

# EDUCATION in AFRICA

## 5 priorities

DEMOGRAPHICS  
FINANCING  
INCLUSION  
QUALITY  
EMPLOYMENT



**unesco**  
International Institute for  
Educational Planning

Published in 2022 by:  
IIEP-UNESCO Dakar  
Almadies-Route de Ngor  
BP 3311 Dakar-Senegal  
Tel: + 221 33 859 77 30  
<https://dakar.iiep.unesco.org>

Attribution:  
Education in Africa: 5 Priorities, IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2022.

ISBN: 978-92-803-1450-2

Director of publication: Koffi Segniabeto  
Editorial team: Jonathan Jourde, Emmanuelle Landais, Léonie Marin  
Editorial consultant: Gaëlle Fillion  
Editing/Revision: Christelle Barbereau, Anne Cocard  
Layout: Axel Clyde Boukono, Suzanne Grossmann  
Contributing writers: Jean-François Kobiané, Professor of Demography at the Institut Supérieur des Sciences de la Population (ISSP) of Joseph Ki-Zerbo University (Demographics), Daniel Kelly, international consultant (Inclusion), François Robert, international consultant (Quality)  
Acknowledgements: Luc Gacougnolle, Guillaume Husson, Ibrahima Diallo, Jennifer Pye, Pablo Suarez Robles, Nicola Tissi.  
Cover photo: © UNICEF/UN0429291/Vincent Tremeau  
Back cover photo: © UNICEF/UN0512337/Dejongh

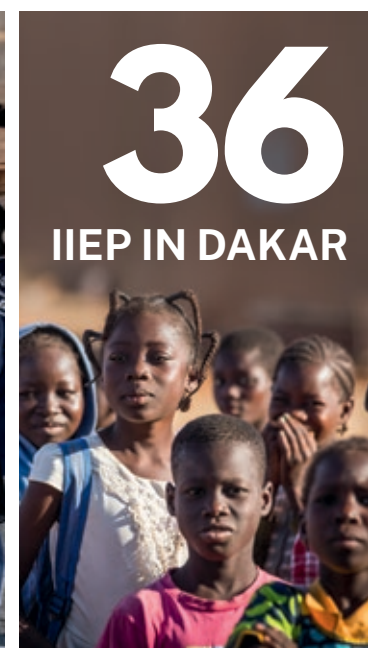


You are free to share, reproduce, distribute and communicate the work, under the following conditions:  
Attribution-you must credit the work.  
Non-commercial use-you may not make commercial use of this work.  
Share Alike-you must share the modified work under the same conditions.

The designations employed in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO or IIEP concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the manner in which it is administered, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.



# Contents



# Editorial

## Focusing our priorities, enhancing our impact



© UNICEF/UNI1372423/Dejongh

With eight years to go before the goals of the Education 2030 Agenda are due to be achieved, our continent is still facing many different challenges in the education and training sector. Which priorities should we, the Africa Office of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), as a privileged partner of ministries in charge of education and training, focus on to maximize the impact of our action?

To mark the twentieth anniversary of IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, we wanted to share our insights. Our findings are based on evidence from over 50 education sector analyses conducted since 2001 in partnership with African countries. This approach has enabled us to identify the lowest common denominator of the challenges we are facing today: the five education challenges in Africa. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, these themes now guide our actions and our strategic direction.

**Demographics.** Africa's school-age population will continue to grow massively in the years to come. By providing countries with the planning tools needed to develop and implement efficient and credible education policies, we will help them to benefit fully from the demographic dividend and contribute to stimulating future economic growth.

**Financing.** The continent's need on this issue is twofold. On the one hand, it is a question of making better use of available resources, notably by improving the dialogue between ministries of education and ministries of finance. On the other hand, it is essential to find new resources to ensure that funding is in line with the challenges facing the education and training sector, notably through fiscal innovations and public-private partnerships.

**Inclusion.** There is still a long way to go to ensure equitable access to education - regardless of individual needs and social status - and to achieve gender equality in education. Among the solutions we advocate for are support for education policies that benefit the poorest, and support for the development of gender-sensitive education sector analyses and plans.

**Quality.** The current learning crisis, aggravated by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, threatens the future of entire generations in Africa. We are committed to helping African countries better manage the quality of education and sustainably transform educational practices.

**Employment.** Given the predominantly young population in Africa, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) plays a key role in fostering employability and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. Our expertise in TVET enables us to support ambitious and innovative programmes on a continental scale and to accompany vocational training reforms at the country level.

These five issues are our priorities, and we will spare no effort in addressing them. IIEP-UNESCO Dakar is determined to help African governments to plan education better, but also to accompany them in the implementation of their education plans and policies. IIEP recognises that the future of our continent depends above all on the education and training of its children and young people. ■

*Koffi Segniagbeto*

HEAD OF OFFICE, IIEP-UNESCO DAKAR

# Demographics



# Intensify efforts in education and training

Today, in 2021, more than a quarter of the African population is of school age. By 2035, these young people will be on the job market. We must therefore invest today in the education of those who will have the continent in their hands tomorrow.

Because the effects of demographic trends only become apparent in the longer term, demographers and decision-makers sometimes struggle to persuade their fellow citizens of the need to mobilize resources today in order to benefit tomorrow's society. African countries must intensify their investment in education and training, to help young people integrate into economic life and transition into the labour market.

This would allow African countries to benefit from their 'demographic dividend'. Economists define this as the increase in productivity that occurs when the working population exceeds the dependent population, i.e., those too young or old to work. The demographic dividend therefore leads towards a 'golden' era in which children born during a baby boom have become adults, have fewer children than their elders, and are actively participating in the economy.

*'Demographic dividend' is a term used to describe an acceleration of economic growth resulting from a change in the age structure of a population.*

## A demographic transition that varies from region to region

Across Africa, the potential demand for basic education will continue to grow substantially over the next three decades. For example, the number of 6 to 15-year-olds, the demographic corresponding to compulsory basic education in Africa, will grow at

an average annual rate of 1.8 per cent in the coming decade, with this growth then slowing to 1.3 per cent between 2030 and 2050<sup>1</sup>. Investment in education should at least be in proportion to this evolution.

However, these estimates hide important regional variations. Central and west Africa are expected to experience higher growth rates, while eastern, northern, and southern Africa are likely to experience lower rates, because different regions are at different stages in their demographic transition. Consequently, west and central Africa will account for more than two-thirds of the continent's school-age population in 2050.

*The demographic transition is the transition from a traditional demographic pattern of high fertility and mortality rates to a pattern of low birth and death rates.*

## Sub-Saharan Africa at the centre of world population trends

Whether the world achieves the international goal of universal schooling depends largely on the progress that is made on the continent. In 2050, one-third of children aged 6 to 15 will live in sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 1 in 5 today.

Across the continent, demographic trends – and the needs they imply – vary significantly from country to country. At the two ends of the spectrum, Cabo Verde and Niger illustrate these differences well. By 2050, the school-age population of Cabo Verde will fall by 19 per cent, while that of Niger will increase by more than 100 per cent – i.e., it will more than double – even though the proportion of school-age children in Cabo Verde is lower. This is because the demographic transition is more advanced in Cabo Verde than in Niger.

In 2017, the pupil/teacher ratio in post-primary education was 35:1 in Niger compared to 16:1 in Cabo Verde. The secondary school completion rate was 17 per cent in Niger and 72 per cent in Cabo Verde in 2016. These differences in the dynamics of the school-age population result in greater pressure on resources in Niger than in Cabo Verde.

## More than half of Africa's population will live in urban areas by 2035

Urban population growth will undoubtedly be one of the continent's major challenges in the coming decades. Demographers estimate that sub-Saharan Africa will have undergone its urban transition by 2035, by which time more than half of its population will be living in urban areas. While universal enrolment targets are far from being met in rural areas, the rapid urbanization of the continent makes it difficult to meet them in urban areas too, even though these are often considered more advantaged.

Such fast-paced urbanization results in the development of informal settlements and shanty towns on the outskirts of cities, posing significant challenges as far as education is concerned. In some countries, access to education in these informal settlements is lower than in the surrounding villages. However, urban-rural inequalities persist, and educational needs remain greater in rural areas. While the share of the population living in rural areas is declining in relative terms, the school-age population in rural areas will continue to grow strongly in absolute terms. Another demographic characteristic of the continent is the young age of its population, raising the crucial issue of employability. Meeting this challenge

### Using demographics to clarify strategies and anticipate costs

In 2018, 207 million children were enrolled in schools in sub-Saharan Africa. While this number represents a high participation rate, the completion rates remain low: only 69 per cent completed primary school and only 44 per cent completed lower secondary school. Ensuring both access and success for all school-age children and adolescents by 2050 will require the construction of 9 million new classrooms and the training of 9.5 million additional teachers. Over the next decade, an additional US\$19 billion will be needed. This additional expenditure represents 46 per cent of current spending on basic education.

will be essential if the continent is to reap the full benefits of the demographic dividend. Investing in skills development today is therefore the best way to prepare for tomorrow.

These demographic issues and their implications in terms of investment in education and training, are at the heart of the continent's agenda. The theme chosen in 2017 at the African Union summit in Addis Ababa, *Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth*, clearly raised this issue. A few months later, at its 72nd session, the United Nations General Assembly in turn launched the Demographic Dividend Roadmap for Africa. As we enter the decade leading up to the deadline for SDG 4, it is time for these political commitments to be translated into action, both at the regional and at the national level. ■

1. United Nations, Population Division, World Population Prospects, Revision 2019

**Education: another source of social protection for health**

On an individual level, a person's likelihood of accessing information on good health practices increases with their level of education. A more educated person tends to be healthier in terms of nutritional balance and hygiene, and they are more likely to use health services. Similarly, at the intergenerational level, the higher the level of education of the

parents – especially the mother – the better the care of the children is. These positive effects of education on health add up, helping to reduce the risks of morbidity and mortality. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic shows that while the shape of the continent's age pyramid gives it an advantage, the poorest and least educated populations remain the most vulnerable. Education therefore appears to offer further protection in terms of health and as a key instrument of resilience.

Health, in turn, has positive effects on education. Good health and nutritional balance in childhood contribute to school success and well-being in adulthood. For UNESCO, the importance of the correlation between education and health is reflected in two of its priorities: providing safe, inclusive, and health-promoting learning environments and 'comprehensive quality, sexual health education for all children and young people'. ■

**Education and migration: getting all children into school**

Strong urban growth is one of the two main demographic challenges in Africa. This phenomenon is largely fuelled by the arrival of young people from rural areas or from secondary towns and converge on the outskirts of large cities in areas with little or no infrastructure. Fertility is often higher in these urban areas because of population age and the low level of education. Thus, some

African metropolises are faced with a paradox: the younger, school aged members of the population are based on the outskirts of the city, with few schools, while the centre of cities with greater infrastructure are home to an ageing population. A second major challenge concerns internally displaced persons, who migrate within their own country in search of safety. Linked to the increase in social and political conflicts and to growing insecurity, the number of internally displaced persons is on the rise in

sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Sahel, where terrorist attacks are recurrent. At the end of 2019, Africa had more than 33 million refugees and internally displaced persons, representing 39 per cent of the total worldwide. Ensuring that the children and adolescents among these displaced populations are schooled is an enormous challenge, not only in financial terms, given the need for infrastructure and staff, but also in terms of psychological monitoring. ■

**A financial simulation model for better planning**

**Focus on our action.** IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, an institute specializing in educational planning, uses a set of technical instruments to help states to develop their educational plans and policies. Among these is the financial simulation model, which is essential for assessing the cost of implementing planning strategies that consider demographic factors. This projection tool makes it possible to anticipate medium-and long-term needs; for example, the number of teachers to be recruited at a given time for each level of education, which is based on the evolution of the school-age population. National goals can then be turned into quantifiable, sustainable, and credible action plans. ■

# Demographics

In 2050, half of Africa's population will be under 15 years old



**1 in 3** children in the world will live on the African continent in 2050

**TO GET ALL AFRICAN CHILDREN INTO SCHOOL WILL REQUIRE**



**9** million additional classrooms to be built, or approx. \$USD 100 billion investment



**9.5** million additional teachers to be recruited and trained

# Financing





# Innovating to maximize resources

Education accounts for the largest amount of public expenditure in Africa. However, its financing remains insufficient and ineffective. Finding ways to optimize public spending on education and to leverage additional resources and alternative financing tools is imperative if we are to guarantee high-quality schooling to the millions of children on the continent, especially the poorest.

Between 2000 and 2014, Africa experienced annual economic growth of 4 to 5 per cent<sup>1</sup>, among the highest rates in the world. However, the cumulative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, population growth, and the expansion of access to education are placing heavy demands on education systems.

## Education in Africa: massive funding, but still not enough

African governments allocated on average almost a quarter of their current expenditure to the education sector in 2015<sup>2</sup>, making education the largest single public expenditure item on the continent. Households are also heavily involved in financing education. In Africa, families contribute about 30 per cent of the total national expenditure on education, even though their means are extremely limited.

Despite the very high priority given to education by the state and households, the resources allocated to the sector on the continent are not sufficient to ensure high-quality education for all. As a proportion of domestic wealth, the resources available for education average about 4 per cent, whereas at least 6 per cent is needed to finance adequate education services.

## Better spending: the primary driver for sustainable financing

Improving the financing of education is not just about increasing the sector's budget. It is first about maximizing efficiency in the use of public education resources. In Guinea, for example, almost a third of the resources invested in primary education are 'wasted', largely because of children dropping out of school and/or repeating grades<sup>3</sup>.

More efficient use of public funds is not only a means of optimizing educational outcomes, it is also a duty to taxpayers, and it sends a strong signal to funding partners. Ensuring greater transparency in how the education budget is spent, fighting corruption, and optimizing the governance mechanisms of education systems, are all powerful drivers for increasing national revenues.

There are also significant disparities in resource allocation in Africa. On average, the richest households capture 8.6 times more public resources for education than the poorest<sup>4</sup>. Redirecting these resources towards the most disadvantaged would be a way to better distribute funds. On the continent, schooling difficulties particularly affect underdeveloped, rural areas with poor social infrastructures and a lack of teachers. Targeting these areas will help reduce social inequalities.

## Alternative resources: building on private funding ...

Where can additional funding for education be found? All stakeholders agree on the need to involve the private sector more in the funding of education services. Financing tools exist, notably for vocational training and higher education. Through the development of public-private partnerships, companies participate

### Advocating for the renegotiation of public debt

Excessive public debt forces states to cut spending on public services. In some extreme cases, such as that of Ghana, more than half of national revenues are lost to debt repayment. According to the International Monetary Fund, in 2020 half of low-income countries are close to debt distress or have already fallen into it. In Sierra Leone, the amount needed to service the debt is roughly equivalent to the 2019 education budget<sup>5</sup>.

in the financing of courses of study in line with the economic demand in countries, thus enabling them to meet their own labour needs. Some governments go further by creating regulatory mechanisms, such as introducing an apprenticeship tax for companies.

## ... and expanding the domestic resource base

Although African states allocate almost a quarter of their budget to education, the amount remains low in absolute terms because the countries' own budgets are insufficient. Increasing the domestic resources of African states through economic growth and tax revenue is a key way of improving education financing. The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity has estimated that 97 per cent of resources for education should ideally come from domestic resource mobilization<sup>6</sup>.

On average, low-income countries have a tax-to-GDP ratio of 17 per cent compared to 34 per cent for member countries of the Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>7</sup>. According to the Global Partnership for Education, increasing this ratio by five percentage points would allow most countries to double their spending on education and other essential services over the next few years.

*Several measures can be considered: broadening the tax base, improving the taxation of industries and multinationals, supporting fairer property taxes, and fighting tax evasion.*

## Reasserting aid priority to Africa

External aid to African countries has declined since the financial crisis of 2007–2008. It is likely to decrease further because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated debt crisis. In 2019, official development assistance represented 0.3 per cent of the gross national income of the member countries of the OECD Development Assistance Committee<sup>8</sup>. While this level of funding has been stable over the past decade, it remains far below donor countries' commitments of 0.7 per cent. The international community can still make significant improvements. Moreover, this external aid should be better targeted geographically. Sub-Saharan Africa receives only a quarter of the world's aid for basic education, even though the needs are greatest there.

These options have considerable potential for improving the financing of education in Africa. Some countries are already taking steps to improve the efficiency of their spending through a more equitable allocation of teachers and materials to schools. The involvement of the private sector is now at the heart of strategies to renew vocational training policies. This alternative and additional funding must be vigorously pursued as it is essential to achieve SDG 4 by 2030. ■

1. World Bank, Africa Pulse, April 2015; African Development Bank Group, African Economic Outlook 2020.

2. IIEP-UNESCO Dakar Database.

3,4. Ibid.

5. IIEP-UNESCO Dakar.

6. The Learning Generation: Investing for Education in a Changing World, The Education Commission, 2017.

7. David Archer, 'Domestic resource mobilisation for education: What should the Global Partnership for Education do in its new strategy?', Network for International Policies and Cooperation in Education and Training (NORRAG), 2020.

8. OECD, 'Aid by DAC members increases in 2019 with more aid to the poorest countries', 2020.

### Education is paying the price of COVID-19

Public funding for education is likely to decline in the coming years. While the COVID-19 pandemic represented a loss of learning time of rare magnitude, the crisis is also having a major impact on education funding. Containment efforts to stop the spread of the virus led to a major economic slowdown in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020, with growth rates of -2 per cent according

to the World Bank<sup>1</sup>, leading to the continent's first recession in 25 years. Government revenues are therefore being impacted, as is the level of public spending. Projections<sup>2</sup> indicate that education expenditure per capita for the region may have fallen by 4.2 per cent in 2020 and stagnated in 2021. Meanwhile, COVID-related spending will further widen the education funding gap in low- and middle-income countries. Prior to the pandemic, UNESCO estimated that there was

an annual shortfall of US\$148 billion in the amount needed to achieve SDG 4. This shortfall was recalculated in September 2020 and had increased by one-third, or an additional US\$30-40 million per year. Low-income countries are the most vulnerable. They may also suffer from a reduction in public development aid if donors shift their budget priorities to meet their domestic needs, or to other sectors, such as health. ■

### Household spending: better distribution of resources for education

School fees, school supplies, additional costs... African households spend an average of 4.2 per cent of their annual budget on education, according to a study covering some 15 African countries by IIEP-UNESCO Dakar<sup>3</sup>. In doing so, they contribute to almost a third of national current expenditure on education. Nevertheless, this expenditure is poorly directed. Families contribute more to the financing of primary education than to that of higher educa-

tion. On the one hand, this is inequitable: the representation of students from the most advantaged social segments is greater in higher education, the education sub-sector that receives the most public resources. On the other hand, it is inefficient: the return on investment in education is greater for higher education graduates than for secondary school graduates, who are themselves more 'profitable' than primary school graduates. To reconcile efficiency and equity, the relative effort of households to finance education should therefore increase with the level of education.

African policy-makers would benefit from promoting mechanisms that encourage substantial household investment in higher education. This is already the case in countries that have gradually replaced very generous but poorly targeted scholarships with well-controlled loan schemes. Furthermore, a more active redistribution policy of educational resources should be encouraged. This would favour access to basic education for the poorest through the establishment of support funds financed by increased household expenditure on higher education. ■

## Equipping the stakeholders who finance education

**Focus on our action.** Good financial management and budgeting are essential to the achievement of educational goals. Strengthening the capabilities of African education administrations to understand these issues is at the heart of IIEP-UNESCO Dakar's mandate. The issues of costs and of the financing of education are core topics within the training courses for managers and technical staff in the sector. This is the case with the training programme on policies for education sector management. Similarly, the methodologies developed by IIEP experts aim to provide countries with robust tools for anticipating needs and optimizing education resources. These themes are dealt with in detail in the *methodological guides for sector analysis* co-developed by IIEP-UNESCO Dakar and used throughout the continent. ■

1. World Bank, World Development Indicators (2020). GDP Growth (annual %) Sub-Saharan Africa.  
 2. World Bank, 'The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education financing', 2020,  
 3. IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, Household education spending: An analytical and comparative perspective for 15 African countries, 2012.

# Financing

## Education: a sector that weighs heavily on budgets

Represents **23%** of recurrent spending of states' budget

Largest sector of expenditure for governments in Africa

### NEW RESOURCES CAN BE LOCATED BY

**Better spending**  
 2 per cent of GDP in low- and middle-income countries is spent inefficiently

**Improving the tax system**  
 Increasing the tax/GDP ratio by five percentage points would allow most countries to double their spending on education

**Reasserting aid priority to Africa**  
 Sub-Saharan Africa receives only 1/4 of the world's basic education aid

# Inclusion



# Ensuring equitable and universal access to education

Family wealth, personal physical ability, and gender are major factors that determine children's access to education. More than 97 million children are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa, which has one of the highest population growth rates in the world<sup>1</sup>. The continent also has the highest exclusion rate for 6 to 11-year-olds. Access for all is both the cornerstone of inclusive education and a prerequisite for it.

The African continent accounts for 38 per cent of the world's out-of-school children, up from 24 per cent in 2000. Only 7 out of 10 children complete primary school<sup>2</sup>. This means that children excluded from basic education are not exclusively from disadvantaged areas, nor are they only from minority groups or groups with special needs. These out-of-school children, who represent a significant proportion of the region's future generation, are currently being abandoned by the institution responsible for providing their schooling.

*To establish inclusive education in sub-Saharan Africa, it is imperative to apply this fundamental principle: universal and equitable access to education.*

## The situation varies by country

Regional figures mask significant variations in the scale and pace of reform and the policy direction towards inclusive education. While some countries are succeeding in closing equity gaps through more inclusive education systems, others are falling behind.

In Niger, for example, only 4 in 10 children completed primary education a decade ago, compared to 6 in 10 today. At the same time, Eritrea and Tanzania have seen their primary school completion rates fall drastically.

Over the same period, Madagascar has significantly improved access to pre-school education, from 1 in 10 children in school to 4 in 10. In other countries, such as Burkina Faso or the Democratic Republic of Congo, the expansion of preschool education has been limited to a 2-percentage point increase over the same period<sup>3</sup>.

## Poverty, a major barrier to inclusive education

Beyond regional variations, children in sub-Saharan Africa are not simply excluded from the education system by sheer bad luck. This situation is often linked to several identifiable factors.

Poverty remains without doubt one of the most significant barriers. In sub-Saharan Africa, children from the richest households are three times more likely to complete primary education than those from the poorest households<sup>4</sup>. They are also 20 times more likely to complete upper secondary education. In recent years, many countries in the region have made a commitment to providing free secondary education. However, this measure only benefits children who have been able to complete primary education.

## Effects of gender are variable and unpredictable

Across sub-Saharan Africa, there has been a gradual improvement in gender parity: 89 girls now complete lower secondary education for every 100 boys, compared to 84 girls a decade ago. However, this regional trend does not reflect the reality in many countries, where girls remain extremely disadvantaged. In Chad, for example, for every 100 boys, only 49 girls complete lower secondary education.

Sometimes, however, disparities are to the detriment of boys. This is the case in Burundi and Senegal, where 83 boys graduate from secondary school for every 100 girls<sup>5</sup>.

## Place of residence, disability, insecurity: other aspects of exclusion

Where children live also has a significant impact on their access to education, often due to the lack of infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa. Children living in urban areas are almost twice as likely as children living rurally to complete primary education and four times as likely to complete secondary education. Those with disabilities – including motor, visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments – are particularly vulnerable to exclusion. The vast majority either do not attend school or drop out early. Often, these barriers to education overlap and accumulate. In Mozambique, for example, almost half of men with disabilities can read and write, compared to 17 per cent of women with disabilities<sup>6</sup>.

*A boy from a disadvantaged background who lives in a rural area and does not speak the language of instruction has little chance of accessing education. His sister with a disability has practically none.*

These challenges are compounded by insecurity and violence, as well as climate change, natural disasters, and epidemics<sup>7</sup>. Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest number of internally displaced children in the world – 4.4 million – and their education is compromised by their situation<sup>8</sup>. Refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than other children<sup>9</sup>.

## The pandemic: an aggravating factor

In this already complicated context, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in nearly 300 million children in Africa missing school<sup>10</sup>. The disruption has had a particularly negative impact on the most vulnerable students, for whom home-based learning is most difficult<sup>11</sup>, owing to the absence, or inadequacy, of educational materials – not to mention the tens of millions of school-age children who cannot benefit from distance learning at all<sup>12</sup>.

As a result of the economic impact of the global health crisis, UNESCO estimates that 23.8 million children could be forced to drop out of school or be deprived of schooling by 2021. If the impact of the loss of learning is added, the total number of children who will not return to school because of the COVID-19 crisis is likely to be even higher. This potential 'generational disaster'<sup>13</sup> appears to be an additional barrier to inclusive education, which needs to be removed. ■

1,2,3,4,5. Data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

6. UNESCO, Report GEM, op. cit.

7. UNESCO, Brief Education 2030, « L'éducation dans les situations d'urgence et les crises prolongées en Afrique subsaharienne », septembre 2016.

8. UNESCO, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 'The impacts of internal displacement on education in Sub-Saharan Africa', Working Document, 2020.

9. Education cannot wait.

10. UNESCO, 'COVID-19: An unprecedented crash test for African education systems', 2020.

11. United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 'Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond', August 2020.

12. UNICEF, 'COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures?', August 2020.

### For an inclusive model of disability

Children with disabilities account for 15 per cent of the world's out-of-school children<sup>1</sup>.

This figure is likely to be much higher in reality because such data are not collected in the majority of African states. The education gap between children with and without disabilities has been widening over the past two decades, both in terms of school completion and of learning outcomes. In schools, many children with disabilities are never identified. In

Francophone Africa, only 5 per cent of second-graders participated in vision screenings in 2014<sup>2</sup>. To improve educational planning and increase the inclusion of these children in education systems, census methods must not only be strengthened, but must also evolve. How should we define whether a child is disabled? The prevailing approach continues to reflect a purely medical view of disability, to the detriment of a socially focused and humane consideration of the issue. To meet the individual support needs of disabled pupils,

their environment and their ability to learn must also be taken into account. The lack of teacher training in inclusive education is also an obstacle.

National legislative and policy frameworks reflect a growing political commitment to inclusive education in Africa, echoing the international framework on the right to education for young people with disabilities<sup>3</sup>. The implementation – still too slow – of national commitments and initiatives is moving towards more equitable and inclusive education systems. ■

### Empowering female teachers: a key driver of inclusive education

Gender inequalities are not just about access to education and student achievement. Worldwide, gender disparities persist in the teaching profession and, more broadly, in the administration of education systems.

With only 43 per cent of teachers at primary level being female, sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest percentage in the world. At secondary level, this has declined

slightly over the past 20 years. Female teachers represent only 30 per cent of the teaching force, compared to the world average of 54 per cent. They are also under-represented in scientific subjects. In Burkina Faso, for example, 20 per cent of teachers of languages and literature are women, compared to less than 10 per cent in mathematics and only 2 per cent in physics.

In addition to social and economic injustice, these gender imbalances in the teaching force have a negative impact on students' perceptions and learning outcomes. A teacher

of the same gender as the student may serve as a role model. He or she can play a central role in creating a climate of equality between girls and boys or, equally, can exacerbate discrimination in the classroom. Female teachers can provide safer learning environments for girls, reducing the risk of gender-based violence. While many studies exist in developed countries on the impact of the gender of teachers on students' academic performance, research is more scarce in developing countries, particularly in Africa. ■

## Advancing gender equality in and through education

**Focus on our action.** As technical lead of the Gender at the Centre Initiative, IIEP-UNESCO Dakar works to promote gender equality in and through education. Launched in 2019 during the G7 summit and coordinated by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, this programme aims to strengthen the capabilities of eight sub-Saharan African countries to integrate gender issues into the development, implementation, and monitoring of education policies. With a team of gender-sensitive education planning and management specialists, IIEP-UNESCO Dakar supports governments, provides training, and produces and shares resources. ■

1. UNESCO, Report GEM, op. cit.  
 2. World Bank, 'Looking ahead: Visual impairment and school eye health programs', 2019.  
 3. Sustainable Development Goal 4, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

# Inclusion

## A major challenge, not only for minorities

Almost **100 million children** are out of school in Africa, the highest level ever reached on the continent



**Gender.** Compared to boys, girls are 10% less likely to complete lower secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, and up to 50% less likely in Chad.



**Poverty.** A child from a rich household is three times more likely to complete primary school than a child from a poor household



**Geography.** A child living in an urban area is 4 times more likely to complete upper secondary education than a child living in a rural area



Quality

# Addressing the learning crisis

Despite years of strong and steady growth in school enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup>, a learning crisis is threatening the future of entire generations. More than 8 out of 10 children do not reach minimum competency levels in reading and mathematics in the region. Why has the rapid expansion of education not been accompanied by high-quality learning for all, and what can be done about this?

Following the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, the Dakar Declaration in 2000, and the Incheon Declaration in 2015, states and their partners have taken the right to education very seriously. Nearly 9 out of 10 primary school-age children are enrolled in school around the world<sup>2</sup>. In sub-Saharan Africa, progress towards access to education has been particularly rapid and significant since the 2000s, even though tens of millions of children are still not in school. Despite schools filling up, there are signs that students are getting little benefit.

*53 per cent of children in low- and middle-income countries have a learning deficit: they cannot read and understand simple text by the end of primary school. In poor countries, this rate can rise to over 80 per cent<sup>3</sup>.*

## The learning deficit: a worrying trend

While 1 in 5 children and adolescents of primary and secondary school age live in sub-Saharan Africa, the region is home to a third of those who cannot read properly. After at least six years of primary schooling, about 60 per cent of pupils across the continent have inadequate numerical and literacy skills<sup>4</sup>. If current trends continue, this crisis will affect an estimated

202 million children and adolescents. Many of them will have difficulty overcoming this initial learning handicap. Many will lose confidence in themselves. How did this happen? Will the growth in school access affect the quality of learning? Or is it just an accident, a growth crisis that stakeholders will soon be able to overcome?

## Following a large influx of pupils, temporary solutions have become permanent

Education systems were not prepared for the rapid influx of students, which has been one of the main policy objectives for several decades, as shown by the quality of school construction or the diversification of teacher recruitment.

In terms of buildings, straw huts and other temporary structures have sprung up out of necessity, but without the minimum hygiene, comfort, and safety requirements. Similarly, many countries have had to hastily recruit young, unprepared teachers, who were parachuted into classrooms without any real pedagogical training and without permanent or stable contracts. Faced with a lack of teachers, parents have sometimes had to hire dedicated but unprepared community teachers themselves, often paying them in kind. These solutions are temporary and fragile, and not conducive to learning.

Local administrations also lack operational capacity and cannot maintain regular contact with schools and teachers. Nor can they increase the low level of funding for learning tools, books, and other materials. The quality of learning has deteriorated to the point where a learning crisis is now being reported by many stakeholders.

## Beyond the lack of means, pedagogy is in question

Schools now host a new group of children, whose parents have not attended school and already have a lot to do, but teaching methods have not been sufficiently adapted to the local environment (language, culture, and so on). Learning topics are often disconnected from the children's reality, and school calendars are not in line with community activities, such as agricultural seasons during which children often help their families. In other words, the standard school model has failed to adapt to the needs of new populations.

Yet governments and partners are not standing idly by in the face of this learning crisis. Many plans and projects are in place. Observing classroom practice has revealed the main difficulties encountered by teachers and the entire chain of supervision linked to the quality of learning. The lessons learned from these studies should make it possible to address issues of quality more effectively, to review teacher training programmes and to help teachers adapt their methods.

## Regular follow-ups: a key issue

Setting up or strengthening regular national learning assessment instruments is an absolute necessity, especially in the primary cycle. The objectives are to measure progress and to provide early warning if quality deteriorates. These tools can also inform educational managers and planners about the effectiveness of measures to restore the quality of learning. For example, to what extent have school results evolved following a reform of pedagogical

approaches, an increase in book provision, or the implementation of an improvement programme in reading and maths? The results are often difficult to interpret but have the merit of focusing the attention of stakeholders on issues to do with quality.

## Promising prospects

In addition to pedagogical management, administrative management – which is seen to play an important role in the quality of learning – is also the subject of studies based on new methodologies. IIEP-UNESCO Dakar is involved in this research. Are realistic and sustainable objectives set for the agents who will implement them? How do we guide teams through policy change? Systems should pay more attention to these key governance issues.

Other experiments exist in several countries, including Senegal and Cameroon, that have taken up the issue of national languages in initial learning. The government of Niger is studying the effects of tightening the curriculum for early grades around basic skills. Other initiatives are taking shape: the introduction of tools for systematically measuring time spent learning in school or the setting-up of distance learning networks for teachers. The COVID-19 crisis highlights the potential of these pedagogical perspectives.

This reflects a growing concern about the quality of learning in schools and appears to be an important turning point in the development agenda. However, there isn't a magic or cheap solution to this crisis. Change in the next 10 or 15 years will require us to gradually build a new social and political consensus around education. ■

1. UNESCO, '6 out of 10 children and adolescents are not learning a minimum in reading and math', 2017.
2. Data from 2018 UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
3. Data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics and World Bank, 'New target: Cut learning poverty by at least half by 2030', 2019.
4. PASEC, 'Quality of education systems in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa: Performance and teaching-learning environment at primary level' [in French], 2019.

### Time for learning

In sub-Saharan Africa, teacher absence varies between 15 and 45 per cent<sup>1</sup>. Even if the evidence remains scarce, their low presence in the classroom – due to ill-health, bad weather, or administrative problems – affects the quality of children’s learning and contributes to inequalities in school results<sup>2</sup>. Delays to the start of school terms, strikes, and child absenteeism also have a significant impact on the time spent in classrooms. However, this remains a complex issue. What time are we talking

about: the days when the school is open, the hours when the children are in the classroom, or the minutes when they are working attentively? A school that appears to be doing its duty may, in fact, have its pupils doing very little work. Of course, it is difficult to set up reliable and permanent measurement mechanisms on a large scale. Such a system would be cumbersome and costly for administrators and might be rejected by teachers, who might feel they are being monitored. However, some methods to reduce the loss of learning time are

emerging. By observing classroom activity, local governments can propose appropriate solutions. Central administrations have a key role to play in limiting delays in teacher deployment, managing career advancement, or changing salary perceptions. Replacing straw huts with more durable buildings would avoid losing weeks of school. Finally, based on how school days are distributed in the year and hours in the week, a more suitable schedule for the children could be developed. ■

### Learning to read, but to read what?

Many children are unsuccessful at school because they have not been able to master reading. The scarcity of books in schools offers one explanation for this. The number of textbooks does not always correspond to the number of children, which means that each pupil does not have their own textbook. Teachers [can] struggle to manage their distribution and

use. Sometimes their content is confusing for the teacher or not suitable for classroom use. While useful to teachers and children alike, fiction and non-fiction books, dictionaries, and atlases are even rarer than textbooks. As a result, the blackboard is sometimes the only medium for learning. The child copies as best he can, often without help. Their learning is therefore purely theoretical: they try to read but have nothing to read. Fortunately, there is

hope. Very low-cost digital access to suitable materials is becoming widespread. In some countries, secondary school textbooks can already be downloaded free of charge via phone, thanks to activist initiatives. Private African publishers of children’s literature are also betting on low-cost digital access. Let us hope that most schools will be able to make use of these new learning channels. ■

## Transforming practices to improve the quality of education

**Focus on our action.** In response to the global learning crisis, IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, in collaboration with its partners (notably the Agence Française de Développement), is proposing a programme to support the management of education quality in Africa at basic level. It aims to support stakeholders at all levels of the education system to transform their professional practices in a sustainable way. The approach is based on participatory assessment and on the co-construction of coordinated and contextualized solutions. In parallel with the technical support missions, this innovative programme results in the production and sharing of knowledge and methodological resources that increase the quality of education. ■

1. World Bank, 2017.  
2. UNICEF, Time to teach: Teacher attendance and time on task in eastern and southern Africa, 2020.

# Quality

## Africa is affected by the global learning crisis

**125 million children** worldwide have not mastered the basics of either reading, writing, or maths after four years of school

**60% of pupils** have poor numerical skills after six years of primary schooling

**50-60% of pupils** have poor reading skills after six years of primary schooling (depending on the sub-region)

### A FRAGILE SITUATION

**20%** of students have non-literate parents

**43%** of pupils attended kindergarten at the beginning of their education

**15-45%** rate of teacher absence, depending on region

$P = (1 + i)^x$   
?





# Employment



# Winning the battle for youth employment

By 2030, about 100 million young people will have entered the labour market in Africa, representing more than 10 million young job-seekers each year<sup>1</sup>. This demographic surge can be an opportunity if the continent can meet the employability challenge. Owing to a lack of appropriate skills, young people account for up to 60 per cent of Africa's unemployed<sup>2</sup>. To meet economic demand and build a future for young people, it has become urgent to strengthen the effectiveness of vocational training systems through partnerships.

While technical and vocational skill development is prominent in the United Nations' Education 2030 Agenda, Africa's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems are not yet up to the challenge.

## Ensuring the training-to-work transition: a question of employability

While youth unemployment in Africa is alarmingly high, 1 in 3 of young Africans who are employed live in extreme poverty<sup>3</sup>. The development of the African continent will depend on an increase in the qualifications of Africa's young people and their acquisition of skills that meet economic and social demands.

In sub-Saharan Africa, only 7 per cent of upper secondary school students were enrolled in TVET programmes in 2014<sup>4</sup>. While this figure is lower than the corresponding figures for North America or Western Europe, the fact that there has been an increase indicates a growing interest in TVET on the continent. However, training programmes are often too general and do not necessarily meet the skill needs of countries. Technical colleges and high schools are often far removed from the professional world and do not give enough importance to practical work and

placements. To ensure an effective and sustainable training-to-work transition, the focus should be on workplace training.

## Strengthening monitoring and improving responsiveness

In the 2000s, many sub-Saharan African countries decided to place skill development at the centre of educational and social policies for development. National employment and training observatories have been created to gather statistics to improve information systems and assess the skill needs of economies. However, TVET systems are often rigid. They have difficulty adjusting to the rapid introduction of new training courses or abandoning courses with low demand from companies that therefore become irrelevant.

Adopting a skills framework or a national qualifications system can help to strengthen the links between education, training, and employment, by identifying promising fields and anticipating the skills that should be given priority in order to boost particular economic sectors. These tools can be shared and adopted by several African countries, thus facilitating the mobility of learners and graduate workers through the mutual recognition of qualifications. These synergies and collaborative practices need to be further developed. Furthermore, the commitment of all stakeholders is essential to ensure that these schemes are implemented in a consistent and harmonious way.

## Strengthening and accelerating partnerships

At the current rate, Africa will only be able to create 100 million jobs of the 450 million that are actually needed in the next 25 years. Generating new jobs requires relevant training courses to be designed

### Higher education in Mauritania

Another challenge is to make higher education, which is often characterized by the predominance of long academic cycles, more flexible, with more focus on employability. In Mauritania, projections suggest that the number of jobs requiring higher education qualifications in the manufacturing, water, and energy sectors is expected to increase sixfold over the next 15 years. If the coverage of higher education in Mauritania is below that of comparable countries, its expansion will have to be done through the development of short professional training courses more suitable to the future labour market.

upstream, in addition to sustained growth. To do this, greater involvement of economic stakeholders, particularly at local level, appears to be an essential means of leverage.

Senegal has based its TVET modernization strategies on strengthening public-private partnerships to meet the needs of priority sectors such as construction and public works, fishing and agriculture. Thus, the Training Centre for Port Trades and Logistics (Centre de Formation aux Métiers Portuaires et à la Logistique) in Dakar was one of the first training centres in sub-Saharan Africa to provide a skills-based training approach.

## Better financing of vocational training

To support these transitions in TVET systems, significant resources are needed. The share of vocational training in education spending is only 4 per cent on average in Africa<sup>5</sup>. In most countries, occupational taxes that are supposed to finance training are collected by the state and paid into the treasury as tax revenues, thus only partially benefiting TVET. However, the situation seems to be gradually changing.

In 2014, Senegal developed the Vocational and Technical Training Fund (3FPT), which subsidizes training and integration projects developed according to the economic potential of localities. Between 2016 and 2018, 3FPT supported more than 18,000 young Senegalese in training in 200 approved organisations across 27 sectors. 3FPT is now cited as an example for sub-Saharan African countries<sup>6</sup>.

Beyond the question of financing, the partnership dynamic remains the main key factor of success and performance of TVET. In Africa, the implementation of public-private partnerships is still far from optimal. Among the obstacles is the lack of a regulatory framework and operational tools. The challenge for the coming years is therefore to redefine the roles of public and private stakeholders in the development and implementation of training in order to strengthen this essential cooperation. Only by taking all these elements into account will TVET contribute to restructuring the African economy, by enhancing the employability of young people for the jobs of the future. ■

1. IIEP-UNESCO Dakar database and the Organization Internationale de la Francophonie.
2. World Bank data, cited in Africa Renewal, 'Africa's jobless youth cast a shadow over economic growth'.
3. International Labour Organization, 'Global employment trends for youth 2020: Africa', 2020.
4. Data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the World Bank, 'The skills balancing act in sub-Saharan Africa', 2020.
5. IIEP-UNESCO Dakar indicator database.
6. Vocational and Technical Training Fund website, <https://3fpt.sn/>.

**For a localized approach to TVET**

To meet the challenge of youth employability in Africa, TVET must respond to the specific challenges of local economies. Mobilizing local actors, and in particular private enterprises, is therefore fundamental. This means that institutions in charge of TVET must remain in touch with territorial realities and the needs expressed by the field. In sub-Saharan Africa, this transition from central systems to local consultation mechanisms is beginning to take place.

The dynamics of supply and demand often lead local labour markets to specialize, to take advantage of their comparative advantages. Vocational training has a key role to play in supporting the economic strategies of different regions and in fostering their resilience to external shocks. The proximity of companies to local training centres facilitates the creation of training pathways aligned with sectoral skill needs – and thus promotes the professional integration of young people into their local economic fabric.

This participatory approach is generally based on regional partnership

frameworks for skill development. This is the case in Mauritania, which is currently carrying out an innovative approach in three regions, with the technical support of IIEP-UNESCO Dakar. Local private companies are involved in identifying the skills needed to develop their most promising sectors: mixed farming in the Gorgol region, construction in Nouakchott, and fishing in Nouadhibou. This partnership will help the training centres to adapt their programmes and will guide young people towards promising career paths. ■

**Public-private partnership: what are the benefits?**

More than ever, the continent needs to train people capable of meeting the skill needs of businesses. This is a precondition for economic growth and will enable young Africans to find decent jobs or to achieve long-term success in entrepreneurship. Public-private partnerships are an essential part of achieving this.

Public-private partnerships can help to identify the skills lacking today, to anticipate those that will be indispensable tomorrow, or to design and deliver coherent training programmes. They also make it possible to evaluate their impact and results, and reduce the financial burden on public budgets, since the private sector takes on the indirect costs of training young people, such as the hosting and supervision of apprentices.

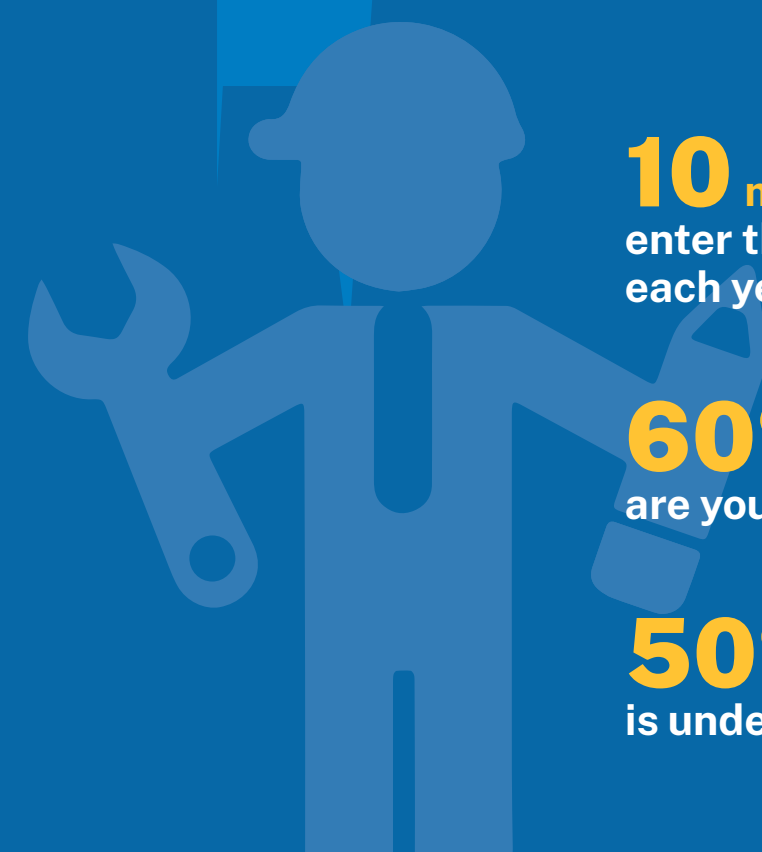
To improve both the employability of young people and competitiveness of the market, the Moroccan authorities have set up delegated management institutes, in partnership with professionals in the targeted sectors. This training system makes it possible to accelerate the specialization and professional integration of young company recruits. ■

**Planning TVET for transition to employment**

**Focus on our action.** IIEP-UNESCO Dakar promotes an innovative approach to supporting and strengthening the planning and management of TVET. The aim is to ensure that all people have access to relevant, high-quality training and skill development throughout their lives. To achieve this, the teams provide technical support to African stakeholders in the sub-sector in the development, implementation, and monitoring of TVET plans and reforms. This includes, for example, defining national or regional frameworks for public-private partnerships. IIEP-UNESCO Dakar encourages networking through the sharing of tools and resources between countries. ■

# Employment

## A young population looking for work



**10 million young people** enter the labour market each year in Africa

**60%** of the unemployed are young people in Africa

**50%** of the population is under 25 in Africa

### PROMOTING THE TVET SECTOR

 **4%** The average share of public expenditure on education devoted to vocational training in Africa

 **7%** Share of secondary school students in sub-Saharan Africa enrolled in TVET programmes



# IIEP-UNESCO Dakar celebrates its 20th anniversary

Since its creation in 2001, as the first pole of expertise in education sector analysis in Africa, our Dakar Office has continued to expand its scope of intervention, to meet the major education challenges on the continent.

IIEP-UNESCO's Africa Office contributes to governments' and partners' joint efforts to achieve lifelong inclusive, equitable and quality education. It forms part of the United Nations 2030 Education Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

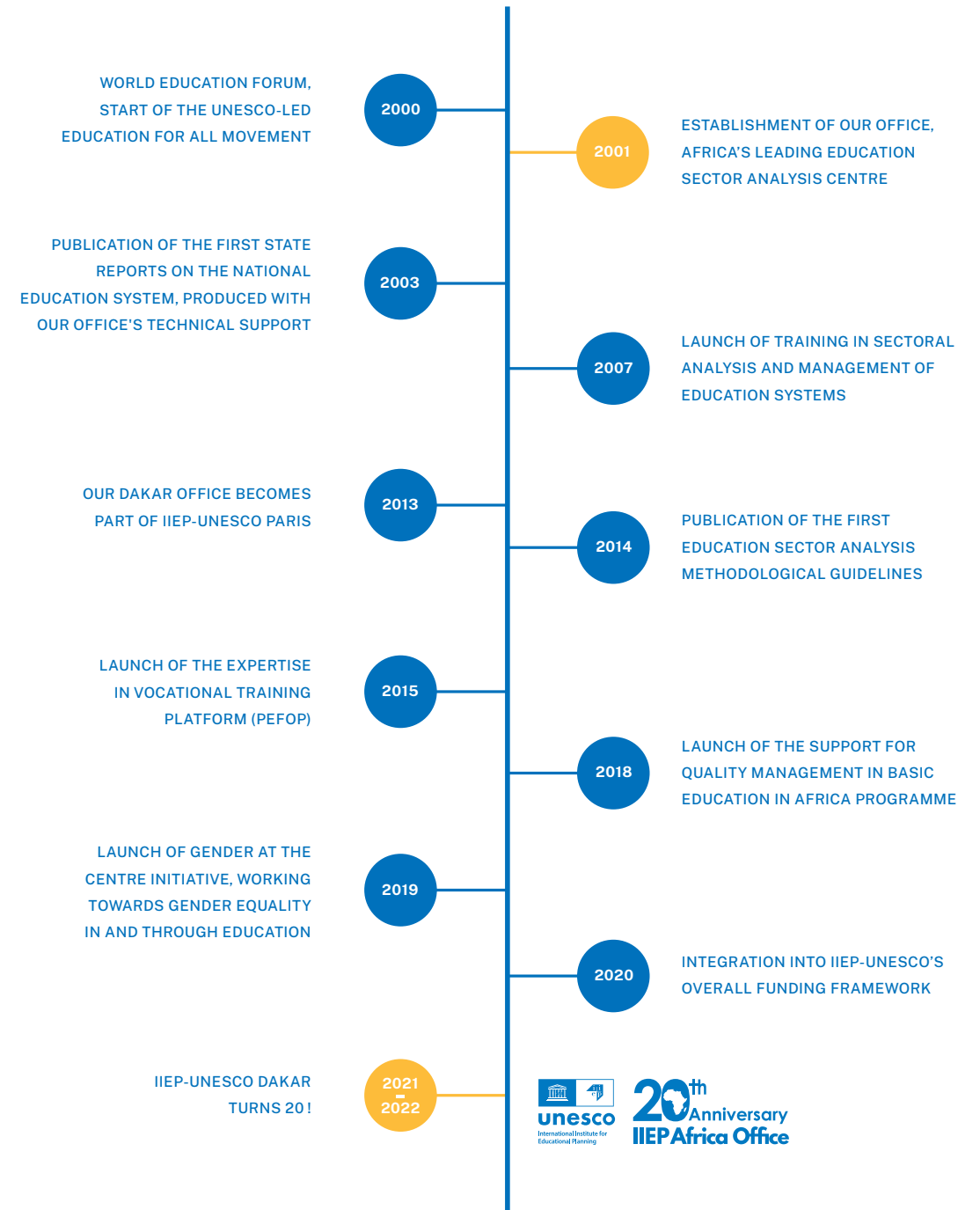
IIEP-UNESCO Dakar provides support to countries at all stages of the education planning cycle: from sector analysis to policy implementation and evaluation. Training, knowledge generation and sharing are an integral part of our mandate, and feed into our technical cooperation activities in the field.

The Africa office is known for its broad and holistic approach to planning and managing education systems and has specialists who can provide in-depth support in several sub-areas of education: technical and vocational education and training, quality management and gender equality.

*Africa and gender equality are two of UNESCO's global priorities. In its 11th Medium-Term Strategy, IIEP is committed to devote at least 50% of its portfolio to Africa, and to mainstream gender in its projects.*

**IIEP-UNESCO**  
11th Medium-Term Strategy, 2022-2025

## IIEP AFRICA OFFICE 20 YEARS OF EXPERTISE AT THE SERVICE OF EDUCATION IN AFRICA



Planning  
**education,**  
building  
**the future**



**unesco**  
International Institute for  
Educational Planning

[dakar.iiep.unesco.org](http://dakar.iiep.unesco.org)