

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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African Union: Girl's Education & Empowerment is a Human Right



The African Union Theme of the Year 2024 on Education will help amplify the collective mobilization of Member States, stakeholders, partner organizations, civil society organisations (CSOs), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dealing with education and the African citizens in general, to massively contribute to the development and enhancement of

quality education for all. According to Prof. Mohammed Belhocine, Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (ESTI) of the African Union, comprehensive, quality and inclusive education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for fostering development, peace and progress.

It is worth noting that, an estimated 244 million children and young people between the ages of 6 and 18 worldwide are out of school, with 129 million of these children being girls. Girls' education is about ensuring that girls learn and feel safe while in or around school and be given the opportunity to complete all levels of education. It is about acquiring knowledge and skills to be fit for the labor market; gain socio-emotional life skills necessary to adapt to a changing world; make decisions about their own lives; and contribute to their communities and the world.

Although there is some progress made by member States in girls' access to schooling, girls still face unique and multiple barriers to education; mostly caused by economic inequalities, poverty, harmful cultural norms and practices such as child marriages, poor infrastructure, violence, food insecurity, armed conflicts, displacements, and the climate and humanitarian crises. These challenges disrupt educational trajectories, robbing girls of their right to learn.

Addressing gender discriminatory norms as well as children and women's poverty and vulnerabilities including in times of crisis is therefore crucial. Violence in public and private spaces specifically prevent girls from accessing and completing education, with the most recent data estimating that a majority of the girls are sexually assaulted

on their way to or at school every year. This consequently leads to lower attendance, higher dropout rates, unintended pregnancies, risks of transmissible diseases, causing psychological and physical trauma. Child marriage is also another critical challenge impeding girls' access to education, and completion of learning. Putting an end to this practice would have a positive impact on girls' and women's learning, skills development, access to socio-political and economic opportunities, and overall quality of life.

Non-access to education has a huge socio-economic cost to the continent. A recent World Bank study estimates that the “limited educational opportunities for girls, and barriers to completing 12 years of education, cost countries between US\$15 trillion and \$30 trillion in lost lifetime productivity and earnings.”

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