CONTRIBUTION AND NEEDS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN EDUCATION IN AFRICA

"Therefore children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy."

Gravissimum Educationis, no.1

Study conducted by

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Catholic education, Catholic teaching, and the Catholic school are generally three expressions used to refer to educational structures whose educational project is founded on the one hand, on the Christian faith and, on the other hand, recognized by the local ecclesial authority. Catholic schools may belong to religious congregations, parishes, dioceses, Christian associations, or private Christian sponsors. The criteria for identifying Catholic schools vary considerably from one country to another. The Catholic school is, first and foremost, a school like any other.[1]. However, according to the Catholic vision of education, the Catholic school must aim for what is called a "holistic" education-that is, one that develops all dimensions of the human person in accordance with Christian anthropology[2]. Thus, the Catholic school promotes intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and artistic development, among others.

The contribution and needs of the Church in the field of education in Africa must be understood within the broader context of the major concerns surrounding education worldwide and, more specifically, in Africa. According to the Holy See's 2024 report on Catholic education in Africa, more than 31 million African children are enrolled in Catholic schools. In a continent where millions of children remain out of school due to insufficient investment by African States and the growing disengagement of developed countries from education in Africa, Catholic schools represent a contribution of significant public and social importance.

Like public schools, these schools have the mission of educating children, adolescents, and young people in a contemporary context marked by numerous challenges, which will be highlighted in this study. In response to the various challenges facing education, policies are being developed at both the global and continental levels. At the same time, the universal Church and the Church in Africa are clarifying their positions and establishing priorities in response to the educational needs of today.

Thus, alongside the contribution that the Church makes to the field of education, there are also needs that must be addressed in order to strengthen and fulfill its commitment to responding to urgent educational challenges.

0.1. United Nations, African Union, Universal Church, and Church in Africa: A Comparative Perspective on Education

In recent years, education has been a central concern for four major actors: on the one hand, the two global actors-namely, the United Nations and the universal Church-and, on the other hand, the two African actors, namely, the African Union and the Church in Africa.

[1] Dagens, C. (Ed.). (2007). *Pour l'éducation et pour l'école : Des catholiques s'engagent* [For education and for school: Catholics commit themselves]. Odile Jacob.

[2] Moog, F. (2017). La notion d'éducation intégrale, pivot anthropologique de l'éducation catholique [The concept of integral education as the anthropological foundation of Catholic education]. *Transversalités*, (141), 35–51.

0.1.1. United Nations and Education as One of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda

One of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda concerns education. Essential to the achievement of all these goals, education is addressed under **Goal 4**, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."[3] The education in question must meet the various criteria clearly outlined above. It must be inclusive, equitable, and of quality, while enabling everyone to learn throughout life. Africa is the region of the world where achieving this goal is both a necessity and an urgent priority.

0.1.2. African Union and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA)

At the 26th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union, held on January 31, 2016, in Addis Ababa, the Heads of State and Government of the Union adopted the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016–2025 as a framework for transforming the continent's education and training systems. CESA gives concrete expression to the vision set out by the African Union in its Agenda 2063, which seeks to empower citizens to become effective agents of change to achieve the "Africa We Want." It also adapts the education-related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to the African context, considering the priorities and challenges specific to the continent.

0.1.3. Universal Catholic Church

Pope Francis, during his audience with the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, praised the efforts being made in the field of education while expressing regret that hundreds of millions of children are excluded from school. The Pope stated: "Today, the world has the largest number of students in history. The figures are encouraging: approximately 110 million children attend primary school. However, there is a sad disparity. Indeed, approximately 250 million children and adolescents do not attend school." The Argentine Pope went so far as to describe this exclusion as cultural genocide. He added: "It is a moral imperative to change this situation. For cultural genocides do not occur only through the destruction of heritage. Brothers and sisters, it is cultural genocide when we steal the future from children, when we do not offer them the adequate conditions to become what they could be."[4] For the Pope, allowing children to grow up outside school is tantamount to committing cultural genocide.

Upon receiving the African Compact on Education, Pope Francis called for quality education in Africa. According to him, this requires collaboration between the Church and States. The Pope stated: "After the mass education policies that characterized the first decades of the post-colonial period, it is now time to work with local governments to continuously improve the quality of

[3]United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (n.d.). *The 17 goals*. https://sdgs.un.org/goals

[4]Francis. (2024, November 21). *Discours du Pape François aux participants à l'Assemblée plénière du Dicastère pour la Culture et l'Éducation* [Address by Pope Francis to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Culture and Education]. Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/speeches/2024/november/documents/20241121-dicastero-cultura-educazione.html

education, especially by providing teachers with sound training, valuing them, and creating the conditions necessary for the dignified exercise of their profession." Pope Francis emphasizes the need to adequately address both teacher training and the conditions under which they carry out their profession.

According to the report prepared by the Holy See on Catholic education in Africa in 2024, "Catholic presence is strategic precisely because it operates in this space characterized by high demand and often insufficient public capacity." In this respect, it does not compete with public education provision; rather, it follows a logic of complementarity in efforts to meet the demand for schooling, whose growth far exceeds the capacity of available educational structures.

0.1.4. The African Compact on Education

The Catholic Church in Africa has consistently remained committed to promoting inclusive and quality education. In the African Compact on Education (Kinshasa, 2022), Article 1 of Axis II, concerning Catholic schools, encourages Catholic schools to "highlight in each educational institution of the Church a policy aimed at having a percentage (between 5 and 10%) of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and families benefit from a scholarship funded by the faithful and parents of students." In Article 3 of Axis III, concerning the State, the African Compact on Education urges African States to "provide financial and social support to the most disadvantaged families in their educational mission." The Compact continues, in the same axis, in Article 6, by encouraging African States to "increase the education budget in order to improve the state of infrastructure and the quality of teaching." In the same axis, Article 7 calls on States to "ensure the quality of initial and continuing teacher training and to provide teachers with a decent salary." The African Compact on Education thus highlights the issue of access to education for all, the quality of school infrastructure, and teacher training and working conditions.

Through the African Compact on Education, Catholic education on the continent aims to contribute to preparing young people who are capable of responding to the social, cultural, political, and economic challenges of today and tomorrow.[5] In this regard, the Catholic Church, through Catholic schools, contributes to educating citizens[6]. Alongside the type of school organization aimed at educating students for citizenship, there is also the course whose content is developed by the Church, namely religious, moral, and civic education[7], which promotes a particular type of society[8].

Within the framework of the African Compact on Education, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo, President of this symposium, emphasizes the obstacles to access to education in Africa. He states:

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[5] Niyigena, J.-P. (2026, May 21). L'éducation catholique au service de la transformation de l'Afrique [Catholic education at the service of the transformation of Africa]. *Vatican News*. https://www.vaticannews.va/fr/eglise/news/2026-05/l-education-catholique-au-service-de-la-transformation-africaine.html

[6] Niyigena, J.-P. (2023). Contribution des religions à l'éducation à la citoyenneté : Cas de l'Église catholique dans une Afrique en quête de la paix [The contribution of religions to citizenship education: The case of the Catholic Church in an Africa in search of peace]. In E. Mutabazi (Ed.), *Communautés et apprentissage de la citoyenneté* [Communities and learning citizenship] (pp. 127–151). Le Bord de l'Eau.

[7] Iyananio, S.-P. (2016). *L'Église catholique et l'éducation à la citoyenneté en République démocratique du Congo* [The Catholic Church and citizenship education in the Democratic Republic of Congo]. L'Harmattan.

[8] Ana Thea Filipovic, Tomislav Kovac et Jean-Paul Niyigena (eds.), *The contribution of religious education to the creation of responsible citizens. European and African perspectives*, Nairobi, Paulines, 2023.

"As a priority area, particular attention will be given to addressing the problems related to the insufficient, albeit growing, number of educated and schooled citizens, as well as the persistence of significant inequalities between the rich and the poor, and between men and women, in terms of access to education, especially in rural areas."[9] He considers that the number of Africans attending school remains insufficient. He also deplores the persistent disparities in access to schooling between the rich and the poor, between girls and boys, and between urban and rural areas. He also addresses the issue of the quality of education in Africa. He adds: "Specific to the African context is also the whole issue of the low quality of education, due in particular to the lack of qualified teachers and supervisors, insufficient teaching materials, inadequate learning time, and poor school management." The issue of the quality of education should not be overlooked at the expense of increasing the number of young people who have access to education. Yet, according to the Congolese Cardinal, quality education depends on certain conditions. These include the qualifications of teachers and supervisors, the availability of teaching materials, and sound management of educational institutions (Cardinal Ambongo, 2023).

This study focuses on school education that is considered compulsory, namely Nursery, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education. It does not cover higher education.

0.2. Objectives of the Study

This study has two types of objectives: a general objective and specific objectives.

0.2.1. General Objective

To conduct a critical and forward-looking analysis of the state of Catholic education in Africa, situating it within the broader context of education on the continent, highlighting its contribution through data on the number of children, adolescents, and young people it serves, while identifying the institutional, pedagogical, financial, and partnership needs necessary for its sustainable development.

0.2.2. Specific Objectives

- Present the general context of education on the African continent;
- Analyze the main strengths and social functions of the Catholic network;
- Identify the challenges related to access, continuity, quality, and sustainability of Catholic schools;
- Highlight regional disparities and the effects of demographic pressure;
- Examine data quality and governance as prerequisites for decision-making;
- Propose strategic guidelines tailored to different African contexts to ensure quality education.

0.3. Methodology and Limitations

This study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. It presents statistical data, interprets, cross-references, and analyzes them. Several sources from various institutions and different scientific disciplines are drawn upon and brought into relation with one another.

[9] African Compact on Education Institute. (2026, August). *Magazine of the African Compact on Education Institute*.

In the first chapter, the data used come primarily from UNESCO, the African Union, the World Bank, and UNICEF. These data help establish the general context of education in Africa. In the second chapter, which focuses on the Catholic Church's contribution and needs in the field of education in Africa, this study draws, on the one hand, on data collected by the Holy See for the year 2024. These data are general in nature; they provide information on Catholic education in Africa and at the regional level, while also highlighting some figures relevant to the broader context of education in Africa.

On the other hand, we draw on data collected from 15 African countries in 2026. These data allow for greater precision and make it possible to identify and highlight certain variables more clearly, such as the funding of Catholic schools, teacher training, the number of schools, the number of students, success rates, and so forth. However, depending on the country, some data are more comprehensive than others.

The quantitative data are revisited and qualitatively analyzed on the basis of the Global Compact on Education (2019 and 2025), the African Compact on Education (2022), the Nigerian Education Pact (2024), and the Central African Education Pact (2026). These are documents recently produced by the universal Church, the Church in Africa, and two local Churches, namely the Church in Nigeria and the Church in the Central African Republic. From the same perspective, the Catholic Church's principal document on school education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, is also used to interpret certain variables. In order to give this study a public dimension, contemporary political philosophy and the philosophy of education inform some of the orientations and perspectives concerning the place of religions in the field of education within a democratic context.

The figures drawn from the Holy See document have a continental and regional scope, except where they concern the Democratic Republic of Congo. The data collected in 2026 cover 15 African countries and are used, on the one hand, to illustrate more precisely the contribution of the Church and the needs of the Church in the field of education in Africa and, on the other hand, to engage in a critical dialogue with figures and data from UNESCO, the African Union, UNICEF, and the World Bank. The countries included in the sample represent the different models of national networks of Catholic schools existing in Africa.

0.3.1. Methodology of the Study on the Fifteen Countries

The present study is part of a scientific approach aimed at establishing as comprehensive and well-documented an overview as possible of the educational mission and activities of the Catholic Church across the African continent. It seeks to highlight, on the basis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from those responsible for Catholic education, both the extent of the Church's contribution to the development of education and the main needs faced by Catholic educational institutions. The methodology adopted is therefore designed to ensure structured data collection, comparative analysis, and rigorous interpretation of data relating to the different national contexts.

The study relies primarily on a descriptive and comparative quantitative approach, complemented by a qualitative dimension intended to provide a deeper understanding of the institutional, pedagogical, pastoral, and financial realities of Catholic education. The quantitative approach

makes it possible to measure the numbers of educational institutions, students, and teachers; completion and dropout rates; infrastructure conditions; student-teacher and student-class ratios; sources of funding; as well as various indicators relating to the organization and provision of Catholic education. The qualitative approach, for its part, takes into account the assessments, priority needs, and challenges expressed by the respondents.

0.3.1.1. Objectives of the Survey

The questionnaire was designed to collect data enabling an analysis of several complementary dimensions of the Catholic Church's contribution to education. In particular, it seeks to determine the size and scope of the Catholic school network, to establish the numbers of students and teachers across the different levels of education, to assess academic performance and learning conditions, and to examine the infrastructure available.

The survey also aims to analyze the operating and governance arrangements of Catholic educational institutions, particularly the respective roles of priests, religious men, religious women, and laypersons in the management of educational establishments. It further seeks to document funding mechanisms, relations between the Church and the State, the Church's participation in the development of education policies and pedagogical resources, as well as the organization of school pastoral ministry.

Finally, particular attention is given to identifying the priority needs expressed by national leaders, particularly with regard to funding for salaries, infrastructure, initial and continuing teacher training, pedagogical resources, strengthening institutional capacities, and dialogue with public authorities.

0.3.1.2. Survey Population and Scope of the Study

The survey population consists primarily of national or institutional leaders responsible for Catholic education in the African countries covered by the survey. The respondents hold positions that provide them with a comprehensive understanding of the organization and functioning of Catholic education in their respective countries, including positions in national leadership, general secretariats, or institutional management. These respondents were selected on the basis of their strategic positions and their ability to provide aggregated information on schools, students, teachers, infrastructure, funding, institutional relations, and the needs of Catholic education.

The primary unit of analysis is therefore the national Catholic education system, although some data pertain to individual schools and their various levels of education. The data collected primarily concern nursery, primary, secondary, and vocational education, as well as, where relevant, higher education and Catholic universities.

0.3.1.3. Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument is a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended, semi-closed-ended, and open-ended questions. Its design aligns with the overall objectives of the study and enables the collection of standardized data that can be compared across different countries. The questionnaire is organized around several major dimensions: the general characteristics of the Catholic education system; schools and their enrolment; students by sex and

level of education; teachers and their distribution by sex and educational level; academic performance; dropout rates; the condition of infrastructure; access to electricity, drinking water, and the Internet; student-teacher and student-class ratios; school governance; sources of funding; student inclusion and protection; teacher training; the Church's involvement in education policy; school pastoral ministry; relations between the Church and the State; as well as the priority needs expressed by school leaders.

This multidimensional framework goes beyond a simple measurement of the Church's numerical presence.

0.3.1.4. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire sent to the relevant officials. The information provided corresponds to the school or academic year indicated by each respondent. This clarification is important in a comparative study, as the reference years may differ from one country to another.

The responses were then compiled into a shared database to facilitate their processing and comparison. Attention was paid to verifying the internal consistency of the data, particularly by cross-checking the numbers of girls and boys against the reported totals, as well as the different categories of schools and teachers.

0.3.1.5. Data Processing and Analysis

The quantitative data underwent primarily descriptive statistical analysis. Student enrolment figures, totals, proportions, and percentages were calculated to highlight the main characteristics of Catholic education in the countries studied. Comparative analysis makes it possible to identify differences between countries and across educational levels. It covers student and teacher enrolment, the representation of girls and boys, completion and dropout rates, infrastructure, access to essential services, student-teacher ratios, and funding mechanisms.

Qualitative responses and multiple-choice questions regarding needs and challenges were analyzed thematically, allowing responses to be grouped into broad categories of needs. This approach helps identify commonalities and country-specific characteristics. Attention was paid to data harmonization. When the categories used or units of measurement differed across countries, the data were grouped according to common categories to make comparisons as meaningful as possible. Aggregated results, however, are interpreted with caution, considering differences in national contexts.

0.3.1.6. Reliability and Limitations of the Data

The scientific quality of the analysis depends on the quality and comparability of the information reported by respondents. Since the questionnaire was completed by institutional officials, the data consist of self-reported information from sources directly involved in the administration of Catholic education. They therefore hold significant institutional value.

Certain limitations must be considered, including uneven data availability across countries, differences in reference school years, some missing data, and the heterogeneity of national education systems. These limitations do not negate the value of the survey but suggest that the results should be viewed primarily as a comparative and diagnostic basis rather than as an exhaustive statistical measure of Catholic education in Africa.

0.3.2. Added Value of Methodology and Some Limitations

The methodology adopted makes it possible to cross-reference quantitative data with institutional and qualitative information collected from field-level leaders, international institutions, and the Holy See. This triangulation constitutes an essential element of the study, as it makes it possible to move beyond the mere presentation of figures toward a more comprehensive understanding of the Church's contribution to education in Africa, its institutional capacities, structural constraints, and priority needs.

Regarding the data on the overall state of Catholic education in Africa and the data presented in the report of the Holy See, an important limitation should be noted. It concerns the absence, in the material available, of a complete description of the initial statistical methodology, as well as an exhaustive list of the countries covered by studies conducted by United Nations and African institutions or of the countries included in the Holy See's statistics. However, this limitation does not affect the relevance of the quantitative and qualitative information on Catholic education in Africa or the challenges arising from it.

0.4. A Four-Part Presentation

This study is divided into four main sections: (1) the general context of education in Africa; (2) the Church's contribution to education in Africa, based on a study by the Holy See using 2024 statistics; (3) a study of Catholic education in selected African countries; and (4) the needs of the African network of Catholic schools. The study also includes appendices.

CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL CONTEXT OF EDUCATION IN AFRICA

By way of introduction, before presenting the Church's contribution to and needs in the field of education in Africa, this study outlines the general context of education on the continent. This will subsequently facilitate a dialogue and comparison between the general context and the specific context of Catholic education in Africa. The general context is presented by focusing successively on the following points: the state of education, the out-of-school population, the gradual decline in the out-of-school population, population growth, the impact of demographic pressure, cuts in education funding, the challenge of gender parity, gaps in data, and some observations.

1.1. The State of Education in Africa

According to UNESCO, Africans are better educated than ever before and are transforming the global labor market, with the working-age population expected to reach 600 million by 2030. UNESCO takes a nuanced view, acknowledging that many African countries are making remarkable progress in ensuring access to quality education and lifelong learning for their

populations. However, UNESCO also recognizes that progress remains gradual, with one in four young people neither in school nor employed or in training.[10] Despite this progress, significant challenges remain, particularly in secondary education. UNESCO states that "in sub-Saharan Africa, 29% of young people complete upper secondary education, compared with 62% worldwide."[11] This shows that sub-Saharan Africa is the region most affected by school dropout.

This situation must also be viewed in the context of the financial constraints facing African countries. Education is one of the key sectors in which African countries are underinvesting due to public debt, as pointed out by Andrew Dabalen, the World Bank's Chief Economist for the Africa region. In this context, educational needs remain considerable. "To achieve universal education by 2030, education systems will need to enroll approximately 170 million additional children and adolescents, which would require the construction of about 9 million new classrooms and the hiring of 11 million new teachers."[12]

Nevertheless, despite the scale of these needs, significant progress has already been made in the region. "This is a major challenge, but the region has already made considerable progress: 270 million children are now enrolled in primary and secondary education, and primary school completion rates have significantly improved since 2000."[13]

1.2.The out-of-school population in Africa

Out-of-school rates vary across Africa depending on the level of education. Early childhood education and vocational training are the two weakest links in Africa's education system. "Seven out of 10 children in sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to early childhood education, and less than 1.5% of young people aged 15 to 24 are enrolled in vocational training programs, compared with 10% in high-income countries."[14] Lower and upper secondary education are more affected by being out of school than primary education. School dropout at the primary and lower secondary levels, as well as the number of children and young people who remain out of school, mean that upper secondary education is the level most affected by school exclusion after Nursery. "58% of adolescents of upper secondary school age in sub-Saharan Africa are not enrolled in school."[15] This figure is particularly striking and provides insight into the extent of the out-of-school population in this part of the continent.

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[10] UNESCO. (2025, October 24). *Q&A: What you need to know about the state of education in Africa*. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/qa-what-you-need-know-about-state-education-africa?hub=180364

[11] UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2026, June 22). *2026 Education Data Refresh*. https://www.uis.unesco.org/en/news/2026-education-data-refresh

[12]World Bank. (2024, October 14). *Urgent education reform key to unlocking faster, more inclusive growth in Africa* [Press release]. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/10/14/urgent-education-reform-key-to-unlocking-faster-more-inclusive-growth-in-africa

[13]World Bank. (2024, October 14). *Urgent education reform key to unlocking faster, more inclusive growth in Africa* [Press release]. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/10/14/urgent-education-reform-key-to-unlocking-faster-more-inclusive-growth-in-africa

[14] Action Education. (n.d.). *L'éducation dans le monde en chiffres* [Education in the world in figures]. https://action-education.org/pourquoi/chiffres-cles-education-monde/

[15] UNESCO & African Union Commission. (2023). *L'éducation en Afrique : Placer l'équité au cœur des politiques* [Education in Africa: Placing equity at the heart of policies]. https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/03/384497fre.pdf

Current demographic dynamics in Africa are exacerbating an existing problem: the significant gap between the number of school-age children and young people and the number actually enrolled in school. According to the *2025 Africa SDG 4 Scorecard*, published jointly by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report),[16] the following provides a breakdown of the figures for the out-of-school population in Africa.

Age Group	Out-of-School Population in Africa in 2023
Children of primary school age	**44 million**
Adolescents of lower secondary school age	**33 million**
Youth of upper-secondary school age	**41 million**
Total	**118 million**

According to UNESCO, "In 2023, the out-of-school rate was estimated at 5.4% in North Africa, 15.9% in Southern Africa, 18.9% in Central Africa, 21% in East Africa, and 24.3% in West Africa."[17] West Africa ranks first, while North Africa stands out for having the highest enrollment rates on the continent. It should be noted from the outset that East Africa and Central Africa rank third and fourth, respectively, after North Africa and Southern Africa. However, as we shall see, these are the two regions with the largest number of Catholic schools. Without these schools, the out-of-school rate in these regions could reach record levels.

1.3. Slow Decline in the Out-of-School Rate and Disparities Between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa

According to CESA 2026–2035, "19.8% of children of primary school age are not enrolled in school in sub-Saharan Africa, compared with 21.7% in 2016." The out-of-school rate at the lower secondary level stands at 31.1%, compared with 32.2% in 2016, while at the upper secondary level, it stands at 43.2%, compared with 46.6%. These figures clearly show that the likelihood of being out of school increases with age in Africa.

According to this report, "the number of out-of-school children and young people has increased over time." It identifies the factors contributing to this slow decline as "population growth, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting school closures, as well as displacement due to conflict and other shocks." These figures should spur the development of new programmes to facilitate

[16]UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa. (2025). *Educating & Skilling Africa, 2*(1): Sharing experiences on teacher professional development and education policies in Africa. https://www.iicba.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2026/02/4th%20Educating%20%26%20Skilling%20Africa%20New_compressed.pdf

[17]UNESCO & African Union. (2025). *Pleins feux sur l'achèvement de l'éducation de base et l'apprentissage fondamental en Afrique : Guider l'apprentissage fondamental* [Spotlight on basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa: Guiding foundational learning]. Global Education Monitoring Report. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/documentViewer.xhtml?v=2.1.196&id=p::usmarcdef_0000397830&file=/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_f4179177-4413-4351-ace6-4953126e0c58%3F_%3D397830fre.pdf&locale=fr&multi=true&ark=/ark:/48223/pf0000397830/PDF/397830fre.pdf

students' return to school, as well as alternative training initiatives. "These children and young people must have access to second-chance programmes, either to enable them to return to school or to help them acquire the skills they need to succeed in the labour market."[18]

The gap between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa is evident. Literacy rates among youth and adults are also rising, albeit slowly. According to UIS data, the literacy rate among youth aged 15 to 24 rose from 87.8% in 2016 to 90.2% in the latest available data for North Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the youth literacy rate rose from 76% to 78.6% over the same period, remaining at a lower level. "Adult literacy rates (among the population aged 15 and older) are lower, increasing from 71.6% to 74.6% in North Africa and from 65.1% to 68.0% in Sub-Saharan Africa."[19] This shows that, despite persistent disparities between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, both regions are making gradual progress in expanding access to education.

1.4. Causes of Non-School Enrollment and School Dropout

Non-enrollment and school dropout are two phenomena affecting the education of children and young people in Africa. Being out of school includes children who have never attended school, as well as those who dropped out at some point during their schooling and did not complete upper secondary education. In Africa, geographical distance and parents' lack of interest in schooling are among the main causes of being out of school. Indeed, several factors may lead parents not to send their children to school, including a lack of interest in or familiarity with schooling; poverty, which may lead them to view their children as sources of income through their contribution to household chores or, simply, through paid child labour; and skepticism about the value of education."[20], given the lack of social benefits for those who have attended school. The African Union identifies poor learning outcomes as one of the major causes of school dropout: "The lack of learning is one of the main factors leading to school dropout." It also mentions other factors underlying school dropout: "Other factors also play a role, including accessibility (whether economic or geographic), social norms, violence in schools, and the lack of relevance of what is taught."[21] In Africa, education is struggling to fulfill its promise as a pathway to social mobility, particularly in the face of rising youth unemployment.

Conflicts raging across various regions of Africa are also a major factor contributing to the slowdown in school enrollment. Although many African countries have made school attendance

[18]UNESCO & African Union. (2025). *Pleins feux sur l'achèvement de l'éducation de base et l'apprentissage fondamental en Afrique : Guider l'apprentissage fondamental* [Spotlight on basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa: Guiding foundational learning]. Global Education Monitoring Report. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397830

[19]UNESCO & African Union. (2025). *Pleins feux sur l'achèvement de l'éducation de base et l'apprentissage fondamental en Afrique : Guider l'apprentissage fondamental* [Spotlight on basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa: Guiding foundational learning]. Global Education Monitoring Report. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397830

[20] Lauwerier, T. (2016). Le concept de « pertinence » : Une réponse à la non-scolarisation ? La question des langues d'instruction en Afrique de l'Ouest [The concept of "relevance": A response to non-schooling? The question of languages of instruction in West Africa]. *L'Éducation en débats : Analyse comparée, 7*, 59–72. https://www.unige.ch/fapse/erdie/application/files/6414/6671/4304/Lauwerier2-EED7.pdf

[21] Lauwerier, T. (2016). Le concept de « pertinence » : Une réponse à la non-scolarisation ? La question des langues d'instruction en Afrique de l'Ouest [The concept of "relevance": A response to non-schooling? The question of languages of instruction in West Africa]. *L'Éducation en débats : Analyse comparée, 7*, 59–72. https://www.unige.ch/fapse/erdie/application/files/6414/6671/4304/Lauwerier2-EED7.pdf

compulsory, progress in enrollment has nevertheless slowed. According to UNESCO, "This slowdown is particularly pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa, mainly due to population growth. More than one in six children lives in conflict-affected areas, representing millions of additional out-of-school children, in addition to those already included in the statistics."[22] It is worth noting that Catholic schools tend to be more resilient than public schools in conflict-affected regions. Church authorities and Christian communities, which have a long-standing tradition of organizing education, often continue to provide schooling even when displaced or living under the control of rebel groups. Unlike those responsible for public education, they are less directly exposed to political conflicts. The educational situation in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo illustrates this difference between Catholic and public education structures.[23]

1.5. Population Growth

Africa's demographic dynamics make it the youngest continent in the world. According to UNESCO, "As the continent with the youngest population-with 60 percent of its population under the age of 25 and a median age of 19.7-Africa has a vast pool of untapped talent, offering significant opportunities for growth and innovation. Young Africans hold the key to greater economic growth and sustainable development across the continent, provided they are educated and equipped with the right skills."[24] Africa's youthful population makes it the continent with the greatest educational needs. It must therefore significantly expand its infrastructure capacity to keep pace with the continent's rapid demographic growth. According to a joint report by UNESCO and the African Union, an additional 75 million African children were enrolled in school in 2025 compared with 2015. According to UNESCO, "the number of out-of-school children increased by 13.2 million, reaching more than 100 million."[25] The efforts made by countries to address the challenge of out-of-school children remain largely inadequate in the face of rapid demographic growth. Consequently, although the number of children enrolled in school continues to rise, so too does the number of children who remain out of school.

1.6. The Impact of Demographic Pressure on Africa's Education System

There are several types of impacts to consider, depending on various factors. These include infrastructure, teachers, and the financial resources required. According to UNESCO, "The lack of school facilities, the shortage of teachers, and inadequate resources further widen the gap. For example, Africa needs to recruit at least 15 million additional teachers to meet primary and secondary education targets by 2030. In Africa, the current education system leaves more than 118 million children out of school. Already struggling to meet the continent's educational needs, it now faces mounting pressure from rapid demographic growth.

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[22] UNESCO. (2026). *Global education monitoring report 2026: Access and equity—Countdown to 2030*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397618/PDF/397618eng.pdf.multi

[23] Ouest-France. (n.d.). À Goma, les étudiants pris au piège de la guerre [In Goma, students caught in the trap of war]. https://www.ouest-france.fr/monde/republique-democratique-du-congo/a-goma-les-etudiants-pris-au-piege-de-la-guerre-70cd44c4-a5d9-11f1-8a27-1e0c4eb5e395

[24] UNESCO. (2024). *Forum de l'UNESCO « L'enseignement supérieur en Afrique (2024) : Un moteur pour le développement durable »* [UNESCO Forum "Higher education in Africa (2024): A driver for sustainable development"]. https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/11/higher-education-africa-cn-fr.pdf

[25] African Union Commission, UNESCO, & UNICEF. (2025). *Transforming learning and skills development in Africa: 2nd continental report on SDG 4 and CESA 16–25*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000393250/PDF/393250eng.pdf.multi

The current state of teacher training is a matter of serious concern. It is estimated that "at present, one in three teachers in the region does not possess the minimum qualifications and training required."[26] The European Union corroborates the data provided by UNESCO regarding the number of teachers Africa needs to address the shortage. The shortage of trained teachers affects both public and Catholic school systems.

UNESCO notes that overcrowded classrooms are becoming increasingly prevalent across Africa. This situation is attributable to both population growth and insufficient investment. According to UNESCO, "Low levels of investment result in overcrowded classrooms. Only 5 of the 23 countries for which data are available have achieved the target pupil-to-class ratio of 40:1. Several countries have ratios of 60:1 or higher."[27]. This reality poses a significant obstacle to the provision of quality education. "Only 1 in 10 children in Africa achieves the minimum level of proficiency by the end of primary school."[28]. This has significant implications for the quality of education. Catholic schools in some of the countries examined in this report are also affected by this situation, as will be demonstrated in the third section.

1.7. Cuts to Education Funding in Africa

UNESCO reports that public funding for education in Africa has stagnated and remains inadequate. This suggests that education is not a sufficiently high priority for many governments. This situation is reflected in the performance of different Catholic school networks, depending on whether they are funded entirely by parents or by the state. State-funded Catholic school networks tend to perform less well than those financed by parents. This disparity is largely attributable to differences in funding levels, as lower levels of financial investment do not necessarily enable schools to provide the same quality of education as higher levels of investment.

In addition to the inadequate public funding allocated to education by African governments, the same UN agency reports a decline in international cooperation in the education sector across Africa. "Aid for education decreased by 7% in Africa in 2024"[29]. We can therefore say that education in Africa is in danger and that Africa's youth and future are under threat.

According to UNICEF, "West and Central Africa is the region most at risk, with 1.9 million children in danger of being unable to attend school."[30]**.** Some countries and regions are more vulnerable than others to the deterioration of their education systems. West and Central Africa are

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[26]European Commission. (2023, January 26). *Un enseignement de qualité en Afrique : L'UE lance une initiative régionale en faveur des enseignants, d'un montant de 100 millions d'euros* [Quality education in Africa: EU launches a €100 million regional initiative for teachers] [Press release]. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/fr/ip_23_288/IP_23_288_FR.pdf

[27]UNESCO. (2025). *Pleins feux sur l'achèvement de l'éducation de base et l'apprentissage fondamental en Afrique : Guider l'apprentissage fondamental* [Spotlight on basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa: Guiding foundational learning]. Global Education Monitoring Report. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397830

[28] **(**UNESCO, 2025)

[29](UNESCO, 2025, p. 53)

[30]UNICEF France. (2025, September 3). Coupes de l'APD : 6 millions d'enfants supplémentaires risquent d'être déscolarisés l'an prochain [ODA cuts: 6 million additional children risk being out of school next year]. https://www.unicef.fr/article/coupes-de-lapd-6-millions-denfants-supplementaires-risquent-detre-descolarises-lan-prochain/

among the regions most affected. At the country level, the situation regarding education funding is no more encouraging. “Unfortunately, in Africa, public funding for education has declined proportionally rather than increased in recent years.”[31] This reality regarding education funding is not conducive to promoting quality education on the continent.

1.8. The Challenge of Gender Parity

Culturally and professionally, women remain at a disadvantage compared with men in terms of access to education and employment opportunities beyond the roles traditionally assigned to them. According to the African Union Commission, child marriage and early pregnancy are factors that contribute to educational inequalities between girls and boys. “If all girls completed secondary school, child marriage could be virtually eliminated and the risk of early motherhood reduced by two-thirds. This is particularly important given the negative effects of child marriage and early pregnancy, not only on girls throughout their lives, but also on their families, communities, and society as a whole.”[32] This gender-related barrier compounds the other factors contributing to school exclusion, leaving girls more vulnerable than boys to being excluded from education or dropping out of school.

1.9. Data Gaps

Significant gaps remain in the availability of educational data in Africa. The various sources consulted for this study highlight the extent of this data gap. For example, many officials responsible for national Catholic school networks whom we contacted as part of this study indicated that they did not have access to precise data on the schools under their responsibility. Others provided only limited data in response to our requests for specific figures.

These data gaps in the education sector are also highlighted by UNESCO. The organization states: “Regarding the lack of data, it should be noted that, as has already been suggested, considerable gaps remain for many countries: for 20 of the 54 countries, less than half of the expected observations are available. Furthermore, for 16 countries, the most recent administrative data in the UIS database date from before 2018.”[33] The World Bank, by contrast, estimates that Africa will need 11 million additional teachers by 2030 to ensure access to education for all children, compared with UNESCO’s estimate. The four-million difference between these estimates highlights the persistent challenges involved in accurately assessing the state of education across Africa.

1.10. Beyond the Numbers: The Challenge of Educational Quality

The school system in Africa, as it is currently organized, does not allow the majority of children to sufficiently develop the targeted skills. Indeed, according to UNESCO, “The report reviews the latest attempt to harmonize data on learning outcomes in Africa, which finds that only 10.8% of

[31]Unfortunately, in Africa, public financing for education has decreased proportionally rather than increased in recent years.

[32]African Union Commission. (2025, March). *Stratégie continentale pour l’éducation en Afrique 2026–2035 : Un cadre d’action* [Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026–2035: A framework for action].

[33]Global Education Monitoring Report Team, African Centre for School Leadership, VVOB, Association for the Development of Education in Africa, Education Sub-Saharan Africa, Forum for African Women Educationalists, & African Union. (2025). *Pleins feux sur l’achèvement de l’éducation de base et l’apprentissage fondamental en Afrique, 2025 : Guider l’apprentissage fondamental* [Spotlight on basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa, 2025: Lead for foundational learning]. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397830_fre

children achieve the minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics by the end of primary school-a level required to continue their education and fulfill their potential."[34] School enrollment is not an end in itself. The quality of education is the ultimate goal of schooling. However, in Africa, the quality of education remains a major challenge, as school conditions are still cause for concern in many countries. Therefore, it is true that we must redouble our efforts to end the exclusion of children from school and school dropout. It is also urgent to ensure the conditions that will allow African children and youth to benefit from a quality education.

1.11. The Overlooked Contribution of Religious and Private Initiatives to Education in Africa

The silence of UNESCO and the African Union regarding the role of religious denominations in education in Africa is evident from the documents reviewed. The studies analyzed and published by these organizations make no mention of the contribution of religious denominations, particularly that of the Catholic Church, to education in Africa. Consequently, the present study is original in that it provides additional insights that contribute to a better understanding not only of the Church's contribution to education, but also of its needs in this area.

The points mentioned above help to provide an understanding of the general and current context of education in Africa. They also describe the context in which the Church strives to ensure the schooling of millions of children across the continent. This context is characterized by insufficient investment, a shortage of teachers, a large number of out-of-school children and school dropouts, overcrowded classrooms, and the failure of children to acquire the competencies that schooling is intended to provide, among other challenges.

[34] Global Education Monitoring Report Team, African Centre for School Leadership, VVOB, Association for the Development of Education in Africa, Education Sub-Saharan Africa, Forum for African Women Educationalists, & African Union. (2025). *Pleins feux sur l'achèvement de l'éducation de base et l'apprentissage fondamental en Afrique, 2025 : Guider l'apprentissage fondamental* [Spotlight on basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa, 2025: Lead for foundational learning]. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397830
"The report examines the most recent efforts undertaken to harmonize data on learning outcomes in Africa. The analysis shows that only 10.8% of children achieve the minimum level of proficiency in reading and mathematics by the end of primary education. Yet this level of proficiency is an essential prerequisite for enabling students to continue their educational journey under good conditions and to fully develop their abilities and potential."

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH TO EDUCATION IN AFRICA, ACCORDING TO THE HOLY SEE'S STUDY BASED ON 2024 STATISTICS

2.1. General Overview

Secularization [35],that has developed in the West over recent decades has contributed to a divergence in the way the role of religions and churches in society and the public sphere is understood in Africa, on the one hand, and in Western Europe, on the other. From a distance, many Westerners do not fully recognize the significant public role played by churches in various areas of public life in Africa, particularly in education. At the time of independence, some African states had no schools at all, as the provision of education had been entrusted to Christian denominations and missionaries.[36] In Africa, the Catholic Church has made significant investments in education through the establishment of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, vocational institutions, and, in some countries, higher education institutions.

This historical dimension of the Church's involvement in education is compounded by the inability of African states to provide schooling for all children, largely due to insufficient resources. Catholic education in Africa is therefore both a historical legacy and a response to a significant social need. In many villages, Catholic schools are the only educational institutions available. As a result, only a very small minority of parents in Africa can choose which schools their children attend. Regardless of their religious or cultural beliefs, many Africans living in rural areas have no schooling option other than the Catholic school.[37]

Beyond these historical and social considerations, Catholic education within national education systems is also an expression of democracy, insofar as one of the fundamental pillars of democracy is the plurality of opinions and conceptions of the good life within society. The existence of Catholic schools in Africa, alongside public schools, schools affiliated with other religions or denominations, and private schools, is evidence of the freedom parents enjoy choosing the education they wish to provide for their children.

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[35] « Mais une chose est le constat unanimement admis concernant le peu d'intérêt des Occidentaux et, parmi eux, des Européens, pour la question de Dieu ou de la religion » ["But one thing is the universally acknowledged observation that Westerners, and among them Europeans, show little interest in the question of God or religion"] (Ledure, 2014, p. 8,translation).
Ledure, Y. (2014). *Sécularisation et spiritualité : Approche anthropologique du christianisme* [Secularization and spirituality: An anthropological approach to Christianity]. Lessius.

[36] "This is the case in the former Belgian colonies (Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi)". (Ngoy Kahahwa, 2021, pp. 207–212, translation). Nestor Ngoy Kahahwa, *Écoles catholiques en République démocratique du Congo face à la paix, la réconciliation et l'environnement* [Catholic schools in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the face of peace, reconciliation, and the environment], in J.-P. Niyigena (Ed.), *Éducation à la paix et à l'environnement : Interrogations et perspectives de l'école catholique* [Peace and environmental education: Questions and perspectives on Catholic education] (pp. 207–212). L'Harmattan.

[37] Nongo Aziagbia, N. D. (2021). Enseignement catholique dans le processus de réconciliation en République centrafricaine [Catholic education in the reconciliation process in the Central African Republic]. In J.-P. Niyigena (Ed.), *Éducation à la paix et à l'environnement : Interrogations et perspectives de l'école catholique* [Peace and environmental education: Questions and perspectives on Catholic education] (pp. 171-182). L'Harmattan.

2.2.1. The Diversity of Catholic Schools in the Context of Colonialism

In Africa, formal education as we know it today through the school system is one of the legacies of the historical encounter between the West and Africa. In many African countries, the provision of formal education was entrusted to the major Christian churches-namely, the Catholic Church, Protestant churches, and the Anglican Church-in accordance with the educational policies promoted by the respective colonial powers.

For example, education was largely entrusted to the Catholic Church in the regions administered by Belgium during the colonial period. This helps explain the large number of Catholic schools in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. By contrast, the former French colonies, under the 1905 law establishing the separation of church and state, did not develop as extensive a network of Catholic schools as the former Belgian or British colonies.

Catholic schools, in their relationship with African states, remain largely shaped by the legacy of the former colonial framework. However, there are some exceptions. In Côte d'Ivoire, although it was formerly a French colony, the state contributes to the funding of children enrolled in Catholic schools.[38]

2.1.2. Catholic Schools: Schools Open to All

Catholic schools welcome children and young people without discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, culture, or philosophical beliefs. "Although Catholic schools are the result of private initiatives, they provide a service of public interest. They fulfill this role in partnership with other public institutions and educational authorities, within a spirit of dialogue and mutual respect. Through their presence, Catholic schools therefore uphold educational and religious pluralism and, above all, safeguard the freedom and right of every family to choose the education they wish for their children."[39] For example, in Niger, the secretary general is Muslim; in Senegal, the majority of children and young people in Catholic schools are Muslim. Catholics account for only 28% of the students[40]. According to a Cameroonian bishop who heads a diocese with a religiously diverse population, the Catholic school is "a privileged setting in which the Church reaches out to the world, welcomes non-Catholics into its structures as a sign of Christ's universal love, and seeks to foster a genuine humanism."[41] Catholic schools in Africa provide a space where different segments of society come together.

2.1.3. Catholic Schools Renowned for the Quality of Education

The quality of education is one of the major challenges facing education systems in Africa. Data from across the continent confirm a significant quality gap between public and Catholic schools. Catholic schools benefit from leadership that places a strong emphasis on effective organization

[38] Appendix 3

[39] Rey, D. (2010). *Urgence éducative : L'école catholique en débat* [Educational emergency: Catholic education under debate]. Salvator.

[40] Appendix 3.

[41] Hourgo Yaouda, B. (2019). L'école catholique à Yagoua et l'accueil des non-catholiques [The Catholic school in Yagoua and the welcoming of non-Catholics]. In J.-P. Niyigena (Ed.), *Religions et défis actuels de l'école* [Religions and current challenges facing the school] (p. 305). Éditions des Jésuites.

despite having fewer resources, sometimes even fewer than those available to public schools. Academic achievement rates are significantly higher in Catholic schools than in public schools.

2.1.4. Catholic Schools: A Contextualized Educational Project in Africa

Since 2017, a process of renewal and contextualization of Catholic education has been underway. This process culminated in the development of the African Educational Pact in 2022. It seeks to position Catholic schools as a catalyst for the continent's sociocultural, political, and economic transformation by responding to contemporary challenges.[42].

2.1.5. Catholic School and the Formation of an Understanding of Religious Faith and Culture in Africa

The African continent is deeply religious, and religious faith plays an important role in everyday life. However, religious convictions can sometimes lead individuals to adopt attitudes or practices that are contrary to human rights or the dignity of human life. This may occur, for example, when people refuse medical treatment or choose not to send their children to school. In some cases, young adolescent girls are also married in accordance with cultural practices. "Catholic schools must confront the distortions of religion which, like any other form of alienation, distance Africans from the very essence of the Christian faith: to free us from fear and death, regardless of where they originate."[43] The Catholic school is a setting in which both an understanding of religious faith and an appreciation of culture are developed, within a framework grounded in human rights and a commitment to combating alienation.

2.1.6. Data Sources

This chapter examines the contribution of the Catholic Church to education, as well as its needs in this area. From a quantitative perspective, the chapter draws on two principal sources: (1) data collected in 2024 by the Dicastery for Culture and Education, an organ of the Holy See responsible for Catholic education worldwide; and (2) data provided by 14 African countries through their national secretariats for Catholic education.

2.2. The Catholic Church's Contribution to Education in Africa Based on the Holy See's 2024 Report

This report compiles data on student enrollment and educational institutions across Africa. It sheds light on several key variables, including regional differences, continuity between educational levels, and the challenges facing Catholic education in Africa.

2.2.1. The Catholic Church: One of the Largest Non-State Education Providers in Africa

The document provided by the Dicastery for Culture and Education states that "Africa remains by far the leading continental hub for Catholic education, accounting for approximately 43.3% of the global share." This highlights the extent to which, for historical, political, social, and economic

[42] Sayaogo, G. (2021). École catholique au Burkina Faso et défis d'éduquer à la paix [Catholic education in Burkina Faso and the challenges of educating for peace]. In J.-P. Niyigena (Ed.), *Éducation à la paix et à l'environnement : Interrogations et perspectives de l'école catholique* [Peace and environmental education: Questions and perspectives on Catholic education] (pp. 213–220). L'Harmattan.

[43] Niyigena, J.-P. (2018). La mission dans la cité : Cas de l'école catholique [Mission in the city: The case of the Catholic school]. In J.-P. Niyigena (Ed.), *La mission hier et aujourd'hui* [Mission yesterday and today] (p. 245). Éditions des Jésuites.

reasons, states rely on partners to help meet the continent's substantial educational needs. In 2024, the total number of Catholic schools across all educational levels stood at 88,057. Total student enrollment was estimated at 30,972,911 across nursery, primary, secondary/intermediate, and higher education institutions. When ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical faculties are included, this figure rises to 31,375,049.

According to the Holy See's report, a document provided by the Dicastery for Culture and Education, the distribution of Catholic schools across Africa indicates that Catholic education plays what the report describes as a "structural" role in some regions, while in others it fulfills a "subsidiary" role, according to the same document.

2.2.2. The geographical distribution of Catholic education in Africa reveals an extensive network

Geographic Area	Country	Students	Schools	Catholics	Percentage of Catholics
East Africa	17	17.2 million	46 486	111.8 million	23,6 %
Central Africa	9	9.1 million	21 388	88.7 million	42,3 %
West Africa	16	4.1 million	17 966	65.4 million	14,5 %
North Africa	7	0.1 million	547	13.5 million	5,0 %
Southern Africa	5	0.4 million	1 345	9.1 million	12,5 %

According to these figures, East Africa is the region with the largest number of children and young people enrolled in Catholic schools. However, the role of Catholic schools within national education systems determines whether Catholic education plays a structural or a supplementary role in those systems.

2.2.3. Catholic Schools: Responding to Inadequate Public Education Provision

According to the Holy See, Catholic schools play two distinct roles in the field of education in Africa. On the one hand, Catholic education "is subsidiary because it complements public provision, addresses needs that are not fully met, and often operates in coordination with national and local authorities." On the other hand, Catholic education "is structural because, in many countries, any reduction in its capacity would have immediate consequences for access to education, the continuity of educational pathways, and the stability of communities." Whether its role is subsidiary or structural, Catholic education responds to an essential and vital need in an Africa where investment in education remains insufficient.

2.2.4. Countries Where Catholic Education Plays a Structural Role

According to the Vatican report, the Democratic Republic of Congo stands out as the continent's leading hub of Catholic education, both in terms of the number of schools (17,216) and the number of students enrolled across the various educational levels (7.90 million). Without Catholic schools, the education system in these countries would be reduced to a fraction of its current capacity. The same applies to Rwanda, Burundi, Malawi, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, and Lesotho.

2.2.5. Countries Where Catholic Education Plays a Subsidiary Role

These are countries in which Catholic schools account for a relatively small proportion of the overall education system. For example, in Mali, Catholic education accounts for only 1% of the school system. The same is true in many other countries, particularly former French colonies, although there are some exceptions.

According to our research conducted in 2026 among national Catholic education officials in 15 African countries, for example, Catholic education in Cameroon accounts for 25% of nursery schools and 22% of primary schools. At the secondary level, Catholic schools account for 14% of all schools. In the Central African Republic, Catholic secondary schools account for 20% of schools, while at the primary level they account for 11%.

2.2.6. Distribution by Educational Level

Levels	Schools	Students	Schools (%)	Students (%)
Nursery	22 125	2 797 027	25,2 %	9,0 %
Primary	44 404	20 727 465	50,6 %	66,9 %
Secondary / intermediary	20 553	7 252 194	23,4 %	23,4 %
Higher Education	715	196 225	0,8 %	0,6 %
Total	**87 797**	**30 972 911**	**100 %**	**100**

2.2.7. Nursery: A Weak Link

According to the Holy See's report, nursery remains a weak link. Many children still lack access to this level of education, also referred to as early childhood or nursery education. In 2024, the Catholic school network comprised 22,125 nursery schools serving 2,797,027 students. This represents only 9% of students enrolled in Catholic schools across Africa.

According to the Holy See, nursery education needs to be strengthened in order to address inequalities at their root. This means that the lack of access to nursery education constitutes a source of inequality in learning opportunities. Children who do not benefit from nursery do not have the same prospects of academic success as those who have access to it.

2.2.8. Primary Education: Rising Enrollment

The Catholic school network in Africa is not immune to the effects of demographic growth and is striving to adapt accordingly. Primary education is the segment experiencing the strongest growth, with enrollment increasing from 19,773,661 to 20,727,465 students between 2023 and 2024, an increase of 953,804 students, or 4.8%. The largest number of children enrolled in Catholic schools are in primary education, accounting for 66.9% of total enrollment. This demonstrates that the Catholic Church's most significant contribution to education in Africa is at the primary level.

2.2.9. Secondary Education: Declining Enrollment

The Catholic school network is also affected by declining enrollment at the secondary level. This reflects the broader context of education in Africa, where school dropout contributes to lower enrollment in secondary education than in primary education. According to the Holy See's study,

the average out-of-school rate is 18.4% at the primary level, compared with 39.4% at the secondary level. The out-of-school rate therefore more than doubles at the secondary level.

In terms of enrollment figures, secondary education accounts for 23.4% of children and young people enrolled in Catholic schools, representing less than half the number enrolled at the primary level. According to figures provided by the Vatican, Catholic schools lose 13,475,271 students after the primary level, representing 64.99% of students who leave the Catholic school network. The report does not indicate whether these young people transfer to other education systems or leave school altogether.

Data provided by UNESCO corroborate the finding that school dropout increases at the secondary level. The Holy See's report further notes that one of the major challenges facing education in Africa is the difficulty of transitioning from primary to secondary education.

2.3. Challenges Facing Catholic Schools in Africa According to the Holy See

In its report, the Holy See identifies two broad categories of challenges: those related to enrollment figures and those concerning the quality of education.

2.3.1. Challenges Reflected in the Data

The document begins by identifying a challenge that is common to education in Africa as a whole and is not specific to Catholic education: the difficulty of entering the school system and of continuing along an educational pathway beyond primary school. The data below confirm this weakness. According to the Holy See, approximately 44.2 million children are excluded from primary education, while approximately 59.8 million adolescents and young people do not attend secondary or intermediate education.

The document highlights the impact of demographic growth on the increasing number of children and young people who remain out of school. "Compared with 2023, the number of children out of primary school increased by approximately 3.0 million, while the number of adolescents and young people out of secondary school increased by approximately 2.2 million." Each year, the number of children who remain out of school increases, even though the overall number of children enrolled in school is also generally rising.

The document then identifies weaknesses that are specific to Catholic education. First, it points to weaknesses related to the geographical distribution of Catholic education across Africa. Although Catholics constitute a very small minority in some African regions, Catholic schools can nevertheless be found there. While the geographical distribution of Catholic education across Africa reveals an extensive network, this network is not evenly distributed. East Africa, comprising 17 countries, has the largest number of students (17.2 million), the largest number of schools (46,486), and the largest Catholic population (111.8 million). Central Africa, comprising nine countries, has stronger structural characteristics, with 9.14 million students, 21,388 schools, and a weighted Catholic population share of 42.3%.

The primary school network is shrinking even as the school-age population grows. The report states: "The density of the primary school network is decreasing from approximately 200 to 194 Catholic schools per million children of primary school age, as the number of schools declines while the school-age population increases." The number of schools is declining. It has fallen from

88,711 to 88,057 schools, a decrease of 654 schools, representing a 0.73% decline. This poses a risk of overcrowded classrooms. The report notes that "the average number of students per school has risen from 348 to 356, an increase of 2.5 percent. For example, the Holy See also points out other consequences of this threat: a slightly reduced institutional base; more intensive use of infrastructure; and potential pressures on classrooms, staff, space, and educational quality." This is evident in the case of the Republic of Congo. The report states the following: "Between 2023 and 2024, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the number of students will increase by 153,273, or 2.0 percent, while the number of schools will decrease by 2,327, or 11.9 percent. The average number of students per school thus rose from approximately 396 to 459, representing an increase of nearly 15.8 percent. (…) This trend indicates significant pressure on existing capacity."

This contrast exacerbates the demographic pressure on schools. As a result, classrooms are becoming increasingly overcrowded. This is because, on the one hand, the number of students enrolled in Catholic schools in Africa continues to rise, and, on the other hand, the number of out-of-school children continues to increase due to demographic trends. The Holy See's report highlights a trend that should put the African Catholic education network on alert: the increase in the number of Catholics on the continent. The number of Catholics has increased by 6.4% compared to the previous year. This leads to a rise in the potential demand for education. Although Catholic schools welcome all children without distinction, it must be acknowledged that these schools are founded by Catholics and that Catholics are the first to send their children there.

According to the Holy See's report, the network of Catholic schools in Africa faces challenges regarding the rigor and efficiency of data collection and management. The data culture still needs to be strengthened. This was also noted during our research with national leaders of Catholic education in Africa. The following chapters will address this challenge.

2.3.2. Challenges Related to the Quality of Education

The Holy See's report expresses concern about the challenges to the quality of education within the Catholic education network in Africa. It highlights the challenge of overcrowded classrooms, particularly at the primary level. West Africa, however, appears to be an exception, as the report notes that "infrastructure growth that outpaces enrollment growth may provide an opportunity to reduce average pressure, expand territorial coverage, and strengthen the network's public-service and social-cohesion functions." In other regions, overcrowded classrooms also place additional pressure on teachers. This may help explain the finding that, despite being enrolled in school, only a small minority of children acquire the competencies they are expected to develop. The quality of education is also identified as one of the factors contributing to school dropout between the primary and secondary levels.

The report identifies several factors that prevent children from continuing their education from primary to secondary school, including "the distance to schools, child labor, early marriage, insecurity, limited local provision, or changes in the collection and transmission of data." With regard to completion and dropout rates, the report points to a major concern: significant territorial and social inequalities that affect primary school completion. As a result, "the average primary school completion rate, for countries with valid data, is 65.7%; the population-weighted figure for children of primary school age is 68.3%." These figures suggest that the dropout rate remains very high, at around 35%.

Any response to the challenges reflected in the data must consider the quality of education. For example, making schooling compulsory, as is the case in some African countries, can increase the number of children enrolled in school. However, this may come at the expense of educational quality if additional classrooms are not built, and adequately trained teachers are not recruited. In this sense, addressing the challenge of out-of-school children may weaken the quality of education when a single teacher is responsible for a class of 80 students. Thus, according to the Holy See, "the response cannot therefore be limited to quantitative expansion." Any response to the challenges identified above, the Vatican report argues, "must incorporate the quality of learning, continuity between educational levels, support for families, teacher training, and financial sustainability."

The Holy See's 2024 report on Catholic education in Africa emphasizes the presence of Catholic schools across all educational levels, from nursery and primary to secondary and higher education. The figures are highly significant, as they demonstrate the role played by Catholic schools in Africa, although the report does not compare Catholic education with other forms of educational provision, whether public or private. Consequently, the report does not indicate what proportion of Africa's overall educational provision is accounted for by Catholic schools. Nevertheless, this report, which takes a broadly continental perspective, situates Catholic education within the wider educational context, particularly about the issue of children remaining out of school. The figures concerning the state of Catholic education across Africa's various regions are not accompanied by further analysis that would provide a deeper understanding of the underlying realities. The report therefore remains largely descriptive, focusing on general indicators such as the number of students, the number of schools, changes in these figures over time, the relationship between educational levels, and the impact of rapid demographic growth on Catholic education.

The report, which consists predominantly of statistical data, concludes by placing the crucial issue of educational quality at the center of educational concerns in the African context. Without going further into the matter, it shows that Catholic education in Africa will need to be developed by seeking a balance between quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement. School enrollment that does not take educational quality into account would, so to speak, constitute a false response to the problem of children remaining out of school and could ultimately contribute to perpetuating it. However, by presenting only the number of schools and students in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the report does not make it possible to assess concretely, for example, how continuity between educational levels is being addressed in specific contexts, how families are supported so that Catholic schools do not become a means of exacerbating inequalities, how teacher training is being addressed, or, finally, what the current state of financing for Catholic schools is.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CHURCH'S CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION IN AFRICA: A STUDY OF SOME COUNTRIES

To ensure greater objectivity and clarity, this study aims to further analyze the Church's contribution and needs in the field of education in Africa by examining the state of Catholic schools in 15 African countries, namely Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Kenya, Senegal, Equatorial Guinea, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Rwanda, Tanzania, and the Congo. This will help confirm or qualify the key assertions made in the Holy See's report and examine various indicators related to the quality of education, such as support for families, teacher training, and the funding of Catholic schools. The data provided to us dates from 2024, 2025, or 2026, depending on the country. The data from the Congo was collected in 2023.

3.1. Number of Students

How many students are there in Catholic schools across the 15 countries? What critical dialogue do these figures establish with data from the Holy See and those of international institutions such as UNESCO, the African Union, etc.?

Countries	Nursery	Primary Level	Secondary Level	Total by country
Mali	2 263	17 654	2 646	**22 563**
Central African Republic	7 589	69 747	13 249	**90 585**
Chad	5 072	58 248	34 713	**98 033**
Côte d'Ivoire	8 994	88 887	44 365	**142 246**
Senegal	16 850	72 681	39 315	**128 846**
Cameroon	47 298	207 420	123 509	**378 227**
Mauritius	–	15 778	18 142	**33 920**
Kenya	165 000	2 600 000	4 300 000	**7 065 000**
Zimbabwe	10 080	87 118	57 345	**154 543**
Congo	81 922	902 679	585 535	**1 570 136**
Burundi	–	492 000	53 852	**545 852**
DR Congo	109 928	4 760 397	1 987 859	**6 858 184**
Equatorial Guinea	8 438	18 563	9 253	**36 254**
Rwanda	196 610	942 536	347 702	**1 486 848**
Tanzania	496 500	612 150	431 607	**1 540 257**
TOTAL	**1 166 544**	**10 945 858**	**8 049 092**	**20 161 494**

3.2. Confirmation or correction of the elements of the Holy See's report

The data collected as part of this survey provide confirmation, clarification, and, on certain points, additional information regarding the figures presented in the Holy See's report. In particular, they confirm the predominance of elementary education in Catholic school systems, as well as the

relative scarcity of nursery education. However, they also highlight significant differences between countries. These data do not include the number of students enrolled in Catholic vocational schools.

3.2.1. Challenges in Ensuring Continuity Across Educational Levels

Reports from the Holy See, UNESCO, the African Union, UNICEF, and the World Bank show that there is a significant gap between primary and secondary education. According to data from 15 countries, this gap must be viewed in context. However, it is clear that access to nursery education remains unequal.

3.2.2. Analysis of Student Enrollment in Catholic Schools

The combined data available for the 15 countries for which information was provided amount to a total of 20,151,494 students across the three levels of education: nursery, primary, and secondary. The distribution of student numbers shows a strong concentration at the primary level, followed by secondary education, while the nursery level remains significantly less represented.

Level	**Total**	**Share of the Total**
Nursery	**1 156 544**	**5,74 %**
Primary	**10 945 858**	**54,31 %**
Secondary	**8 049 092**	**39,95 %**
Total	**20 151 494**	**100 %**

Thus, the available data indicate a total enrollment of 20,151,494 students across the three levels of education in the 15 countries. However, this figure cannot be directly compared with the figure of 31,375,049 students presented in the Holy See's study for Africa as a whole, since the two statistical datasets cover neither the same number of countries nor necessarily the same categories of educational institutions or the same data collection periods.

Nevertheless, the difference between the two estimates highlights the need for further harmonization of statistical data on Catholic education in Africa. Several countries with a strong presence of the Church in the education sector, notably Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and Malawi, are not included in the present table. Their inclusion could substantially alter the continental enrollment figures. It is therefore necessary to establish a more systematic statistical framework for documenting educational institutions, levels of education, and student enrollment based on common definitions.

Nevertheless, the available data for the 15 selected countries make it possible to confirm or further clarify several important trends.

3.2.3. A clear predominance of primary education remains evident

The data collected confirm the central role of primary education within Catholic education networks. Of the 20,151,494 students enrolled across the three levels of education in the 15 selected countries in 2026, 10,945,858 students are enrolled in primary education, representing 54.31% of total enrollment.

Secondary education accounts for 8,049,092 students, or 39.95%, while preschool education accounts for 1,156,544 students, or 5.74%. In other words, out of every 100 students recorded, approximately 54 are enrolled in primary education, 40 in secondary education, and 6 in preschool. The predominance of primary education is therefore particularly clear. With more than half of total enrollment (54.31%), primary education constitutes the main level of schooling within the networks studied. Secondary education nevertheless represents a substantial proportion, accounting for nearly 40% of students, which reflects a significant presence of Catholic education at this level. The highest primary-school enrollments are recorded in the Democratic Republic of Congo (4,760,397), Kenya (2,600,000), Rwanda (942,536), Tanzania (612,150), and the Republic of the Congo (902,679). These five countries account for a considerable share of the primary-school enrollment presented in the table.

Two particular situations should nevertheless be highlighted. In Kenya, secondary education has a higher enrollment than primary education (4.3 million compared with 2.6 million). The same situation occurs in Mauritius, where secondary education accounts for 18,142 students, compared with 15,778 in primary education. These exceptions show that the structure of student enrollment varies considerably across national education systems and according to the organization of Catholic education networks.

3.2.4. The Relatively Low Enrollment in Nursery Education Confirmed

Nursery education remains the least represented category in the available data. It accounts for 1,156,544 students, or 5.74% of the total enrollment of 20,151,494 students recorded across the three levels of education. This proportion confirms the still relatively limited role of nursery education within the Catholic networks studied, compared with primary education, which accounts for 10,945,858 students, and secondary education, with 8,049,092 students.

Nursery enrollment nevertheless varies considerably from one country to another. It is particularly high in Tanzania (496,500 students), Rwanda (196,610), Kenya (165,000), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (109,928). The Republic of Congo, with 81,922 students, also records a significant nursery enrollment, while Cameroon has 47,298 students.

By contrast, enrollment is much lower in Mali (2,263), Chad (5,072), the Central African Republic (7,589), and Equatorial Guinea (8,438). This considerable variation reflects a high degree of heterogeneity in the development and organization of nursery education within the Catholic networks studied. It may be linked to several factors, including demographic dynamics, economic resources, national education policies, cultural traditions, the institutional capacities of Catholic education networks, as well as the ways in which nursery structures are established and operated. It may also be explained by differences in data collection and enumeration methods across countries.

The particularly significant role of Tanzania in nursery enrollment deserves specific attention. With 496,500 students, it accounts for approximately 42.9% of all nursery students recorded in the table. This figure significantly changes the overall picture of nursery education and shows that, in some Catholic networks, investment in early childhood education may have reached a considerable scale. Conversely, the low enrollment figures recorded in several countries may indicate that nursery education remains relatively underdeveloped within Catholic institutions. However, these differences should be interpreted with caution, as the absence or low level of reported data does

not necessarily mean that no educational provision exists. In some contexts, nursery institutions may fall under other Church structures, be managed by religious congregations, or may not be included within the statistical scope of the network under consideration.

The available data nevertheless tend to confirm that, despite significant enrollment figures in several countries, nursery education remains generally less developed than primary and secondary education within the networks studied. This situation deserves particular attention in the context of the development of Catholic education in Africa, given the importance of early childhood education in preparing children for primary school, supporting their cognitive and socio-emotional development, and building foundational learning skills.

The analysis thus highlights a dual reality: the relatively limited role of nursery education across the sample studied, but also the existence of national networks in which nursery education already constitutes a large-scale educational sector. This diversity calls for strengthening Catholic education policies and strategies by considering the specific realities of each country, while placing greater emphasis on equitable access to quality nursery education.

3.2.5. A Significant Difference Between Primary and Secondary Education

The data collected also highlight a significant gap between primary and secondary education. Primary education accounts for 10,945,858 students, compared with 8,049,092 students in secondary education.

The difference is therefore 2,896,766 students, equivalent to approximately 26.47% of primary enrollment. Nevertheless, secondary education represents 39.95% of the total number of students recorded, demonstrating that it occupies an important place within Catholic education networks.

The ratio between the two levels further clarifies this situation: for every 100 primary students, there are approximately 73.54 secondary students. The gap between the two levels is therefore significant, but secondary education remains much more strongly represented than was indicated in the previous analysis.

3.2.6. The Particular Impact of Kenya on the Enrollment Structure

Kenya is a particularly important case for interpreting the data. Its 4.3 million secondary students represent an exceptionally large share of the total secondary enrollment in the study. Its weight therefore has a strong influence on the overall structure of the three levels of education.

After excluding Kenya, the enrollment figures are as follows:

Nursery : 991 544 students
Primary : 8 345 858 students
Secondary : 3 749 092 students
Total : 13 086 494 students

The relative distribution, excluding Kenya, is therefore as follows:

Level	**Number without Kenya**	**S**hare
Nursery	991 544	**7,58 %**
Primary	8 345 858	**63,77 %**
Secondary	3 749 092	**28,65 %**
Total	**13 086 494**	**100 %**

Excluding Kenya, primary education therefore accounts for nearly two-thirds of students (63.77%), while secondary education represents only 28.65%. The ratio between the two levels becomes much more pronounced: for every 100 primary students, there are approximately 44.92 secondary students.

This comparison shows that the Kenyan data have a decisive effect on the aggregate enrollment structure. However, they should not be regarded as an anomaly to be excluded, but rather as a distinctive characteristic of the Catholic education network in Kenya. For the continental analysis, it is therefore methodologically relevant to present both the results including Kenya and those excluding Kenya, in order to better highlight the general trends.

3.2.7. The Differentiated Role of the Catholic Church in National Education Systems

The table also highlights the diversity of the role played by the Catholic Church in national education systems. In some countries, notably Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, and the Republic of Congo, the enrollment figures recorded point to a large-scale educational presence. In other countries, such as Mali and the Central African Republic, enrollment figures are much more limited.

This difference may be interpreted as an indicator of the institutional and historical position occupied by Catholic education in each country. However, it is important to distinguish between the notion of a "structural role" and that of a "subsidiary role." These categories cannot be established solely based on student enrollment.

They should also take into account the number of educational institutions, their geographical distribution, the levels of education they provide, their capacity, their relative share of the national education provision, and their contribution to vulnerable populations. Enrollment figures are therefore an important indicator, but they are not sufficient on their own to determine the Catholic Church's overall contribution to a country's education system.

3.2.8. Conclusion

Overall, the data from the 15 countries studied reveal a significant Catholic educational presence, with 20,151,494 students enrolled across the three levels of education. The distribution of enrollment remains dominated by primary education (54.31%), followed by secondary education (39.95%) and nursery education (5.74%).

The analysis nevertheless reveals considerable diversity across countries. The demographic and institutional weight of several networks, particularly those in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and the Republic of the Congo, strongly influences the aggregate

results. Kenya, in particular, has a significant impact on the share of secondary education, while Tanzania contributes substantially to nursery enrollment.

These findings therefore suggest that continental averages should not be interpreted as reflecting a homogeneous reality. Rather, they point to the existence of differentiated national models of Catholic education provision and organization. They also underscore the importance of greater harmonization of statistical data in order to establish, at the African level, comparable indicators covering educational institutions, students, teachers, levels of education, and operating conditions.

Finally, the gap observed between primary and secondary education should be interpreted with caution. Aggregate data by level do not make it possible to track the same student cohort longitudinally and therefore cannot automatically be equated with a school dropout rate. Nevertheless, they highlight a significant structural difference between primary and secondary enrollment, particularly when the effect of Kenya is excluded. This issue warrants further investigation in a subsequent study focusing, in particular, on transitions between levels, enrollment capacity, school fees, dropouts, transfers to other education networks, and the provision of technical and vocational education.

3.3. Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo: Reversal in Primary and Secondary Enrollment Figures

Level	Kenya	RDC	Kenya–DRC Gap
Nursery	165 000	109 928	**+55 072** Kenya
Primary	2 600 000	4 760 397	**–2 160 397** Kenya
Secondary	4 300 000	1 987 859	**+2 312 141** Kenya
Total	**7 065 000**	**6 858 184**	**+206 816** Kenya

Kenya therefore has 206,816 more students than the DRC across all three levels of education, representing a relatively small difference of 3.0%. However, this similarity in overall enrollment figures masks a considerable difference in their distribution.

3.3.1. A Very Different Enrollment Structure

In Kenya, secondary education constitutes the largest share of student enrollment: 4.3 million students, representing approximately 60.9% of all Catholic students recorded. Primary education accounts for 2.6 million students, or 36.8%, while nursery education represents only 2.3%. In the DRC, the situation is almost the reverse: primary education accounts for 4.76 million students, or approximately 69.4% of the total. Secondary education accounts for 1.99 million, or 29.0%, while nursery education represents only 1.6%.

3.3.2. Kenya: A Catholic Education Network with a Strong Presence in Secondary Education

Kenya stands out for the exceptional size of its secondary-school enrollment. With 4.3 million students, the country has more than twice as many secondary students as the DRC, even though the two countries have very similar overall enrollment figures. The share of secondary students in Kenya reaches 60.9%, compared with only 29.0% in the DRC. The difference is therefore nearly 32 percentage points.

This pattern suggests that the Kenyan Catholic school network has a particularly strong presence in secondary education. It also calls for a reassessment of the assumption that declining enrollment from primary to secondary education is necessarily a general feature of Catholic education networks across Africa.

This situation also raises an important question concerning student mobility and movement between different education networks. The case of Kenya, where secondary enrollment exceeds primary enrollment, could be explained, at least in part, by the admission into Catholic secondary schools of a significant number of students from other, non-Catholic education networks. Conversely, the situation observed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where secondary enrollment is significantly lower than primary enrollment, could indicate that some students who attended Catholic primary schools continue their secondary education in institutions belonging to other networks, irrespective of school dropout.

Differences in enrollment between the various levels of education should therefore not be interpreted solely in terms of the internal dynamics of the Catholic education network. They may also reflect patterns of student mobility between networks, which would need to be further investigated through longitudinal data capable of tracking students' educational pathways from one level to another.

3.3.3. DRC: A Very Clear Predominance of Primary Education

The DRC, by contrast, has an enrollment structure strongly concentrated in primary education. With 4,760,397 students, primary education accounts for nearly seven out of ten students in the Catholic school network under consideration. The Congolese primary education system thus has 2,160,397 more students than that of Kenya. Conversely, the DRC has 2,312,141 fewer secondary students than Kenya.

3.3.4. A Difference That Calls for Cautious Interpretation

However, it would be scientifically imprudent to conclude immediately that Kenya necessarily has a "more developed" Catholic education system at the secondary level than the DRC. The observed structure may depend on several factors: the historical organization of Catholic school networks; the distribution of schools across the different levels of education; national education policies; school-age demographics; the transition from primary to secondary education; the presence of other education providers; and the methods used to collect data and define statistical categories.

3.3.5. A Finding That Calls for Nuance

The Democratic Republic of Congo has 4,760,397 primary students and 1,987,859 secondary students. Kenya, however, presents exactly the opposite pattern: 2,600,000 primary students and 4,300,000 secondary students. This contrast is significant enough to Kenya–DRC comparison primarily calls for a more nuanced view of the claim that declining enrollment

between primary and secondary education is a general characteristic of Catholic education in Africa.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has 4,760,397 primary students and 1,987,859 secondary students. Kenya, however, presents exactly the opposite pattern: 2,600,000 primary students and 4,300,000 secondary students. This contrast is significant enough to warrant a specific comparative analysis of the two Catholic education systems. It shows that Catholic education networks across Africa are not homogeneous and that a single explanation based on school dropout is insufficient.

3.3.6. Interim Conclusion

The analysis of student enrollment across the 13 countries with usable data reveals three major characteristics. First, primary education remains the main level of Catholic education, accounting for 55.34% of the students recorded. Second, secondary education represents an exceptionally large proportion, at 41.26%, which calls for further analysis of educational pathways and transition mechanisms between the different levels, as well as possible movement between different education networks within the same country. Third, nursery education remains very weakly represented, accounting for only 3.39% of total enrollment.

These findings confirm certain general trends identified in previous analyses while also calling for a more nuanced interpretation. Above all, they highlight the importance of improving the continental statistical system. A reliable understanding of the Catholic Church's contribution to education in Africa requires harmonized, regularly updated data covering all countries, levels of education, and types of educational institutions.

The objective should therefore not be limited to determining how many students attend Catholic schools, but also to understanding where they are located, at which levels, under what conditions, and with what qualitative and quantitative contribution the Church participates in the realization of the right to education in Africa.

3.2. Number of Teachers in Selected Countries

How many teachers are there in Catholic schools in the countries that provided data on this question? Which kind of critical dialogue do these figures establish with data from the Holy See and those of international institutions such as UNESCO, the African Union, etc.?

COUNTRIES	NURSERY SCHOOLS	PRIMARY SCHOOLS	SECONDARY SCHOOLS	TOTAL
Burundi	1988	22364	856	25 208
Cameroon	1781	6 045	10 092	**17 918**
Côte d'Ivoire	312	2232	2 122	**4 666**
Mali	119	527	40	**686**
Mauritius	nr	869	1 529	2 428
Central African Republic	262	1080	532	1 936
DRC	5028	120 183	100 537	225 748
Republic of Congo	nr	Nr	2 900	2 900

Rwanda				43 453
Senegal	728	1883	1530	4 280
Chad	142	1 221	2 304	3 667
Zimbabwe	252	2 551	2 719	**5 522**
Equatorial Guinea	480	587	560	**1627**
Kenya	12 980	82 000	55 000	**149980**
Total				**490 019**

3.2.1. Interpretation of the Table

The table presents the number of teachers in Catholic education across three levels of education: Nursery, primary, and secondary. The data cover 14 countries: Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritius, the Central African Republic, the DRC, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Chad, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea, and Kenya. The overall total is 490,019 teachers.

However, a methodological caution is necessary: the data by level are incomplete for some countries. For Mauritius and the Republic of Congo, the number of nursery teachers is indicated as "nr"; for the Republic of Congo, the primary figure is also "nr." For Rwanda, only the total of 43,453 teachers is provided, without a breakdown by level. Percentages by level should therefore be calculated based on the data available, rather than on the total of 490,019 teachers.

3.2.2. Ranking of Countries by Total Number of Teachers

Rank	Countries	Total Number	Share of the total
1	DRC	225 748	46,07 %
2	Kenya	149 980	30,61 %
3	Rwanda	43 453	8,87 %
4	Burundi	25 208	5,14 %
5	Cameroon	17 918	3,66 %
6	Zimbabwe	5 522	1,13 %
7	Côte d'Ivoire	4 666	0,95 %
8	Senegal	4 280	0,87 %
9	Chad	3 667	0,75 %
10	Republique of Congo	2 900	0,59 %
11	Mauritius	2 428	0,50 %
12	Central African Republic	1 936	0,40 %
13	Equatorial Guinea	1 627	0,33 %
14	Mali	686	0,14 %
Total		**490 019**	**100 %**

The first observation is the very high geographical concentration of teacher numbers. The DRC alone accounts for 46.07% of all teachers recorded. Kenya accounts for 30.61%. Together,

these two countries therefore have 375,728 teachers, representing approximately 76.68% of the total. In other words, more than three-quarters of the teachers in the table are in the DRC and Kenya. If Rwanda is added, the three leading countries account for approximately 85.55% of the total. This concentration must be taken into consideration in any continental analysis, as the overall average is strongly influenced by these large Catholic education networks in Africa.

3.2.3. Distribution of Teachers by Level

For the countries where data by level are available, the figures are as follows:

Level	Known figure	Share of Disaggregated
Nursery	**24 072**	**5,39 %**
Primary	**241 542**	**54,11 %**
Secondary	**180 721**	**40,50 %**
Disaggregated Total	**446 335**	**100 %**

The total of 446,335 does not include the 43,453 teachers in Rwanda, as these are not disaggregated by level.

Although Kenya has a higher student enrollment than the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the latter has a larger number of teachers. This situation could be explained, in part, by the level of public funding allocated to Catholic education in the DRC. A similar trend also appears to emerge in Rwanda and Burundi.

However, this difference cannot be attributed solely to the level of funding. It may also be related to the geographical configuration and distribution of schools in these different countries. Indeed, the ratios between students, classrooms, and teachers can vary considerably from one school to another: a school enrolling a large number of students may have a limited number of classrooms and, consequently, a smaller teaching staff, while another school, enrolling fewer students but having greater infrastructure capacity, may have more classrooms and teachers.

These observations therefore call for student enrollment figures to be considered in relation to human resources, available infrastructure, and the financing arrangements for Catholic education. They also highlight the fact that a significant increase in student enrollment-the massification of education-does not guarantee an improvement in the quality of education. Quantitative expansion in access to schooling may, on the contrary, place additional pressure on infrastructure, staffing conditions, and teaching resources, making the quality of education a major concern alongside access to schooling.

3.2.4. Analysis of Nursery Education Level

The known number of nursery teachers is 24,072. The figure is particularly high in Kenya (12,980) and the DRC (5,028). Burundi also has 1,988 teachers, while Cameroon has 1,781. Kenya alone accounts for approximately 53.9% of the nursery teachers recorded in the available data.

This situation shows that the development of Catholic education in some countries is accompanied by a significant presence from early childhood onward. However, the generally low share of nursery education, approximately 5.4% of the disaggregated enrollment, indicates that this level remains significantly less developed than primary and secondary education.

3.2.5. Qualitative Interpretation

This low proportion may reflect several factors: the Church's historically stronger presence in primary education; more limited institutional coverage of nursery; the higher operating costs associated with nursery structures; the sometimes more limited public recognition or funding of nursery education; and an institutional priority given to compulsory schooling. The development of nursery education therefore potentially represents an important area for the expansion of Catholic education.

It should also be emphasized that, in many African countries, Catholic education has only relatively recently incorporated the nursery level into its institutional organization. This situation is part of an educational conception that was long influenced by the teaching of the Catholic Church, particularly by the guidelines set out in Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, published on December 31, 1929, which addressed the fundamental principles of Christian education and the various agents involved in education.

From this perspective, the family occupies a primary and fundamental place in the education of the child. The Church has therefore long favored an approach that did not encourage schooling at too early an age, considering that, during the first years of life, children should primarily benefit from the education and care provided by their families. The limited development of nursery education within Catholic institutions can therefore be understood, in part, considering this traditional conception of educational responsibilities.

The gradual integration of nursery education into Catholic education thus represents a relatively recent development that deserves further study. It can be linked to changes in education policies and to the progressive expansion of nursery education in Africa. In response to the growth of nursery provision offered by public systems and non-Catholic private networks, Catholic education has gradually been led to adapt its organization to meet new family expectations and respond to changes in the educational landscape.

This development deserves particular attention, as it reflects a process of institutional adaptation within Catholic education: while remaining committed to the primacy of the family's educational role, Catholic education appears to be increasingly recognizing the importance of nursery education as the first stage of a child's educational pathway and as a crucial setting for preparing children for subsequent learning. It therefore invites further examination of how the Church currently reconciles its understanding of family education with the emerging demands associated with early access to education.

3.2.6. Analysis of Primary Education Level

With 241,542 teachers, primary education constitutes the dominant level. It accounts for 54.11% of teachers whose level of education is known. The largest numbers are recorded in: DRC: 120,183; Kenya: 82,000; Burundi: 22,364; Cameroon: 6,045; Zimbabwe: 2,551; Côte d'Ivoire: 2,232;

Senegal: 1,883. The DRC alone accounts for nearly 49.8% of the primary school teachers included in the available data.

The predominance of primary education highlights the historical and strategic role of the Catholic Church in the field of basic education. Catholic education therefore appears to play a particularly important role in developing foundational skills, including literacy, the acquisition of basic knowledge, and moral and social education. This situation is particularly significant in contexts where public education systems do not always have sufficient capacity to meet the demand for schooling.

3.2.7. Analysis of Secondary Education Level

Secondary education accounts for 180,721 teachers, representing 40.50% of the reported total. The largest numbers are recorded in: DRC: 100,537; Kenya: 55,000; Cameroon: 10,092; Mauritius: 1,529; Senegal: 1,530; Zimbabwe: 2,719; Chad: 2,304.

The DRC alone accounts for approximately 55.6% of the secondary school teachers included in the data. In several countries, secondary education represents a very significant proportion, and in some cases even exceeds primary education. For example: Cameroon: 10,092 secondary school teachers compared with 6,045 primary school teachers; Mauritius: 1,529 secondary school teachers compared with 869 primary school teachers; Congo: 2,900 secondary school teachers, while data for primary education are not provided; Chad: 2,304 secondary school teachers compared with 1,221 primary school teachers; Zimbabwe: 2,719 secondary school teachers compared with 2,551 primary school teachers.

This shows that Catholic education is not limited to a basic education network. In several countries, it also has a well-developed secondary education network.

3.2.8. Primary-Secondary Comparison

The ratio between primary and secondary education is particularly revealing. Across the available data, there are 241,542 primary school teachers compared with 180,721 secondary school teachers. Primary education therefore has approximately 60,821 more teachers than secondary education.

The primary-to-secondary ratio is approximately 1.34 primary school teachers for every 1 secondary school teacher. The gap is therefore relatively limited. This suggests a significant continuity between basic education and secondary education within the Catholic education network. However, the situation varies considerably from one country to another. Some countries show a strong predominance of primary education, while others have a secondary education sector that is almost as large, or even larger.

3.3. Student Enrollment and Teaching Staff Ratios

How does the student–teacher ratio compare across countries, and what qualitative insights does it provide?

3.3.1. Analysis by Education Level

The comparison of the two tables also reveals a particularly important trend: the number of students increases sharply from nursery to primary education and remains very high at the secondary level, while the distribution of teachers is not always proportional to this structure.

At the primary level, there are 10,043,179 students, representing more than half of the total. This is therefore the level that generally requires the greatest teaching capacity. At the secondary level, enrollment reaches 7,463,557 students, accounting for more than 40% of the total. This figure is particularly significant because secondary education generally requires a higher degree of subject specialization among teachers. nursery education accounts for only 1,074,622 students, or 5.78%. However, this does not mean that its need for teachers is low: early childhood education often requires closer pedagogical supervision and more intensive teacher–student interaction.

3.3.2. Strong Demand for Education

With 20,161,494 students enrolled across the nursery, primary, and secondary levels, and an additional 141,110 students in vocational training across the 15 countries studied, the Catholic education network represents a considerable educational capacity. The large student populations at the primary and secondary levels demonstrate the significant role played by the Church in expanding access to education.

3.3.3. High Concentration of Human Resources

Teachers are highly concentrated in the DRC and Kenya. This concentration partly corresponds to their very large student populations. However, the case of Kenya is particularly interesting: 7.065 million students for 149,980 teachers, or approximately 47 students per teacher. The absolute number of teachers is therefore very high but remains relatively low in relation to the number of students. The number of teachers is not sufficient to measure quality.

It would be scientifically incorrect to automatically conclude that the country with the lowest ratio has the best education system. Quality also depends on teacher qualifications; initial and continuing training; working conditions; staff stability; remuneration; infrastructure; the actual number of students per class; teaching time; the availability of teaching materials; the quality of school governance. The student–teacher ratio is therefore an indicator of student support, rather than a comprehensive indicator of quality.

3.3.4. Significant Imbalance Between Students and Teachers

One of the main findings of the comparison is the existence of an imbalance between educational demand and the human resources available. Some countries have very large numbers of teachers in absolute terms but must simultaneously serve millions of students. Conversely, some countries have much smaller student populations but proportionally more teachers.

Three situations can therefore be distinguished:
High demand + high teaching capacity

→ The case of the DRC, although the student–teacher ratio remains under significant pressure.
High demand + teaching capacity relatively insufficient in relation to the number of students

→ Particularly evident in Kenya.
Smaller student populations + relatively high teaching capacity

→ The case of Mauritius and, to a lesser extent, Cameroon.

3.3.5. Comparative Synthesis

Dimension	**Main result**
Students	**18 581 358**
Dominant Level	**Primary: 54,05 %**
Second-Largest Level	**Secondary : 40,17 %**
Nursery	**5,78 %**
Teachers Recorded	**490 019**
Largest Number of Teachers	**DRC : 225 748**
Second	**Kenya : 149 980**
Lowest Ratio	**Mauritius : ≈14 Students per Teacher**
Highest Ratio	**Kenya : ≈47 Students per Teacher**
Another High Ratio	**Centrafrique : ≈47 Students per Teacher**

Countries	**Students– Boys**	**Students– Girls**	**Students – Total**	**Teachers – Men**	**Teachers – Women**	**Teachers – Total**
Mali	951	308	**1 259**	80	20	**100**
Central African Republic	217	307	**524**	38	24	**62**
Chad	0	0	**0**	0	0	**0**
Côte d'Ivoire	550	300	**850**	205	85	**290**
Senegal	1 120	826	**1 946**	115	24	**139**
Cameroon	2 852	2 088	**4 940**	246	165	**411**
Mauritius	175	25	**200**	23	7	**30**
Kenya	45 000	40 000	**85 000**	3 200	2 300	**5 500**
Zimbabwe	350	150	**500**	8	4	**12**
Burundi	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
DRC	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Equatorial Guinea	523	323	**846**	108	44	**152**
Rwanda	13 302	13 683	**26 985**	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tanzania	NIL	NIL	**18 060**	NIL	NIL	**NIL**

3.4. Catholic Vocational Training in Africa: Presence, Capacity and Challenges

Countries	Students – Boys	Students– Girls	Total Students	Teachers – Men	Teachers – Women	Total Teachers
Mali	951	308	**1 259**	80	20	**100**
Central African Republic	217	307	**524**	38	24	**62**
Chad	0	0	**0**	0	0	**0**
Côte d'Ivoire	550	300	**850**	205	85	**290**
Senegal	1 120	826	**1 946**	115	24	**139**
Cameroon	2 852	2 088	**4 940**	246	165	**411**
Mauritius	175	25	**200**	23	7	**30**
Kenya	45 000	40 000	**85 000**	3 200	2 300	**5 500**
Zimbabwe	350	150	**500**	8	4	**12**
Burundi	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
DRC	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Equatorial Guinea	523	323	**846**	108	44	**152**
Rwanda	13 302	13 683	**26 985**	RAS	RAS	**RAS**
Tanzania	NIL	NIL	**18 060**	NIL	NIL	**NIL**
GRAND TOTAL	**65 040**	**58 010**	**141 110**	**4 023**	**2 649**	**6 696**

The available data on Catholic vocational schools highlight a significant presence of the Church in the field of technical and vocational education in Africa. This presence exists within a continental context marked by rapid population growth, a very young population, and persistent difficulties in accessing education and employment.

The information collected through our research shows that vocational training is already an important component of Catholic educational activity and can play a strategic role in skills development, employment integration, and the socio-economic development of young people and the continent.

East Africa emerges as one of the main centers of this presence. Kenya alone has 85,000 students enrolled in the vocational institutions identified and 5,500 teachers. Rwanda has 26,985 students, while Tanzania has 18,060 students according to the reported total. These figures illustrate the scale of the vocational training capacity developed in this part of the continent. The particularly significant weight of Kenya should be emphasized: with 85,000 students, it represents by far the largest share of the enrollment recorded among the countries for which complete student data are

available. Vocational training thus appears to be a sector in which the Church already has considerable institutional capacity.

However, this presence is not limited to East Africa. Vocational institutions are also recorded in Mali, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cameroon, Mauritius, Zimbabwe, and Equatorial Guinea. Student numbers vary considerably from one country to another: 1,259 students in Mali, 524 in the Central African Republic, 850 in Côte d'Ivoire, 1,946 in Senegal, 4,940 in Cameroon, 200 in Mauritius, 500 in Zimbabwe, and 846 in Equatorial Guinea.

This diversity confirms that the presence of vocational education within the Catholic education network in Africa is based on very different national realities. Some countries have institutions serving several thousand or even tens of thousands of young people, while others have smaller-scale networks. Development strategies for vocational training must therefore take into account existing capacities, local needs and opportunities, as well as the employment opportunities specific to each country.

The question of teachers nevertheless remains important when assessing the training capacity of these institutions. The data collected show significant teaching staff numbers in several countries. Kenya has 5,500 teachers, Cameroon 411, Côte d'Ivoire 290, Senegal 139, Equatorial Guinea 152, and Mali 100. The Central African Republic has 62 teachers, Mauritius 30, and Zimbabwe 12. The available data reveal significant differences in the number of teachers across countries. This diversity is particularly evident between countries with large networks, such as Kenya, and those where the recorded numbers are much more limited. It shows that Catholic vocational training does not have the same scale everywhere and that its level of development varies considerably from one national context to another. The availability of detailed data for some countries and their absence for others is also an important factor to consider when interpreting the results.

The participation of girls is another significant element. In several countries, they represent a substantial share of students enrolled in vocational institutions. They account for approximately 47% of enrollment in Kenya and slightly more than half in Rwanda. They also represent more than 40% of students in Senegal and Cameroon. This participation shows that Catholic vocational institutions can make an important contribution to young women's access to technical and professional skills.

Compared with conventional secondary education, vocational education remains a very weak component. Yet, in an African context where youth unemployment is a major social and economic issue, technical and vocational education should be regarded as a priority pathway.

The data collected reinforce several trends identified in the Holy See's report, particularly the importance of East Africa, the diversity of national contexts, the need for differentiated strategies, and the importance of strengthening technical and vocational training. These findings also raise questions for the African Educational Pact, insofar as its focus on social skills related to living together appears to give insufficient attention to technical and vocational skills.

3.5. Financing of Catholic Schools

Pays	State	Parents	NGOs
Mali		100%	
Mauritius	100%		
Cameroon	10%	80%	10%
Senegal			
Congo	5%	95%	
Côte d'Ivoire	65%	30%	
Chad		100%	
Central African Republic		100%	
Kenya	30%	70%	
Zimbabwe		100%	
Burundi	90%	10%	
DRC	80%	20%	
Equatorial Guinea	80%	20%	

From the outset, one observation deserves to be made. In Senegal, the Catholic school network is still awaiting payment of the subsidies granted by the State for the 2025–2026 academic year. It can therefore be concluded that there are irregularities in the disbursement of public funding to Catholic schools. The Ivorian network, by contrast, reports that the funding allocated by the State is insufficient to cover the operating costs of Catholic schools. According to their figures, at the secondary level, the State funds students at 100%, whereas at the primary level, it provides only 30%. This, to some extent, puts the contribution of States to the operation of Catholic schools into perspective.

The available data highlight a wide diversity of financing models for Catholic schools in Africa. This diversity concerns both the respective contributions of the State and parents and, more broadly, the degree to which schools depend on a primary source of funding.

3.5.1. A Wide Diversity of Financing Models

Parents are the main source of funding in a significant number of the countries studied. Their contribution reaches 100% in Mali, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Zimbabwe. It also represents 95% in Congo, 80% in Cameroon, and 70% in Kenya. These figures show that, in several Catholic education systems, the financial viability of schools depends primarily on families' ability to contribute.

This situation directly raises the issue of the social accessibility of Catholic education. When families bear all or the vast majority of schooling costs, access to Catholic schools can become more difficult for low-income households. The ability to pay school fees then becomes a determining factor in access to an education that is nevertheless intended to be open to all.

3.5.2. A Highly Variable State Contribution

The State's financial contribution also varies considerably from one country to another. It reaches 100% in Mauritius, 90% in Burundi, 80% in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea, 65% in Côte d'Ivoire, 30% in Kenya, 10% in Cameroon, and 5% in Congo.

The updated figure of 65% for Côte d'Ivoire is particularly important. Côte d'Ivoire remains a case where the State is the main contributor to the financing of Catholic schools, since its contribution exceeds that of parents, which stands at 30%. However, unlike a situation in which the State would provide almost all the funding, the Ivorian model appears to be a mixed model, combining a majority public contribution with a substantial contribution from families.

This configuration distinguishes Côte d'Ivoire from countries where parents provide 100% of the funding. It also shows that public funding does not necessarily mean the disappearance of family contributions: the two sources can operate in a complementary manner.

3.5.3. Different Historical and Institutional Models

Another pattern can be observed in some countries where public funding is particularly significant. This situation may be linked to historical agreements between the Church and the State, sometimes inherited from the colonial period. In these systems, some Catholic schools may benefit from public support, while other institutions, particularly those established later, rely more heavily on contributions from parents.

This distinction is particularly relevant when analyzing the former Belgian colonies, where the coexistence of different financing arrangements may explain some of the disparities observed between schools. Thus, the percentages should not be interpreted solely as economic indicators. They also reflect different legal, historical, institutional, and political frameworks across countries.

3.5.4. Financing as an Indicator of Social Accessibility

The type of financing is an important indicator of the social accessibility of Catholic education. In principle, the greater the State's contribution, the greater the potential to reduce the direct financial burden borne by families. Public funding can therefore help strengthen social inclusion and make Catholic education accessible to a larger number of children.

However, financial accessibility does not automatically guarantee the quality of education. Catholic schools that receive substantial public funding may face challenges similar to those encountered by the public education system: growing enrollment, inadequate infrastructure, shortages of teaching materials, difficulties in recruiting or qualifying teachers, and budgetary constraints. It is therefore important to distinguish between two dimensions: access to schooling and the quality of education provided. High levels of public funding may promote the former without necessarily resolving all the challenges associated with the latter.

3.5.5. The Limitations of Financing Primarily Provided by Parents

Conversely, when Catholic schools are financed primarily or exclusively by parents, the main challenge concerns equity and the inclusion of vulnerable families. In countries where parents cover 100% of the costs, Catholic schools may become difficult to access for families with limited financial resources. This issue is particularly important for the Church, since the Catholic educational mission has a social dimension and seeks to serve the most vulnerable populations.

According to the Archbishop of Bamenda in Cameroon, Catholic schools financed by parents can therefore become financially inaccessible to some children from Catholic families, particularly when their parents or families do not have the means to pay school fees.[44] To address this challenge, the African Compact on Education recommends that Catholic schools operating primarily through family contributions establish solidarity mechanisms, particularly to enable a proportion of talented children from vulnerable families to attend these schools. This approach makes financial solidarity a concrete instrument of educational justice.

The situation in the Central African Republic provides a significant example in this regard: according to data from the Central African Compact on Education, more than 15% of children and young people enrolled in Catholic schools benefit from financial support. This practice shows that a school can be primarily funded by families while simultaneously developing internal solidarity mechanisms.

3.5.6. Still-Limited Diversification of Funding Sources

The table also reveals that NGOs have a very limited presence in the funding models reported. In the available data, their contribution is not explicitly identified as a significant source of funding. This suggests that African Catholic schools rely primarily on two actors: the State and families. However, a high concentration of funding in a single source can increase the system's vulnerability.

Dependence on parents exposes schools to the economic difficulties faced by households and can deepen inequalities in access. Dependence on the State, meanwhile, can make schools vulnerable to changes in public policy, budgetary constraints, and shifts in education funding mechanisms.
Diversifying funding sources-including the State, families, the Church, foundations, institutional partners, NGOs, and other solidarity mechanisms-therefore represents an important avenue for strengthening the financial resilience of Catholic schools.

3.5.7. A Comparative Analysis of the Main Financing Models

The data make it possible to distinguish several models.
Model based on quasi-exclusive or exclusive parental funding: Mali, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Zimbabwe, where parents account for 100% of the reported funding; Congo (95%), Cameroon (80%), and Kenya (70%), where their contribution remains predominant.

Model based on predominantly public funding: Mauritius (100%), Burundi (90%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (80%), Equatorial Guinea (80%), and Côte d'Ivoire (65%).

Relatively mixed model: Côte d'Ivoire, with 65% public funding and 30% parental contributions, as well as Kenya, with 30% public funding and 70% parental funding.

Model with low public contribution: Cameroon (10%) and Congo (5%), where families bear most of the financial burden.

[44] Nkea, A. (2019). The Catholic school in the Anglophone Ecclesiastical Province of Cameroon: Identity and challenges. In J.-P. Niyigena (Ed.), *Religions et défis actuels de l'école* [Religions and current challenges facing the school] (pp. 275–282). Éditions des Jésuites.

It should nevertheless be emphasized that the data for some countries, particularly Senegal, do not make it possible to determine the precise distribution of funding. Furthermore, for Côte d'Ivoire, the updated available percentages are 65% for the State and 30% for parents, representing 95% in total. The remaining 5% is not attributed to any source in the table provided. It is therefore preferable not to assign it arbitrarily to a category without additional data.

3.5.8. Interpretation in Light of the African Compact on Education

The table thus highlights a wide diversity of financing models for Catholic schools in Africa, but also a general tendency toward the concentration of funding in a primary source, particularly parents in several countries. With 65% public funding, Côte d'Ivoire remains an example of significant State support for Catholic education, but it can no longer be considered a system financed almost entirely by the State. It is better understood as a model of predominantly public funding shared with families.

From a qualitative perspective, this financial configuration has important consequences for the accessibility, social equity, quality, and sustainability of Catholic education. Heavy reliance on parental contributions can deepen inequalities in access and place greater pressure on economically vulnerable families. Conversely, substantial public funding can promote accessibility and institutional stability while also creating a degree of dependence on public policies.

It therefore appears necessary to seek a balance between public funding, family contributions, and solidarity mechanisms, rather than relying exclusively on a single source of funding.

In light of the African Compact on Education, financing should therefore not be viewed solely as a matter of institutional management. It is also an issue of educational justice, solidarity, human dignity, and the common good. One of the major challenges facing Catholic education in Africa is to develop financial models that can simultaneously ensure the quality of education, accessibility for poor families, the dignity of students and teachers, and the sustainability of educational institutions.

From this perspective, the central question is not only who finances the Catholic school, but also how financing contributes to its educational mission, its openness to vulnerable populations, and the realization of the common good.

3.6. Access to Safe Drinking Water in Catholic Schools

3.6.1. Comparative Table of Catholic Schools with Access to Safe Drinking Water

Pays	Nursery Schools	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Vocational Schools
Burundi	90%	35%	60%	25%
Cameroon	95%	85%	75%	80%
Côte d'Ivoire	100%	100%	N/A	100%
Mali	100%	70%	100%	100%
Maurice	N/A	100%	100%	100%
Central African Republic	30%	45%	40%	50%
DRC	56%	52%	51%	N/A
Republic of Congo	75%	75%	75%	100%
Rwanda	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Senegal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tanzania				
Chad	90%	90%	95%	0%

3.6.2. Comparative Analysis

The overall average access to safe drinking water is approximately 73.9%.

Level	Average of Available Data
Nursery	79,5 %
Primary	72,4 %
Secondary	74,5 %
Vocational	69,4 %

The situation therefore appears relatively favorable, with average coverage exceeding 70% across the different education levels. However, this average masks considerable disparities between countries. The highest levels are observed particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Mauritius, where several education levels reach 100%. Cameroon also has high coverage, ranging from 75% to 95%. By contrast, the Central African Republic records much lower levels, ranging from 30% to 50%. The Democratic Republic of Congo also falls within an intermediate range, with coverage of 51% to 56% for the available data. Access to safe drinking water is one of the most favorable indicators among the three infrastructure indicators examined. The presence of water in a large proportion of schools is essential for students' hygiene and health, disease prevention, children's dignity, the quality of the school environment, and the creation of a safe and supportive environment for learning.

However, the significant disparities between countries show that access to water remains geographically unequal. The contrast between countries where coverage reaches 100% and those where it remains around 30-50% likely reflects major differences in infrastructure, investment, and geographical conditions.

The situation of vocational schools deserves particular attention. Their available average (69.4%) is the lowest among the four education levels. This may pose a particular challenge because vocational training often requires sanitary infrastructure adapted to practical activities.

3.7. Internet Access

3.7.1. Comparative Table of Catholic Schools with Internet Connectivity

Countries	Nursery Schools	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Vocational Schools
Burundi	2%	4%	10%	1%
Cameroon	2%	2%	20%	25%
Côte d'Ivoire	15%	50%	99%	100%
Mali	10%	20%	25%	25%
Mauritius	N/A	100%	100%	100%
Central African Republic	0%	1%	2%	0%
DRC	6%	11%	14%	nr
Republic of Congo	40%	40%	40%	100%
Rwanda	-	-	-	-
Senegal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tanzania				
Chad	0%	0%	1%	0%

3.7.2. Comparative Analysis

Internet access presents a significantly weaker situation. Across the 34 reported observations, the overall average is approximately 28.4%.

Level	Average of Available Data
Nursery	9,4 %
Primary	25,3 %
Secondary	34,6 %
Vocational	43,9 %

A very clear trend emerges: the higher the level of education, the more frequent Internet connectivity becomes. Nursery education is the least connected level, with an average of only 9.4%.

Primary education reaches 25.3%, secondary education 34.6%, while vocational education reaches 43.9%.

This progression is particularly visible in Côte d'Ivoire: nursery 15%; primary 50%; secondary 99%; vocational 100%. In Mauritius, all three reported levels reach 100%. By contrast, the Central African Republic records 0%, 1%, 2%, and 0%, while Chad also shows an almost complete absence of connectivity.

Internet access appears to be the main infrastructure deficit across the school networks studied. The contrast with access to safe drinking water is particularly significant: safe drinking water accounts for approximately 73.9% of the available observations, compared with approximately 28.4% for Internet access. There is therefore a gap of approximately 45.5 percentage points between the two infrastructures.

This situation is important in light of the digital transformation of education. A school may have a functional building and access to safe drinking water while remaining largely excluded from the digital environment. The increase in connectivity with the level of education is nevertheless significant. Vocational schools have the highest proportion of connectivity. This may be explained by the fact that vocational training is more closely linked to technical and digital skills and to employment opportunities.

However, this situation also reveals a digital divide within the Catholic education system: primary and, especially, Nursery schools are much less likely to have Internet connectivity than secondary and vocational schools.

3.8. Electricity

3.8.1. Comparative Table of Catholic Schools with Access to Electricity

Countries	Nursery Schools	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Vocational Schools
Burundi	90%	40%	70%	35%
Cameroon	40%	35%	45%	60%
Côte d'Ivoire	N/A	100%	100%	100%
Mali	90%	60%	100%	100%
Mauritius	N/A	100%	100%	100%
Central African Republic	10%	10%	10%	15%
DRC	40%	37%	N/A	N/A
Republic of Congo	60%	60%	60%	100%
Rwanda				
Senegal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tanzania				
Chad	0%	0%	0%	0%

3.8.2. Comparative Analysis

The overall average access to electricity is 55.2%.

Level	Average of Available Data
Nursery	47,1 %
Primary	49,1 %
Secondary	60,6 %
Vocational	63,8 %

Electricity therefore occupies an intermediate position between safe drinking water and Internet access. Secondary and vocational schools are relatively better equipped than nursery and primary schools. Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Mauritius show very high levels for the available data, reaching 100% in several education levels. By contrast, the Central African Republic records only 10-15%.

Electricity is a structuring infrastructure for the modernization of schools. Its absence directly limits the use of computers, access to the Internet, the use of projectors and audiovisual equipment, classroom lighting, the use of modern educational equipment, and the development of digital skills. There is therefore a logical relationship between the two tables: where access to electricity is limited, the development of Internet connectivity becomes mechanically more difficult. Vocational education nevertheless appears to be better equipped with electricity (63.8%) than primary education (49.1%) and nursery education (47.1%). This difference is consistent with the specific needs of vocational institutions, which make greater use of technical equipment.

3.9. Solidarity, Inclusion and Well-Being

3.9.1. Comparative Table

Countries	**Existence of Solidarity Support for Vulnerable Families**	**Existence of an Inclusion Policy in Catholic Education**	**Existence of a Protocol for Preventing Abuse Against Students**	**Percentage Distribution of Contributors to Solidarity**			
				Parents	State	Church	NGO
Mali	Yes	Yes	Yes	0%	0%	50%	0%
Central African Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	70%	0%		
Chad	Yes	Yes	Yes	90%	0%	5%	5%
Côte d'Ivoire	Yes	Yes	No	100%	0%	0%	0%
Senegal	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cameroon	Yes	Yes	Yes	15%	10%	35%	50%
Mauritius	Yes	Yes	Yes	20%	80%	20%	20%
Kenya	Yes	Yes	Yes	75%	10%	30%	15%
Zimbabwe	Yes	Yes	Yes				
Burundi	Yes	Yes	Yes	30%	30%	30%	10%
DRC	No	Yes	Yes	45%	50%	4%	1%
Rwanda	Yes	Yes	Yes	20%	50%	30%	

3.9.2. Declared Solidarity in the Majority of Countries Studied

The Holy See's document emphasizes the importance of supporting families in the development of Catholic education in Africa. It stresses that education cannot be considered solely in terms of access to schools but must also take into account the economic and social difficulties that may prevent some families from keeping their children in the education system. The Global Compact on Education and the African Compact on Education emphasize this point by proposing that a certain proportion of children from vulnerable families should receive financial support through solidarity mechanisms.

This orientation is confirmed by the findings of our research. Of the twelve countries that responded to the questions relating to solidarity, eleven report the existence of solidarity mechanisms for vulnerable families. Such solidarity is reported in Mali, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cameroon, Mauritius, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Burundi, and Rwanda. The Democratic Republic of Congo constitutes an exception, as our research indicates the absence of solidarity mechanisms for vulnerable families.

This situation deserves particular attention. The Holy See's report emphasizes the need to take families and their ability to access education into account. Our research shows that this concern is indeed present in the vast majority of the countries studied, but that it is not uniform. The situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo therefore qualifies the general orientations of the Holy See's document. It does not allow us to conclude that there is a direct contradiction, but it shows that solidarity mechanisms for children from vulnerable families are not systematically present in all contexts. Overall, the findings of our research therefore align with the importance given by the Holy See's study and the African Compact on Education to solidarity with vulnerable families.

3.9.3. Social Inclusion Policy in Catholic Education: An Orientation of the Holy See and the African Compact on Education in the Face of National Realities

The Holy See's document emphasizes the openness of Catholic schools in Africa. It notes that Catholic schools do not serve only Catholic populations but should also welcome students from other religious and cultural communities. This analysis is fully confirmed by our research. In all twelve countries studied, the existence of an inclusion policy in Catholic education is reported. This is the most consistent finding of our research. None of the twelve countries studied reports the absence of an inclusion policy.

This convergence between the 2024 Holy See report, the 2022 African Compact on Education, and the present research is particularly significant. It shows that inclusion is a widely recognized dimension of Catholic education in the countries studied. It also confirms the analysis of the Holy See's report that Catholic schools can perform a social function extending beyond a strictly confessional framework. In religiously and culturally pluralistic societies, this inclusive dimension can contribute to dialogue between communities and to social cohesion.

However, our research concerns only the existence of an inclusion policy. It does not establish the extent to which such policies are implemented at school level or measure their outcomes. The comparison therefore reveals strong convergence at the institutional level, without allowing us to assess the actual effectiveness of inclusion policies.

3.9.4. Prevention of Abuse Against Students: A Partial Confirmation of the Orientations of the Holy See and the African Compact on Education

The Holy See's study and the African Compact on Education emphasize the importance of governance and the quality of the educational environment. Student protection is therefore an essential component of the responsible operation of educational institutions. Our research relates this concern to a specific variable: the existence of a protocol for preventing abuse against students. The results show that eleven of the twelve countries studied report having an abuse-prevention protocol.

Mali, the Central African Republic, Chad, Senegal, Cameroon, Mauritius, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda answer "yes." Côte d'Ivoire is the only country in our research for which the answer is "no." This indicates a generally favorable situation

within the sample studied. The vast majority of countries have an institutional mechanism for preventing abuse. The situation in Côte d'Ivoire nevertheless represents a particular gap.

This does not constitute a direct contradiction with the Holy See's document or the African Compact on Education (II, 6), since the sources considered here do not provide comparable data for each country. Our research establishes the reported existence or absence of a protocol, but it does not allow us to assess its effective implementation.

3.9.5. Solidarity and Partnership Mechanisms in Catholic Education

The variable "contributors to solidarity" can be related to observations in the Holy See's document concerning the need to strengthen partnerships and support mechanisms for Catholic education. The Holy See's document and the African Compact on Education (III.3, 4, 6, 7) emphasize, in particular, the importance of partnerships with States, mechanisms to support families, and forms of shared responsibility among the different stakeholders.

The results of our research show that solidarity is based on very different configurations across countries. In Mali, the Church's contribution is estimated at 50%, while the contributions of parents and the State are estimated at 0%. In the Central African Republic, parents account for 70% of the contribution to solidarity, while the State is estimated at 0%. Data concerning the Church and NGOs are not reported. In Chad, parents account for 90%, the State 0%, the Church 5%, and NGOs 5%. In Côte d'Ivoire, parents account for 100%, while the State, the Church, and NGOs collectively account for 0%. No breakdown is reported for Senegal. In Cameroon, parents account for 15%, the State 10%, the Church 35%, and NGOs 50%.

In Kenya, parents account for 75%, the State 10%, the Church 30%, and NGOs 15%. In Burundi, parents account for 30%, the State 30%, the Church 30%, and NGOs 10%. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, parents account for 45%, the State 50%, the Church 4%, and NGOs 1%. In Rwanda, parents account for 20%, the State 50%, and the Church 30%. For Zimbabwe, no quantitative breakdown is reported.

These results show a wide diversity of models of contribution to solidarity. This diversity is consistent with the approach of the Holy See's report and that of the African Compact on Education, which emphasize the importance of partnerships among the Church, States, families, and other stakeholders, as well as the need to take into account the specific realities of each context.

The comparison therefore shows that solidarity in Catholic education does not rely on a single model. In some countries, parents appear to be the main contributors. In others, the roles of the State, the Church, or NGOs are more prominent. However, this variable presents an important methodological limitation. In some countries, the sum of the percentages exceeds 100%. This is notably the case in Cameroon, Kenya, and Mauritius. These data therefore cannot be interpreted as a conventional distribution of total funding equal to 100% without additional information on the methodology used.

3.9.6. Comparison of Results by Country

The comparison of the variables examined in this part of our research reveals several situations. Mali, the Central African Republic, Chad, Senegal, Cameroon, Mauritius, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Burundi, and Rwanda show convergence across the three main institutional variables: solidarity with vulnerable families, an inclusion policy, and a protocol for preventing abuse.

Côte d'Ivoire presents a particular situation. Our research indicates the existence of solidarity and an inclusion policy, but the absence of a protocol for preventing abuse.

The Democratic Republic of Congo also presents a particular situation. Our research indicates the existence of an inclusion policy and a protocol for preventing abuse, but the absence of solidarity mechanisms for vulnerable families.

These two cases show that the three dimensions are not necessarily present simultaneously in all countries. They also qualify any uniform interpretation of Catholic education in Africa. The presence of inclusion or protection mechanisms does not automatically mean that solidarity mechanisms for vulnerable families are also in place, and vice versa.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NEEDS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN AFRICA

The contribution of Catholic schools to education in Africa is a reality. The Catholic Church is undoubtedly one of the major partners of African States in this field. Nevertheless, although the network of Catholic schools in Africa is diverse, it needs to be strengthened in several areas. Some needs are urgent, and the quality of education depends on how these needs are addressed. Two main categories of needs emerge from our study: the sustainability of the network, particularly in relation to the financing of infrastructure and operational costs, and the strengthening of institutional and teacher capacity.

4.1. Table - Urgent Needs and Infrastructure Needs

Countries	Urgent Needs	Infrastructure Needs	Infrastructure Financing	Facilities	Electricity	Safe Drinking Water	Internet Connectivity
Mali	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Central African Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chad	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Côte d'Ivoire	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Senegal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cameroon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mauritius	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Kenya	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tanzania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Zimbabwe	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Burundi	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Democratic Republic of Congo	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Equatorial Guinea	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Republic of the Congo	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Rwanda	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No

4.2. Table - Strengthening the Capacity of Institutions and Teachers

Countries	Needs related to institutional capacity building	Salary funding	Teaching tools	Initial teacher training	Continuing teacher training	Training of management teams	Faith-based education office	Faith-based education inspectorate
Mali	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**No**
Central African Republic	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**No**
Chad	**Yes**	**Yes**		**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**
Côte d'Ivoire	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**
Senegal	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**
Cameroon	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**
Mauritius	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Kenya	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**
Tanzania	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**
Zimbabwe	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**
Burundi	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**—**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**
Democratic Republic of Congo	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**
Equatorial Guinea	**N/A**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**N/A**
Republic of the Congo	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**No**
Rwanda	**No**	**No**						

The research findings highlight a diversity of needs faced by Catholic education in the countries studied. These needs are not limited to financial resources or physical infrastructure. They also concern the quality of learning, teacher training, school governance, the institutional capacity of school networks, as well as dialogue and collaboration with public authorities.

In order to better understand this reality, the identified needs can be grouped into three broad categories: urgent needs, infrastructure-related needs, and needs related to strengthening the institutional capacity of Catholic education. This classification makes it possible to relate challenges associated with financing and human resources to those affecting the material conditions of school operations, as well as to those concerning governance, pedagogical support, and the management of school networks.

This situation must be assessed in light of the quantitative importance of Catholic education in Africa. In this study, this importance is illustrated, on the one hand, by the Holy See report, updated with 2024 data, which records 88,057 schools and 30,972,911 pupils across the four school levels considered. When students in higher education are added, the total number of enrolled students reaches 31,375,049. On the other hand, the study draws on data collected from 14 African

countries. These data indicate that, in 2026, the 14 countries selected had 141,110 students enrolled in vocational training and 18,581,358 pupils enrolled across the three education levels.

The scale of this network gives particular significance to the needs expressed: the challenge is no longer merely to maintain an educational presence, but to ensure that this presence has the institutional, human, pedagogical, and material resources necessary to provide quality education.

4.3. Urgent Needs

The first category includes, in particular, salary financing, infrastructure financing, teaching tools, initial and continuing teacher training, institutional capacity building, as well as dialogue and collaboration with the State.

The comparative analysis shows that strengthening institutional capacity is the most widely shared urgent need, as it is identified in 13 of the 14 countries studied. It is followed by infrastructure financing, identified in 12 countries, and then by continuing teacher training, identified in 11 countries. Salary financing and the strengthening of dialogue with the State are each identified in 7 countries, while teaching tools are identified in 6 countries and initial teacher training in 3 countries.

These findings therefore show that the urgent needs of Catholic education are not the same across all the countries covered by the survey. Moreover, these needs are not exclusively financial. Financing remains a major issue, but the capacity of school networks to organize themselves, professionalize their operations, support educational institutions, and develop the skills of their personnel emerges as a cross-cutting priority.

4.3.1. Financing of Salaries and Infrastructure

In Africa, the Church makes a significant contribution to the education of children, adolescents, and young people. However, the financing arrangements for Catholic schools vary considerably. Three broad models can be distinguished: financing primarily provided by parents, predominantly public financing, and mixed financing. Mali and the Central African Republic illustrate the first model, Mauritius the second, while Côte d'Ivoire falls under the mixed model.

The mixed model remains complex. In Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire, different sub-models coexist. Some schools are financed entirely by parents, while in other schools teachers are paid by the State, whereas ordinary operating costs are covered through parental contributions. Thus, within the same national network, several financing mechanisms may coexist.

The analysis also shows that 100% public financing does not necessarily mean that the resources available are sufficient to ensure the normal operation of a school. In some contexts, delays in the disbursement of public funding require parents or Church structures to cover part of the salaries and operating expenses.

Infrastructure financing is, in turn, the second most widely identified urgent need, with 12 out of the 14 countries reporting this need. This situation must be considered in relation to changes in enrolment. In 2024, the number of pupils enrolled in Catholic primary education increased, while

the number of primary schools decreased, resulting in an increase in the average number of pupils per school. This trend places additional pressure on existing infrastructure.

The need therefore concerns not only the construction of new schools. It also involves the maintenance, rehabilitation, expansion, and adaptation of existing infrastructure, so that their capacity can keep pace with changes in school-age populations.

It therefore appears necessary to strengthen public financing where it is absent or insufficient, particularly in countries such as the Central African Republic, Mali, and Chad. The objective should be to ensure that parents' financial contributions do not become a source of social inequality. "Our schools are fast becoming schools for the rich. Since we have to collect enough fees to pay our teachers and cover other expenses, many of our schools charge high fees that the poor cannot afford to pay. As a result, our schools are increasingly filled with the children of the rich, thereby undermining the goal of making education available to all."[45] Every child should have access to quality education, regardless of the network to which their school belongs.

However, the development of connectivity cannot be separated from access to electricity. A school that does not have a sufficient electricity supply cannot fully benefit from digital tools. Electricity is therefore a material prerequisite for the modernization of teaching and learning.

4.3.2. School Facilities and Basic Material Conditions

The need for adequate school facilities is identified in 11 out of 14 countries. It directly concerns the physical capacity of schools to accommodate students and is particularly significant in contexts where enrolment is increasing more rapidly than the number of schools. Access to drinking water also remains an important concern, as it is identified in 9 out of 14 countries. Some Catholic schools still do not have access to drinking water or electricity. This situation constitutes an obstacle to normal operating conditions and, consequently, to the quality of education.

4.4. Needs Related to the Quality of Education

Financing and infrastructure account for a significant part of the difficulties related to access to, retention in, and quality of education. However, they do not fully explain all the challenges identified. The findings also highlight the importance of pedagogical factors.

The question of children's access to and retention in school may, in fact, conceal a more fundamental issue: the quality of learning. It is therefore necessary to promote methodologies, content, and pedagogical approaches that are adapted to local realities and to the diverse profiles of children. In many school networks, education remains primarily focused on literacy and classroom attendance, while the competencies acquired by the end of primary education remain insufficient for a large proportion of pupils.

4.4.1. Teaching and Learning Resources

Teaching and learning resources are identified in 6 out of 14 countries. However, their importance extends beyond their purely material dimension. It reflects the capacity of African education systems to produce, contextualize, and adapt knowledge and learning tools. The study shows that,

[45] Andrew Nkea, *The catholic school in the Anglophone ecclesiastical province of Cameroon. Identity and challenges*, dans Jean-Paul Niyigena (éd.), *Religions et défis actuels de l'école, Bruxelles*, Éditions jésuites, 2019, p. 282.

in several national networks, the teaching and learning resources used are sourced from abroad. The African Catholic school network therefore continues to face the challenge of becoming more of a producer of knowledge and learning resources adapted to the cultural, social, and educational realities of Africa.

This approach is consistent with the perspective of the African Educational Pact, which calls for the development of education rooted in African realities while promoting dialogue and collaboration with public authorities. From this perspective, the Nigerian Compact on Education (2024) encourages the local production of teaching and learning resources and a careful assessment of imported educational materials to determine their relevance to the local context.

4.4.2. Initial and Continuing Teacher Training

Teacher training constitutes another major challenge. Continuing teacher training is identified in 11 out of 14 countries, demonstrating that improving the skills of teachers already in service is a widely shared priority.

This need is particularly important in a context marked by digital transformation, globalization, and the fragility of certain sociopolitical and economic environments. Teachers must be able to anticipate challenges, foster creativity, and adapt their practices to new educational realities. Initial teacher training, for its part, is identified in only 3 out of 14 countries. However, this figure does not mean that this need is absent in the other countries; it simply indicates that it was explicitly reported in three countries.

In the longer term, Catholic school networks should anticipate the teacher shortage projected for Africa and invest in teacher-training institutes or faculties specializing in pedagogy and didactics. The professional and financial recognition of teachers should also be regarded as a prerequisite for the quality and sustainability of education.

4.5. Strengthening Institutional Capacity

Strengthening institutional capacity is the most widely shared need among the countries studied: it is identified in 13 out of 14 countries. Such a priority is consistent with the scale of the Catholic school network in Africa. An educational presence serving several tens of millions of pupils requires structures capable of effectively ensuring the coordination, planning, support, monitoring, and evaluation of schools. The quantitative expansion of the network must therefore be accompanied by the professionalization of its governance structures.

4.5.1. Training of School Leadership Teams

Training school leadership teams is the most widely shared institutional need: it is identified in all 14 countries. This finding is particularly significant. School leaders must simultaneously oversee administrative management, personnel management, pedagogical monitoring, infrastructure management, relations with families, and the implementation of Catholic education policies, while also ensuring the implementation of State policies regarding the provision of education, as well as the administrative collaboration that this requires.

It therefore appears necessary to establish specific initial and continuing training for school leadership teams, as well as opportunities for sharing experiences and updating skills. Such training

should also include the capacity to work with families, in accordance with the orientations of the African Compact on Education.

4.5.2. Pedagogical Offices and Pedagogical Inspection

The establishment of a faith-based pedagogical office is identified as a need in 10 out of 14 countries, while a faith-based pedagogical inspectorate is identified in 7 countries. These structures are essential to giving Catholic education a genuine capacity for pedagogical support. In some countries, the absence of a pedagogical office leads school networks to focus primarily on the administrative management of schools without sufficiently developing their own pedagogical approach. The absence of pedagogical inspection also limits opportunities for teacher support, assessment, and professional development. The development of these structures should therefore be a priority in the professionalization of national, diocesan, and congregational school networks.

4.6. Developing Nursery, Secondary, and Vocational Education

The needs of Catholic education concern not only resources and governance. They also concern the balance among the different levels of education. The development of nursery education appears urgent. The data indicate the need to develop this level more proportionately in relation to primary education. Maintaining a significant gap between the two levels may contribute to perpetuating educational inequalities between children who have benefited from nursery preparation and those who enter primary school directly. This development requires both teacher training and investment in appropriate infrastructure.

Similarly, the imbalance between primary and secondary education observed in several school networks requires particular attention. Keeping young people in school for as long as possible requires investment in infrastructure and human resources. The experiences of Kenya and Mauritius are, in this regard, interesting examples within the framework of the study.

Technical and vocational education should also be further developed. It represents an opportunity to combat school exclusion and to provide alternative pathways for young people who do not continue in general education. Technical and vocational institutions can also play a role in the reintegration of young people returning to education.

4.6. Inclusion and Educational Solidarity

Inclusion constitutes another important area of focus. The recommendation to enroll in Catholic schools a proportion of 5 to 10% of children from vulnerable families is already being implemented in some countries. However, this mechanism remains limited in view of the scale of the phenomenon of school dropout and exclusion from education linked to poverty.

Inclusion should also extend to children with special needs[46]. Conventional teaching and learning methods do not always respond adequately to the diversity of students' profiles. Catholic school networks would therefore benefit from establishing guidance and support units capable of accompanying the students concerned and helping teachers differentiate their pedagogical practices.

[46] Simon Bizimana, *Brothers of Charity and Inclusive Education*, dans Jean-Paul Niyigena (éd.), *Religions et défis actuels de l'école*, Bruxelles, Éditions des jésuites, 2019, p. 195-204.

Educational solidarity should therefore not be limited to occasional financial assistance. It should be conceived as an institutional mechanism for addressing inequalities in access to, retention in, and success at school.

4.7. Professionalization of Coordination Structures

Institutional strengthening should also extend to national, diocesan, and congregational coordination services. In several countries, public funding is allocated directly to schools without providing support to the structures responsible for coordinating the networks. This situation weakens their capacity to fulfil their mission.

Data collection is a significant challenge. Despite the development of communication technologies, several networks still experience difficulties in obtaining reliable and up-to-date data on their schools. The professionalization of coordination services therefore appears essential.

In this regard, the study recommends moving from a system based primarily on the appointment of persons in charge towards a system that relies more strongly on the recruitment of competent professionals. The experiences of Kenya, Mali, the Central African Republic, Zimbabwe, and Mauritius may serve as useful references for this transition.

4.8. Strengthening Partnership with the State

The development of Catholic education must ultimately be grounded in a constructive relationship with public authorities. The right of parents and the Church to provide education in accordance with their convictions must be reconciled with every child's right to quality education.

Dialogue with the State should therefore seek to strike a balance between freedom of education and institutional organization, on the one hand, and equity in access to public resources, on the other. As the ultimate guarantor of the right to education, the State has a responsibility to ensure that children receive a quality education, regardless of the school network they attend.

Public financing should therefore be based on reasonable criteria of equity and respect for the fundamental principles of democracy, without undermining the educational freedom that is inherent to Catholic schools.

4.9. Conclusion

The cross-analysis of the data shows that the needs of Catholic education in Africa are multidimensional and interdependent. Financial, infrastructural, pedagogical, and institutional challenges cannot be addressed separately.

The first priority is to ensure sufficient resources to enable schools to operate under equitable conditions. The second is to improve basic infrastructure—school facilities, drinking water, electricity, and internet connectivity-in order to create an environment conducive to learning. The third concerns educational quality, through the availability of appropriate teaching and learning resources, initial and continuing teacher training, and the development of context-sensitive pedagogical approaches. Finally, the fourth priority, which cuts across all the others, is the professionalization and strengthening of institutional capacity.

The priority given to the training of school leadership teams in all 14 countries studied, to institutional strengthening in 13 countries, and to infrastructure and connectivity in the vast majority of countries shows that the future of Catholic education does not depend solely on its quantitative expansion. It depends above all on its ability to build education systems that are more professional, more inclusive, better equipped, pedagogically relevant, and institutionally robust.

In this perspective, the African Compact on Education can provide a framework for convergence, bringing together the various stakeholders-the Church, families, States, schools, universities, and international partners-around a common objective: to ensure that every African child and young person has access to quality, inclusive education rooted in African cultural realities and oriented towards human dignity, the common good, and the building of a sustainable society.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this study on the contribution and needs of the Catholic Church in the field of education in Africa, one major conclusion emerges: Catholic education has become a structural actor in Africa's educational development, yet the scale of its quantitative contribution still contrasts with the institutional, pedagogical, infrastructural, and financial weaknesses that limit its long-term impact. The challenge for the future is therefore no longer simply to demonstrate the importance of the Church's presence in education, but to create the conditions that will enable this presence to develop into a sustainable, inclusive, high-quality educational capacity oriented towards the integral development of the person.

The analysis of the broader context first shows that education remains one of the continent's major challenges. Despite the progress made over several decades, population growth, poverty, conflicts, population displacement, territorial and social inequalities, and inadequate financing continue to keep millions of children and young people out of school. The data used in this study indicate that 118 million children, adolescents, and young people were out of school in Africa in 2023, while the challenges become increasingly significant as learners progress through the different levels of education. Secondary education remains particularly fragile, while nursery education is still insufficiently developed. This situation is all the more concerning because Africa is the world's youngest continent, and its school-age population will continue to grow significantly.

Demographic expansion therefore represents both an immense opportunity for human development and considerable pressure on education systems. It is in this context that the contribution of the Catholic Church takes on its full significance. According to Holy See data, with 88,057 institutions and 30,972,911 pupils across the four school levels considered, supplemented by students in higher education bringing the total number of enrolled students to 31,375,049, the Church has a substantial educational infrastructure. The data collected directly from the countries studied in 2026, meanwhile, provide a more detailed picture of national realities: they record 20,151,494 pupils across the three levels of education in the 15 countries selected, as well as 141,110 students enrolled in vocational education and training. These figures should not be added together or compared mechanically because of differences in scope, reference periods, and statistical definitions; nevertheless, they demonstrate the exceptional scale of the Catholic educational presence in Africa. The cross-analysis of enrolment figures nevertheless reveals that the fundamental issue is not merely the number of pupils served, but the continuity and quality of their educational pathways.

In the 15 countries for which usable data are available, primary education accounts for 10,945,858 pupils, or 54.31%; secondary education accounts for 8,049,092 pupils, or 39.95%; while nursery education accounts for only 1,159,544 pupils, or 5.74%. This structure confirms the central role of primary education, while also highlighting the importance of secondary education and the relative weakness of nursery education.

This analysis must, however, be qualified by the considerable differences between countries. The case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, shows an extremely large network, while Kenya presents a particularly distinctive configuration, with a strong presence in secondary education and vocational education and training. The Kenya–DRC comparison therefore shows that it would be scientifically inappropriate to regard the decline in enrolment between primary and secondary education as a universal characteristic of Catholic education in Africa. National trajectories differ and require differentiated policies.

Comparing student enrolment figures with those of teachers provides further insight. The study records 490,019 teachers, including 241,542 in primary education, 180,721 in secondary education, and 24,072 in nursery education, with the remainder mainly relating to data that were not disaggregated. The geographical concentration is particularly pronounced: the DRC and Kenya alone account for more than three-quarters of the teachers recorded. This concentration confirms the existence of major Catholic educational hubs, but it also reminds us that continental averages can conceal considerable national disparities.

Above all, the number of teachers cannot be interpreted in isolation. The case of Kenya, with approximately 47 pupils per teacher, illustrates considerable pressure on human resources, whereas Mauritius presents a much more favorable ratio. However, the pupil–teacher ratio alone is not a measure of quality. Teacher qualifications, continuing professional development, remuneration, job stability, working conditions, infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, class size, and the quality of school leadership must all be taken into consideration simultaneously.

This observation is consistent with one of the study's most significant findings: quantitative growth can become a vulnerability when it is not accompanied by a proportional expansion of capacity. At the primary level, enrolment increased by 4.8%, while the number of schools decreased by 1.7%, causing the average number of pupils per school to rise from approximately 438 to 467. The growth in enrolment is therefore both a sign of confidence in Catholic education and a source of pressure on schools. It must be accompanied by investment in classrooms, teachers, equipment, textbooks, and overall learning conditions.

Secondary education emerges, in several analyses, as the main area requiring attention. While the need for schooling increases with age, Catholic education provision contracts in certain contexts. This situation creates a risk of disruption to students' educational pathways. The objective of an education policy cannot simply be to bring more children into primary school; it must also enable them to remain in school, learn, complete their education, and acquire the skills necessary for their personal, social, and professional lives. Geographical isolation, poverty, child labor, insecurity, early marriage, and adolescent pregnancy are among the factors that can hinder this continuity.

In this regard, vocational training represents a strategic opportunity that remains insufficiently exploited. The available data identify 141,110 students enrolled in the vocational institutions

surveyed. Kenya, with 85,000 students, Rwanda with 26,985, and Tanzania with 18,060, demonstrate that the Church already has significant capacity in this area. Girls' participation is also substantial in several countries. Technical and vocational education could therefore become a major instrument in combating school dropout, developing skills, and facilitating young people's integration into the workforce, particularly on a continent facing high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment.

The analysis of funding further confirms that the sustainability of Catholic education constitutes a major challenge. Funding models vary considerably: almost exclusive reliance on parents in Mali, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Zimbabwe; substantial public funding in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Equatorial Guinea; and mixed models in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya. In several countries, parents bear between 70% and 100% of the reported funding. Such dependence can undermine access to education for low-income families. Conversely, public funding can enhance accessibility and stability, without necessarily guaranteeing quality. The real challenge, therefore, is to develop models of shared responsibility and solidarity involving the State, families, the Church, technical and financial partners, foundations, and, where appropriate, civil society organizations.

Infrastructure constitutes another essential dimension of this sustainability. The data collected show that needs concern not only facilities, but also electricity, drinking water, and internet connectivity. Internet connectivity is identified as a need in 12 of the 14 countries, facilities in 11 countries, and drinking water in 9 countries. These figures show that digital transformation cannot be separated from the basic material conditions required for schools to function effectively. A truly high-quality education policy must therefore address simultaneously the construction and rehabilitation of buildings, access to water and sanitation, electrification, connectivity, and educational equipment. However, a cross-analysis of all the data points to an even deeper need: strengthening institutional capacity. This is identified in 13 of the 14 countries, making it the most widely shared need. Even more significantly, the training of school leadership teams is identified in all 14 countries studied. Pedagogical offices are needed in 10 countries, while pedagogical inspection is identified as a need in 7. These findings show that the issue of Catholic education is not merely a matter of buildings and funding; it is also a matter of governance, professionalization, planning, pedagogical support, monitoring, and evaluation.

Data governance therefore emerges as a cross-cutting priority. Difficulties in data collection, differences in definitions, missing data, and discrepancies between sources still make it difficult to obtain a fully consistent continental overview. The discrepancy between the 31,375,049 students recorded in the Holy See's study and the 20,151,494 students recorded in the sample of 15 countries should therefore not be regarded as a statistical contradiction; rather, it highlights the need to harmonize the scope, definitions, reference periods, and data-collection methods. The study therefore rightly recommends the establishment of a continental data system and an African Observatory for Catholic Education capable of regularly producing high-quality, comparable statistics.

All these observations point towards the same overarching direction: Catholic education in Africa must move from a logic of presence to a logic of impact. Presence is measured by the number of schools, students, and teachers; capacity is measured by infrastructure, human resources, funding, and governance; but impact is measured by learning outcomes, academic achievement, completion

of educational pathways, inclusion, employability, child protection, and contribution to human development. The study therefore emphasizes that these three dimensions-presence, capacity, and impact, must be monitored jointly.

From this perspective, the African Educational Pact emerges as a particularly relevant framework for convergence. It makes it possible to connect the Church's specific mission with the continent's major educational challenges: human dignity, fraternity, equity, quality, inclusion, human capital development, peace, and social and environmental responsibility. The mission of the Catholic school cannot therefore be reduced to the transmission of religious or academic knowledge. It must contribute to the holistic formation of individuals capable of participating in the building of more just, fraternal, peaceful, and supportive societies.

The future therefore requires a strategy built around several priorities: expanding nursery education; protecting and improving the quality of primary education; strengthening and revitalizing secondary education; developing technical and vocational training; professionalizing teachers and school leadership teams; improving infrastructure and connectivity; diversifying funding mechanisms; strengthening solidarity mechanisms for vulnerable families and girls; professionalizing national and diocesan coordination structures; harmonizing data; and institutionalizing partnerships between the Church, States, universities, and international partners. This strategy must, however, be differentiated. The realities of the Democratic Republic of Congo are not the same as those of Kenya, Rwanda, Cameroon, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, the Central African Republic, or Mauritius. The data clearly show that there is no single model of Catholic education in Africa, but rather a plurality of institutional, pedagogical, and financial models. A continental vision is therefore necessary to establish common standards, but it must be implemented through national and regional strategies adapted to demographic, economic, social, political, and ecclesial contexts.

Ultimately, the great strength of Catholic education in Africa lies in its network, its territorial reach, its educational experience, its potential for mobilization, and its ability to serve diverse populations. Its greatest weakness lies in the gap between this importance and the institutional, human, material, and financial capacities available to support it. The challenge, therefore, is not simply to build more schools, but to build stronger, more professional, more inclusive, and more equitable Catholic education systems that are better able to measure their outcomes.

The ultimate objective is therefore integral human development. A Catholic school that is truly faithful to its mission is one that enables a child not only to enter school, but also to remain there; not only to learn, but also to develop all dimensions of his or her humanity; not only to protect the child's dignity, but also to equip him or her with the skills needed to build a future; and not only to welcome the more privileged, but also to remain particularly attentive to the most vulnerable. From this perspective, Catholic education can become not merely an important provider of educational services, but a genuine African laboratory for educational innovation, fraternity, social justice, peace, and human development.

The success of this transformation will ultimately depend on the capacity of the Church in Africa to move from a juxtaposition of individual institutions towards a genuine collective intelligence in education: jointly producing data, sharing experiences, training leaders, pooling resources, evaluating outcomes, engaging in dialogue with States, and mobilizing universities. The African

Educational Pact can provide the framework for this convergence, while the African Educational Pact Institute can contribute to its research, training, dissemination, and implementation support.
Thus, the fundamental question for the coming years could be formulated simply: how can we ensure that every child welcomed into a Catholic school in Africa is not only able to access education, but also to remain in school, learn, grow in dignity, develop his or her talents, and continue along an educational pathway up to the level corresponding to his or her abilities and life aspirations? It is only under these conditions that the Church's immense quantitative presence in African education can be transformed into genuine and lasting social, ecclesial, and human impact.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CESA - Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025
IACE – Institute for the African Compact on Education
SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals
ACE -African Compact on Education
GCE -Global Compact on Education
DRC -Democratic Republic of Congo
AU - African Union
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Holy See Study on Catholic Education in Africa (2024)

Appendix 2: Summary Forms of Responses to the 2026 Questionnaire on the Contribution and Needs of the Catholic Church in the Field of Education in Africa

Appendix 3: *Global Compact on Education* (2019/2025)

Appendix 4: *African Compact on Education* (2022)

Appendix 5: *Nigerian Compact on Education* (2024)

Appendix 6: *Central African Compact on Education* (2026)