

UNEQUAL EDUCATION

In sub-Saharan Africa, a girl is only 35% more likely to graduate university than die of maternal related causes³.

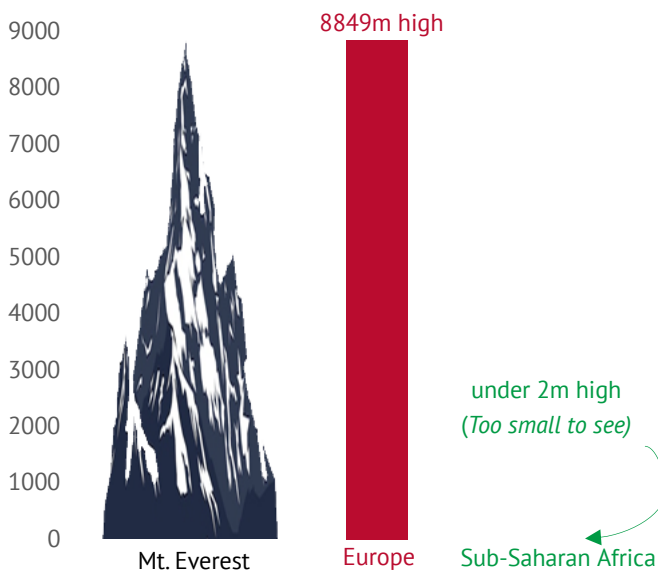
If we compare the graduation rates for women in the 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa with the other regions of the world we can see the scale of global education inequality straight away. The female graduation rate in Sub-Saharan Africa (3.3%) is extremely low even compared with regions with high rates of gender inequality such as the South and West Asia Region and Arab States, let alone the richest regions in North America and Europe (Figure 1).

A young woman reading this in Europe is 6,000 times more likely (670,700%)⁴ to get a university degree than they are to die in childbirth or from other maternal related causes, but the odds for a young women in Africa are very different (Figure 2).

The difference is too large to see on a chart but if we make the number of women graduating per maternal death in Europe the same height as Mount Everest, how high would sub-Saharan Africa be? Under 6 feet tall, shorter than some people reading this report (Figure 3).

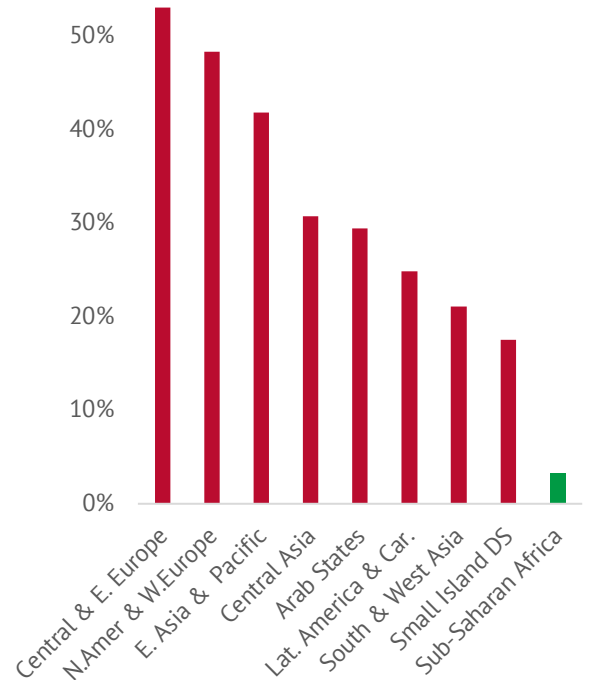
This is how unequal life chances are for girls in our modern, interconnected world.

FIGURE 3: LIKELIHOOD OF WOMEN GRADUATING VS DYING OF MATERNAL CAUSES: COMPARISON



Source: UNESCO, Indicator [GGR_6t7_F..](#) & World Bank, [SH.MMR.RISK](#), Image: scaled from [Freepik.com](#)

FIGURE 1: GROSS GRADUATION RATIO, FIRST DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN TERTIARY EDUCATION, FEMALE (%), LATEST YEAR



Source: UNESCO, Indicator [GGR_6t7_F..](#)

FIGURE 2: WOMEN'S ODDS GRADUATING UNIVERSITY VS DYING MATERNAL CAUSES

Belgium	7,650 : 1
Denmark	8,624 : 1
France	4,606 : 1
Germany	6,743 : 1
Italy	11,456 : 1
Netherlands	7,595 : 1
Portugal	4,043 : 1
Spain	15,669 : 1
Sweden	8,550 : 1
United Kingdom	3,712 : 1
Burkina Faso	1.2 : 1
Congo, Dem. Rep.	1.1 : 1
Ghana	9 : 1
Guinea	1.1 : 1
Madagascar	3 : 1
Mauritania	1 : 1
Mozambique	7 : 1
Namibia	33 : 1
Niger	0.9 : 1
Rwanda	2 : 1
South Africa	48 : 1

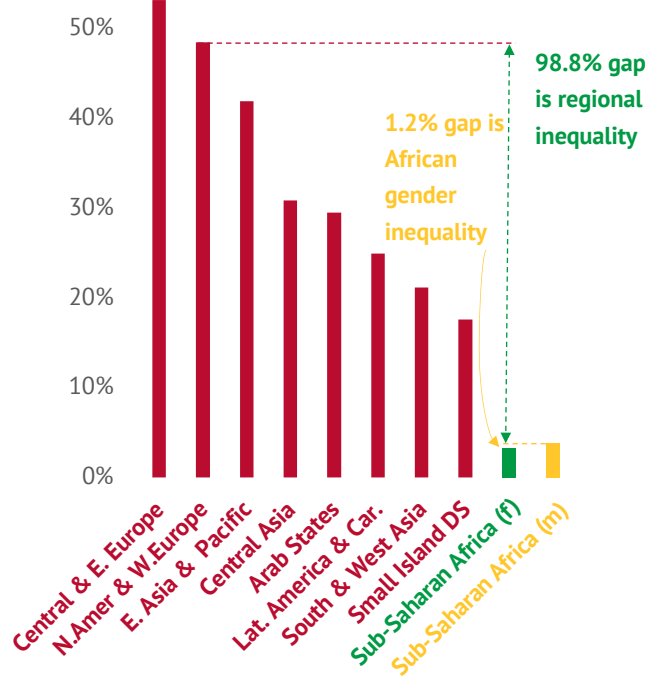
Source: UNESCO, Indicator [GGR_6t7_F..](#) & World Bank, Indicator [SH.MMR.RISK](#)

Gender discrimination at the national level plays a part, particularly in Francophone African countries like Niger, but it is also important to note that the tertiary gender parity gap in sub-Saharan Africa overall has halved in the last 20 years⁵ and that male graduation rates in sub-Saharan Africa are also low, just above female rates.

As Figure 4 shows, **98.8% of the gap between graduation rates for women in sub-Saharan Africa and North America & Western Europe is because of the inequality between regions** and only 1.2% is gender inequality in Africa.

Since 2016 the world has created an average of 2 Billionaires and 90,000 more African child labourers every week.

FIGURE 4: FEMALE GRADUATION RATES ALL REGIONS & SSA MALE GRADUATION RATES



Source: UNESCO, Indicator [GGR_6t7_F..](#) & [GGR_6t7_M..](#)

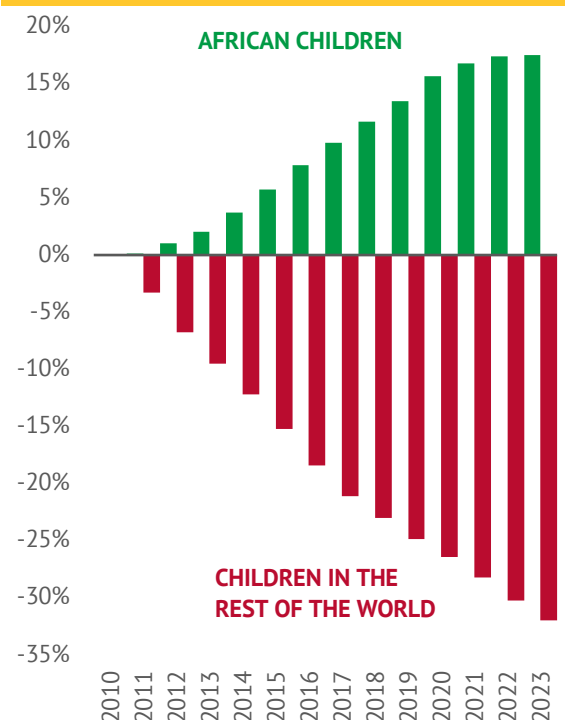
WHAT ABOUT SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN?

At the start of the 21st century, around a quarter of children out of school were in Africa and the number was declining slowly.⁶ Since 2010, you can see that far from falling, the number of African children out of school is now actually going up (Figure 5). The increase alone in African children out of school (15.7 million)⁷ is equivalent to the number of all the high school students in the United States⁸.

Since the start of the Sustainable Development Goals, and despite a huge increase in global wealth and progress elsewhere, millions more African children have become so poor they have been forced to work to survive instead of going to school. There are now 16 million more *child labourers* in Africa than when the SDGs started⁹.

In fact, since 2016 the world has created an average of 2 billionaires and 90,000 more African child labourers every week¹⁰. The two are not unconnected.

FIGURE 5: CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN SINCE 2010, %



Source: UNESCO, Education-Estimates.org [‘Out of School Rate’](#)

WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN STILL IN SCHOOL?

It does not get much better if we look at the situation for children in school. African school children are less likely to finish school¹¹ and less likely to achieve a basic level of literacy than children in other continents¹².

The school completion rates for Gen Zs in Africa are so low that a young person in Portugal has more chance of graduating university than a young person from Madagascar has of finishing primary school¹³.

In Central African Republic, a girl is more likely to be married by the age of 14 than they are to complete primary school¹⁴. A girl in Chad is twice as likely to die of preventable causes before the age of 5 than to complete secondary school¹⁵.

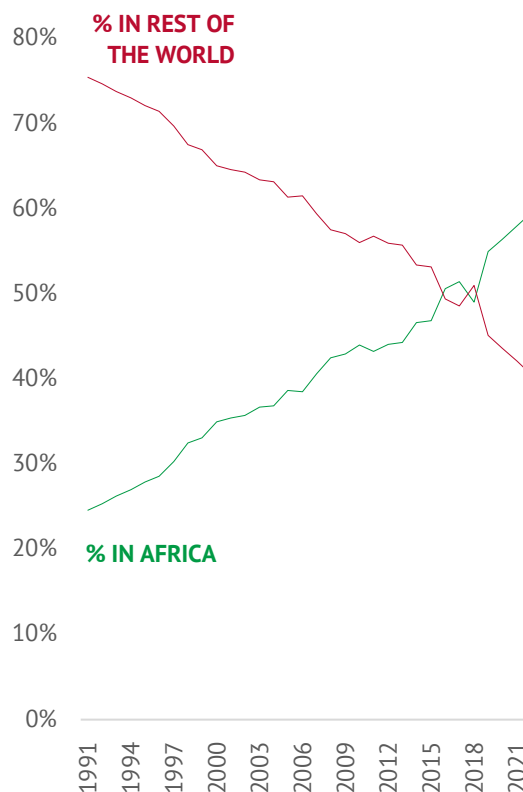
In 20 sub-Saharan African countries, a child has a higher chance of being forced into child labour as they do of completing school¹⁶.

There is also huge inequality in education outcomes. If we compare the change in the number of young people who are illiterate (15-24 year olds that cannot read and write) since 1991, you can see a clear long-term pattern (Figure 6). There has been significant progress in ending illiteracy in the other regions of the world but not in Africa. Less than 1 in 4 of the world's illiterate young people used to live in Africa in 1991; now it is 60%¹⁷.

There are several non-African countries, such as Afghanistan, where totalitarian states and embedded conflict have caused the number of illiterate young people to also increase. However, in Africa, there is an almost continental wide trend. Young people in the world today are over 6 times more likely to be illiterate if they are African rather than non-African (up from 2.5 in 1991)¹⁸. It is important to remember this is the average; young Africans with disabilities, or from ethnic minorities or rural areas are even more likely to be illiterate.

The number of 15-24 year old Africans who are illiterate has increased from 41 million to 52.9 million since 1991¹⁹, despite world wealth more than doubling in that time²⁰.

FIGURE 6: 15-24 YEAR OLDS WHO ARE ILLITERATE BY LOCATION (1991-2021)



Source: UNESCO, Indicator [IllPop_Ag15t24](#).

A young person in Portugal has more chance of graduating University than a young person in Malawi has of finishing Primary School.

In Niger, a young girl is more likely to be married by the age of 14 than they are to complete primary school.

Despite new technologies and a world that has never been richer, education inequality between young people is increasing and it has a devastating impact. Being unable to read the news or write a few sentences changes the trajectory of your entire life. It will likely trap you in the poorest jobs and bring huge risks to your health and your children's health.

It also makes it very difficult for you to effectively protest against the injustices you face. Some of the 20% of children in Africa²¹ who are child labourers have mined minerals used inside devices this report is being read on. However, their voices and realities rarely appear on those device screens and thus are rarely on our leaders' minds.

With the restricted ability of marginalised young people to effectively protest, **it is clear that unless there is greater solidarity and organisation between young people the situation is unlikely to change.**

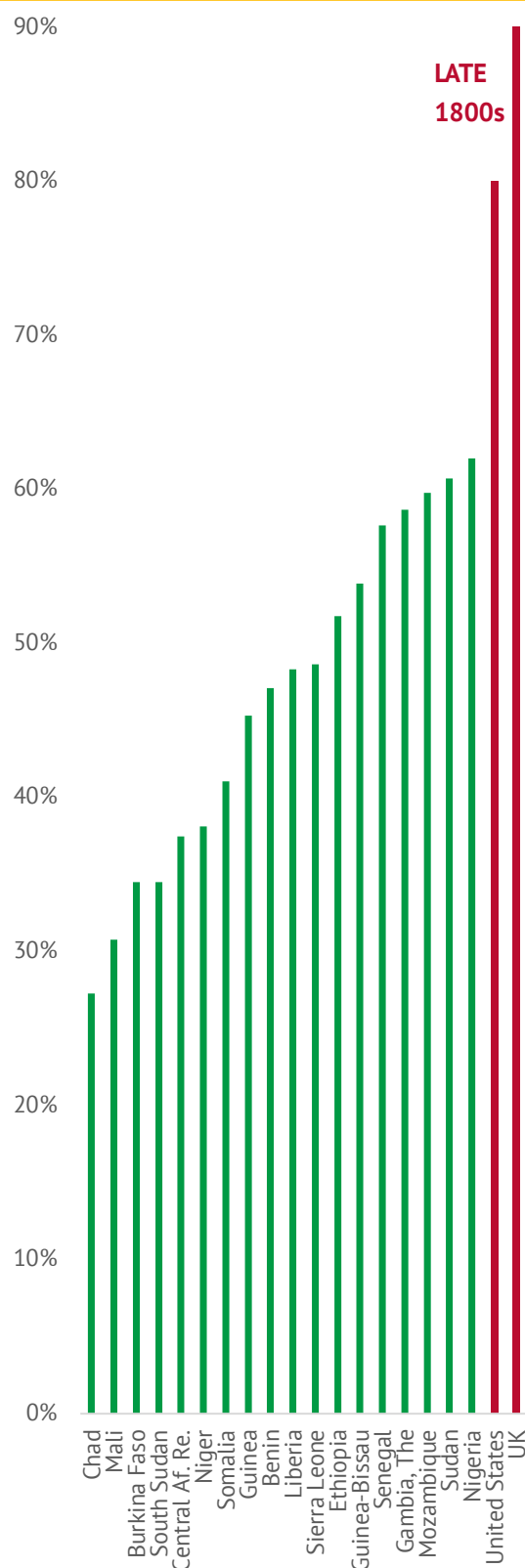
The disparity in literacy rates between countries in Figure 7 is already unacceptable. But it gets worse, whilst this is the current data for African countries, the UK literacy rate is from 1890 and the US from 1870, just after the American Civil War.

It shows how long African children have lost out, both through unrectified historical injustices and ongoing modern injustices.

In the absence of a united youth movement, education inequality will remain for generations to come. In all the African countries in Figure 7, the current *youth* literacy rate for 15-24 year olds today is also lower than the US and UK 18th century *adult* literacy rates²², meaning the literacy injustice is set for another half century at least.

It is also important to note the US data in 1870 was itself incredibly unequal: 80% of the overall adult population was literate but only 20% of the black population²³. There are still significant racial inequalities in education in North America²⁴, but the situation has improved thanks to the civil rights and racial justice movements. Unfortunately, we have not yet made much difference to the exploitation, discrimination and structural injustices faced by children in Africa.

FIGURE 7: % LITERATE ADULTS, AFRICAN COUNTRIES LATEST DATA, UK 1890, US 1870



Source: **WORLD BANK** [SE.ADT.LITR.ZS](#) & **Clark, Gregory** *The great escape: The industrial revolution in theory and history* & **Mintz, Steven** *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Statistics Education in America, 1860-1950*

EDUCATION BUDGETS

We can start to understand the inequality in literacy when we consider how much is spent on education. Education expenditure per child in sub-Saharan Africa, North America, and the European Union is vastly different.

In 1976, the legacy of colonialism and slavery had left a wide gap between education budgets, but that gap has since become a chasm (Figure 8). Education budgets in every European and North America country have increased sharply in the last 48 years. In all African countries budgets either have either grown slowly or not at all.

The European country with the lowest expenditure in 1987 was Malta (dotted red line), with a budget per child that was \$651 larger than the highest sub-Saharan Africa country, South Africa (dotted green line). **The gap, in purple, has grown 17-fold to \$11,583. We may have inherited the education inequality of previous generations, but rather than end it, we have dramatically increased it.**

The African lines in Figure 8 are so low it is hard to quantify the multiples. A better illustration is if we make the education budget per child in the US the height of the Statue of Liberty in New York, from her toes to the tip of her torch. How high would other countries be? Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa are below the top of her toe. Burundi would be just 7cm off the ground (Figure 9).

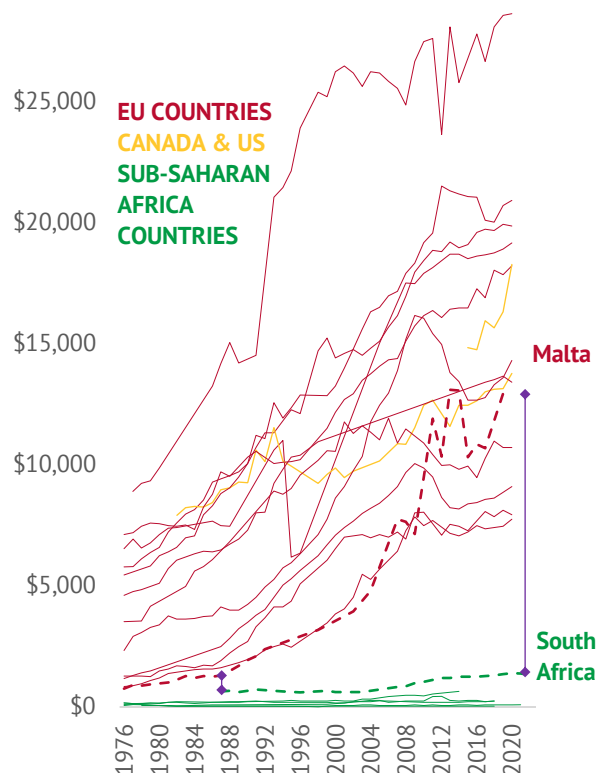
The global inequality between education budgets is huge. **More is spent on eight days of education for a school child in Malta than the entire school life of a child in Malawi²⁵. This cannot lead to a more equal world.**

The Luxembourg Education Ministry has a larger education budget than eleven low-income African countries *put together*²⁶. Luxembourg has 100,000 school-aged children, and the African countries 50 million²⁷.

Norway has under a million school aged children, but the Norwegian education budget is *twice as large* as the *combined* education budget in 30 African countries with 236 million school aged children between them²⁸.

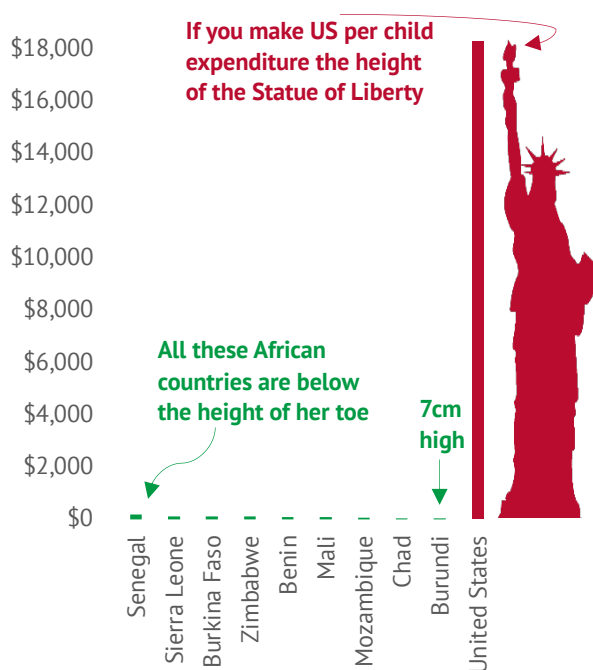
World wealth has doubled and then doubled again since 1976²⁹. It would cost 0.2% of global wealth³⁰ to achieve universal education and ensure every child has a trained teacher. **How rich do we have to be before we act?**

FIGURE 8: GOVERNMENT EDUCATION EXPENDITURE PER CHILD, CONSTANT \$



Source: UNESCO Government Expenditure on Education Constant Retrieved 14 Jul 23 & World Bank SP.POP.0014.TO

FIGURE 9: COMPARING CURRENT EDUCATION EXPENDITURE PER CHILD



Source: UNESCO Government Expenditure on Education Constant Retrieved 14 Jul 23 & World Bank SP.POP.0014.TO