

WELCOME REMARKS BY

H.E. Prof Mohamed Belhocine, Commissioner ESTI

Honourable Ministers,
Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and gentlemen,
All protocols observed,
Good morning to you all.

It is a great honor and pleasure to welcome you all at the AU Commission headquarters for the opening ceremony of the AU/CIEFFA's 9th High Level Dialogue on "*Investing in girls' education systems as a form of reparation, justice and sustainable development for African communities*".

- The African Union through the Agenda 2063 acknowledges that Education is a fundamental human right and the key that opens doors to every other basic Human right. This is equally echoed within other key overarching frameworks and policies including, the soon-ending Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 16-25 and undoubtedly in the new consecutive one from 2026 to 2035 as well as in Art 12 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the Sustainable Development Goals 4 & 5 on quality education, and gender equality; and other related policies promoting gender equity and parity in education.
- Today, various commendable efforts are being deployed in advancing gender equality in education and now more than ever before, we are having more girls accessing school, notably, at primary level.
- However, more still needs to be done. And as today's soon to be launched the continental Report on the state of Girls and women's education in Africa will prove to us, gender equality remains a pressing issue especially in the face of inequalities, humanitarian contexts, and conflict and hostile situations that hinders retention and completion rates. Challenges limiting girls and young women and other marginalized communities including those living with disabilities, those on the move, those internally and externally displaced include socio-cultural and gender stereotypes, economic inequalities, poverty, conflicts, humanitarian emergencies and fragilities.
- The proportion of countries achieving gender parity in completion ranges from 36% in early childhood education (ECE) to 29% in primary education, 17% in lower secondary, 9% in upper secondary, 7% in TVET, and 0% in post-secondary non-tertiary and short-cycle tertiary education. These are trends which highlight that girls and women marginalization becomes more pronounced the higher up they go in the education lifecycle.
- The challenges observed in literacy later in life indicate that the relatively better outcomes

in reading are not sustained. As of 2021, approximately 34 million adolescent girls of secondary school age across Africa, remain out of school according to UNESCO UIS. And reports abound that girls and women are also disadvantaged in terms of ICT skills development.

- This year, in line with the AU theme of the year on "*Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations*", greater emphasis is put on Education at the cornerstone of an equitable healing and repairing process of the long-lasting inequalities and historical repairs. It requires us to better understand our past as well as our future socio-cultural and economic environment, while leveraging pan African solidarity, in order to drive Africa's sustainable development.
- As per the theme of our 9th HLD, it also implies in its essence, *investing in girls' education systems as a form of reparation, justice, and sustainable development for African communities*, not only Now but also for a better Tomorrow. Indeed, this can be done through different measures and interventions, namely, through direct financial investment in education systems, deliberate policy reform, investment in safe schools, infrastructure development, ensuring affordability of sanitary pads for adolescent girls and all female learners, WASH facilities in schools, and generation of gender-responsive data and evidence in education which will systematically contribute to retaining them at school for continued and deeper learning.
- In addition, other key measures and interventions should include, support widespread advocacy, gender-responsive legislation, and policies, teacher development, curriculum reforms, but also ownership and accountability in the processes by Educational stakeholders.
- Allow me to share a bit about our continental #AfricaEducatesHer Campaign phase 2 which advocates that girls return to school, remain in schools, and complete learning. For this purpose, I am proud to say that 10 African Union Member States have launched the campaign namely: Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Togo, Senegal, Saharoui Arab Democratic Republic, Seychelles, Chad, Burundi, and Malawi ; with more countries planning to join the movement and implement the campaign.
- I cannot continue my remarks without mentioning one of our milestone events on advancing girls education; the African Union 1st Pan African Conference on Girls and Women's Education in Africa (PANCOGE^d) which was held last July 2024. The PANCOGE^d aimed to position equitable access to quality education for girls and women within the agenda of the AU theme of year 2024, from which has derived the adopted Addis Ababa call for action and recommendations. The Conference managed to galvanize support for financing for women and girls' education and strengthen advocacy towards high level adoption of gender transformative and inclusive policies and frameworks to ensure parity. In this view, we intend to continue amplifying the voices of all key actors, focusing on championing women and girls' education in the continent and further strengthening the continent's narrative through transformative policies, data and research, education financing, strengthened collaborations and partnerships, amongst other key strategies.

- To conclude, as we have gathered here today, I would like to call on you all esteemed partners, to continue catalyzing the investments and actions for long lasting progress and parity through gender equality in education, for the inclusive and sustainable future of our continent. As the 9th edition of the HLD begins, let us make sure that together we will chart a path through your innovative strategies, and bold partnerships towards the vision we aspire to, ensuring a prosperous Africa where no one is left behind.
- I wish you all enriching and fruitful deliberations!