



Process Summary of the West and Central Africa Commitment for Educated, Healthy and Thriving Adolescents and Young People

#EducationSavesLives
#WCAcommitment

“We, the Ministers of Education and Health of West and Central Africa (WCA), meeting in Kintélé, on 6 April 2023, proclaim our vision of a West and Central Africa where all adolescents and young people have access to their rights and are equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values they need to transition to adulthood, to relate to others in healthy and respectful ways, and to be ready to become active, self-reliant and responsible citizens in their communities, countries and regions.”

A worrying situation

With a growing population of adolescents and youth in West and Central Africa (WCA), there is an opportunity to reap an unprecedented demographic dividend if they are educated, healthy and employed. However, major obstacles remain and must be overcome to achieve this:

Early and unintended pregnancies

In WCA, 33% of women have given birth before the age of 18, and 3.5% of adolescents before the age of 15.

Early and forced child marriages and unions

Six of the ten countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world are in the WCA region.

School completion rate

One in four adolescent girls and almost one in five adolescent boys have no formal education or training.

Early sexual début

In most countries, between 5 and 25 per cent of girls have had sex at or before the age of 14.

Menstrual health

Only two WCA countries have more than 50% of women who believe that the fertile period is in the middle of the menstrual cycle.

Unmet need for family planning

Only two in five women aged 15-49 have their family planning needs met with modern contraceptive methods.

Social norms and gender-based violence

On average, in the countries of the region, nearly half of girls and more than one-third of boys aged 15 to 19 years justify wife beating.



Female genital mutilation (FGM)

The percentage of adolescent girls, aged 15-19, who have undergone FGM varies from less than 1% to more than 90% across the WCA countries.

New HIV infections and knowledge about HIV

In WCA, only 24% of boys and 22% of girls aged 15-19 have comprehensive knowledge about HIV and AIDS.

Risks associated with the use of the Internet

Globally, the proportion of children aged 11-16 who use the internet and have experienced online bullying has increased from 7% in 2010 to 12% in 2014.

Origins of the WCA Commitment process

West and Central African (WCA) countries have agreed on several occasions on the need for urgent action in response to unacceptable levels of early and unintended pregnancy, HIV and gender-based violence.

In 2015 at the Dakar Conference, representatives of ministries of education and health, civil society and youth networks from 17 WCA countries called for a high-level commitment to strengthen education and health programmes in response to early and unintended pregnancy, HIV and GBV. In 2018, representatives from the ministries of education and health of 22 WCA countries agreed on the main issues to be addressed, the key steps towards a commitment and the steering bodies. As a result, a regional process towards a strong political commitment for adolescents and young people to access comprehensive education and information programmes and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services tailored to their needs has been undertaken.

The commitment process is led by a **High-Level Committee (HLC)**, composed of recognised leaders from education and health authorities, traditional and religious leaders, civil society, culture and youth. **The HLC is supported by a regional Technical Working Group (TWG)**, bringing together the United Nations, ECOWAS, ECCAS, civil society organisations, bilateral cooperation, and young people.

With the support of the TWG, and under the leadership of education and health authorities, **18 countries in West and Central Africa conducted national consultations on the situation of adolescents and young people.**

These consultations – which involved a wide range of stakeholders such as civil society, parent-teacher associations, religious and traditional leaders, youth and teachers' unions – enabled the countries to assess the situation of adolescents and young people in their countries and come up with recommendations that have been synthesized and submitted to the region's ministers of education and health.



This process led to **the endorsement by ministers of education and health from 25 countries of the WCA Commitment for Educated, Healthy and Thriving Adolescents and Young People**, on 6 April 2023 at the Grand Hôtel de Kintélé in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. The Commitment will have an **accountability framework** and **measurable targets**.

A commitment to African transformation and development

The WCA Commitment envisions healthy, educated, responsible adolescents and young people who are actors in the development of their families, communities, and countries. It addresses early and unintended pregnancies, child marriages, STI and HIV infections, psychoactive substances, sexual and gender-based violence, and gender disparities in education that have a devastating impact on the region's economic and social development.

"(...) strengthen the capacity of adolescents and young people to make informed choices and adopt healthy behaviours related to sexual and reproductive health."

Based on recommendations from 18 countries and one regional consultations, building on the data and evidence on the situation of adolescent and young people in WCA and inspired by the results and effects of similar commitments in other regions, the Commitment is expected to lead to significant impact in countries:

- **Increased mobilisation of resources and actors** for education and health programmes that meet the needs of adolescents and young people
- **Scaling up** of these programs
- **Improved coordination between education and health**, and among stakeholders in general
- **Monitoring progress on sexual and reproductive health, gender equality and protection from violence** through education and health programmes

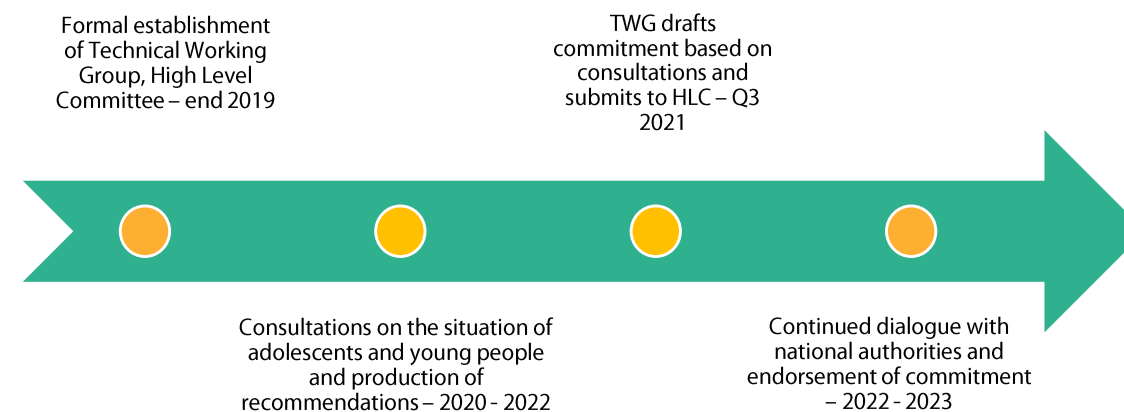
The Commitment will make a significant contribution to the implementation of a strong regional normative framework...

- the African Union's Agenda 2063
- the African Youth Charter
- the African Union Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend (2016)
- the Continental Strategy on Education for Africa (CESA 16-25) and the Gender Equality Strategy for CESA (16-25)
- the Maputo Plan of Action 2016-2030
- the Continental Policy Framework for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

... and is in line with several important initiatives, such as:

- the Ouagadougou Partnership
- the FP2030 Partnership
- the Education Plus Initiative
- the Safe to Learn Initiative

Timeline



Endorsement of the WCA Commitment - 6 April 2023



Endorsement of the WCA Commitment

The endorsement ceremony was co-organised by the Government of the Republic of Congo and the TWG, bringing together the ministers of education and health, regional economic communities, members of the HLC, several United Nations agencies, civil society organisations and youth networks in the region. It was placed under the patronage of Mr. Anatole Collinet MAKOSSO, Prime Minister, Head of Government of the Republic of Congo, and sponsored by Mrs. Antoinette SASSOU N'GUESSO, President of the Congo Assistance Foundation.

By endorsing the WCA Commitment, member states committed to...

Support cross-cutting principles of action by working towards

- **Involvement of all stakeholders** and community engagement, including parents, teachers, religious, customary and traditional leaders and young people alongside the authorities
- Programmes **for all adolescents and young people**, including those most at risk of early and unintended pregnancy, HIV and GBV, and those left behind
- **Evidence-based and human rights-based** programmes
- **Intergenerational dialogue** and deconstruction of taboos
- Establishment of **friendly, safe and inclusive spaces** for exchange to promote the participation of children and young people
- **Strengthen monitoring and evaluation** of commitments and ensure qualitative data collection and processing by involving civil society, young people and the research community

- Guarantee the **availability of the necessary funds** to finance the implementation of the Commitment
- **Intersectoral collaboration**, particularly between health and education, based on a harmonised and strengthened legal, policy and strategic framework
- **Monitoring, evaluation and research for improved decision-making**, effective programmes and services tailored to the needs of adolescents and young people
- Harnessing the potential of **digital solutions** for education and health
- **Capacity building** of all stakeholders as a cornerstone of any programme.



In favour of:



Comprehensive education and information programmes, with a focus on

- Implementation of programmes **inside and outside schools**
- Developmentally appropriate and **age-appropriate** programmes
- Programmes **adapted to the legal, political and cultural context** of each country
- **Teacher training** and development of teaching and learning tools
- **Development of attitudes, values and skills** beyond knowledge



Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services seeking to

- Foster **school health services** and promote health services through education, including increased social and behavioural communication
- **Remove legal barriers to SRH services**
- Ensure **confidentiality and privacy** of users by service providers
- Provide adolescent and **youth-friendly spaces** that ensure quality services (in health facilities and communities)
- **Promote SRH for girls** (e.g. contraception, menstrual health, HPV vaccination), with integrated packages of services
- Ensure **access to HIV testing**, self-diagnosis or voluntary testing
- **Build capacity** (service providers, community actors)



A response to gender inequality and sexual and gender-based violence (including in schools) for

- **Safer, healthier, and more inclusive schools**, learning and community environments for all adolescents and young people
- **Zero tolerance** and reporting systems for violence
- **Adequate infrastructure** (water and sanitation, menstrual health)
- **Prevention, detection, reporting**, and referral of violence for holistic care
- **Strengthening school regulations**, including codes of conduct
- **Teaching and learning about GBV**, including in schools

The targets of the WCA Commitment are, in all countries:



By 2027

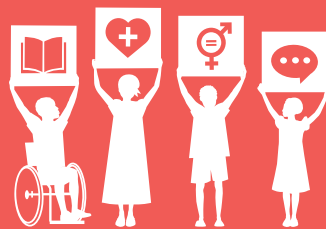
- **Inclusive policies that protect the health and education rights of all** adolescent girls and boys, and young women and men, and that integrate comprehensive education and information programmes and sexual and reproductive health services for young people in and out of school are implemented.
- Trained teachers and trainers implement **comprehensive education and information programmes in 50% of schools and 100% of teacher training colleges.**
- Trained health-care providers provide **adolescent- and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health-care services**, including family planning and information and education, **in 75% of health facilities.**
- **Evidence-based, multisectoral policies and strategies** are in place and implemented to address GBV, including in school settings and complex humanitarian contexts.

- **100% of countries increase domestic resources** for the implementation of inclusive education and information programmes and sexual and reproductive health services for in- and out-of-school youth.



By 2032

- **Gender disparities** in education are **reduced by 50%** in basic and secondary education.
- **Early and unintended pregnancies** are **reduced by 50%.**
- **Gender-based violence** and harmful practices, including early, child and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation, are **reduced by 50%.**
- **New HIV infections** among adolescents and young people aged 10-24 are **eliminated.**



LISTEN, UNDERSTAND, ACT

WCA
COMMITMENT