**1 million+**  
**children**

reached (almost half of which were girls) through school feeding programmes to ensure they get the nutrition they need to thrive and effectively learn in school.



Building and rehabilitation of ...

**492** classrooms and school blocks

in 15 countries, as well as

**279** temporary learning spaces,

**114** preschools, and

**95** schools

in 22 countries to ensure that children have a safe and inclusive learning environment.

## Ensuring children are safe and comfortable in school (continued)

Supported strengthened water, sanitation and hygiene by »

building over

**117** WASH facilities

in schools, and

improving the WASH facilities in over

**321** schools



**Advocacy for education<sup>5</sup>**

**36** influencing successes

reported in education, including

**15** changes

related to laws, policies, regulations, or guidelines on girls' rights.

1. Based on annual reach reporting by country offices, July 2024 to June 2025.
2. Results are aggregated based on data reported by projects this year, including both those operating in development contexts and those responding to crises. They represent a sub-set of overall reach figures since they are specific to particular project activities and depend on individual project reporting cadence. Best efforts have been made to adjust for double counting during the aggregation through careful review and adjustment where projects have reported more than once during the year. For specific data related to humanitarian programming, please refer to the Humanitarian Snapshot for 2025.
3. Project performance against targets was calculated and reported for global outcome indicators that are part of the dataset available this year. Where multiple data points had been reported by a project, an average was first calculated per project. The average performance across projects was then calculated as a mean.
4. Monitoring data from 2420 teachers in 18 projects.
5. Based on annual reporting against our [Global Advocacy Strategy](#), July 2024 to June 2025.

# What are some of the key issues?

## Selected findings from research



Girls with one of the books they have selected from the mobile library in Timor-Leste.

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### Globally, education has seen historic enrolment gains since 2015, yet deep inequalities persist.

An estimated 272 million children and youth remain out of school (including 133 million girls),<sup>6</sup> with low-income countries facing severe gaps in early childhood education, literacy, and basic learning outcomes.<sup>7</sup> Crisis-affected regions are particularly vulnerable, with 85 million school-aged children out of school – 52 per cent of them girls.<sup>8</sup> Attacks on education and climate-related disruptions have surged, compounding barriers to access and safety. Over 400 million students faced school closures due to weather events between 2022 and 2024, including 242 million students in 2024 alone, with South Asia and Africa significantly affected.<sup>9</sup>

**The global private, fiscal, and social costs of children and youth not learning is estimated at US \$10 trillion per year.**

UNESCO. 2024. *Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/5: Leadership in education – Lead for learning*

**Gender disparities remain entrenched.** While girls often outperform boys in reading, they face greater risks of dropping out of school due to unpaid care burdens, conflict, and climate shocks. Women dominate teaching roles but are underrepresented in leadership, hindered by lack of mentorship and systemic bias.

**Financing shortfalls are critical, with aid to education sharply declining and low-income countries spending a fraction per learner compared to high-income nations.** The future of education hinges on inclusive leadership, retaining teachers, the integration of artificial intelligence, and collaboration across different sectors. The Fortaleza Declaration, adopted at the 2024 Global Education Meeting, calls for urgent investment and recognises youth as key agents of change. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030 will require closing a US \$97 billion annual funding gap and ensuring education systems are resilient, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all learners.

**Across crisis-affected and development contexts, Plan International's research this year highlights persistent barriers to inclusive, quality education – particularly for girls and marginalised learners.** In displacement settings, language barriers and gaps in trauma-sensitive responses are major obstacles.

6. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Global Education Monitoring Reporting Team. 2025. [SDG4 scorecard progress report on national benchmarks: focus on the out-of-school rate](#)
7. UNESCO. 2024. [Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/5: Leadership in education – Lead for learning](#). Paris, UNESCO
8. Education Cannot Wait. 2025. [State of Education for Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents: Access and Learning Outcomes Global Estimates 2025](#)
9. UNICEF. 2025. [Global snapshot of climate-related school disruptions in 2024](#)

For example, the [Adolescent Girls in Crisis](#) report highlighted that Ukrainian adolescents attending host country schools in Poland and Romania describe confusion, fatigue, and emotional distress due to unfamiliar languages and harsh classroom interactions. These findings underscore the need for structured language-bridging and learner-centred teaching that responds to the needs of all students.

**Minimum conditions for learning, such as safe infrastructure, materials, and psychosocial support, are essential.** In Ethiopia and Sudan, the [Still We Dream](#) report found students reported studying in burnt-out classrooms with no books or chairs, while teachers struggled with morale.

**“ I had great interest in learning but when the war broke out, we stopped learning. We didn’t attend class even for year. Due to the continued war, many of the children lost their parents ... The high school we were learning at, its classrooms were burnt. The school was almost empty, no books and chairs. We shared one book for 12 students. Many students had no exercise books and uniforms.”**

Young woman research participant, 18 years old, Ethiopia

**Being out of school is most acute in protracted crises**, driven by conflict, displacement, poverty, and school destruction. Adolescents in Lebanon and Ethiopia described missing three to five years of education, with barriers to re-enrolling in school including lack of documentation and unsafe routes.

Climate shocks further exacerbate risks of dropping out of school by increasing unpaid care burdens and reducing household income, disproportionately affecting girls. Girls’ education is increasingly disrupted by climate-related events, which reduce learning time through water scarcity, unsafe travel, and economic strain. Research from West Africa and Nepal showed how girls face heightened risks of dropping out of school due to poverty, hunger, and increased domestic workloads. Families often deprioritise girls’ schooling when resources are scarce, exposing them to exploitation.

Learners want climate education that is practical and empowering, yet current curricula often lack depth, and teachers are not sufficiently trained. Locally relevant, resilience-focused initiatives, like clubs and campaigns, can boost girls’ motivation and leadership. To support girls’ learning in climate-affected areas, education systems must integrate disaster preparedness, climate adaptation, sexual and reproductive health and teacher capacity-building.

In Guinea, girls linked climate change to missed classes and called for actionable learning like weather forecasting and preparedness.

**“ Because of these climate changes ... I have to travel a long distance to fetch water, which causes me to be late for class.”**

Young woman participant, 18 to 24 years old, Guinea<sup>10</sup>

Research also highlighted that re-engagement with education works when costs are offset and flexible education modalities are available.

[The Changing Lives 2024](#) report found that sponsorship models, accelerated learning and targeted outreach helped adolescents return to school. One sponsored student in Uganda credited support with school fees with enabling her continued education while peers dropped out:

**“ The payment of school fees stands out for me the most. It stands out because it represents the essentials for my education. I was never sent away from school to go and get fees because Plan International had already paid for me. Some of the children had to go back home while we were studying. They would spend days and some, weeks absent from school ... if it was not [for] Plan, I would have stopped in those low primary classes.”**

Adolescent girl, 16 years old, Uganda

10. Respondent from [A Gathering Storm: A study on the gendered impact of climate change on the rights of adolescent girls and young women in the Sahel](#)

Across reports, curriculum content, language, delivery modalities and materials interact to shape what adolescents actually learn in fragile and stable contexts alike. Reports consistently call for relevant, participatory curricula (including climate resilience and sexuality education) paired with practical materials, teacher preparation, and assessments aligned to intended skills.

Girls in Poland and Colombia reported challenges with skipped sexual and reproductive health and rights topics and teachers unprepared to support menstruation.

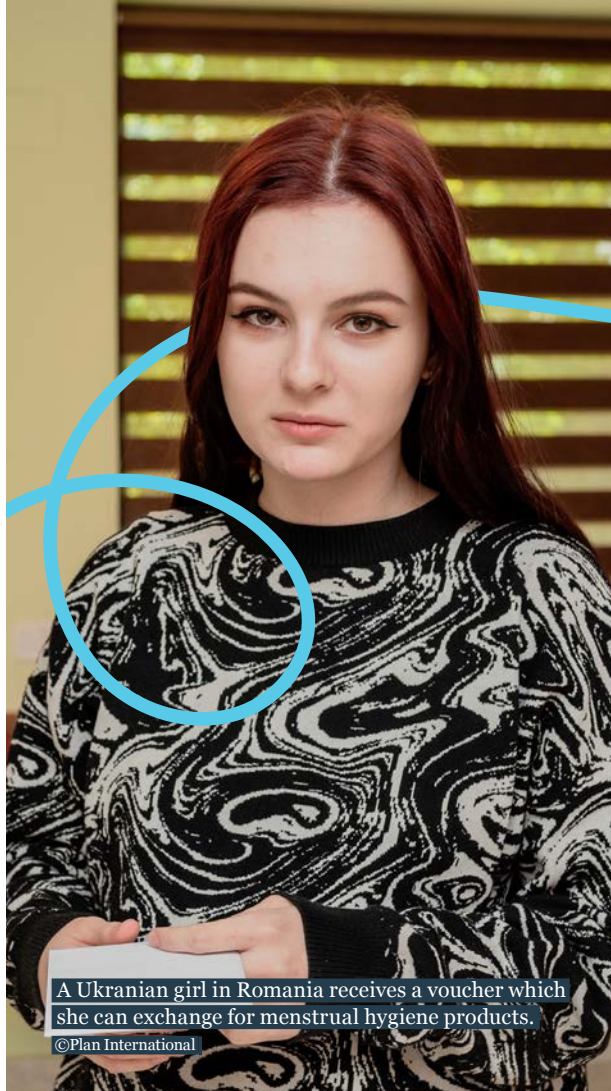
“ We had SRHR [sexual and reproductive health and rights] as one of the topics in our biology class. However, our teacher simply decided to skip this topic.”

Adolescent girl, 15 to 19 years old, Ukraine<sup>11</sup>

Education that drives gender equality – and responds to the needs of all learners – is essential. Students called for teaching that addresses consent, safety, and gender norms. One boy in Cameroon suggested sexual and reproductive health and rights education should help girls avoid exploitation, while findings in Colombia and Ethiopia described stigma and school dropout linked to pregnancy and menstruation, highlighting the need for integrating a strengthened focus on gender equality and tackling harmful norms and inequalities education into daily schooling (including teacher training on bias and school related gender-based violence, as well as menstrual health support).

“ Provide them with sanitary pads ... and a learning programme that taught [sic] women how they should not be easily fooled by men”

Adolescent male, 16 years old, Cameroon<sup>12</sup>



In development contexts, several reports indicated that weak governance around water, sanitation and hygiene and the prevention of harassment continues to erode safety and dignity, especially for girls. In Colombia, 87 per cent of schools lacked basic water, sanitation and hygiene services, undermining girls' safety and participation. [The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2024](#) report found only 19 per cent of girls felt completely safe at school, with calls for whole-school approaches to tackle harassment.

Education Technology ('EdTech') and blended learning were shown to expand access but must be paired with strong pedagogy and mentoring. In Ukraine, online learning helped maintain continuity of schooling but reduced interaction and excluded marginalised groups like Roma adolescents. By contrast, the *Towards Gender Transformative STEM Education* report found programmes like Black Girls Code and Passerelles Numériques showed success when combining digital tools with mentoring and culturally relevant content.

11. Respondent from [Adolescent Girls in Crisis Voices from Ukraine, Poland and Romania](#)

12. Respondent from [State of the World's Girls 2024: Still We Dream](#)

# What have we learned?

## Selected findings from evaluations

**We reviewed 54 evaluations of Plan's inclusive quality education programming this year, covering 24 countries in all five of our regions.**

**Our evaluations revealed strong improvements in teaching practices.** In Nepal 78 per cent of schools were demonstrating improved teaching practices (up 64 per centage points from before the project), while in Niger 68 per cent of teachers demonstrated improved practices, exceeding the goals of the project. In Romania, the engaging lessons and supportive environment created by enthusiastic teachers was highlighted by students as essential for learning, while in Tanzania one school administrator commented, *'I saw how motivated the teachers were, following up with children, especially girls, when they were absent from school'* linking improved teaching to improved student attendance.

**Plan's education projects expanded access to education,** especially in emergency contexts, with nearly 38,000 students enrolled by the end of projects in South Sudan, Uganda and the Central African Republic. Three projects in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Tanzania achieved between 11 and 22 per centage point increases in primary and secondary enrolment and attendance. Distributing financial support in the form of bursaries, scholarships and learning materials to vulnerable families was highlighted as critical to ensure children remain in school. Retention and transition rates were also strong, with reductions seen in dropout rates for girls across six countries under the multisectoral *Girls Get Equal* project, including an impressive 11 per centage point reduction in dropout for secondary students in Niger. Success was attributed to the project's integrated, cross-thematic approach, with activities like village savings and loans associations supporting parents financially to keep their girls in school.



A young girl from Nepal says the learning kiosks make difficult topics fun and easier to understand.  
©Plan International

**Plan's evaluations revealed substantial improvements in learning outcomes in foundational subjects like literacy and numeracy.** In India 97 per cent of students who attended the *Shikshantar* supplementary learning centres demonstrated competency in core subjects like English and Maths compared to the start of the project where barely any students (less than one per cent) showed competency. The extra study support provided to learners, especially girls, in welcoming and accessible supplementary learning centres with qualified teachers was foundational to improving learning outcomes. In Uganda 68 per cent of students attending supported primary schools achieved at least minimal reading and maths proficiency (up 40 per centage points from before the project), while in Nepal the *Girls Learn Equally* project resulted in between 5 and 19 per centage point improvements in students' performance in core subjects across different grade levels. In Niger, 74 per cent of pupils at Plan-supported schools were proficient in maths which was 49 per centage points higher compared to the group who did not receive support from the project.



A woman serves meals of maize and beans to students at primary school in Kenya.  
©Plan International

**Strong outcomes related to re-enrolling in education were achieved for out-of-school students too**, with 100 per cent of out-of-school learners completing an educational cycle in Zimbabwe, and 98 per cent of schools in Burkina Faso allowing pregnant girls to return after having a baby. As one parent noted in Uganda *“The AEP [Accelerated Education Programme] gave hope to learners who had dropped out of school, especially young mothers, to re-enrol”* showing how alternative education can help girls continue their education and reap the lifelong benefits that come from this.

**Making the school environment safe and inclusive is important for student wellbeing, supporting attendance and learning outcomes.**

Water, sanitation and hygiene interventions showed strong results across several projects, including 100 per cent of targeted schools with inclusive facilities in Tanzania, improved hygiene behaviours for 85 per cent of children in Nepal, and improvements across a range of areas in Bangladesh (including 98 per cent of girls able to access handwashing stations and running water latrines at school, improving 32 and 27 per centage points respectively compared to the start of the project). Menstrual health and hygiene efforts significantly reduced school absences, with 87 per cent of girls in Nepal and 97 per cent in another project in Bangladesh reporting no missed school days, supported by sanitary pad availability and rest spaces. Beyond water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, broader school improvements like rehabilitating classrooms were seen as key to

improving retention of children in education. For example, in Uganda the construction of a girls’ dormitory improved girls’ enrolment and enabled the re-opening of the Advanced (A) Level in Adjumani secondary school, which had not been operational for 10 years.

**School safeguarding was also significantly strengthened across multiple projects, helping to create safer environments where learners can thrive free from harm.** In Uganda 94 per cent of schools were assessed as inclusive, protective and gender-responsive, increasing 61 per centage points from before the project, with one teacher commenting *“I realised that punishing a child or beating a child doesn’t correct the mistake but instead adds a problem to the child. We have now dropped the sticks,”* making school safer for students.

**Given the risk posed to education facilities by climate change, disaster risk reduction programming is another key aspect of ensuring a safe school environment.** Projects achieved strong outcomes in Nepal and Bangladesh with 100 per cent of schools meeting safety standards (up 75 per centage points from baseline). In addition 85 per cent of learners knew where safe and unsafe zones were in their school (up 24 per centage points from at project initiation), better enabling them to perceive hazards and seek safety in the event of a disaster. Success was driven by learner-centred training and integrating disaster response into school management processes and broader community disaster management practices.

**Plan International achieved notable policy influence across several countries, driving government action to strengthen inclusive, gender-responsive education systems and disaster preparedness.**

In **Nepal**, the *STEAM Ahead* project worked closely with local governments to adopt inclusive, gender-responsive education policies, including education in emergency plans, child protection policies, local curricula as well as disaster risk reduction plans. Following engagement with Plan International, local governments improved their institutional capacity enabling them to secure additional provincial funding for disaster risk reduction.

In **Bangladesh**, national-level engagement prompted the government to consider adjusting school calendars in disaster-prone areas, while in Uganda Plan's projects led to the modification of tools for government school supervision and inspection to include items such as supportive learning environment and markers for gender equality and inclusion, and influenced the recruitment of additional inspectors to ensure quality standards are met.

In **Cameroon**, the Safe Schools Declaration Roadmap, a nationally endorsed framework that translates Cameroon's commitment to protecting education into concrete action, was adopted. This milestone is especially impactful for girls and young women affected by conflict and displacement, as it sets the foundation for safer, more inclusive learning environments. Plan played a leading role throughout the process, facilitating inclusive consultations, coordinating civil society efforts, and ensuring that girls' voices shaped the roadmap's priorities. Through strategic advocacy, technical engagement with key ministries, and high-level multi-stakeholder platforms, the office positioned itself as a key influencer in advancing child protection, education in emergencies, and gender equality.

In **Ethiopia**, we made significant progress in advancing girls' rights through sustained high-level advocacy with federal and regional government officials. By convening strategic meetings focused on gender-based violence, inclusive education, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health, the office created rare opportunities for policymakers to hear directly from youth advocates and humanitarian actors about the barriers girls face. These efforts led to formal pledges from Members of Parliament to implement gender-responsive budgeting and policies and culminated in the passing of a new bill to address gender-based violence in educational settings, marking a major institutional shift toward accountability and protection



A 13-year-old answers questions in class in Uganda.

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**Plan also successfully handed over education activities to government and community partners to ensure their continuation.**

For example, in Uganda the government absorbed 12 teachers from the *SPIN project*, while in Sudan the government absorbed all personnel (18 teachers, 9 cooks) associated with a school feeding programme. In Nepal, two wards earmarked funds for the operation and maintenance of drinking water supply systems, while in Ghana the *Be Smart* project worked closely with the government to integrate school-based interventions like teacher training and adolescent clubs into national education systems and resulted in District Assemblies committing to incorporating these activities into annual plans and budgets.

# Where we need to keep going deeper ...

The evidence available this year has informed insights which are relevant for Plan International but also the wider sector, in terms of how investment is targeted and how programmes are designed, to achieve gains in inclusive, quality education:



**We need to continue to strengthen teacher capacity and skills to improve learning outcomes.**

Competent teachers who have a commitment to gender equality and the inclusive participation of all children are foundational to learning. In parallel, we also need to establish mechanisms to better monitor how these gender-transformative teaching approaches contribute to learning outcomes so we can better understand what works and why.



**We need to continue to support the upgrading of infrastructure and embedding maintenance support.**

Improvements to classrooms, water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, and counselling spaces were linked to better attendance and learning. To sustain these gains, projects must plan for long-term upkeep, including financing, sourcing repairs and training. Partnerships with governments and communities are key.



**We need to continue providing learning and financial support, including via integrating livelihoods to ensure sustainability.**

Bursaries, school fee support and supplies helped families keep children in school. Linking parents to income-generating activities or village savings and loans associations help sustain education costs beyond the project period.



**We need to continue to strengthen disability inclusion in programme design and delivery.**

While many projects reached marginalised groups, there is scope to improve how interventions support children with complex disabilities or older adolescents. Efforts to support children with disabilities was sometimes limited by a lack of local disability organisations or specialised services, particularly for those with more complex impairments; therefore partnerships are vital.



**We need to continue exploring scalable, low-cost technology solutions in education.**

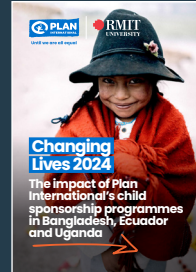
While digital tools showed promise, poor connectivity and limited access can hinder uptake. As digital learning grows globally, Plan's future efforts can focus on inclusive, locally relevant technologies that match teacher capacity and learner needs.

# Read more



## [I am Ready!](#)

Learn about our accelerated intensive pre-primary education model.



## [Changing Lives 2024: The impact of Plan International's child sponsorship programmes in Bangladesh, Ecuador and Uganda](#)

An action-oriented research series – conducted in collaboration with RMIT University – on the impact of child sponsorship, and how we can continually improve.



## [State of the World's Girls 2024: Still We Dream](#)

The 2024 State of the World's Girls Report focuses on the experiences of young people whose lives are dominated by conflict, involving a large-scale survey of 9,995 participants from ten countries plus 104 in-depth interviews from four countries.



## [Reports from the Real Choices, Real Lives Research Series:](#)

A study that has been following the lives of over 100 girls in 9 countries around the world from their birth in 2006 until they turned 18 in 2024.



## [The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2024](#)

Results from listening to over 3,000 girls' voices in the United Kingdom, to explore their feelings about the issues they face growing up as a girl.



## [Humanitarian Programming in 2025](#)

Our Humanitarian Evidence Snapshot provides a deeper look into our evidence from research and programming in emergencies this year, including in education.



## Until we are all equal

### About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion, and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters, and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crisis and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national, and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

### We won't stop until we are all equal.

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The analysis underpinning the full suite of 2025 evidence snapshots was led by the Plan International Global Monitoring and Evaluation and Research Teams, with inputs and collaboration from colleagues in the Programmes, Humanitarian and Policy and Advocacy Teams.

**Note:** Images used throughout this report are not of research participants. Consent was received for the use of all images.

**Front cover image:** A 15-year-old and her friends stand in the doorway of their school in Kilifi county in Kenya.

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