



NOTE D'INFORMATION

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Sustainable Development Goal on education: where do girls and boys stand?

Ministère de l'Éducation nationale,
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Directrice de la publication : Fabienne Rosenwald
Auteurs : Alexandra Farrugia ; Robert Rakocevic, DEPP-MIREI
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Maquettiste : Anthony Fruchart
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► The UN Agenda 2030 calls on the countries of the world, North and South, to end poverty and make a successful transition to sustainable development in many areas such as the environment, employment, health and justice, among others. As an integral part of this agenda, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the fourth of which is devoted to education, are monitored by indicators addressing the issue of inequalities, particularly gender inequality. SDG4 highlights the continuing significant disparities between countries and regions of the world in the enrolment and educational achievement of girls and boys.

► SDG4 involves ensuring equal access to quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. It is broken down into several targets covering different areas of education and training, and concerns both young people and adults.

In secondary education, fewer girls than boys are enrolled in education in low-income countries

According to the SDG4, all girls and boys should complete free and quality primary and secondary education by 2030. However, in many countries there is no legal obligation to participate in the entire secondary education. In Europe, primary and lower secondary education are compulsory in all countries (Eurydice, 2020). Upper secondary education (ISCED 3, see "For more information") is compulsory (fully or partially) in less than half of European countries. Participation at this level is still high and equitable across Europe, albeit slightly to the advantage of girls: on average, only 6.5% of girls (3.9% in France) and 6.8% of boys (5.1% in France) of age to be enrolled at ISCED 3-level are out of school in 2018. In North America, this is the case for 4% of girls and the same share of boys ► **figure 1**. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is very different: participation in education is low overall and the advantage on the boys' side (62% of girls out-of-school and 55% of boys). The gap is particularly high in Chad (86% of girls and 72% of boys) and virtually non-

existent in Burkina Faso, but still with a high rate of non-enrolment (66% for both genders in this country).

By age 15, girls are often more proficient than boys in reading

In addition to the completion of an education cycle, SDG4 aims to strengthen the proficiency of both girls and boys by 2030. In 2018, in all the countries participating in PISA, more 15-year-old girls than boys meet or exceed the minimum proficiency level of reading, which is equivalent to level 2 in this assessment ► **figure 2**.

Students who do not have this level are not able to identify the main idea in a medium-length text or to find information based on explicit criteria. While in some Asian countries (Saudi Arabia, Thailand) there are significant gender gaps in favour of girls, Europe is not exempt: 57% of girls and 34% of boys are competent in Northern Macedonia; 84% of girls and 75% of boys in France.

In primary education, in mathematics, in more than half of the countries participating in TIMSS 2019, boys are slightly more likely than girls to reach the minimum level of skills, i.e. the intermediate level (59% of boys and 54% of girls in France). As for computer and information literacy in lower secondary education, for the 14 countries and regions participating in ICILS 2018, boys are often performing less well than girls, for example in France, where 49% of boys score below level

2 in ICILS 2018 compared to 38% of girls, or in Finland, with 34% of low-performing boys and 21% of girls (see "For more information"). However, although they are close to or ahead of boys in mathematical and digital skills, girls are less likely to pursue careers in information and communication technologies (UNESCO, 2020).

Girls participate less in vocational education

The ambition of the SDG4 is that, by 2030, all women and men should have access to quality and affordable "technical and vocational" education, that is, education that prepares them for working life. In most parts of the world, boys aged 15-24 participate more than girls of the same age in vocational education (VET). Vocational education includes secondary education, particularly at the upper secondary level (except in a few countries, such as Germany, where vocational education begins at the lower secondary level), post-secondary non-tertiary education, which is particularly developed in Germany, and short tertiary education, which is particularly present in France, notably through programmes leading to qualification such as BTS, DUT and paramedical and social vocational diplomas (see "For more information"). The Europe region has the highest participation of girls, but also the largest gender gap, to the advantage of boys

► **figure 3**.

Italy in particular has the greatest gender disparity (16% of girls and 26% of boys); conversely, Luxembourg has near-parity. France lies between these two extremes: 17% of girls and 22% of boys in VET. Lower participation of girls in vocational education may indicate that girls drop out of school: in Mauritania, for example, less than 1% of girls aged 15 to 24 are enrolled in vocational education, but 63% of girls of theoretical upper secondary school age are not enrolled at all (in 2018). On the contrary, it may indicate a significant participation of young women in long-term higher education. However, in higher education, women remain under-represented in engineering, computer science and agriculture (UNEVOC, 2020; DEPP, 2020).

Women are more likely to graduate from higher education, especially in high-income countries

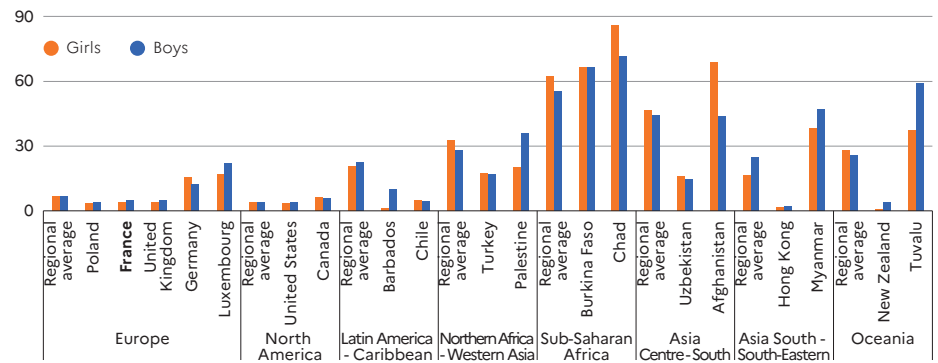
SDG4 differs from previous global education agendas in its emphasis on equal access to higher education for women and men. In 2017, France has as many women (30.9%) as men (29.3%) aged 25 or older with higher education degrees ▶ **figure 4**.

Estonia and Qatar have 49% and 35% of women aged 25 or older with higher education, respectively, compared with 31% and 15% of men. These countries have the highest gender disparities in favour of women. Conversely, in Tajikistan, the gender difference is in favour of men. In many countries, these results are quite significantly affected by generational gaps in access to higher qualifications, particularly in Europe. Taking into account only young people aged 25 to 34, the share of higher education graduates increases considerably and the gaps remain in favour of women: for example, in 2019, 52% of women and 44% of men have higher education qualifications in France (Eurostat). ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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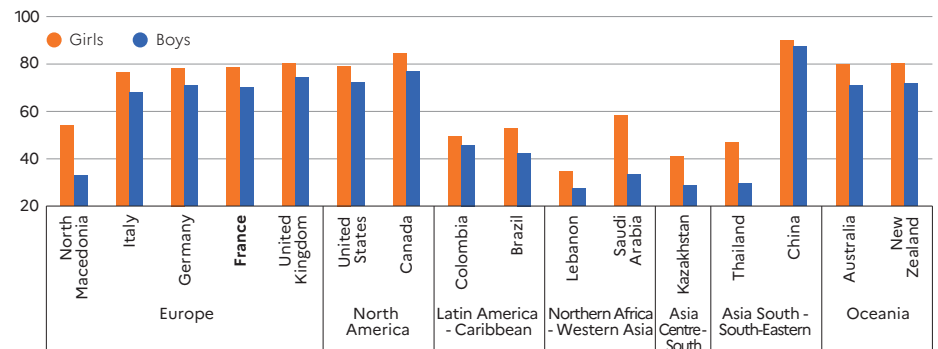
► 1 Out-of-school rate for girls and boys of upper secondary school age, in 2018, in %



Source: Unesco database (UOE 2019 data). See "For more information".

Réf. : Note d'Information, n° 21.13. © DEPP

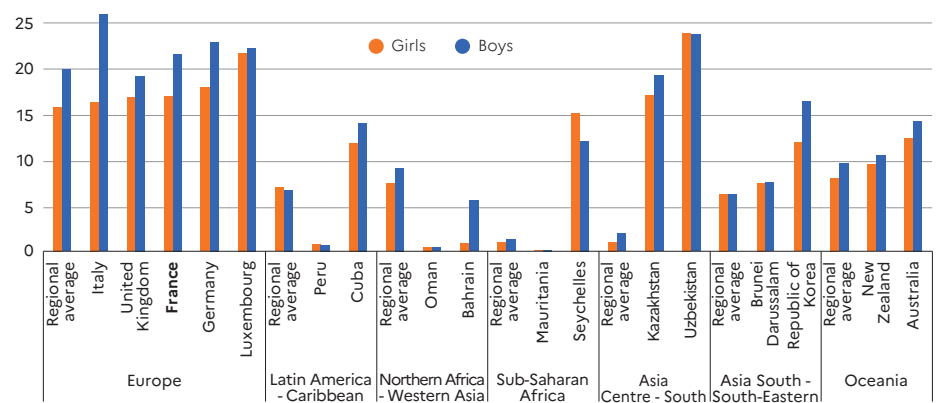
► 2 Proportion of girls and boys achieving at least the minimum proficiency level in reading at PISA 2018 (OECD), in %



Source: OECD, PISA 2018 (Vol. II, Table II.B1.7.12). See "For more information".

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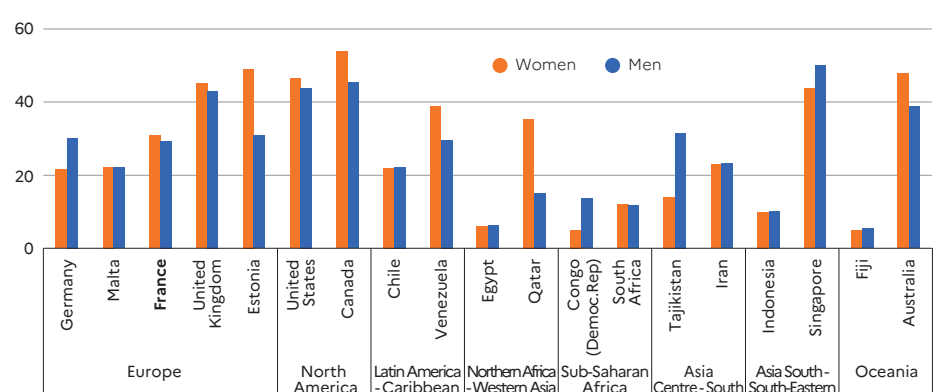
► 3 Proportion of 15-24 year old girls and boys enrolled in vocational education, in 2018, in %



Source: Unesco database (UOE 2019 data). See "For more information".

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► 4 Women and men aged 25 or more who graduated from higher education, in %



Source: Unesco database (survey data). See "For more information".

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