



Until we are all equal

Girls Education
& Empowerment
Fund

A young girl with a bright smile, wearing a white short-sleeved shirt, a brown tie, and a brown skirt, stands in a classroom with wooden desks. Her hands are resting on the desks in front of her.

Introducing the
**Girls Education
& Empowerment
Fund**

Education is the key to unlocking a better, more equal world. One where girls can grow up and access countless opportunities and break the cycle of poverty – not just for themselves, but for their families and future generations.

Education is the key that empowers girls to choose their own futures and create a better world for all.

Yet right now, there are more than 130 million girls are currently being denied an education for reasons that are entirely preventable. The ongoing impacts of COVID-19, an increase in climate shocks and disasters, rising global conflict, and a devastating global hunger crisis mean millions more girls are facing a permanent end to their education. These crises are threatening to undo decades of progress towards gender equality. This is where the Girls Education & Empowerment Fund (GEEFund) can transform lives.



02 **Acknowledgement of Country**

Plan International Australia acknowledge and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Elders past and present of this nation. We recognise sovereignty was never ceded and that this land always was and always will be First Nations land. We recognise their ongoing connection to land, waters and community, and we commit to ongoing learning, deep and active listening, and taking action in solidarity.

What is the Girls Education & Empowerment Fund?

Plan International Australia's GEEFund is a multi-year giving initiative that aims to super-charge your support to tackle the barriers that stop girls from receiving an education. It works by pooling your contributions with other donors to leverage it for more funding from Plan International's institutional partners – **effectively multiplying your impact by turning \$1 into \$2 (or more)**. The fund is designed to create change that doesn't just impact girls' lives now, it drives change for future generations.

What makes GEEFund special is how we approach the issue of girls' education. We address all the barriers that prevent her from accessing and completing a quality education so that she is empowered to pursue a life of her choosing. These include:



Stunting & poor childhood development

Inequality begins even before birth. The moments from conception right up to a child's second birthday will influence their health, growth and learning potential for the rest of their lives. Girls are more likely to be subjected to poor nutrition and limited access to early education programs, which makes it harder for them to thrive once they go to school.



Poor access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene

A lack of safe toilets, menstrual products and clean water at school to help manage menstrual hygiene means girls are forced miss school when they have their periods. Additionally, in many countries, girls are responsible for collecting water for their families, which keeps them out of school and puts them in danger of violence.



Gender-based violence and insufficient child protection

Conflict and gender-based violence – whether it takes place at home, in the classroom, or while travelling in between – can prevent girls from thriving at school and eventually leads to them dropping out altogether. Child marriage is another breach of girls' rights that forces millions of girls to leave school forever.



Lack of support around sexual and reproductive health

When a girl is denied access to information about her sexual and reproductive health – information as basic as how pregnancy occurs – unplanned early pregnancy becomes a very real consequence. And when a girl does fall pregnant, she can often face social isolation, health complications and an end to her education.



Economic hardship and lack of livelihood opportunities

Poverty and the cost of school can lead to girls' education not being prioritised by their caregivers. Girls are often the first to be pulled from school before their male siblings so that they can tend to domestic duties, such as preparing food and caring for younger siblings, which limits their opportunities for the rest of their lives.



Crises & Emergencies

COVID-19 and the global hunger crisis have shown us that emergencies exacerbate other inequalities girls already face. Girls and women are being fed the least and last. They are more likely to experience gender-based violence, child marriage and early pregnancy. And once their education is disrupted, it's likely they will never return.

***Girls' education is impacted by all these barriers.
But an education also has the power to overcome them.***

Why invest in girls?

Every child on the planet deserves the chance to reach their full potential, regardless of their gender. But we also know our world today is failing girls. Poverty and injustice are dark realities for many. But girls are disproportionately affected. In times of disaster and conflict, girls face an increased risk of gender-based violence and exploitation. When hunger strikes, girls eat last and least, and are first to be pulled from school. Once a crisis disrupts a girl's education, it is unlikely that they will ever return.

Gender inequality and discrimination know no borders. This isn't restricted to any one community, culture or continent. Half the world's population is being held back by gender-based discrimination, but it doesn't have to be this way – it's something we have the power to change. When we focus on investing in a community at large, girls often miss out. When we target our investment on girls, no one misses out.

Investing in girls' education is life-changing for girls themselves – but the ripple effects it can have for entire communities and countries has the potential to truly transform our world. Here are some examples:

1.

Educating girls improves nationwide employment opportunities and outcomes.

It lifts more people out of poverty and increases a country's gross domestic product (GDP). We know that if all girls are able to finish their secondary education or equivalent, our global GDP can increase by 10% over the next decade.

2.

Educating girls means more children survive infancy and grow up healthy.

If every girl completed 12 years of schooling, the number of babies born early would fall by 59% and infant deaths would drop by 49%. Educated mothers are more likely to choose education and healthier lifestyle options for their own children and help end damaging practices like female genital cutting and child marriage.

3.

Educating girls stops child marriage.

12 years of education for every girl would reduce child marriage worldwide by 64%. This is because an educated girl is less likely to be forced into marriage. On top of this, educated mothers are more likely to invest in their daughters' education and stop the cycle of early marriage

4.

Educating girls is one of the most effective – and most overlooked – ways to mitigate climate change.

For every year a girl stays in school, her country's climate resilience measurably improves by 3.2 points. Educated girls can reclaim their reproductive rights, foster greater climate participation and leadership, as well as develop their life skills for a green economy.

Why must we act now?

All children and young people deserve the same opportunities in life, and the education of girls is essential in creating a brighter future for all – but right now, that future is in jeopardy.

The impacts of COVID-19, intensifying climate shocks and disasters, rising conflict and the global hunger crisis are devastating, especially for girls. More than 20 million girls were pulled out of school due to COVID-19 school closures.



Girls and women account for 70% of the world's hungry, and 50% of all refugees fleeing conflict, disaster and instability. By 2025, an additional 12.5 million girls each year may not be able to complete their schooling due to factors related to climate change.

Not only are these girls being denied the education they need to create the life they want, they're also being denied crucial support services that help protect them from gender-based violence, child marriage and the loss of their reproductive rights.

We know that girls are significantly less likely to return to school if they've been forced to leave for any reason. Girls already face unique barriers to education, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic, conflict, hunger and climate change.

An educated girl is more likely to invest in herself, her health, her family and her community, which translates to more money invested in economies. This means more jobs for everyone, and a reduction in overall poverty.

A girl who can stay in school is more likely to grow into a woman who marries later, chooses if and when she'd like to have children, has a healthier family, earns a greater income, and pursues the life she wants. A girl who completes an education becomes a woman who can transform the lives of those around her.

What are we doing about it?

We strive for a just world for all children and central to that mission is equality for girls. We believe a better world is possible. An equal world; a world where all children can live happy and healthy lives, and where girls have equal opportunities. This is the world you are helping us create.

We believe in gender equality in education. That's why, together with our partners, we advocate for girls' and young women's education at a grassroots level and support girls to be leaders in their own communities.

To ensure girls aren't left behind and can continue their education, Plan International has a five-tier approach to help break down the barriers they face:

1. Keep girls in school and provide them with a quality education

- Support accelerated, catch-up programs and wide scale distance-learning programs, especially for girls impacted by crisis, conflict and disasters
- Work to promote back-to-school campaigns that show parents and caregivers the lasting impacts that education can have.
- Provide distance-learning materials like radios and print materials to support children impacted by crisis.
- Train teachers to intervene in cases of gender-based violence and instances of girls dropping out of school.

2. Protect girls from violence

- Ramp up our programs that focus on gender-based violence prevention training in communities.
- Strengthen our remote case management services to support families experiencing gender-based violence.
- Support parents to cope with the financial and psychological hardships of crisis, conflict and disasters so that they can adequately care for and protect their children.

3. Increase access to sexual and reproductive health rights

- Continue expanding our sexual and reproductive health rights education using remote and digital approaches so girls and young women are empowered to know their rights and access critical services.
- Help resource and train nurses in local sexual reproductive health clinics.
- Work with local partners to expand sexual reproductive health referral services.
- Empower and train youth advocates to go to schools to teach reproductive health.

4. Strengthen girls' economic security and social protection

- Expand the size and reach of our social-protection programs.
- Support women's and youth savings groups.
- Expand youth vocational training programs.
- Provide training and support for young women pursuing entrepreneurial initiatives.

5. Support girls' agency and voice

- Facilitate girl-led research and action projects where girls can express their voice and views, including to people who have the power to make the change they seek.
- Provide girls with information and resources on the risks of child, early and forced marriage and empowering them to educate their community.
- Provide training and support for young women to advocate for their rights in government forums and local community councils.

Plan International Australia is bringing people together to create change that lasts. Children, families, local communities, government, schools, businesses, and you.

We do what we do so babies can survive their first 1000 days, so children can learn in safe environments, so girls can live and work without discrimination, so young people can stand up for their rights, and so all children can break free from poverty. We view the children, families and local communities we work with as our partners and our equals.

By standing with girls and supporting them to speak up, to know their rights and to lead, we are working towards a better, more equal world for all.

Together, we have the power to move humanity towards a better tomorrow for girls and communities globally.

How can you get involved?

GEEFund isn't a short-term fix – it's a giving initiative designed to support an entire generation of girls to finish school and choose their own futures.

To achieve long-term change, we need a long-term plan. That's why we ask GEEFund supporters to commit to a multi-year pledge of at least \$5,000 per year for five years. This money is then used to leverage further funding in the form of multi-year grants from our institutional partners, **turning \$1 into \$2 (or more)**. These partners include:



Every girl has the right to go to school, pursue the life she wants and own the decisions that will shape her future. Only then can we achieve lasting change for all.

If you would like to be part of making this a reality, please head to our website planau.me/gee-fund or email us at ano.philanthropy@plan.org.au



Until we are all equal

plan.org.au 13 75 26

Plan International Australia
18/60 City Road, Southbank VIC 3006
GPO Box 2818, Melbourne VIC 3001
Tel: 13 75 26 Fax: +61 (3) 9670 1130
Email: info@plan.org.au

ABN 49 004 875 807

 /planaustralia

 @PlanAustralia

 @plan_australia