EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS

Beyond Access: Strengthening Girls' Transitions Across Learning Pathways

Evidence synthesis and decision tools grounded in evidence from 68 countries

Global progress in girls' education is accelerating, yet it hides deep inequities. Millions of girls and young women - especially those affected by poverty, rurality, displacement, or disability - still do not complete secondary school. Evidence from accelerated and other flexible learning pathways shows that when systems plan and deliver with girls' realities in mind, their trajectories can shift significantly. When education leaders work in concert with families, communities, and other sectors that shape girls' daily lives, education can contribute to transformative outcomes.

More than ever, education leaders need clear, evidence-backed guidance and practical tools to make this happen, identifying who has been left behind, understanding the barriers they face, and prioritising cost-effective actions that strengthen transitions into and through formal schooling and alternative pathways. This guidance distils insights and provides new tools for governments aiming to improve access, transition, retention, and completion for the girls whom education systems have not yet reached. Many of the evidence-based strategies offered are also relevant for other learners navigating multiple hurdles - whether gender norms, distance to school, displacement, or disability.

The scale of transition losses

Millions of girls and young women do not complete secondary education, not because the desire to learn is absent, but because education systems are not designed to sustain their progression. Globally, girls' and young women's access to education has improved, but millions still remain at the margins due to intersecting barriers, including poverty, conflict, crisis, rurality, displacement, disability and restrictive gender norms. Over the past ten years, more than 50 million girls and young women have enrolled in school, and global gender gaps in secondary completion rates have improved.[i] Yet global averages mask significant differences between and within countries. And in some cases, where enrolment increases, so too do inequalities.

- **The out-of-school rate more than doubles in crisis-affected contexts and low-income countries,** where more than 1 in 3 girls and young women are not in school.[ii]
- **Gender gaps in completion rates remain wide in sub-Saharan Africa,** where the pace of progress over the past decade has plateaued, especially at the secondary level.[iii] In the region, while 70% of girls complete primary school, only 26% of girls finish upper secondary.[iv]
- **Within-country disparities are often more extreme than global ones.** In Nigeria, 13% of the poorest rural girls and 19% of the poorest rural boys complete secondary school compared to more than 90% of the wealthiest urban boys and girls. Disability, displacement, and ethnicity further marginalise.[v]

Girls and young women facing the steepest barriers are the ones most likely to be pushed out of the system, due to inadequate school infrastructure and sanitation, security concerns in and around schools, or pressure to comply with social norms that expect them to marry and have children young. Conflict, climate shocks, and disasters are placing unprecedented strain on education systems, with girls often facing the brunt of disruptions. Strengthening access, retention, and transitions is essential to the resilience of education systems and the learners they serve. This requires deliberate planning that is both gender-responsive and gender-transformative.

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Leadership decisions can strengthen girls' transitions

Critical gaps in how systems support girls' transitions persist. This is an accountability gap: at points where learners move between programmes, institutions, ministries, or administrative levels, responsibility can become unclear and support can weaken. Girls' learning and transition pathways are rarely linear—many move in and out of school or non-formal education due to barriers such as poverty, mobility constraints, or school policies around pregnancy. At each re-entry or transition point, accountability often breaks down, without clear mechanisms to ensure learners continue progressing.

Many education systems overlook the unique needs of these girls and young women in education sector planning:

- **Only 4 of 60 education sector plans outline strategies to boost girls' and young women's participation in alternative and flexible learning programmes.** These include Somalia, Guinea, and Pakistan's Baluchistan and Punjab provinces. No plans, however, provide targeted support to facilitate their transitions to formal school beyond programme completion.[vi]
- **Long-term outcomes for girls and young women remain largely invisible in current data systems.** An increasing number of programmes provide gender-disaggregated enrolment or learning data. But few provide transition data that capture girls' participation or retention in formal school.
- **Data rarely captures how gender intersects with other vulnerabilities.** To design transformative education programmes for all girls and young women, data and monitoring systems must go beyond sex-disaggregation to reflect how factors such as age, poverty, disability, and displacement shape girls' outcomes.

The result is a critical blind spot: systems can count how many girls enter alternative non-formal programmes, without knowing their profiles or whether they move into, through, and beyond formal schooling in ways that meaningfully improve their life chances. For many girls and young women, the transition to formal school comes with new challenges.[vii] Without deliberate action, these gaps continue to push girls out of the system.

Leadership decisions can close these gaps by aligning resources, responsibilities, and delivery across the system. This includes strengthening data systems to track progression over time, clarifying roles and responsibilities for placement and follow-up support, and committing sustained financing to flexible and alternative learning pathways. While fragmented governance, weak inter-ministerial coordination, and financing rigidities constrain systems, greater efficiency in how resources are aligned and deployed can unlock transformative results for girls and other marginalised learners.

Systems must also look beyond formal schools to the full ecosystem of provision. Where government schools are overstretched, capacity can be enhanced by drawing on some of the very principles of accelerated programmes, by engaging communities, addressing learners' basic health and protection needs, and making learning more engaging, and relevant to their lives, cultures, and home languages.[viii] Alternative and flexible learning pathways have proven that more can be done with existing resources. But it doesn't stop at accelerated programmes. Absorption capacity can also be strengthened by leveraging affordable non-state or community schools. Together, these approaches can create more inclusive, responsive systems that better support the learning and long-term success of girls, young women, and all learners facing structural barriers. While the challenge is clear–so too are the solutions emerging from evidence and practice.

Evidence-based insights for sustaining girls' progression

Our analysis found that - when designed to meet the needs of learners facing overlapping barriers to inclusion - accelerated and other flexible learning pathways can improve not only learning, but the quality of life of girls, young women, and the people around them. Accelerated education programmes (AEPs) are flexible, age-appropriate programmes, run in an accelerated timeframe, which aim to provide access to education for out-of-school children and youth.[ix] Drawing on the largest AEP evidence base to date spanning 68 low-and middle-income or crisis-affected countries, we screened more than 11,000 sources and analysed 387 evidence sources, including journal articles, government documents, programmatic evaluations and donor reports (see our methodological note below).

Grounded in the insights of those closest to the work—local researchers, governments, and frontline implementers - the evidence suggests these actors are not simply carrying out programmes; they are generating solutions and offering lessons that should inform global policy and practice. Below, we summarise 5 key lessons:

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1. **Addressing structural barriers and harmful gender norms is critical to improving education outcomes**. When poverty narrows opportunity and gender norms police ambition, girls and young women face barriers that reinforce each other. Intentionally tackling these barriers is essential. AEPs from Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Malawi, to Uganda, South Sudan, and Ethiopia, all the way to Nepal, combine income support and savings groups with norm-changing efforts at the classroom, school, community, and government levels. Whether developing gender-responsive teacher training with the Forum for African Women Educationalists or working with local authorities and schools to strengthen protection mechanisms, coordinated efforts have shifted attitudes, increased safety and institutional support, enabling married, parenting, and over-age adolescents to participate and progress more consistently.
2. **Sustained academic and social support leads to lasting impacts.** Many AEP graduates leave formal school after an initial transition. Across Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Nepal, structured social and academic support—through girls' clubs, peer groups, community mentors, and alumni role models, including for girls and young women with disabilities—has strengthened belonging, confidence, learning outcomes, and transition pathways, demonstrating that sustained mentorship and peer engagement are critical to persistence and progression beyond programme completion.[x] These strategies are often already embedded in formal school policies and sector plans, and with enhanced delivery decisions can easily be scaled.[xi]
3. **Flexible and accelerated pathways can deliver cost-effective results.** AEPs that have successfully increased educational and broader life outcomes for girls and young women often do so at a lower unit cost per learner than the formal education system.[xii] This is achieved through better use of existing resources and infrastructure, by meaningfully engaging communities, recruiting and training local teachers, and addressing learners' basic needs through cross-sector collaboration. In Ghana, Malawi, and Somalia, for example, linking girls and young women to external services, such as mobile health clinics, community feeding schemes, or social protection for those with disabilities helped increase access and retention and improve programmes' value for money.[xiii]
4. **Innovations in alternative pathways can strengthen formal systems.** In Pakistan, Nepal, and Uganda, AEP innovations have enhanced formal school governance, inclusive pedagogy, and protection systems, by embedding trained female facilitators into EMIS rosters, institutionalising gender-based violence budgeting and safeguarding standards, and integrating disability identification and monitoring tools within national ministries.[xiv] What begins as targeted transition support is increasingly shaping how formal systems plan, finance, and deliver for girls facing multiple barriers.
5. **Girls are active and powerful agents in their own learning, and in their communities.** The evidence didn't just tell us *what works* for girls and young women –– it also captured what matters to them, recognising girls as decision-makers and agents of change in their own right. Recognising this agency should reinforce, not reduce, systems' responsibility to remove barriers and sustain their progression.[xv] In Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and Malawi, programmes that design learning to promote practical skills and age-appropriate curricula enhance girls' motivation, participation, and agency.[xvi] Across countries and contexts, girls and young women exercise leadership and challenge harmful norms. From mentoring their peers with disabilities in Nepal, to advocating against early marriage in Zimbabwe, they advance equity and inclusion within their communities.[xvii] Despite barriers, they consistently describe education as their pathway to safety, dignity, and a different future—proof that the desire to learn is not the barrier; opportunity is.

These insights demonstrate the catalytic potential of education to transform the lives and opportunities of individuals and societies. For girls and young women, impacts reach far beyond education, improving livelihoods outcomes and access to broader public services. Ripple effects lead to intergenerational impacts that further transform norms and better individuals, communities, and societies. A rigorous evaluation of the Pathways to Choice programme in Nigeria, for example, demonstrated a 680% increase in school attendance and a 76% reduction in child marriage.[xviii] As a result, researchers estimated that a $114 million investment to help adolescent girls enter, return to, and/or remain in school could deliver societal returns of up to $2.5 billion.

But transformative education is never achieved by a single actor. It emerges when learners, families, schools, communities, and governments move together. From Ubuntu in Southern and Eastern Africa, to Igwebuike in Nigeria, Buen Vivir in Latin America, Bayanihan in the Philippines, and Gotong Royong in Indonesia, indigenous knowledges have long recognised the strength in numbers – that inclusion is a shared social obligation, and real progress depends on acting together.[xix] This means also involving boys and men - girls' fathers, brothers, partners, community leaders. When they engage with questions about gender roles and power dynamics, boys

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and men can also transform - developing more caring relationships, challenging restrictive expectations of masculinity and contributing to safer, more inclusive communities. In doing so, they confront discrimination, and model more equitable behaviours that strengthen the conditions for girls' participation. .

Indigenous knowledge and values affirm that ensuring girls' and young women's right to learn and flourish is not only a policy choice but a collective responsibility—one that requires shared action across sectors and society. And one that, as a result, benefits all. Indeed, recognising and valuing local cultures, relationships, and indigenous knowledges–is fundamental to what makes accelerated education effective.[xxi] Approaches grounded in local and indigenous knowledge are more likely to be culturally relevant and effective.[xxii]

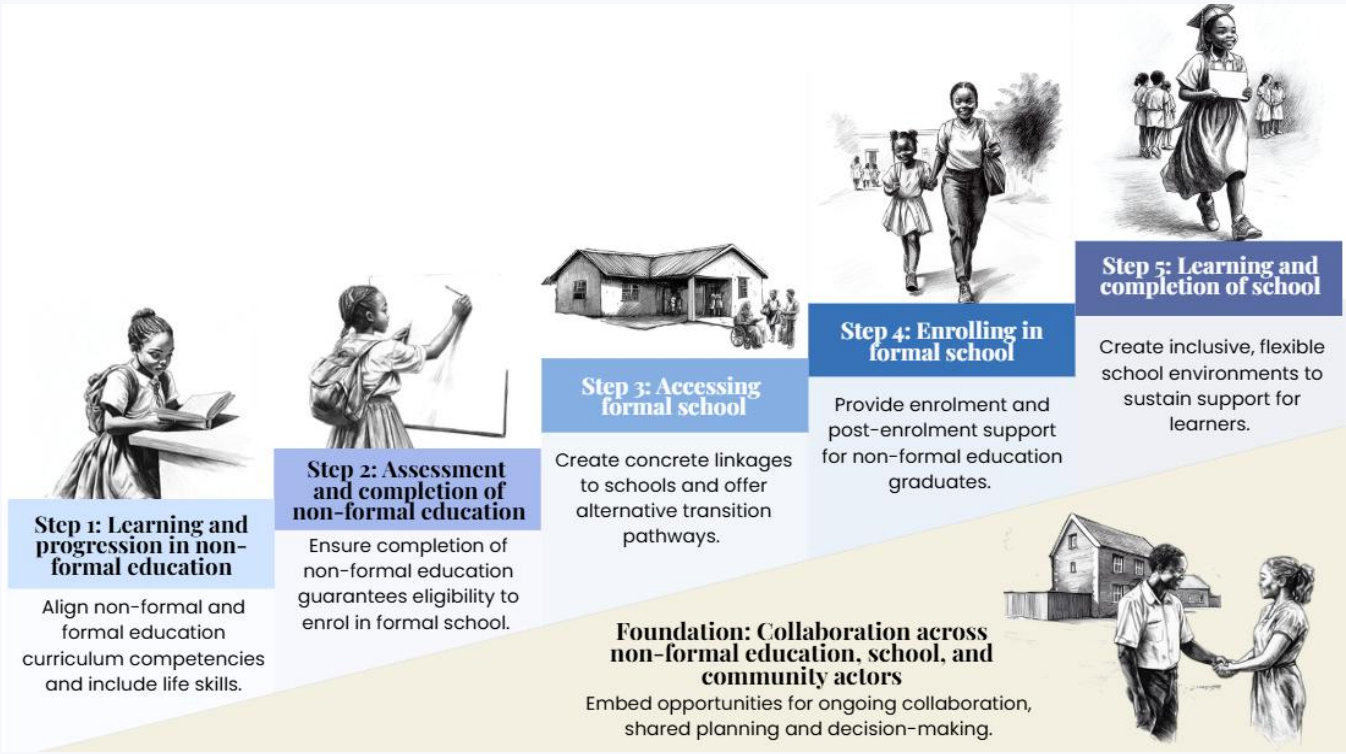
STEP is a new framework to navigate decisions and delivery

Education leaders need evidence-based tools to make transitions visible and more effectively plan and deliver gender-equitable outcomes. Education.org's Supporting Transitions through Evidence-based Planning (STEP) Framework helps close this transition and accountability gap. It equips leadership teams with practical, evidence-based strategies to create the conditions for out-of-school girls and young women to enter school, stay in school, and complete their education. The STEP Framework is structured around the transition journey itself––mapping the stages a learner moves through, the risks that arise at each point, and the decisions systems need to make to sustain their progression. By breaking the transition journey into five concrete stages, underpinned by one cross-cutting foundation, STEP reveals the risks that can derail her progress and the opportunities systems can leverage to enhance her success.

It also recognises that transitions to formal school may not always be a viable option for girls, young women, and other learners with unique needs. For many young people who work, have children, are married, heads of households, or come from nomadic and pastoralist communities, transitions to skills and vocational training or employment may be preferred, and may provide better, more responsive opportunities to learn and thrive.

While the STEP Framework offers a progressive series of steps to comprehensively plan for transitions, the journey each learner takes is often far from linear. Each child has their own starting point, with detours, pauses, and occasional roadblocks that shape their unique pathway and require systems to respond with flexibility. The STEP Framework helps make visible the conditions that need to be in place to make transition pathways work. By doing so, it supports leadership teams to prepare for and respond to transition risks and failures.

Supporting Transitions through Evidence-Based Planning: The STEP Framework



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To support its use in practice, the STEP Framework has been translated into a tool to guide education sector planning. The tool helps education leadership teams to answer and respond to four key questions to strengthen transition success:

- Where are girls most at risk of interrupted progression across the learner journey?
- Which gender-specific and intersecting barriers are driving that risk at each stage?
- Where is responsibility for continuity unclear or weak?
- Which actions are feasible now, and which require longer-term system reform?

Since launching the STEP Tool in our high-level guidance, *The next STEP: Helping children successfully transition from alternative education to school*, and our full evidence synthesis, *Transitions to formal education: Evidence-based strategies to ensure all learners thrive in school*, we have been enhancing its utility and relevance for education planning and delivery. To do this, we've deployed and are continuing to refine an online interactive version of the STEP Tool. The tool takes users through a series of questions to analyse their context, identify priorities across the STEP Framework, and explore relevant risk-mitigation strategies. A tailored risk assessment report is generated, mapping relevant actions to ensure decisions are grounded in local realities rather than generic best practice.

The STEP tool is open-source and can be accessed online. An editable paper-based version is also available for offline use, making it ideal for in-person meetings and workshops where digital tools may not be accessible. Both versions––digital and paper––can be used by decision-makers, programme managers, and implementers to diagnose barriers, plan interventions, and support follow-up and progress review. The tools are supported by a starter pack that guides users step-by-step on how to use the tool effectively, making it accessible for a variety of stakeholders and use-cases.

The STEP tool also brings together insights from our first synthesis on AEPs and its accompanying high-level guidance, *Steering through the Storms*, which highlight 10 dimensions of effective AEPs that enhance programme impact, particularly when regulated by government leaders. At the centre of these dimensions is a focus on equity and inclusion, which ensures AEPs and transition pathways address the unique needs of out-of-school learners. Both our first and second synthesis, and their accompanying tools and guidance, were developed to meet the requests of government partners who expressed the need for evidence-based strategies and tools to catch learners up on foundational skills and ensure their access and retention in school, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic.

STEP in action

STEP is designed to be used seamlessly within existing education sector planning, review, and coordination processes. It helps ensure these processes are better gender-responsive, particularly as they relate to the needs of girls and young women facing overlapping challenges. In practice, ministries can draw on STEP during sector analyses, mid-term reviews, and annual workplans to identify which groups of girls are at risk and why - and use it to align planning, programme design, and financing around a shared, gender-responsive pathway for girls' transitions.

Early use cases of STEP demonstrate how it is already being implemented to guide education decision-makers across diverse contexts:

- In Nigeria's Lagos State, STEP informed refinement of the draft Policy on Non-State Schools by clarifying progression standards and strengthening accountability across alternative pathways and formal schools.
- In Uganda, STEP is informing integration of flexible pathways and retention priorities into its national education sector strategic plan, including re-entry from accelerated education into school or skills training.
- In Pakistan, STEP is informing federal and provincial policy revision and feeding lessons from flexible pathway models into its national action plan.

The table below provides examples of key risks and mitigation strategies found in STEP, drawing mainly on AEP/NFE and other flexible pathway contexts. Government leadership teams and implementing partners can draw on these evidence-based actions to support girls and young women to transition to and remain in formal education, while adapting them to broader transition pathways, including skills training where relevant. Many of these strategies are also relevant for other learners navigating multiple hurdles—whether distance, displacement, or disability. The strategies and examples are not exhaustive but illustrate what can be found in the online tool, where decision-makers can select a country to learn more about the example. They are relevant not only for accelerated education programmes, but also other flexible learning pathways and non-formal education (NFE) models.

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STEP Framework Element and Actionable Insight	Key risk areas	Government leadership actions (national and sub-national)	Delivery actions (Government implementers, schools, CSOs, communities)
Foundation. NFE, formal school, and community collaboration Embed opportunities for regular collaboration, shared planning and decision-making	• Roles and coordination across actors are un-clear or fragmented, with limited government leadership or oversight. • Limited involvement of gender, disability and inclusion specialists in planning and delivery. • Harmful gender norms and expectations not directly addressed, limiting girls' participation, completion and transition.	• Institutionalise multi-sectoral NFE governance protocols and coordination platforms, mandating gender and inclusion focal points, the participation of youth, and clear roles and responsibilities to monitor and track transitions. (Philippines; Sierra Leone) • Mandate community engagement and social and behaviour change activities through policies, plans, and NFE guidelines. (Ghana; Malawi; Mali) • Harmonise nonformal and formal data systems and disaggregate by gender, disability, household location, etc. (Jordan; Pakistan; Uganda)	• Build on existing community- and school-governance structures to create an NFE taskforce, encouraging equal participation amongst females and males, youth, and under-represented groups. (Afghanistan; Sierra Leone) • Work with community actors to raise awareness of girls' right to education, challenge harmful social norms, and cultivate community champions. (Somalia; Sierra Leone) • Collaborate with school authorities to track and support girls and young women after NFE completion. (Nigeria)
Step 1. Learning and progressing in NFE Align NFE to formal school curriculum competencies and include life skills	• Curriculum does not reflect the realities & needs of marginalised learners including girls and young women. • Learning materials are not age-appropriate or accessible and may reproduce stereotypes or exclude learners. • Teaching rarely adapts to different gender, disability, language, or inclusion needs.	• Establish gender-responsive quality standards, guidelines, and curricula aligned with formal school subjects, including life skills and promoting instruction in learners home languages. (Central African Republic; Nigeria; Uganda) • Create pathways to recruit, and train community teachers, especially women and refugees; enforce Codes of Conduct. (Afghanistan; Pakistan; Uganda) • Mandate disaggregated reporting on NFE attendance, learning outcomes, and progression, by gender, disability, displacement, age, and other factors. (Tanzania)	• Engage CSOs to design gender- and culturally- responsive curricula, teacher training, and learning environments; provide flexible hours and childcare services for working adolescents and young mothers. (Uganda) • Recruit and train more female teachers from learners' communities, including youth, refugees, and ethnic or linguistic minorities who can teach in learners' home language. (Ethiopia; Liberia) • Regularly collect and analyse NFE learner data, adjusting programme activities to tend to inequities based on gender, disability, displacement, age, or other factors.(Liberia)
Step 2. Assessment and completion of NFE Ensure NFE completion guarantees eligibility to enrol in formal school	• Assessment and completion pathways are insufficiently flexible, stalling learner progression and transition. • Testing locations, schedules, and tools unintentionally exclude learners, due to disability, displacement, work or domestic responsibilities. • Learning, progression, and completion data are insufficiently disaggregated or used for decision-making.	• Develop gender-responsive and disability-inclusive protocols and standards for NFE completion exams and certification processes and procedures; waive entry exam requirements for NFE graduates. (Nigeria) • Embed multiple exit points into NFE transition pathways, aligning exit points with school enrolment periods, & simplifying or exempting NFE graduates and certificate holders from additional entry exam. (Bangladesh) • Mandate disaggregated reporting of NFE exit exams and formal school entry exams (by gender, disability, displacement, age, and other factors.) (Nigeria)	• Provide accommodations for learners to access and pass exams, especially girls, refugees, those with disabilities or learners living in rural and remote areas (e.g., transport to testing centres, flexible scheduling, communication support or extra time on tests). (Kenya; Nepal) • Sensitise school leaders to NFE completion processes, addressing stigma towards non-formal education. (Bangladesh) • Use disaggregated- test results to determine the most appropriate transition pathways and placements for NFE graduates. (Ethiopia)

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STEP Framework Element and Actionable Insight	Key risk areas	Government leadership actions (national and sub-national)	Delivery actions (Government implementers, schools, CSOs, communities)
Step 3. Accessing a formal school Create concrete linkages to schools and offer alternative transition pathways	• Learning environments and routes to/from schools may not be safe or adequately protect young people. • School facilities and services are not sufficiently accessible, inclusive, or gender responsive. • Absence of schools, especially at the secondary level and for girls in rural, remote, or fragile areas.	• Ensure national NFE guidelines offer multiple transition pathways tailored to learner profiles & community contexts; mandate consultation with communities to determine the most viable transition pathways for learners (Nigeria) • Map schools to NFE centres to deter-mine where additional access support may be neede. (Sierra Leone) • Mandate gender-sensitive & disability-accessible infrastructure, safe-guarding and protection mechanisms, to ensure access to gender-specific WASH facilities, reduce risks of gender-based violence in and around schools and offer confidential referral pathways for survivors. (Namibia, Myanmar, Sierra Leone, Uganda)	• Design transition pathways with girls, young women, and their families; provide counselling to learners to determine the most appropriate pathway. (Malawi) • Ensure NFE graduates have physical access to a formal school, providing where relevant safe, accessible and affordable transportation. (Ghana) • Work with schools, NFE, and community governance structures to design and implement protection and safeguarding protocols, ensuring girls' safe access to formal school and drawing on legal frameworks to enforce protection efforts. (Nepal, Nigeria)
Step 4. Enrolling in a formal school Provide enrolment and post-enrolment support to NFE graduates.	• Learners, communities and schools receive little practical guidance or support on when, where & how to enrol. • School leaders not adequately sensitized to transition pathways, making stigma and negative attitudes a barrier to enrolment. • Enrolment and placement processes do not consider the unique academic, social, or material needs of girls and young women facing intersecting vulnerabilities.	• Create and disseminate protocols for enrolling NFE learners into formal school, stipulating clear roles and responsibilities of local authorities, NFE providers, and formal schools, and providing guidelines for how to adequately consider girls' needs in enrolment processes and post-enrolment support. (Mali) • Develop and enforce re-admission policies, especially for overage and undocumented learners, refugees, pregnant girls, and young mothers. (Liberia, Uganda, Uganda) • Mandate disaggregated reporting on NFE learners' enrolment in formal schools or alternative transition pathways (by gender, disability, displacement, age, etc.) (Jordan, Tanzania)	• Sensitise learners and their families to enrolment processes so they know where, when and how to enrol; engage community members, especially women leaders and champions of girls' education to mobilise girls and young women to enro. (Ghana, Senegal). • Address or advocate for the removal of financial and logistical barriers to enrolment (e.g., access to documentation, costs of uniforms and learning materials, reintegration of pregnant adolescent and young mothers). (Zimbabwe, Nepal) • Track NFE learner enrolment in for-mal school or alternative transition pathways; consider gender, age, and learning levels when planning post-enrolment support. (Ghana)
Step 5. Learning and completing formal school Create inclusive, flexible school environments to sustain support for learners.	• Girls and young women do not have access to female role models, teacher, school leaders, or social support. • Teaching and classroom management re-enforce harmful gender norms and gender-based violence or fail to address the needs of girls. • Incentives are not in place to discourage dropout due to poverty, childcare, or other work responsibilities.	• Remove school fees expand the provision of bursaries, and scale and sustain school-based feeding, nutrition, psychosocial support, or livelihood activities to incentivise school participation. (Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone, Uganda) • Create national guidelines and protocols for establishing school-based mentorship models, including peer support groups or Girls' and Boys' clubs. (Uganda) • Embed accelerated learning principles and approaches in formal education systems, including teacher education and training frameworks, curricula, and assessment. (Ethiopia)	• Link NFE graduates to subsidies, scholarships, or school and social welfare programmes to ensure their basic WASH, health, and nutrition needs are met, including sexual and reproductive health needs for girls and young women (Afghanistan; Guinea) • Ensure girls & young women have access to role models or mentors who can provide academic or psychosocial support. (Uganda, Nigeria) • Cultivate female school leadership and train formal school leaders and teachers in inclusive and gender-responsive practices, addressing the needs of girls with disabilities or ethnic and linguistic minorities. (Madagascar; West Africa)

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The transition support mechanisms embedded within STEP are backed by a robust evidence base. Prior research shows that within formal systems these strategies have been used to boost access, learning and completion for girls and young women at scale and across diverse contexts.[xxiii] They include:

- **Eliminating financial barriers** to education and providing school meals to girls from low-income households
- **Reducing long distances and making schools more physically accessible**, especially for girls and young women living in rural and remote areas
- **Improving teaching and creating gender-responsive learning environments**, addressing the cognitive, behavioural, and psychosocial needs of all learners
- **Increasing parental and community engagement, and involving women** in school governance structures to cultivate champions of girls' education and broader wellbeing

Too often, evidence sits invisible and/or unused—STEP translates it into a decision-ready framework and tool to drive delivery.

Using STEP: Now, Next, Later

Effective gender-responsive, learner-centred interventions are multidimensional - addressing academic, financial, and environmental barriers across education, health, and protection. STEP helps governments strengthen transitions into, through, and beyond formal schooling. The evidence and insights are there. The task now is to use them: making transition risks visible, clarifying responsibility, and sequencing reforms realistically. [xxiv]

NOW
Address foundational risks, ensuring recognition of transition pathways and safeguarding learner wellbeing.

NEXT
Implement high-leverage reforms to enhance quality and inclusion for all learners.

LATER
Embed transitions in data systems and financing mechanisms to strengthen sustainability, scale, and efficiency.

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Methodological Note

This Insights in Brief is based on Education.org's high-level guidance, The next STEP: Helping children successfully transition from alternative education to school and full synthesis, Transitions to formal education: Evidence-based strategies to ensure all learners thrive in school. Using Education.org's Locally Inclusive Framework for Education Decision-Making (LIFTED) method, over 11,000 sources of evidence were screened, and 387 sources were included, analysed, and assessed for quality, relevance, and inclusivity. A detailed description of the methods, including the quality appraisal tool, can be found in a technical report. By drawing on more than peer-reviewed evidence, LIFTED surfaced 20 times more evidence on learners with disabilities, 15 times more evidence on girls, young women, and youth, and five times more evidence on forcibly displaced learners. The number of authoring organisations emerging from the evidence base is also three times larger, with five times as many sources produced by local researchers, implementers, and government institutions. Stakeholders from more than 70 organisations working on AEPs in lower- and middle-income countries or crisis-affected contexts contributed to this work, including by shaping the research question, providing evidence, or inputting into the analysis and translation of insights as they pertain to the development of the STEP Framework and Tool, as well as this Insights in Brief. Many of these stakeholders also co-developed case studies including on AEPs in Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Uganda.

Accompanying executive summary can be found here. Our online tool is in testing mode. For further information or to provide feedback, please contact info@education.org.

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