

Formula for progress: Educate both girls and boys

There is a universal understanding and internationally shared vision that education for all is the key to development. For the estimated 218 million children engaged in child labour, access to quality education is the pathway to a better life. Experts have stressed that educating girls, in particular, paves the way for wider changes in the families, societies and work places. A number of studies have also made strong links between enhanced educational access for girls and GDP growth.

There are, however, many barriers to girls' access to school. When families have limited resources, they may feel they have to choose between educating their sons or daughters. Decisions may not be based on natural aptitudes, skills, or the motivation levels of either the male or female child. The predetermined gender roles may not necessarily benefit young boys either, and may even be harmful. From a young age they may feel a heavy burden to perform academically - perhaps beyond their capacities – in order to live up to their families' expectations to succeed.

These unequal gender relations propel a vicious cycle of underinvestment in girls from generation to generation, starting at the earliest stages of their lives and continuing throughout their life cycles. Today, over two-thirds of the world's 860 million illiterates are women. Girls take on a great deal of unpaid household work for their families, including childcare, cooking, cleaning, and gathering water and fuel. Many girls in poor communities are expected to contribute to household income. If girls are attending school, there is precious little time for study. They may also be pushed into work as domestic labourers or other forms of work, even trafficking and prostitution.

Education sows the seeds of gender equality. Because of the direct and indirect discrimination that girls and women experience, it is recommended that specific measures be taken to include facilitating access to education for girls in national plans, policies and programmes. This in turn will facilitate future access to decent work.

More information can be requested through the campaign e-mail address gendercampaign@ilo.org

Find out more

- [ILO-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour \(IPEC\)](#)
- [The 2008 World Teachers Day Message \(October 5\) issued jointly by the ILO, UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and Education International \(EI\)](#)
- [ILO-World Day Against Child Labour 2008 – Education: the right response to child labour](#)
- [ILO- Bureau for Employers' Activities \(ACT/EMP\) on child labour](#)
- [ILO- Bureau for Workers' Activities \(ACTRAV\) on child labour](#)
- [ILO Conventions and Recommendations on child labour](#)
- [Gender Equality and Decent Work - Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations Promoting Gender Equality](#)