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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ECONOMIC LETTER OF EAST AFRICA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN (EAIO)

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Education in EAIO

Key numbers

- On average in EAIO in 2015, the **gross school enrolment ratios for primary education** were of **94.1%** for girls and **97.6%** for boys, below the Sub-Saharan African average (95.8% and 100.2% respectively)
- The **average adult literacy rate** (+15 years) in EAIO was **70.9%** in 2018, above the Sub-Saharan African average of 65.0%
- In addition, a child born in EAIO in 2020 could expect to have **43%** of the **human capital** of a child who would have benefited from a complete education and good health by the age of 18
- Average **public spending** on education in EAIO was **11.8%** of total expenditure

In summary...

A still-fragile education sector in EAIO

Free primary education has improved enrolment rates in East African and Indian Ocean (EAIO) countries. However, the transition from primary to secondary school remains low, due to a lack of infrastructure, social barriers and the general cost of schooling, with great disparities in gender and geography. Quality education is crucial if countries are to increase their growth potential and benefit from the opportunities offered by certain key sectors (the service industry, tourism, etc.), which require a skilled workforce. Additionally, in the face of persistently high demographic growth rates, efforts to finance the education sector are insufficient, and for the time being, require donor support.

In detail...

Despite overall improvement, access to education from secondary level upwards is still low

As the region has a very young population, education will be crucial to countries' ability to lift themselves out of poverty. According to the World Bank, more than half the population in EAIO region is of school-going age: the population under 20 represents 51.4% of the female population and 52.9% of the male population. On average in EAIO, the gross primary school enrolment rate has risen significantly, from 44.0% in 1971 to 94.1% in 2015 for girls, and from 57.5% in 1971 to 97.6% in 2015 for boys. However, the average gross enrolment rate in the region in 2015 remained below that of Sub-Saharan Africa (95.8% and 100.2% respectively). Madagascar and Rwanda had the highest gross enrolment rates in 2015, due to a high number of repeaters. However, according to the latest census in 2022, 22.3% of the Rwandan population had never attended school. By contrast, Somalia recorded the lowest rates.

At secondary level, the gross enrolment rate has also grown considerably, from 9.8% in 1971 to 44.3% in 2015. Mauritius and Seychelles, the region's two high-income countries, record the highest rates (98.7% and 96.1% respectively in 2019 for both sexes). In 2015, Somalia and South Sudan recorded the lowest rates in the region (below 15%). For Madagascar, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia and South Sudan, the large gap between primary and secondary schooling indicates a low transition rate between these levels, linked in particular to the high cost of sending children to school and to societal barriers, particularly for girls.

Significant gender and geographic disparities, and lack of infrastructure

However, EAIO countries face persistent challenges, including significant disparities in access to education. In 2015, the gross enrolment rate gap between girls and boys was 3.4 percentage points (pp) at primary level and 1.5pp at secondary level. At primary level, these disparities for boys were remarkable in South Sudan (24.9pp) and Somalia (13.4pp), compared to a high enrolment of girls against boys in six countries in the region (Djibouti, Tanzania, Burundi, Seychelles, Uganda, Rwanda and Mauritius). Although less pronounced, these disparities continue at secondary level, particularly in Eritrea, South Sudan and Kenya.

In addition to gender disparities, equitable and inclusive access to education remains limited by high levels of poverty, particularly for rural, nomadic and displaced populations. Children generally face significant deprivation (water, food) due to inadequate infrastructure, particularly health infrastructure, and inadequate water and sanitation facilities. In addition, distances to school can be long and dangerous, classrooms are often overcrowded, and it is difficult to find qualified teachers, especially female teachers, and textbooks. At primary level, pupil-teacher ratios can vary from 32 pupils to 1 teacher in one country to 60 to 1 in another. Burundi and Rwanda have therefore introduced the double-shift system to remedy the shortage of teachers and classrooms, while reducing the weekly learning time.

An unchanged low literacy rate and human capital

The average adult literacy rate (+15 years) in EAIO was 70.9% in 2018, above the Sub-Saharan African average of 65.0%. This rate varies widely from country to country, ranging from 34.5% in South Sudan to 95.9% in the Seychelles. Kenya and Tanzania record rather high rates. Rwanda has a higher rate than neighboring Burundi for adults, but a slightly lower rate for young people. Ethiopia has the second-lowest literacy rate in the region (51.8%), with UNESCO estimating that 90% of 10-year-olds cannot read and understand age-appropriate text. Comoros and Sudan are the other EAIO countries with rates below the sub-continental average. Similarly, the highest rates are generally observed in urban areas, and the lowest among rural and nomadic populations. Furthermore, the greatest disparities between men and women are observed in Eritrea, Burundi and Ethiopia (around 15pp), with the lowest recorded in Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles. Literacy levels among young people (aged 15-24) are higher overall (83.2%).

In addition, a child born in EAIO in 2020 could expect to have 43% of the human capital of a child who would have benefited from a complete education and good health by the age of 18. This level of human capital is 3pp higher than that of Sub-Saharan African countries, but 5pp lower than that of middle-income countries, creating an obstacle on the country's potential growth. South Sudan (0.31), Sudan and Rwanda (0.38) are the countries in the region with the worst scores.

Despite an increase in higher education, training is not always aligned with job market requirements

Although slightly higher than the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (9.4%), the gross enrolment rate in higher education remains very low (10.0% on average in EAIO in 2017), even though countries wish to base their development on sectors requiring skilled labor (tourism, finance, etc.). In 2017, EAIO students preferred to study business, management and law (28.5% of EAIO graduates), a field of choice in many countries (Burundi, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania). Students also chose education studies (20.6% of EAIO graduates), particularly in Comoros, Ethiopia and Uganda, and to a lesser extent, studies in health (11.5% of EAIO graduates), especially in Burundi and Tanzania.

However, the skills acquired at school often don't match the requirements of the job market. In Kenya, around 20% of companies found it hard to fill vacancies in November 2023, mainly due to a lack of qualified candidates and high salary expectations among applicants. Even in the most advanced countries, skill requirements remain imperfect, and as such authorities are realigning their job descriptions towards more technical skills.

New public policies supported by NGOs and donors

All EAIO countries have made elementary education free (Somalia, Sudan), and most have extended it to primary school (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Comoros, Seychelles) and even higher education (Mauritius), thereby boosting enrolment. However, implementation is not always guaranteed (Madagascar, South Sudan). Moreover, additional expenses such as school lunch and uniforms (Kenya, Rwanda) can represent a costly budget for households, and social barriers can hinder the enrolment of girls (Ethiopia).

Average spending on education in EAIO was 11.8% of total expenditure, below international recommendations. Of the 15 countries in the region, only three met the recommendations: Tanzania (20.6%), Burundi (19.9% of expenditure) and Kenya (19.1%). South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea were the countries devoting the lowest proportion of spending to their education sector.

The region's countries benefit from substantial donor support in the education sector, notably from the World Bank (USD2.2 billion between 2021 and 2023), the European Union (USD245 million) and the African Development Bank (USD49.5 million). Tanzania is the country that has benefited most from donor support (USD975 million), followed by Rwanda (USD411.9 million) and Kenya (USD326.4 million). France, through AFD, also supports education in EAIO countries, with a commitment of EUR114.7 million since 2021. In Kenya, France has supported six different school feeding projects amounting to 4.2MEUR.

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