**Youth Declaration**

**Recommendations on Education and Adolescent girls and young women**

Plagued by child, early and forced marriage, child-bearing and pervasive gender-based and sexual violence, sub–Saharan Africa is also the region most lagging behind in girls’ secondary education.

Even before COVID, nearly 34 million girls - equivalent to 38% of girls between the ages of 12-14 and 60.5% of girls 15 to 17 years old--were not in secondary school.[[1]](#footnote-0) Nearly half of girls aged 15-19 are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa.[[2]](#footnote-1) All of these are threats to their health and well-being and increase their risks of acquiring HIV.

The  [2022 Global AIDS update Report](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.unaids.org%2Fen%2Fresources%2Fpresscentre%2Fpressreleaseandstatementarchive%2F2022%2Fjuly%2F20220727_global-aids-update&data=05%7C01%7CDacheJ%40unaids.org%7C3463755d02ee46af8a6508da8bf12547%7Cc2e1cf9be1b644eb8021428c292d3eb5%7C0%7C0%7C637976165679775885%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=5a0qW3mMTJ%2FJckxXi2MZ%2BJtYizgOo%2FFTyTvtI1gUbIM%3D&reserved=0) shows that:

* Every two minutes, an adolescent girl or young woman was newly infected with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa in 2021.
* Eighty-two per cent of adolescent girls and young women newly infected with HIV in 2021 live in sub-Saharan Africa, including two-thirds in eastern and southern Africa.
* There were 4900 new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women every week in sub-Saharan Africa in 2021.
* Six in seven new HIV infections among adolescents 15-24yrs are among girls.
* On average, the rate of new infections across the sub-Saharan Africa region is more than three times higher among adolescent girls and young women than among their male peers.

The SDGs promise that no one would be left behind. That means all women and girls, groups living in marginalized situations, and affected by the HIV epidemic.

Education is a right of all children. Educating girls is a must. Secondary education, including comprehensive sexuality education, helps adolescent girls prevent teenage pregnancy, child marriage, gender-based violence, including Intimate Partner Violence[[3]](#footnote-2).

Getting girls through at least a secondary education is a key strategy to enable AGYW to prevent HIV—with impressive drops in new HIV infections by as much as one-third to one-half in high-prevalence countries.[[4]](#footnote-3) Increasing educational achievement among AGYW is also linked to better Sexual Reproductive Health outcomes, and safer births. [[5]](#footnote-4)

There’s need to address the intersecting inequalities in girls’ and young women’s lives that increase their risks of HIV, lift structural drivers and put gender equality and the education and rights of adolescent girls at the centre of the HIV/AIDS response

[Education Plus](https://www.unaids.org/en/topics/education-plus) is a high-level political advocacy drive for holistic, multisectoral actions and scaled-up investments to prevent HIV among adolescent girls and young women. The Initiative responds to the alarming numbers of adolescent girls and young women acquiring HIV and dying of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, among other threats to their survival, well-being, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

**Recommendations to Governments and Policymakers:**

1. Adopt and roll out promising, game-changing interventions, initiatives and approaches to advance gender equality, e.g. Education Plus Initiative to advance gender equality and end AIDS as a public health threat.
2. Invest in free universal access to secondary education, keep girls in school till completion of secondary education, and provide them with life skills, access to youth-friendly health services, violence-free environments and economic opportunities after school.
3. Prioritize investment in a holistic approach that empowers adolescent girls and young women and addresses unequal gender power dynamics and harmful gender norms that stand in the way of girls' education.
4. Leverage secondary education as the strategic entry point for the delivery of other basic needs including mental health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), food security and nutrition, menstrual health management
5. Make policy and legislative reforms to ensure the fundamental rights of young people including adolescents and young women are protected. End gender-discriminatory laws and practices
6. Ensure meaningful participation and leadership of adolescent girls and young women in decision-making platforms.
7. Adopt youth-centred approaches that are inclusive, diverse, feminist informed and participatory in the education sector reforms.
8. Invest in preventing gender-based violence and creating safer school environments for adolescent girls and young women. Young people’s participation is necessary for formulating policies to address school-related violence and bullying.

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2. UNFPA. Adolescents and Youth Dashboard. Available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/data/dashboard/adolescent-youth>; and UNESCO UIS.Stat. Available at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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