

August 2025

PUBLICATION

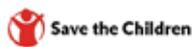
JOFA-ACTE Learning brief on education and social mobility
in Mali and Madagascar



JOINING FORCES
For All Children

 Co-funded by
the European Union

Learning Agenda Planning



JOFA-ACTE Learning brief on education and social mobility in Mali and Madagascar

Education is widely regarded as a fundamental driver of social mobility, offering individuals the opportunity to move beyond the constraints of their socioeconomic background (UNESCO 2024). However, in many regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, access to quality education remains a major challenge. In countries such as Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Malawi and Mali, a significant proportion of children work, often in hazardous conditions, which severely hampers their educational opportunities and long-term socioeconomic progress.

The EU-funded project **Joining Forces for Africa: Acting to End Child Labour** (JOFA-ACTE) is a concerted effort to address these challenges. Implemented in Mali, Burkina Faso, Madagascar and Malawi, the project aims to reduce the worst forms of child labor by giving children, families and communities the knowledge, skills and resources to recognize the risks and find safer and sustainable solutions. In Mali, the project addresses the wider risks of child labor, focusing particularly on those associated with agriculture and artisanal gold mining in Sikasso, Bamako, the communes of Sikasso, Fourou, Loulouni, Nièna and Misseni. In Madagascar, the project specifically targets child labor in mica mines in the Anosy region, providing 1,000 families with education and other income-generating opportunities.

The project tackles the structural factors behind child labor by linking access to education to concrete economic and social support for families. Rather than

treating education and work separately, it explores how integrated, context-specific strategies can change the incentives and realities that keep children out of school, laying the foundations for long-term social and economic mobility.

This note is part of the JOFA-ACTE Learning Agenda¹ and presents key information on education and social mobility from two of our four implementing countries, Madagascar and Mali. Based on the discussions of a recent webinar², the dossier offers perspectives on schools as drivers of social mobility and poverty reduction, analyses the challenges related to the quality and development of education systems while highlighting the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Mali and Madagascar.

The idea is to explore the role of education in promoting upward social mobility and reducing child labor. The document examines structural inequalities, limited access to quality education and alternative models such as non-formal education. Flexibility in education and combining work and education are seen as strategies for reducing child labor, particularly in marginalized areas. The report also presents the lessons learned from the project, the challenges encountered and recommendations for future action and/or improvements.



¹ Further information is available at: <https://joining-forces.org/publications/learning-agenda-planning-joining-forces-for-africa-acting-to-end-child-labour-jofa-acte/>

² A webinar was organised by WVG on April 30th, 2025, as part of the learning agenda of the JOFA-ACTE project and the sessions were led by the teams in Mali (WVI Mali and TdH Mali) and the teams in Madagascar (TdH Madagascar and SIC Madagascar).

Background information on education and social mobility

Intergenerational social mobility refers to the extent to which children experience different socioeconomic outcomes from their parents – such as variations in education, income, occupation, social class or health – reflecting the distribution and transmission of life chances across generations (Suárez-Arbesú et al. 2024). It is widely recognized as a key indicator of equity and opportunity within a society, as it reveals the extent to which individuals can transcend the socioeconomic status of their family background. Education remains one of the most powerful and consistent drivers of upward mobility, in particular in low- and middle-income countries, where access to schooling can open up pathways to employment, income stability and improved well-being (Azomahou and Yitbarek 2016; UNESCO 2023; Beegle et al. 2022).

A growing body of research shows that mobility is determined by individual and systemic factors, including parental education, gender, geography, school quality and socioeconomic context (Ouedraogo and Syrighas 2021; Kim et al. 2021). Structural constraints such as lack of infrastructure, exposure to climatic shocks, child labor and limited access to quality learning environments often reinforce inequalities. These factors are evident in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, where upward and downward educational mobility can coexist within and across generations (Suárez-Arbesú et al. 2024; World Bank 2020). In addition, household-level vulnerabilities and income volatility directly affect children's schooling decisions, particularly in fragile economies (Azomahou and Yitbarek 2016; Beegle et al. 2022).

Despite the persistent belief in meritocracy, particularly in high-income contexts, structural realities often determine who can actually access opportunities. Mijs (2021) shows that, in many Western societies, citizens continue to trust merit-based advancement, even when systemic disadvantages remain invisible or unrecognized. Institutions such as the OECD (2018) and the World Economic Forum (2020) point out that these invisible forces manifest themselves as “sticky floors”, which anchor individuals at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. These dynamics are often more difficult to tackle than “glass ceilings”, which affect individuals at higher levels of achievement who face discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity or other factors.

In addition, studies of educational mobility in African countries such as Malawi and Madagascar have shown a steady – albeit uneven – trend towards better mobility outcomes. Beegle et al (2022) note that while many children now achieve higher levels of education than their parents, these gains are more pronounced at the lower end of the education distribution (e.g. primary education) and less consistent in transitions to secondary or tertiary levels. Galiani et al (2021) also found that intergenerational mobility varies considerably across

regions, depending on local investment in human capital, the policy environment and the quality of institutions.

Building on this body of research, Suárez-Arbesú et al (2024) provide a comprehensive analysis of mobility patterns in Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda, Malawi and Nigeria. Applying imputation techniques and transition matrix methods, their study assesses mobility in terms of education, occupation and income. Their findings reveal that educational mobility is systematically higher than occupational or income mobility, suggesting that while access to schooling may expand, this does not always translate into improved economic outcomes or gains in economic status. Interestingly, the study finds that educational mobility is often higher for mothers than fathers, indicating greater gains for women, who historically faced systemic disadvantages in these contexts (Suárez-Arbesú et al. 2024: 1). However, the analysis also shows significant variation between countries and highlights persistent patterns of intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, including cases of downward mobility – where children underperform their parents – a trend increasingly discussed in policy discourse amid global concerns about shrinking middle classes and declining economic optimism (Suárez-Arbesú et al. 2024: 2, 7).



A broader analysis by Azomahou and Yitbarek (2016), based on national household survey data in nine sub-Saharan African countries, examines education as a key driver of social mobility. Their findings reveal that intergenerational educational persistence, i.e. the extent to which educational attainment is transmitted from one generation to the next within families, has declined over the past 50 years, particularly after the 1960s – a period marked by significant post-independence reforms and increasing investment in human capital (Azomahou/

Yitbarek 2016: 2). Despite this progress, parental education – particularly that of mothers – remains a key determinant of children’s educational outcomes, with the mother-daughter bond showing particularly high persistence (Azomahou/Yitbarek 2016: 2, 27). The study also reveals that educational mobility is more pronounced at the bottom of the educational ladder, where children from diverse backgrounds are more likely to reach primary education. However, access to secondary and tertiary education remains unequal, reinforcing existing inequalities (Azomahou/Yitbarek 2016: 27). Recent global evidence reinforces this link: education not only raises individual incomes but also has a cumulative effect on household well-being and societal equity (Psacharopoulos/Patrinos 2018; UNESCO 2023). In fragile contexts, inclusive and flexible models – such as non-formal education and accelerated learning – have become essential to rebuild disrupted pathways to mobility, especially for marginalized youth (World Bank 2020).

Drawing on a dataset covering more than 72 million individuals, research by Ouedraogo and Syrighas (2021) highlights significant disparities in social mobility in Africa, shaped by geography, gender and the rural-urban divide. Their research shows that individual factors – such as age, gender, marital status and place of birth – and household conditions, including family size and indicators of financial hardship such as access to electricity and water, influence the likelihood of upward or downward mobility. Above all, they find that educational mobility strongly predicts occupational mobility and that social mobility outcomes in the broad sense are closely linked to the quality of institutions, public investment in education and social protection coverage. These findings underline the importance of structural and policy interventions to break cycles of intergenerational poverty and promote equitable development (Ouedraogo/Syrighas 2021: 2).

The report 2025 **Barriers to Basics: Corruption and Discrimination in Education and Health Services**, published jointly by Transparency International and the Equal Rights Trust, explores how corruption and discrimination intersect to undermine access to essential services in several African countries. Drawing on case studies from Ghana, Madagascar, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zimbabwe, the report highlights the cumulative barriers faced by marginalized communities. It introduces the concept of “discriminatory corruption”, a form of corruption that has a disproportionate impact on individuals because of their ethnicity, gender, disability or socioeconomic status. By reinforcing structural inequalities, discriminatory corruption further restricts access to education and healthcare, exacerbating the exclusion of already disadvantaged groups (Transparency International/The Equal Rights Trust 2025).

As part of the JOFA learning programme, an internal learning session on education and social mobility was held in April, with contributions from two of the four implementing countries, Mali and Madagascar. The session began with a question: “If education were a journey, what kind of vehicle would it be today? One participant replied: “A school bus with lots of stops and diversions but also diversified and going in the right direction”. This thought sums up the complexity and dynamism of the seminar discussions. Based on the presentations and discussions that took place during the webinar, as well as documentary research, this note summarizes the main lessons learned from Mali and Madagascar, focusing on the structural conditions that determine access to education and social mobility.

Education and social mobility in Mali

In Mali, although enrolment rates have risen in recent decades, the quality of education remains a major challenge (UNICEF 2023, 2024; GPE 2025). As widely recognized in development research, countries with weak education systems face considerable obstacles to long-term economic growth, inclusion and competitiveness. Despite the ongoing efforts of the Malian government, technical and financial partners, NGOs, civil society, private education providers, parents and even the children themselves, education in Mali continues to face a series of structural and contextual obstacles. These include widespread poverty, a series of teacher and pupil strikes, limited school infrastructure – particularly in rural areas – restrictive gender norms, the lingering impact of the 2012 socio-political crisis which led to school closures, mass population displacement due

to insecurity, and reduced partner engagement. In addition, obstacles include disruptions related to climate change (e.g. delayed opening of schools and reduced learning hours due to extreme heat), mismatch between education outcomes and labor market needs, limited access to education for children with disabilities (due to a lack of accessible infrastructure, e.g. ramps, separate latrines and trained teachers), challenges related to the language of instruction and pressures from rapid population growth, etc.

According to data from the first cycle of the Modular and Permanent Household Survey (EMOP, January-March 2023), an estimated 57.1% of the Malian population has no level of education. This figure masks stark geographic disparities, with 41.7% of urban residents and 64.3% of



rural residents reporting no level of education (INSTAT, 2023). These percentages refer to the share of individuals with no education within each subgroup, rather than the national total. The data also show that around six out of ten people have never attended school, i.e. 52.7% of men and 61.4% of women. School exclusion is particularly acute in rural areas. Among children under five, the rate is 94.9%, reflecting the limited development of pre-school education in the country.

The level of higher education remains extremely low: only 1.5% of the population has reached university level and only 5.4% has completed secondary education. Almost a third of the population has not progressed beyond primary school, indicating that universal primary education is far from being achieved. In addition, the education system continues to suffer from the attrition of pupils. In the first cycle of basic education, the main reason for dropping out is voluntary withdrawal (53.2%), followed by academic failure (14.9%), financial constraints (6.5%) and preference for learning or work (6.2%).

In addition, recent official statistics show that the unemployment rate in Mali is 5.4%, with significant variations depending on the level of education. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Mali, this low rate is mainly because it is an economy dominated by the informal sector and subsistence agriculture, which absorbs a large part of the workforce, even though the jobs created are often precarious and poorly paid. The unemployment rate is 16.3% for higher education graduates, 11.9% for secondary education graduates and 10.2% for primary education graduates. This suggests that higher levels of education are associated with lower chances of employment. In addition, 31.5% of young people aged 15-24 and an equal proportion of those aged 25-34 are neither in employment, education or training (NEET) – a critical indicator of young people's vulnerability and disconnection from the labor market.

These figures highlight a systemic mismatch between the education system and the needs of the labor market. The current system remains ill-suited to the realities of

the workforce, as the skills imparted by formal education often do not match those required by employers. The main challenges are as follows:

- The mismatch between qualifications and available jobs;
- Too much emphasis on theoretical education and not enough on practical skills, entrepreneurship and adaptability;
- Weak links between the private sector and educational establishments, which limits learning opportunities in the workplace;
- High rates of underemployment or unemployment among young graduates, who often find it difficult to find stable or interesting employment despite having completed their studies.

Despite persistent challenges, education in Mali is still widely perceived – at least in theory – as a viable route to social mobility and poverty reduction. According to the members of the JOFA consortium in Mali (World Vision, Educo, Plan Mali, SOS Villages d'Enfants, Terre des Hommes), inclusive, quality basic education, as well as vocational training and skills development, can significantly improve an individual's income prospects, access to decent work and overall quality of life. These opportunities not only enhance economic potential, but also contribute to better health, greater resilience and more sustainable livelihoods. Vocational training, in particular, provides young people with practical, marketable skills and plays a protective role in helping them avoid common child protection risks such as abuse, exploitation and neglect. Education also promotes social cohesion, strengthens the participation of civil society, encourages peacebuilding and advances equality between men and women. Quality schooling is therefore seen as an essential lever for breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and achieving broader sustainable development goals.

In Mali, vocational training and skills-based education are increasingly seen as a credible – and in many cases, more effective – alternative to conventional academic routes for promoting youth employment,

reducing inequality and enabling social mobility. These programmes can respond directly to a country's human development needs and offer practical solutions for integrating young people into a dynamic and constantly changing labor market. However, realising their full potential requires changing societal attitudes, improving infrastructure and ensuring that vocational training is fully recognized as part of national education policies.

The Malian government, in collaboration with the GPE (Global Partnership for Education) and other partners, is taking steps to address systemic challenges in education by prioritising the quality of teaching and learning. These efforts aim to build a more efficient, equitable and resilient education system. Key strategies include creating the conditions necessary for the effective implementation of programmes, such as improving the learning environment, enhancing teacher training and increasing the availability of inclusive education practices. The reform programme also sets out clear guidelines for aligning the education system with cultural values and socio-economic development priorities.

To improve access and learning outcomes, the government is developing flexible educational pathways and investing in mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS). Community involvement is also being encouraged, with greater participation by parents' and mothers' associations (Association des Parents d'Élèves – APE, Association des Mères d'Élèves – AME) and school management committees (Comité de Gestion Scolaire – CGS), women's and youth groups, and the children themselves – for example, through participation in school cooperatives or school governance structures.

The JOFA-ACTE project in Mali recognized the central role of Koranic schools in the national educational landscape and worked actively to integrate them into wider efforts to prevent child labor and promote inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. In particular, the Ministries of Education and Religious Affairs have demonstrated a shared commitment to reinvigorating efforts to integrate Koranic schools into the formal education system. This initiative is supported by the creation of a special commission to oversee the integration process. In line with this objective, the project has involved stakeholders such as the Association des Maîtres des Écoles Coraniques (AMECO), recognising their influence and potential to further the aims of child protection and education. A Medersa school is also included in the Children's Club programme, which contributes to raising awareness and defending children's rights and the fight against the worst forms of child labor (WFCL). These actions reflect a strategic approach aimed at ensuring that children in Koranic schools are not excluded from national education reforms and that they are protected from the risks associated with child labor.

Although not part of this project, but the Fanga school for primary school pupils is an effective and innovative intervention implemented in Mali that has proved

its worth.³ The Fanga School is a context-specific intervention designed to tackle the multiple barriers that prevent vulnerable children from accessing and remaining in school. Through its flexible and accelerated learning approach, it effectively supports children at risk of dropping out of school, including those who work, those with special needs and those from displaced or nomadic families. Operating in underserved rural areas, it reflects the principles of one-room schools and community education, offering tailored learning in safe and protective environments – particularly important for girls. The model is reinforced by school bursaries, school kits and canteens that reduce financial burdens and improve pupil well-being and retention. By raising community awareness of girls' education, children's rights and gender-based violence, and by involving local leaders, the Fanga school promotes inclusive and sustainable education. Its alignment with internationally recognized best practice demonstrates its potential to significantly improve access, equity and outcomes in education systems serving at-risk populations. The Fanga School Primary School had 250 pupils in the 2024-2025 school year. The target for 2025-2026 is 300 pupils.

Another example of initiatives led by national NGOs is mobile schools, which adapt to local conditions for each child in remote or hard-to-reach areas. These mobile schools help overcome difficulties such as insecurity, long distances and geographical isolation, enabling more children to go to school. These learning spaces can be tents, temporary shelters or mobile classrooms often mounted on vehicles and managed by qualified local teachers. As well as providing immediate access to education, they aim to ensure equity, support girls' education, serve nomadic populations and maintain learning in areas affected by crisis or insecurity.



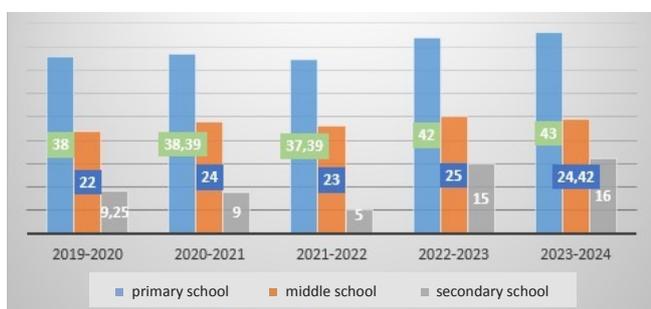
Furthermore, mobile schools are not simply infrastructure projects: they rely heavily on community management. Local communities play a central role in setting them up and running them, with parents often helping with logistics such as transporting equipment or finding school sites.. This participatory approach fosters local ownership and strengthens sustainability. In addition, teachers are usually recruited and trained within the community, which reduces costs and ensures that educators understand the local context. This familiarity also strengthens relationships between students and teachers, leading to more relevant and effective learning.

³ A twenty-minute video in French about the school is available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/ukzsBUEo9Uw?si=1gbDWuUHE0Z3ct>

Education and social mobility in Madagascar

As Madagascar seeks to accelerate inclusive growth and reduce poverty, the role of education in promoting upward social mobility has become more urgent and complex, particularly in the face of climatic, economic and demographic pressures. In Madagascar, the members of the JOFA project stress that schools continue to represent an essential route to social mobility and poverty reduction. They help to improve skills and employability, build human capital, change harmful social norms and support intergenerational mobility. For many low-income families, education is seen as the main lever for breaking the cycle of poverty. It also plays a transformative role by changing mindsets and promoting more equitable social values.

The histogram below shows changes in completion rates for the three levels of education (2019 to 2024) – primary school (blue), middle school (orange), secondary school (grey)⁴. The data shows a steady improvement in graduation rates, particularly in primary education, which has risen from 38% in 2019-2020 to 43% in 2023-2024. Middle school graduation rates have remained relatively stable, fluctuating around 24%, while high school rates, while lower overall, have increased from 5% in 2021-2022 to 16% in 2023-2024. These trends suggest a gradual rise in educational attainment, with positive implications for long-term social mobility.



While these trends indicate gradual improvements, particularly at primary level, transition to and completion of secondary and tertiary education remains limited, with drop-out rates still high among adolescents, particularly girls in rural areas. This reinforces existing inequalities in access to long-term mobility opportunities.

Despite the progress made, Madagascar continues to face significant obstacles to realising the full potential of education as a driver of social mobility. These challenges stem from multidimensional poverty, recurrent political and economic crises and persistent problems with the quality and relevance of education, including high drop-out rates and weak governance of the system. Four main categories of obstacles have been identified, many of which are similar to those observed in Mali. Firstly, economic barriers remain significant. Widespread poverty makes the direct costs of education – such as school fees, materials and uniforms – prohibitive for many families.

In addition, food insecurity and malnutrition contribute to frequent absenteeism, with hunger and illness preventing children from attending school regularly. Secondly, social and cultural factors play a key role in limiting access to education and upward mobility. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy, particularly among girls, often disrupt educational trajectories and reduce the perceived value of school for both parents and children. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural and low-income communities, where cultural expectations clash with structural barriers such as limited access to school infrastructure and learning materials. Children with disabilities face additional levels of exclusion due to the lack of appropriate learning environments, trained staff and inclusive teaching practices. Thirdly, systemic problems persist in the education sector. These include the quality of teaching, the use of non-native languages as a medium of instruction, the lingering legacy of a colonial education model, inadequate and remote/virtual school infrastructure and the absence of essential services such as school meal programmes. Finally, environmental and safety barriers – such as increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters, long distances to school and regional insecurity – pose additional risks to regular school attendance and continuity of learning.

Like many low- and middle-income countries, Madagascar faces a growing gap between the formal education system and the realities of the labor market, a challenge exacerbated by rapid technological change, informal employment and limited economic diversification. In terms of aligning the education system with the current needs of the labour market, a number of problems have been identified:

- Skills mismatch and underemployment of graduates;
- The quality of teaching, a victim of multifaceted problems;
- Insufficient development of vocational and technical training;
- Lack of information on the labor market;
- The weakness of the private sector, the main provider of jobs after the public sector;
- The predominance of the informal sector.

This dynamic has major consequences for the social mobility of young people, leading not only to underemployment, but also to growing frustration, disillusionment, worsening inequalities and persistent poverty. In this context, vocational training and skills-based education represent both a complementary pathway and an alternative to traditional academic education, particularly in the face of persistent school drop-out and skills mismatch. These programmes enable young people to acquire practical and sought-after skills, such as competency-based education (CBE) and entrepreneurship, and challenge the low social value historically placed on technical and manual professions in Madagascar. The JOFA-ACTE project in Madagascar

⁴ Figures for the histogram were drawn from the annual reports of the Statistics Department and the Education Planning Directorate, Ministry of National Education, Madagascar. <https://www.education.gov.mg/ressources/annuaire-statistiques/>

actively invests in alternative educational pathways that expand opportunities for vulnerable children and young people. Vocational training and Complementary Education and Training (EFC) offer complementary and ambitious routes to socio-economic empowerment, equipping learners with practical, market-relevant skills and improving their employment and entrepreneurial prospects. Working closely with local communities and education stakeholders, JOFA-ACTE supports the expansion of skills-based training, with a particular focus on girls and rural youth. This includes promoting entrepreneurship education, delivered through both formal programmes and informal community-led initiatives. The projects build on national efforts such as Fihariana⁵, supported by the Presidency (PRM), which aims to encourage entrepreneurship among young people by integrating entrepreneurship education into schools and incorporates accelerated apprenticeship programmes to re-engage out-of-school youth and those whose education has been interrupted. It is important that vocational training is not seen as a fallback option, but as a viable and ambitious route to employment, innovation and social inclusion – in line with Sustainable Development Goal target 4.4.⁶ These condensed models of flexibility enable learners to catch up, re-enter the system and move on to formal or vocational pathways, thereby improving their long-term mobility and inclusion.

In addition, the JOFA project team has identified the different roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. Firstly, national decision-makers (e.g. the government and the ministry of education) develop education policies and allocate resources. They enforce legislation and regulations to ensure access for all children and are responsible for teacher training. Secondly, decentralized local authorities are responsible for territorialising national strategies and managing schools. Thirdly, the private sector, which is involved in designing training programmes and make its expertise and the needs of businesses available to guide curricula. Fourthly, civil society organizations, which play a role in raising awareness of the importance of education and in providing social and psychological support for learners. Effective coordination between these stakeholders is therefore essential to ensure that national policies are translated into local action and that resources are used effectively. Strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms – particularly at decentralized level – is essential to improving educational outcomes and social equity.

In Madagascar, CSOs have a crucial role to play in getting children into school and keeping them there.

They identify specific needs and obstacles through participatory studies and research, data collection, mapping and community consultation. In addition, CSOs contribute to the development and implementation of innovative and appropriate programmes, such as formal and non-formal education within the framework of Education for All, educational support for vulnerable and backward children, awareness-raising programmes on the importance of education and teacher training, and the creation/support of community schools. CSOs also advocate for and influence public policy. They monitor education policies, advocate, lobby, create support groups and participate in decision-making bodies.

CSOs complement formal education systems through innovation and dissemination of best practice, partnerships with schools, local authorities and businesses, and in-service teacher training. They also implement educational models and vocational training courses, such as catch-up programmes for school dropouts, the promotion of non-formal education, the development of specific skills (agriculture, crafts, hospitality and tourism, new technologies) and the fight against exclusion (specific programmes for disabled children, street children and children exposed to child labor).

CSOs work with governments to address structural or systemic barriers to education through evidence-based research and advocacy (participatory studies and research, production of reports and policy recommendations, lobbying of policy makers, etc.). As mentioned above, they also implement innovative programmes and pilot projects (design and implementation of alternative programmes, pilot projects, sharing of best practice, development of a sustainability and exit plan). Finally, CSOs and governments work together to build the capacity of local actors (support for the coordination of central managers, training for teachers and school headmasters, support for local organizations such as parents' associations, participation in forums for dialogue at all levels, etc.).

To move forward, the education reforms in Madagascar, as stipulated in the orientation law N2022-018 on the general orientation of the education system, prioritize equity, relevance and resilience. This means tackling systemic inequalities, investing in teacher quality and integrating flexible, skills-based learning pathways. It will also be essential to ensure that the voices of young people, particularly from marginalized communities, are heard in policy development and programme delivery to make education a real driver of social transformation.

⁵ Further information on the Fihariana project is available at: <https://www.moov.mg/article/88120-entrepreneuriat-le-programme-fihariana-a-appuye-26-000-porteurs-de-projet>

⁶ Target 4.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) aims to significantly increase, by 2030, the number of young people and adults who have relevant skills – including technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills – for employment and decent work. Indicator 4.4.1 specifically measures the proportion of individuals with information and communication technology (ICT) skills, disaggregated by type of skill, reflecting the growing importance of digital skills in today's labor markets.

Policy recommendations and ideas for improving education and social mobility

Based on the positive outcomes of the project mentioned above, but more importantly on the challenges, gaps and lessons learned, which were presented and discussed during the webinar, this learning pack proposes policy recommendations and interventions that can enhance the potential of education as a tool for reducing poverty and social mobility:

1. Developing inclusive, equitable and lifelong learning.

Aligned with: CESA 2026-2035 priorities 1, 3 and 6; ACRWC article 11; UNICEF strategic outcome 1; GPE equity priority for Africa.

- Give priority to basic learning by strengthening early childhood care and education (ECCE), particularly in rural and fragile areas.
- Develop inclusive and context-sensitive education models for learners with disabilities, displaced populations and those living in informal settlements.
- Promote education that transforms gender by expanding peer mentoring networks, investing in menstrual health services and integrating sexual and reproductive health and rights into school curricula.
- Institutionalize mother-tongue teaching in early grades to improve comprehension and retention, with gradual transitions to bilingual/multilingual learning.
- Develop lifelong learning systems through adult literacy, community learning centres and second chance programmes for adolescents and young people outside the system.



2. Modernising and diversifying TVET and skills development.

Aligned with: AU TVET Strategy (2021), CESA 2026-2035 priorities 4, 6 and 8; SDG 4.4.

- Co-develop TVET and skills-based learning pathways with employers, CSOs and young people to reflect market demand, climate resilience, digital economies and green jobs.
- Recognize and accredit informal learning (e.g. apprenticeships, Koranic schools) through flexible national qualifications frameworks.
- Promote youth entrepreneurship and financial literacy through school programmes and community innovation centres, building on initiatives such as Fihariana.
- Invest in digital TVET infrastructure and open educational resources, extending access to rural and conflict-affected areas.
- Strengthen national TVET councils and regulatory frameworks to ensure quality assurance and coordination between providers.

3. Build resilient and climate-responsive learning systems.

Aligned with: CESA 2026-2035 priorities 5 and 9; MCP priority on resilience; UNICEF strategic outcome 2.

- Design and build eco-safe schools that are resilient to climate shocks and conflict, with accessible water, sanitation and renewable energy systems.
- Introduce climate and environmental education into school curricula, from primary to vocational training, with an emphasis on learning by doing and local solutions.

- Integrate disaster preparedness, early warning systems and psychosocial support into national education plans.
- Support the creation of student-led climate clubs and innovation labs to encourage leadership in community sustainability and adaptation.

4. Improve the quality of teaching and the relevance of learning.

Aligned with: CESA 2026-2035 priorities 2 and 4; UNICEF strategy outcome 3; GPE priority on basic learning.

- Institutionalize continuing professional development (CPD) in inclusive, digital and competency-based pedagogies.
- Improve teacher recruitment, deployment, remuneration and welfare, particularly in hard-to-reach and underserved areas.
- Ensure the provision of contextually appropriate and gender-sensitive learning materials, including in mother tongues and Braille/audio.
- Promote digital literacy for learners and teachers through blended models, investing in connectivity, devices and offline access.
- Integrate community learning centres that bridge the gap between school and informal learning, incorporating mentoring and peer support systems.

5. Deepen participatory governance and financing of education.

Aligned with: CESA 2026-2035 Priorities 7 and 10; ACRWC Article 11(6); GPE Systems Strengthening Priority.

- Empower decentralized education offices to lead planning, financing and monitoring at local level, with tools for transparency and community participation.
- Institutionalize the role of school management committees (e.g. APE, AME, CGS) and youth and women's groups in school development plans and budget monitoring.
- Establish local education oversight committees with CSOs to monitor equity, safety, inclusion and performance indicators.
- Increase national funding for education in a climate-smart way, using programme-based budgeting and citizen audits to improve accountability.
- Develop real-time feedback mechanisms (SMS surveys, suggestion boxes, student councils) to ensure community needs are addressed.

6. Foster protective and rights-based educational environments.

Aligned with: ACRWC, CESA 2026-2035 priority 3; UNICEF strategy (cross-cutting)

- Integrate child protection systems into school governance with clear pathways and safeguarding policies.
- Expand school nutrition and meal programmes, mental health support and on-site services, particularly in fragile contexts and areas of extreme poverty.
- Establish partnerships with religious and community leaders to change norms that restrict girls' education or encourage child labor and early marriage.
- Monitor compliance with the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and other legal frameworks guaranteeing free and compulsory education, including through joint reviews with civil society.

References

African Union Commission (2021) Strategy for the Revitalisation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Africa. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission. Available at: <https://edu-au.org/TVET-strategy> [16.06.2025].

African Union Commission (2022) Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025: Mid-Term Review Report. Addis Ababa: African Union. Available at: <https://edu-au.org/CESA> [16.06.2025].

African Union Commission (2024) Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2026-2035: Re-imagining Education for the Africa We Want. Addis Ababa: African Union. Available at: <https://edu-au.org/CESA26-35> [16.06.2025].

African Union (1999) African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Addis Ababa: Organization of African Unity. Available at: <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-rights-and-welfare-child> [16.06.2025].

Azomahou, Théophile T./Yitbarek, Eleni A. (2016): Intergenerational mobility in education in Africa. Has progress been inclusive? World Bank policy research working paper 7843.

Beegle, K./Castañeda, A. /Gatti, R., 2022. Intergenerational mobility in Africa. VoxDev [online]. Available at: <https://voxdev.org/topic/health/intergenerational-mobility-africa> [16.06.2025].

Galiani, S., Gertler, P. and Schargrodsky, E., 2021. The dynamics of intergenerational mobility in developing countries. *Journal of Development Studies*, 57(12), pp.2044-2062. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220388.2021.2008366> [16.06.2025].

Global Partnership for Education (2022): GPE 2025: Strategic Plan. Washington, DC: GPE. Available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/gpe-2025-strategic-plan> [16.06.2025].

Global Partnership for Education (2025): Mali: Overview and Results. Online: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/mali>.

Joining Forces (n. d.): JOFA-ACTE. Online: <https://joining-forces.org/jofa-acte/> [12.05.2025].

Kim, Y.S./Boyle, H., Nakamura, P./Wiedeman, D., 2021. Educational inequality and intergenerational mobility in Malawi. *Journal of International Development and Cooperation*, 16(2), pp.77-90. Available at https://www.ejdc.org/archive/view_article?pid=jidc-16-2-77 [16.06.2025].

Mijs, Jonathan J. B. (2021): The inequality paradox: income inequality and the belief in meritocracy go hand in hand. *Socio-Economic Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 7-35 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwy051>.

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018): Un ascenseur social en panne? How to promote social mobility. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264301085-en>.

Ouedraogo, Rasmene/Syrichas, Nicolas (2021) : Intergenerational social mobility in Africa since 1920. IMF Working Paper WP/21/215.

Psacharopoulos, George/Patrinou, Harry Anthony (2018): Returns to investment in education: A decennial review of the global literature. *Economics of Education*, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 445-458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2018.1484426>.

Right To Play (2024): Mali profile: Education and protection in crisis situations. Online: <https://righttoplay.com/en/news/staying-strong-despite-crisis-in-mali/> (consulted on 2 May 2025)

Suárez-Arbesú, Claudia/Vicente, María Rosalía/Lopez-Menéndez, Ana Jesús (2024): An approach to social mobility in African countries: Is there a transmission of education, occupation or income from parents to children? *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, Vol. 90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2024.100893>.

Transparency International/The Equal Rights Trust (2025): Barriers to Basics: Corruption and discrimination in education and health services.

UNESCO (2023): Global Education Monitoring Report 2023: Technology in Education – A Tool for Whom? United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Online: <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report>.

UNESCO (2024): Education global monitoring report 2024/5: Leadership in education – Leading to learn. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Online: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391406>.

UNICEF (2023): Education. UNICEF Mali. Online: <https://www.unicef.org/mali/en/education>

UNICEF (2024): Mali's pupils will return to school for the new school year 2024-2025 on 4 November 2024. UNICEF Mali, 3 November. Online: <https://www.unicef.org/mali/en/press-releases/mali-students-will-return-school-new-2024-2025-school-year-november-4th-2024> [05.05.2025].

UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (2024) Annual Report 2023. Nairobi: UNICEF ESARO. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/documents/eastern-and-southern-africa-region-humanitarian-situation-report-no-2-31-december-2024> [26.05.2025].

World Bank (2020a): Refugee policy review framework. Online: <https://www.worldbank.org>.

World Bank (2020b): Realising the future of learning: From learning in poverty to learning for all, everywhere. Online: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/realizing-future-of-learning-from-learning-poverty-to-learning-for-everyone-everywhere> .





Funded by
the European Union



JOINING FORCES

For All Children

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Joining Forces and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

