

Summary

- † The main barriers to girls' education are also barriers to many boys' education.
- † Barriers to the remaining group of out-of-school girls of primary school age are increasingly related to additional vulnerabilities, like disabilities; unstable or poor urban living conditions, including homelessness; being on the move; and being affected by conflict or violence.
- † New global targets including out-of-school secondary school-aged girls make it more important to understand the local alternative costs of schooling, notably linked to a gendered labour market, early marriage and assumed claims on girls related to the religious revival in the area.
- † Some of the main barriers identified in this scoping study affect boys and girls differently. Gendered data is largely missing on some key groups of vulnerable children in West Africa:
 - Education data on child disabilities segregated by functional domains.
 - Education data from new slum areas surrounding the bigger cities in the region.
 - Education data for street child populations in the region.
 - Education data for domestic servants in major cities.
 - Education data for conflict-affected families and children, especially people on the move, and therefore not registered in camps.

Introduction

This scoping study aims to take stock of the state of knowledge on gender and education in West Africa. This is pertinent, not only because the situation for girls in the region is precarious, but also because it is rapidly changing.

The state of knowledge challenges some common preconceptions. This study stresses how most education challenges are in fact shared by girls and boys, although certain challenges affect boys and girls differently. In fact, the only obstacle unique to girls is the notion that girls should do other things rather than go to school. In most cases, combinations of different factors interact in the ways they affect the schooling of both girls and boys. Understanding these intersecting vulnerabilities is key to understanding the remaining challenges to girls' education in West Africa.

The analysis presented here also highlights how some common generalizations may not hold. For example, from the quantitative analysis of statistical data, it may easily seem as if urban children collectively are privileged and foster children collectively deprived with regard to education. But a closer look indicates that this is not always the case. Similarly, while child labour and early marriage are often believed to be the causes of girls' dropping out of school, the reverse may be the case, as, for example, when poor schooling quality means that child labour and marriage options trump the option of continued education.