



## SECTORAL BRIEF

# GENDER AND EDUCATION IN KENYA



Credit photo : Marcel Crozet / ILO

## Introduction

This policy brief is part of the Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP), which assesses the status of gender equality and women's empowerment in Kenya based on recently produced reports and resources. The assessment aims to strengthen national understanding and data on advancing international, regional and national commitments to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE). As the primary source of evidence-driven advocacy and programming, the CGEP provides insights to county and national stakeholders, development partners, the European Union, and the UN System to advance gains and overcome challenges at the county and national levels.

Furthermore, the gender analysis is guided by the transformative and rights-based gender equality and women's empowerment approach embodied in the core European Union values on human rights and reinforced by the new EU Gender Action Plan 2021-2025 (GAP III). The framework recognises that gender equality is crucial in promoting democracy, good governance and sustainable development.

## Background and Context

The Kenyan Government rolled out a 100 per cent transition policy alongside the free day secondary school education to increase the number of girls and women in secondary and higher education.

As a result, all EU policies and actions in Kenya contribute to the dual goal of advancing gender equality and accelerating progress toward Kenya's SDG goals and targets. Gender analysis is a starting point for gender mainstreaming and integrating gender equality and inclusion perspectives into the EU programming processes, policies, actions and dialogues.

This policy brief serves as a strategic guide for programmes and policies aimed at advancing and strengthening Kenya's integration of gender equality and women's empowerment across key stakeholders: The Government of Kenya (Ministries, Departments, Agencies [MDAs] and structures of governance: national, county and communities); development partners including the private sector and the United Nations (UN) agencies. This ensures that actions aimed at closing gender gaps and ending discrimination are informed by context-specific analysis that reflects the different realities, needs and challenges of men, women, boys and girls in all their diversity.

This move is aimed at ensuring girls' enrolment and completion of education in rural and semi-arid areas and informal urban settlements. As a result, primary school to secondary school transition rates

increased from 83.3 per cent in 2018 to 95 per cent by the first quarter of 2020<sup>1</sup> with the help of the National Government Administrative Officers.

PRIMARY SCHOOL TO SECONDARY SCHOOL  
TRANSITION RATES

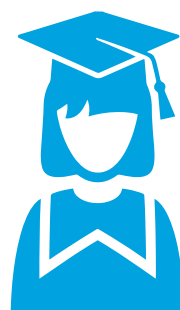
83.3% ▶ 2018



95% ▶ 2020

Moreover, the Government developed the National Guidelines for school re-entry in Early Learning and Basic Education, 2020. The guidelines provide a framework to enhance re-entry for learners who drop out of school, including those with special needs and disabilities, and to improve retention, transition and completion rates at all basic education levels. The guidelines have ensured pregnant girls and young mothers can join school and continue their education.

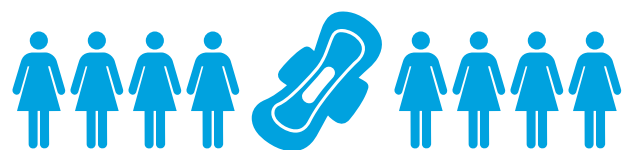
In collaboration with development partners, the Government enhanced access to education for girls through the provision of various scholarships, including *Elimu* (education) Scholarship Bursaries, *Wezesha* (empowerment) Scholarship, National Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities (NDFPWD), Kenya Pipeline Company Foundation Inuka flagship Scholarship programme, Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, County Bursaries, National Government Constituencies Development Fund (NGCDF) and Affirmative Action Funds. The scholarships have ensured that more girls (55 per cent) from vulnerable families can access education.



IN 2020,  
**4,811**  
OUT OF 9,000  
SCHOLARSHIPS WERE  
AWARDED TO GIRLS

The Government has introduced school feeding programmes in Arid and Semi-Arid (ASAL) areas and free sanitary towels to all public primary schools countrywide to retain girls in school. In 2018,

**3.7 MILLION GIRLS RECEIVED 14.8 MILLION PACKETS OF SANITARY TOWELS.<sup>2</sup>**



Kenya has also adopted the Menstrual Hygiene Management Policy 2019-2030, which anchors these interventions. However, the girls in re-entry programmes face challenges, especially the poor, without caregivers for the babies left at home.

Most county governments are yet to link the feeding programmes to the Early Childhood and Development Education (ECDE) to offer nutritional support for children and cushion learners from malnutrition. Further, there is a need to make rural polytechnics more attractive to girls and boys and a deliberate effort to avoid boxing girls to traditional gender roles. The Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) is more favoured over the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) because it pays students and takes a shorter duration (six months instead of two years). Effectively, the KYEOP undermines the attractiveness and relevance of the rural polytechnics and county-run TVETs.

1 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. *Kenya Economic Survey (2021)*. <https://www.knbs.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Economic-Survey-2021.pdf>.  
2 Republic of Kenya. 2018. Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes: State Department of Gender. Accessed <https://gender.go.ke/sanitary-towels-program/>

## Findings and current situation

Kenya has experienced gender disparities in education since independence. Women's access to education has been limited and they face multiple hurdles of gender discrimination. The traditional gender discrimination and gender roles have hindered women's full participation in education and training. For girls, education is riddled with cultural obstacles and restrictive gender norms intertwined with traditional beliefs and practices.<sup>3</sup> The disparities are evident in primary and secondary education, and institutions of higher learning and vocational colleges. However, in the last two decades, the gender gap in education has been fluctuating rapidly, although girls remain under-represented. According to the Ministry of Education,

41%, in 2015

43% in 2016

42% in 2017

of total university enrolment.<sup>7</sup> Women also lagged across all levels, i.e., Undergraduate, Post-graduate diploma, Masters and PhD. In addition, more men than women enrolled in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses. Furthermore, women and girls face barriers in education enrolment and completion, such as early marriage, pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, with a high drop-out rate among girls.

**GIRLS ACCOUNTED FOR  
49.1%  
OF THE TOTAL SCHOOL  
ENROLMENT IN 2002.<sup>4</sup>**



In 2009, girls accounted for 46.5 per cent of total school enrolment compared to for 53.5 per cent of boys.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, gender disparities exist in primary school enrolment, with the index at 0.97 in favour of boys.<sup>6</sup>

Similar trends have been witnessed in higher learning institutions, particularly universities in Kenya. Although the enrolment of girls and women in universities in Kenya has improved, females remain under-represented compared to their male counterparts. According to the Commission for University Education (CUE), women accounted for

The government has, however, made deliberate efforts to increase school enrolment for both boys and girls. Gender mainstreaming in education has focused on eliminating bottlenecks that hinder women's full participation in education and training. Under the current Constitutional dispensation, access to education is a right and priority for all persons, irrespective of status. Furthermore, the Constitution emphasises the need for affirmative action for marginalised groups, including women, girls and marginalised communities.<sup>8</sup>

Since 2009, enrolment rates in primary and secondary schools has increased with girls accounting for 49.1 per cent and 47.3 per cent of total enrolment rates in primary and secondary levels, respectively.<sup>9</sup> At the national level, the gender parity index for secondary school enrolment was 0.99 in 2019.<sup>10</sup> In the same period, 43 per cent of

3 Lorentzen, I. 2020. Kenyan girls' fight for education and empowerment. Dissertation presented at Malmo University.

4 Republic of Kenya. 2016. Ministry of Education, Strategic plan. Nairobi. Government Printers.

5 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST). 2014. Basic Education, Statistical Booklet, UNICEF. Nairobi: Government printers

6 Analytical Report on Education and Training, based on 2019 KPHC.

7 Commission for University Education (CUE). 2016. State of University Education in Kenya.

8 Republic of Kenya. 2019. National policy on Gender and Development. Sessional Paper No. 02 of 2019.

9 Ibid.

10 Kenya Population and Housing Census, 2019 – Analytical Report on Education and Training

females were enrolled in Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET).<sup>11</sup>

Due to the affirmative actions and gender mainstreaming practices in education in Kenya, there are now more women in education in primary, secondary, university and TVET institutions. Further, the number of women enrolling in STEM courses has gradually increased.<sup>12</sup> Despite these gains, key issues accelerating school drop-outs include unwanted pregnancies and child marriages that hamper girls' education, low transition rate among

boys and girls to secondary school and institutions of higher learning, socio-cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), defilement, boys and girls dropping out of school to assume household roles in the absence of parents, weak mechanisms for coordination and cooperation between national and county governments in the provision of education, and emerging issues such as betting, COVID-19, misuse of mobile phones and cyberspace.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusions

Gender disparities that are associated with the lack of women education in Kenya affect their access to economic and leadership opportunities including in business and employment.<sup>14</sup> Due to cultural barriers, early marriages, preference over the male child and lack of finances, most young girls cannot access primary or secondary education. Lack of

gender-sensitive curriculums may also hinder girls' performance in school or from engaging in subjects that are considered technical such as maths and sciences. The Government should work with other partners to implement retention measures to ensure girls complete their education so they can full participate in economic development.

## Recommendations for the Government of Kenya

- a. Support the implementation of the gender mainstreaming action strategy (2018-2022) of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and roll it out to the county levels. Identify male and female gender champions in the MoE's leadership and managers who can lead in advocating for gender equality in education at all levels.
- b. Implement the National Girl's Education Strategy along with a gender-responsive Recognition Prior to Learning (RPL) programme to certify more young women who possess artisan and technical skills acquired through experience and apprenticeship.
- c. Introduce feeding programmes in ECDEs through County governments<sup>15</sup> to enhance nutritional support among learners, especially from disadvantaged families. In counties where the feeding programmes are ongoing, the programs need to be scaled up to accommodate more learners. The Government should also invest in expanding government-supported Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to low-income families to allow women to work and earn incomes.
- d. In partnership with non-state actors, the state departments for primary education and public health to prioritise provision of sanitary towels to girls in schools.
- e. Implement programmes that support women's participation in STEM fields to reduce gender biases and male dominance and increase their chances of accessing job opportunities.

11 Republic of Kenya. 2019. National policy on Gender and Development. Sessional Paper No. 02 of 2019.

12 Commission for University Education. 2018. State of University Education In Kenya. CUE.

13 Republic of Kenya (2019). National policy on Gender and Development. Sessional Paper No. 02 of 2019.

14 Ibid.

15 This data is not consolidated, we do have the WFP supported Counties [Turkana, Marsabit, Samburu, Garissa] and those that have temporal schemes [Nairobi, West Pokot].

## Recommendations for Other Stakeholders and Partners

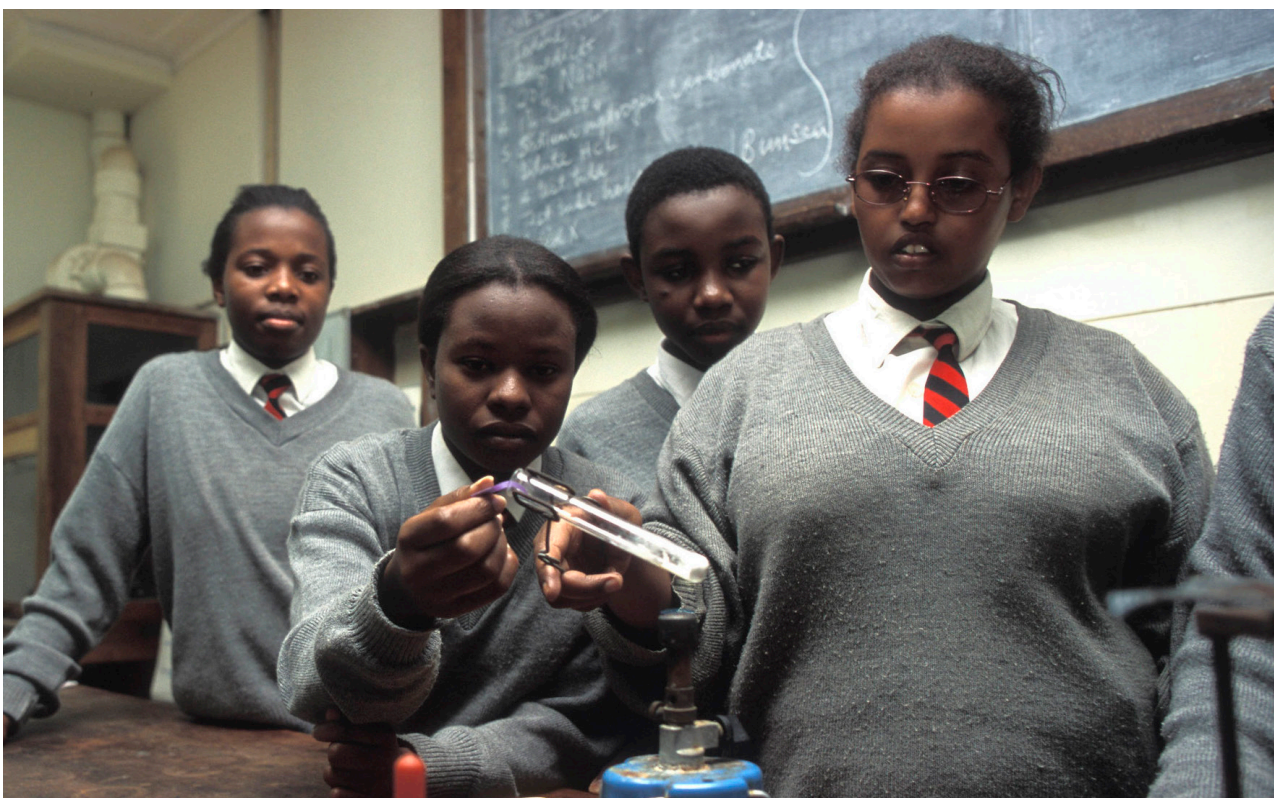
- a. Engage the private sector and the civil society actors in the education, TVET and ECDE sectors to improve education and skills development to correspond with job requirements in Kenya.
- b. Collaborate with the Government to create awareness in local communities on the importance of girl's education and address cultural norms that hinder girls from accessing education.
- c. Support the development of gender policy and mainstreaming in TVET and implementation of GEWE strategies through TVET scholarship programmes for women and marginalised groups.
- d. Support civil society actors in education to advocate for the availability of TVET programs to enhance awareness among young people.
- e. Support programmes that increase digital literacy and education for girls, women, youth and aspiring entrepreneurs to enable them to access, participate and benefit from the digitalised economy, including e-commerce platforms.

## Acknowledgements

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