

CONCEPT NOTE

**African Union International Centre for Girls and Women's Education in Africa
(AU CIEFFA)**

**"The 2nd African Union Pan African Conference on Girls and Women's Education
(AU PANCOGE_d2)"**

Theme: *'Prioritizing Girls and Women's Education: Develop their skills and
accelerate learning and training opportunities'*

Date: From 02 – 04 July 2026

Venue: Bujumbura, Burundi

I. Introduction or Background

In the context of the implementation of the 2024 African Union Theme of the Year on Education, the organization of the First African Union Pan-African Conference on Girls' and Women's Education (AU PANCOGE^d 1) represented one of the key highlight events. The Conference was held at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 2 to 5 July 2024, under the theme: "Prioritizing Girls and Women's Education: A Strategy for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality and Relevant Learning in Africa."

In implementing the Call for Action adopted at the inaugural AU PANCOGE^d 1, Member States and partners recommended that the AU Commission's Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI) Department, through the AU International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (AU CIEFFA), institutionalize the PANCOGE^d as a biennial continental platform for assessing progress and accelerating commitments toward girls' and women's education (GWE) in Africa.

Africa is home to over half a billion children aged 0–14, a figure projected to reach 580 million by 2030 (Brookings Institution, 2023). Harnessing this demographic dividend requires sustained investments in the education of the most vulnerable and marginalized, particularly girls. Notable progress has been achieved in expanding access to education, and gender parity particularly at primary level. Evidence show that Sub-Saharan Africa has added tens of millions of girls to schools since 2015, contributing to a global increase of 50 million enrolled girls across primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary education between 2015 and 2023. However, advancement remains hindered by entrenched socio-cultural norms, economic barriers, persistent gender inequalities, conflict, humanitarian crises, and climate-induced displacement. Evidence shows that Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for nearly 30% of all out-of-school children globally, with 9.3 million of them likely to never enter a classroom (UNESCO, 2023).

Against this backdrop, marked by overlapping political, humanitarian and climate crises that have exacerbated inequalities, AU CIEFFA underscores that sustained investment in girls' education is not optional but imperative for Africa's social and economic transformation.

It is within this context that the AU Department of ESTI through its Specialized and Technical Office, AU CIEFFA supported by the World Bank EAGER Project, jointly with the Government of Burundi is convening stakeholders working across gender

equality, education, and social protection at the 2nd Pan-African Conference on Girls' and Women's Education (PANCOGE2), under the theme: "Prioritizing Girls and Women's Education: Develop their skills and accelerate learning and training opportunities."

The AU PANCOGE2 is scheduled in Bujumbura, Burundi, from 2 – 4 July 2026, in alignment with the AU Decade on Accelerating Education and the first year of implementing the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2026–2035.

II. Rationale or Justification

The organization of the AU PANCOGE2 is justified on several strategic, institutional, and programmatic grounds, as outlined below:

1. Alignment with the African Union Commission (AUC) Mandate

AU PANCOGE2 directly supports the mandate of the AUC Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI) and AU CIEFFA in promoting girls' and women's education in Africa, advancing gender equality in and through education, youth gender champions' empowerment, and inclusive socio-economic transformation across Member States. It contributes to the operationalization of commitments under the AU Gender Strategy and other continental policy frameworks endorsed by Heads of State and Government, thereby reinforcing AU leadership in promoting gender-responsive education systems.

2. Contribution to the African Union Agenda 2063

The conference advances the aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063, particularly Aspiration 1: "A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development"; and Aspiration 6: "An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially women and youth." By strengthening institutional mechanisms that expand access to education and skills for girls and young women, PANCOGE2 contributes directly to the realization of these continental goals.

3. Relevance to the African Union Theme of the Year 2026

AU PANCOGE2 aligns with the AU Theme of the Year 2026 on Water Sustainability, by translating this priority into concrete programmatic actions

that link girls' and women's empowerment, inclusive development, resilience, and sustainable socio-economic transformation. Strengthening education and skills development, particularly in STEAM, climate-resilient sectors, and water governance, enhances Member States' capacity to address emerging challenges and opportunities.

4. Contribution to the World Bank EAGER Program

The conference directly supports the EAGER Project Development Objective (PDO): *"To increase girls' and women's educational attainment and earnings in the program areas, and to strengthen regional institutional capacity to assess progress in gender equality in the region."* AU PANCOGEEd 2 contributes to several EAGER subcomponents and outputs, including subcomponent 2: Social Norms, subcomponent as well as subcomponent 3: Knowledge Platform. It specifically supports the delivery of Output 1: Social Norms & GBV Prevention, and Output 3: EAGER Knowledge Platform Implemented. By convening policymakers, practitioners, and technical experts, the conference strengthens evidence-based policymaking and cross-country learning.

5. Relevance for EAGER Beneficiary Countries

The conference will generate actionable policy recommendations, institutional strengthening measures, and knowledge products that directly benefit EAGER participating countries : Burundi, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, while also supporting the preparedness of future EAGER countries, including Comoros, DRC, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Holding the event in Burundi as the Chair of the African Union ensures contextualized engagement, enhanced national ownership, and strengthened capacity of regional and national institutions.

6. Alignment with the World Bank Group's Job Creation Priority

The conference will also contribute to the World Bank Group's strategic focus on job creation, by promoting pathways that expand girls' and young women's access to education and foundational learning, employable skills and vocational training, as well as markets, productive assets, and livelihoods opportunities. This, in turn, supports improved employability, productivity, and earnings, which are core objectives of the EAGER program.

III. Objectives

The 2nd African Union Pan-African Conference on Girls' and Women's Education (AU PANCOGE^d 2) will pursue the following objectives:

1. **Assess continental progress on Girls' and Women's Education (GWE)** since the inaugural AU PANCOGE^d1 (2024), by identifying key achievements, persistent bottlenecks, and emerging opportunities that require policy attention and investment.
2. **Facilitate structured peer learning and evidence-based knowledge exchange** among AU Member States, regional bodies, civil society, research institutions, and development partners on effective policies, system reforms, and scalable approaches that advance gender equality in education.
3. **Develop actionable, regionally relevant policy recommendations and institutional strengthening measures** that support Member States to accelerate progress toward gender-responsive education systems integration TVET and STEAM, learning outcomes, and economic empowerment for girls and young women.
4. **Enhance the African Union Commission's institutional capacity**, particularly within ESTI and AU CIEFFA, to serve as a regional knowledge hub for coordinating, monitoring, and supporting Girls' and Women's Education initiatives and strengthening accountability across the continent.
5. **Contribute directly to the World Bank EAGER Project Development Objective (PDO)** by producing policy outputs, institutional capacity results, and knowledge products that reinforce regional systems for tracking and advancing gender equality in education, skills development, and economic outcomes.

IV. Expected Outcomes and Next Steps

The conference is expected to generate the following outcomes and next steps:

A. Deliverables

The conference will produce the following deliverables:

- Conference Proceedings including outcome documents and Policy Brief capturing key findings, commitments, and priority actions.
- Endorsed Continental and National Action Plan to accelerate progress in Girls' and Women's Education.

- Technical Monitoring Framework for tracking gender equality in education across AU Member States, aligned with continental indicators and EAGER regional metrics.
- Knowledge Products (policy notes, research summaries, analytical briefs) for dissemination through the EAGER Knowledge Platform and AU CIEFFA's knowledge hub.

B. Institutional Strengthening Results

The conference is expected to contribute to strengthened institutional capacities at continental and national levels through:

- Improved regional coordination mechanisms among Member States, AU CIEFFA, AUC-ESTI, and development partners.
- Enhanced gender-responsive monitoring and reporting systems for tracking progress on education and skills indicators.
- Strengthened national capacities to design, promote, finance, and implement evidence-based, gender-responsive policies in Girls' and Women's Education.

C. Policy and Operational Implications

The outcomes of AU PANCOGED 2 will contribute to:

- Integration of conference recommendations into national education sector plans, gender strategies, and related policy processes.
- Institutional adoption of the technical monitoring framework by AUC departments and Member States for ongoing follow-up and results reporting.
- Deployment of technical assistance missions to support implementation of agreed actions, including planning, budgeting, and monitoring support.

D. Timeline and Responsibilities for Follow-Up

AU CIEFFA, under the aegis of the AUC Department of ESTI and Member States, will coordinate the implementation of follow-up actions. A detailed timeline for dissemination, technical support, and monitoring will be developed during the conference and formalized in the Conference Proceedings and Action Plan.

E. Downstream Outputs (2026–2027)

The following outputs will be produced as part of the post-conference follow-up:

- Publication of Proceedings including the Outcome documents and Policy Briefs for continental dissemination.
- The Host country to present the report of the conference at the upcoming Specialized Technical Committee on Education Science and Technology

(STC/EST composed of Ministers in charge of Education, Science, Technology of the AU Member States.

- The Host country to engage with peers for the nomination of an AU Head of State as the AU Champion of Girls Education in Africa.
- Release of knowledge products through the EAGER Knowledge Platform and AU CIEFFA's repositories.
- Organization of a mid-term follow-up meeting to assess Member States' implementation progress.
- Country-level technical missions, continuing through 2027, to assess and support the integration of policy recommendations into national systems and ensure sustained implementation.

V. Methodology or Format

The conference will be structured to ensure a balanced combination of high-level dialogue, technical exchanges, and capacity-building activities, enabling both strategic knowledge sharing and practical skill development. The agenda will comprise the following core components:

Opening and High-Level Keynote Sessions: Setting the strategic context for Girls' and Women's Education (GWE) in Africa, articulating continental priorities, and reaffirming political commitment from the African Union, Member States, and partners.

Thematic Panel Discussions: Expert-led and evidence-based sessions addressing priority issues, including:

- gender equality and social norms.
- inclusive and gender-responsive education systems.
- skills development, TVET, and pathways to decent work.
- economic empowerment and market linkages.
- social protection, safety, and resilience.

These panels will draw on regional evidence, Member State experiences, and findings from the EAGER program.

Interactive Workshops: A youth innovation Hub, Hands-on, practitioner-oriented sessions designed to facilitate peer learning, problem-solving, and exchange of best practices among Member States, regional institutions, civil society, and development partners.

Breakout Sessions: Targeted technical discussions focusing on specific contexts, challenges, investment priorities, and solutions, with an emphasis on identifying

implementable actions and strengthening institutional capacity.

Closing and Adoption Session: A formal session to validate and adopt key conference outputs, including the Outcome document, and various recommendations.

Where feasible, the conference will adopt a hybrid format, combining in-person and virtual participation to broaden accessibility for stakeholders across Member States, regional organizations, civil society actors, academic institutions, and development partners. This approach ensures inclusivity, cost-effectiveness, and wider dissemination of knowledge products and policy guidance.

VI. Profile of Participants

The conference will convene a broad and representative group of stakeholders from across the continent and the international community to ensure comprehensive policy dialogue, technical exchange, and multi-sectoral coordination. Participants will include:

Senior Government Representatives: Ministers and high-level officials responsible for education, gender, youth, planning, and social protection from AU Member States.

African Union Commission Officials: Representatives from relevant AUC departments and AU Organs, including ESTI, WGYD, HHSD, PAP to ensure institutional coherence, strategic coordination, and follow-up at continental level.

Education and gender Specialists: Education planners, curriculum and assessment experts, EMIS specialists, and sector coordination teams engaged in policy development, systems strengthening, and implementation.

Gender Equality and Social Protection Experts: Technical experts working on gender-responsive planning, social norms change, GBV prevention, child protection, and social protection measures that influence girls' access, retention, and transition in education.

Key Stakeholders including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): Traditional and Religious leaders, Local, National, and regional NGOs and community and Faith-based organizations advocating for girls' education, gender equality, education financing, and youth empowerment.

Development Partners: Representatives from bilateral and multilateral institutions, Foundations and Philanthropists supporting education, gender equality, and human capital development, including UN agencies, international financial institutions, and regional organizations.

Academic and Research Institutions: Scholars, policy analysts, and research institutions with expertise in girls' education, gender studies, skills development, social norms, and education policy analysis.

Youth and CIEFFA Alumni: Young women and girls from youth-led networks, student unions, young innovators, and community groups to ensure that the perspectives of young people, particularly those most affected, are meaningfully reflected in policy dialogue.

Media and Communications Professionals: Journalists, media organizations, and communication specialists responsible for ensuring visibility, accurate reporting, and dissemination of conference outcomes across the continent.

The conference is expected to bring together **approximately 200–300 participants**, representing all AU Member States as well as regional organizations, technical partners, and international development agencies. Sponsored participants will be selected based on established criteria taking into account their respective work, contribution to the girls' education agenda and the belonging to above listed category of stakeholders. The conference is also open for self-sponsored participation.

This level of participation will help ensure diverse perspectives, broad ownership of outcomes, and a strong platform for coordinated implementation across the continent.

VII. Date and Venue

The conference is scheduled to take place from 02 – 04 July 2026 in Bujumbura, Burundi.

VIII. Language

The conference will provide simultaneous interpretation in English, French, (Arabic, Portuguese -Tbc) for plenary sessions and sign language to facilitate full and active participation across linguistic groups.

IX. Contacts

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