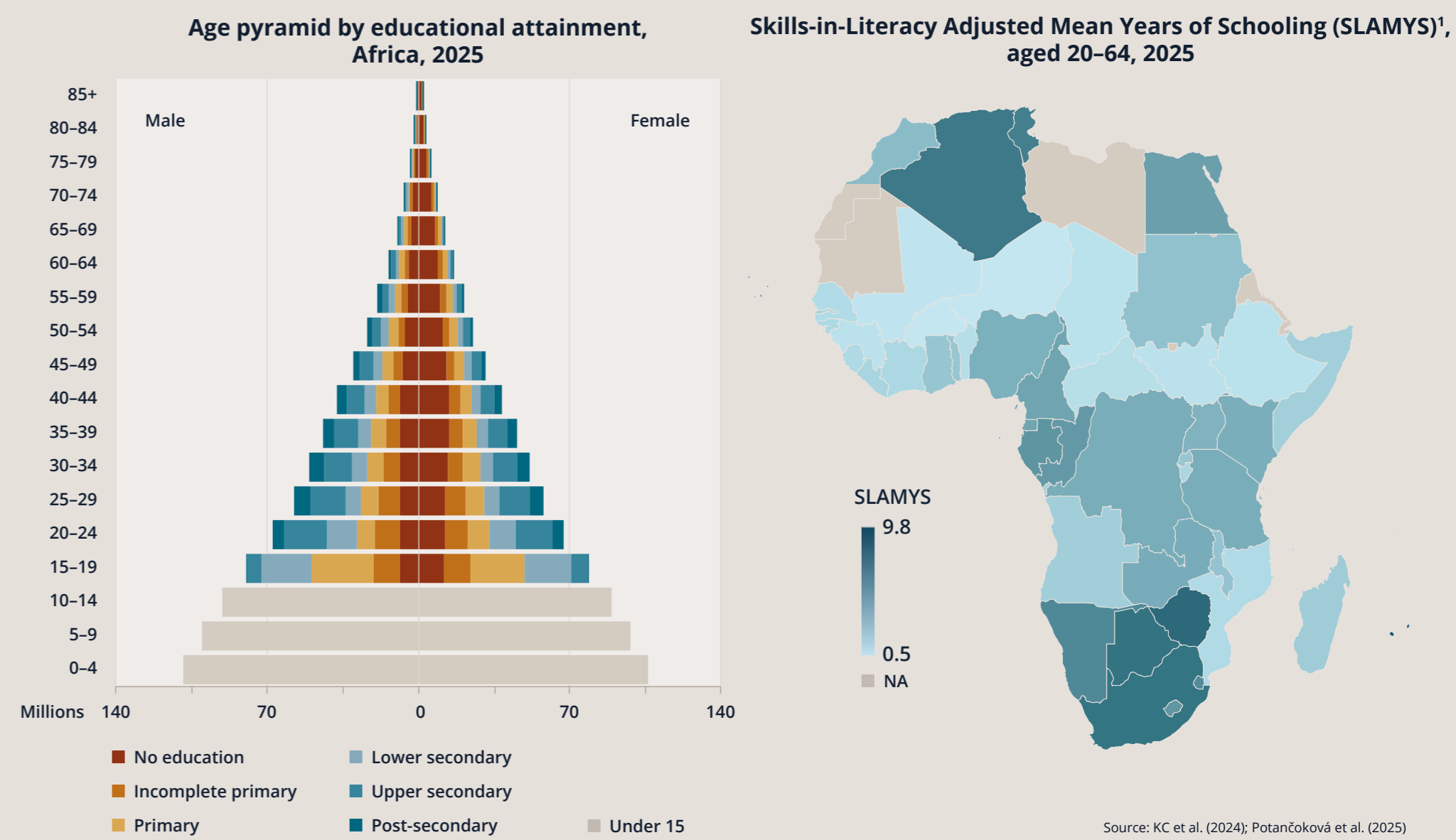


AFRICAN HUMAN CAPITAL DATA SHEET 2026

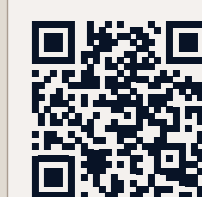
Past trends, skills, and future pathways

Supported by the Yidan Prize project funds



Population and human capital trends

Data, rankings, maps, definitions, sources and notes: www.africanhumancapital.org



	Population (in millions)				Mean Years of Schooling (20-64), 2025			Skills-in-Literacy Adjusted Mean Years of Schooling (SLAMYS) ¹ (20-64), 2025			Educational attainment distribution % (20-64)						Total Fertility Rate (children per woman) by education			Life Expectancy at Birth (years)					
	1980	2025	Further Progress	Stalled Progress	Both	Female	Male	Both	Female	Male	2025			2070 - Further Progress			2070 - Stalled Progress			Total	No education	Post-secondary	Female	Male	
											None or incomplete primary	Primary or lower secondary	Upper secondary or above	None or incomplete primary	Primary or lower secondary	Upper secondary or above	None or incomplete primary	Primary or lower secondary	Upper secondary or above						
Africa	483	1550	3064	3712	7.1	6.5	7.7	3.8	3.3	4.5	40	29	32	17	22	61	33	31	36	4.3	5.6	2.5	64.3	60.5	
Eastern Africa	146	513	1015	1232	6.0	5.7	6.4	3.0	2.7	3.4	49	33	18	21	29	50	40	38	22	4.2	5.3	2.5	66.1	61.2	
Burundi	4	14	27	34	4.6	4.1	5.1	1.9	1.6	2.4	62	31	7	35	33	32	54	36	11	5.0	5.4	3.1	63.7	60.0	
Comoros	0.3	0.9	1.5	2	8.1	7.8	8.5	2.9	2.4	3.5	34	35	31	5	23	72	16	40	44	4.0	5.6	2.8	66.3	61.9	
Djibouti	0.3	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	69	15	17	34	18	48	57	19	24	2.7	3.1	1.4	65.6	60.6	
Eritrea	2	4	6	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	68	15	17	33	19	48	58	19	24	3.9	4.4	1.9	68.8	64.7	
Ethiopia	34	135	258	321	3.6	3.2	4.0	1.1	0.8	1.4	70	20	11	27	28	45	56	27	17	4.1	5.1	2.0	68.3	62.5	
Kenya	16	58	96	107	8.3	8.1	8.6	4.5	4.2	4.8	25	40	35	16	18	65	23	39	38	3.3	4.9	2.2	65.0	60.2	
Madagascar	9	33	60	73	5.0	5.0	5.1	2.5	2.3	2.7	55	35	11	24	33	43	43	41	16	3.8	5.0	1.8	67.9	63.5	
Malawi	6	22	46	54	7.6	6.8	8.4	3.1	2.5	3.9	34	43	23	9	31	60	21	50	29	4.1	5.0	2.4	66.4	59.7	
Mauritius	1	1	1	1	10.3	10.5	10.2	8.2	8.1	8.2	16	33	51	1	9	90	2	25	73	1.4	1.6	1.2	78.4	72.1	
Mozambique	11	36	72	86	4.2	3.6	4.9	1.6	1.2	2.1	63	24	12	27	31	42	57	29	14	4.5	5.4	1.6	62.9	57.3	
Rwanda	5	15	27	31	5.3	4.7	5.8	2.8	2.4	3.3	61	26	13	19	32	49	44	36	21	3.8	4.3	2.3	68.6	64.3	
Seychelles	0.1	0.1	0.1	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	29	67	1	7	92	2	20	79	2.3	3.1	1.9	77.2	69.2	
Somalia	6	20	52	68	3.7	2.8	4.5	2.3	1.7	3.0	73	16	11	33	25	42	63	23	15	6.5	7.1	3.3	58.4	54.1	
South Sudan	4	12	14	21	3.5	2.8	4.3	1.1	0.7	1.5	63	17	20	26	19	55	49	23	28	4.5	4.9	2.4	57.7	54.5	
Uganda	13	51	119	141	7.7	7.3	8.1	4.1	3.6	4.6	45	36	19	19	31	50	37	39	24	4.6	5.5	3.2	65.1	61.0	
United Republic of Tanzania	19	71	164	200	7.8	7.5	8.2	4.6	4.1	5.0	25	64	11	12	41	47	19	64	17	4.7	6.3	2.7	68.6	64.4	
Zambia	6	22	43	49	8.1	7.7	8.6	4.6	4.1	5.2	34	38	28	8	23	58	30	38	32	4.2	5.4	2.5	64.6	59.5	
Zimbabwe	7	17	25	29	11.0	10.8	11.2	8.7	8.3	9.1	14	23	63	10	9	81	14	21	65	3.4	4.2	2.3	63.3	58.1	
Middle Africa	53	220	525	645	6.9	5.9	7.9	3.9	3.0	4.9	36	41	24	14	29	57	27	43	30	5.5	6.4	3.0	61.8	57.8	
Angola	8	39	91	113	4.7	3.8	5.6	2.4	1.7	3.1	43	44	12	3	49	48	19	60	21	5.2	6.2	2.3	64.7	59.7	
Cameroon	9	30	58	65	8.4	7.8	9.0	5.0	4.3	5.8	25	44	31	9	20	71	18	41	42	4.4	5.8	3.0	62.6	59.4	
Central African Republic	2	6	15	18	4.7	3.6	5.8	1.3	0.8	2.1	63	30	7	39	26	35	62	32	6	5.8	6.1	2.7	57.0	52.6	
Chad	5	21	51	63	4.1	3.1	5.1	1.1	0.6	1.7	66	24	10	25	33	43	55	31	14	6.2	6.4	2.7	55.1	51.9	
Congo	2	6	12	14	8.5	7.9	9.1	5.6	4.9	6.3	19	61	21	10	37	52	16	23	23	4.1	5.3	2.6	65.5	62.7	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	27	113	291	365	7.7	6.6	8.9	4.5	3.5	5.7	31	40	30	15	23	62	26	40	34	6.1	7.1	3.1	61.8	57.8	
Equatorial Guinea	0.3	2	4	4	7.0	6.3	7.6	4.9	4.2	5.5	24	63	14	10	47	43	17	66	17	4.1	5.2	2.3	63.2	59.4	
Gabon	0.7	3	4	4	8.6	8.3	8.8	6.0	5.6	6.3	18	59	23	11	38	52	16	59	26	3.4	4.6	2.4	69.0	64.2	
Sao Tome and Principe	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.5	5.9	5.9	6.0	4.2	4.0	4.3	39	45	16	11	38	51	22	54	24	3.8	4.3	2.7	71.5	66.1	
Northern Africa	109	276	415	487	8.5	8.0	9.0	5.2	4.5	5.9	31	18	51	12	4	84	21	15	65	3.1	3.9	2.4	74.1	69.6	
Algeria	19	47	65	74	10.1	9.5	10.6	7.7	7.1	8.3	16	32	52	6	7	88	9	23	68	2.9	3.9	2.4	77.8	75.2	
Egypt	44	118	188	219	9.1	8.6	9.7	5.2	4.4	6.1	27	7	66	5	2	94	11	8	81	3.0	3.3	2.6	73.7	68.9	
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	3	7	9	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	28	47	5	6	88	9	26	65	2.5	3.8	2.0	76.1	70.5	
Morocco	19	38	44	52	7.1	6.5	7.7	3.6	3.0	4.3	39	32	29	10	3	81	15	39	47	4.7	2.3	3.2	1.7	76.8	72.6
Sudan	17	52	94	115	5.8	5.5	6.1	3.2	2.8	3.6	60	10	31	35	2	62	54	8	38	4.4	5.0	2.9	68.4	63.3	
Tunisia	7	12	14	16	10.6	10.3	10.9	7.4	6.9	7.9	9	45	45	0	7	93	1	33	66	2.1	3.2	1.5	78.9	72.4	
Southern Africa	33	74	79	83	10.4	10.5	10.3	8.0	8.0	7.9	11	34	55	3	10	87	5	31	65	2.3	3.1	1.9	65.5	59.8	
Botswana	1	3	4	4	10.5	10.6	10.4	8.2	8.1	8.2	10	36	54	3	8	89	5	30	65	2.7	4.4	2.1	67.2	62.4	
Lesotho	1	2	3	3	8.6	9.4	7.7	5.8	7.0	4.6	29	43	28	14	20	67	21	42	37	3.0	3.8	2.2	56.6	51.2	
Namibia	1	3	4	5	9.4	9.6	9.1	6.7	6.8	6.5	20	44	36	11	21	68	16	44	39	3.3	4.4	2.0	63.8	56.9	
South Africa	30	65	67	70	10.5	10.5	10.4	8.1	8.1	8.1	9	33	57	2	9	90	3	29	68	2.3	2.9	1.9	66.0	60.3	
Swaziland	0.6	1	1	2	8.9	8.8	9.0	6.5	6.3	6.7	28	37	35	18	20	63	25	35	40	2.8	3.5	1.8	61.1	53.8	
Western Africa	141	467	1030	1264	6.7	5.7	7.6	3.0	2.2	3.8	44	24	32	17	20	63	35	26	39	4.9	6.1	3.2	58.3	56.5	
Benin	4	15	31	38	5.8	4.6	7.0	1.4	0.8	2.1	50	31	19	8	33	58	27	42	31	5.0	6.0	2.9	62.0	59.0	
Burkina Faso	7	24	53	66	2.4	2.1	2.8	0.5	0.3	0.7	81	14	5	45	30	25	73	20	8	4.8	5.4	2.7	61.9	58.4	
Cabo Verde	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.8	8.1	8.0	8.1	5.9	5.8	6.0	29	47	24	3	44	54	8	56	36	1.9	2.8	1.4	79.8	71.1	
Cote d'Ivoire	8	33	54	63	5.6	4.3	6.8	1.7	1.1	2.5	54	28	18	21	24	55	42	31	27	4.4	5.4	2.0	60.7	58.3	
Gambia	0.7	3	5	6	6.3	5.7	7.0	2.0	1.5	2.6	45	27	28	11	23	65	29	33	38	4.2	5.2	2.5	64.5	61.7	
Ghana	12	35	63	77	8.2	7.6	8.8	2.9	2.3	3.5	29	42	29	9	26	65	19	45	36	3.6	5.2	2.5	67.7	63.9	
Guinea	5	15	26	33	4.4	3.3	5.7	1.1	0.6	1.7	64	21	16	21	29	50	49	28	23	4.4	4.9	2.2	60.7		

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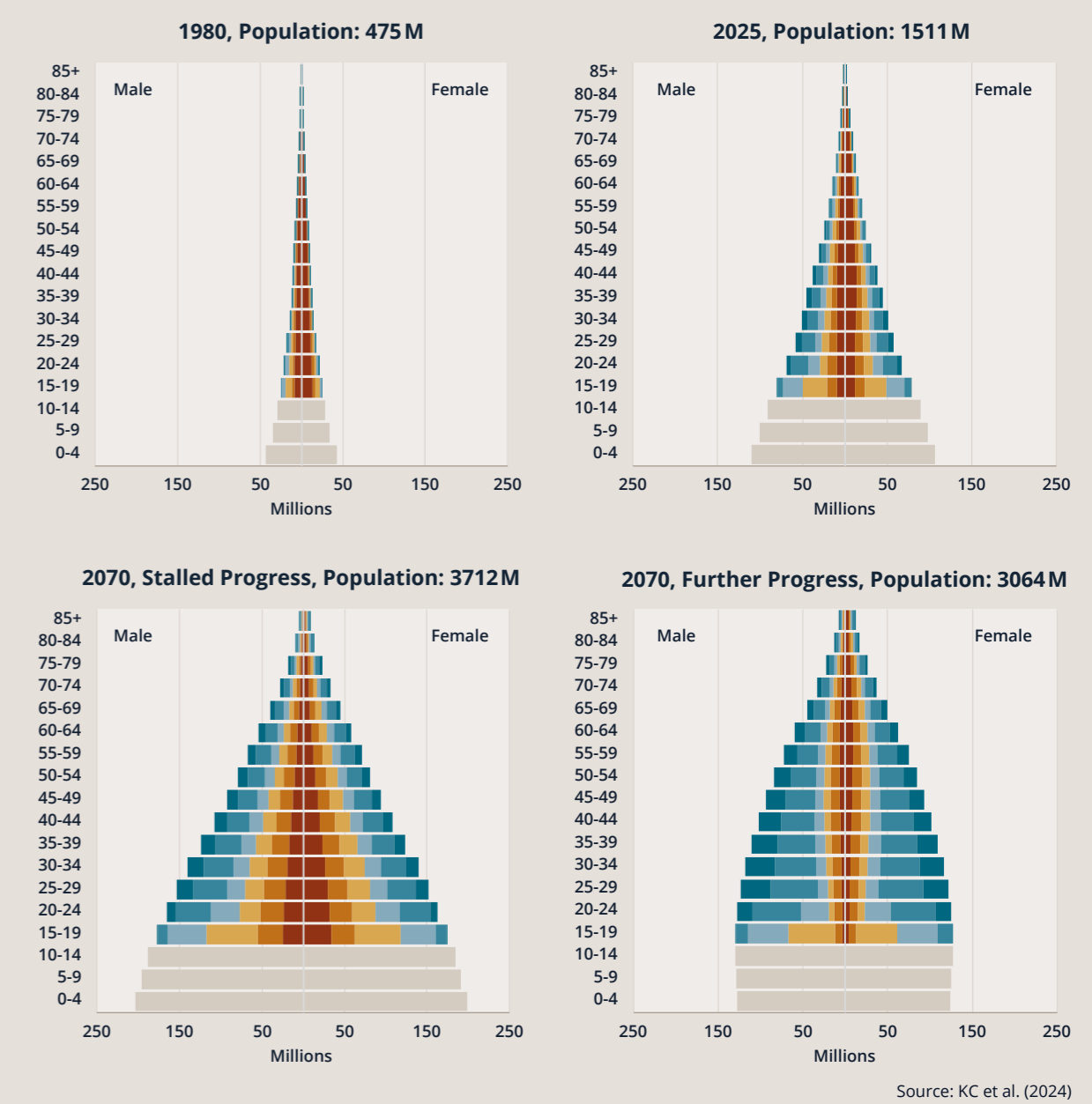
Africa's demographic transition

Africa is undergoing profound demographic changes. Since 1980, rapid population growth has been driven by sharp declines in mortality, especially among children, while fertility initially remained high. The continent's population grew from 475 million in 1980 to 1.5 billion in 2025 and is projected to double again by 2070. Under the Further Progress scenario, Africa's population would exceed 3 billion by 2070, while under a Stalled Progress scenario it would reach around 3.7 billion.

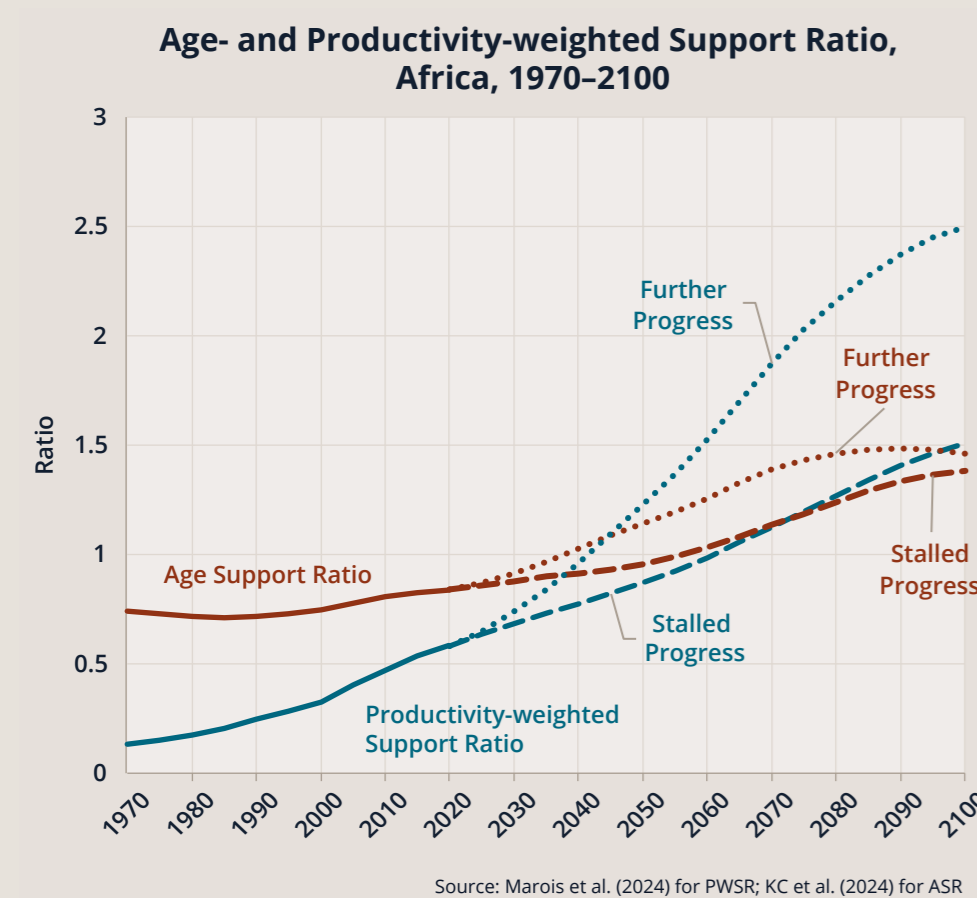
At the same time, the age structure is shifting. The age pyramid, once very broad at the base, is gradually becoming more rectangular as fertility declines and life expectancy rises. Life expectancy increased from about 50 years in 1980-84 to 62 years in 2020-24, and is projected to reach around 72 years by 2065-69 under the Further Progress scenario. On average, African fertility has fallen from 6.5 children per woman in 1980-84 to about 4.3 today and, under Further Progress, is expected to decline further to around 2.2 by 2065-69, slightly above the replacement level. Under Stalled Progress, these changes would occur much more slowly, with life expectancy reaching only about 64 years and fertility declining to around 3.3 children per woman by 2065-69, resulting in a younger age structure.

A key driver of fertility decline is the expansion of female education. As more girls complete primary and secondary school, fertility declines and families invest more in each child's health and learning. The proportion of elderly remains low and will stay below world average over the coming decades, implying rather low old-age dependency. This implies an increase in the working-age population and thus an opportunity for economic growth by easing the burden of support. Whether Africa can seize this opportunity (also called the "demographic dividend") will depend not only on the pace of fertility decline, but also, and above all, on how educated and integrated in the labor force, and productive the working-age population will be.

* The definitions of the "Further Progress" and "Stalled Progress" scenarios are provided below.



Education drives demographic dividend



studies have shown that improvements in productivity (proxied by education and skills), which in many countries occurred in parallel to declining fertility, play an even more important role in fostering economic growth (Lutz et al., 2019).

Age Support Ratio (ASR)
The Age Support Ratio compares the typical working-age population (20-64) to the number of children under 20 and adults 65+. A ratio of 1 means that there is one working-age person for each not of working age, indicating an equal number of assumed workers and dependents. A lower ratio means more people need support from fewer workers.

Productivity-weighted Support Ratio (PWSR)
The Productivity-weighted Support Ratio refines this measure by weighting the working-age population according to their education and skills. A value of 1 for the weighted working-age population corresponds to the productivity of a worker with the world average human capital in 2015. If the PWSR is far below the ASR, it means the education and skills of the working-age population are low. Their productive capacity is therefore weaker, making the support burden heavier than the simple age structure suggests.

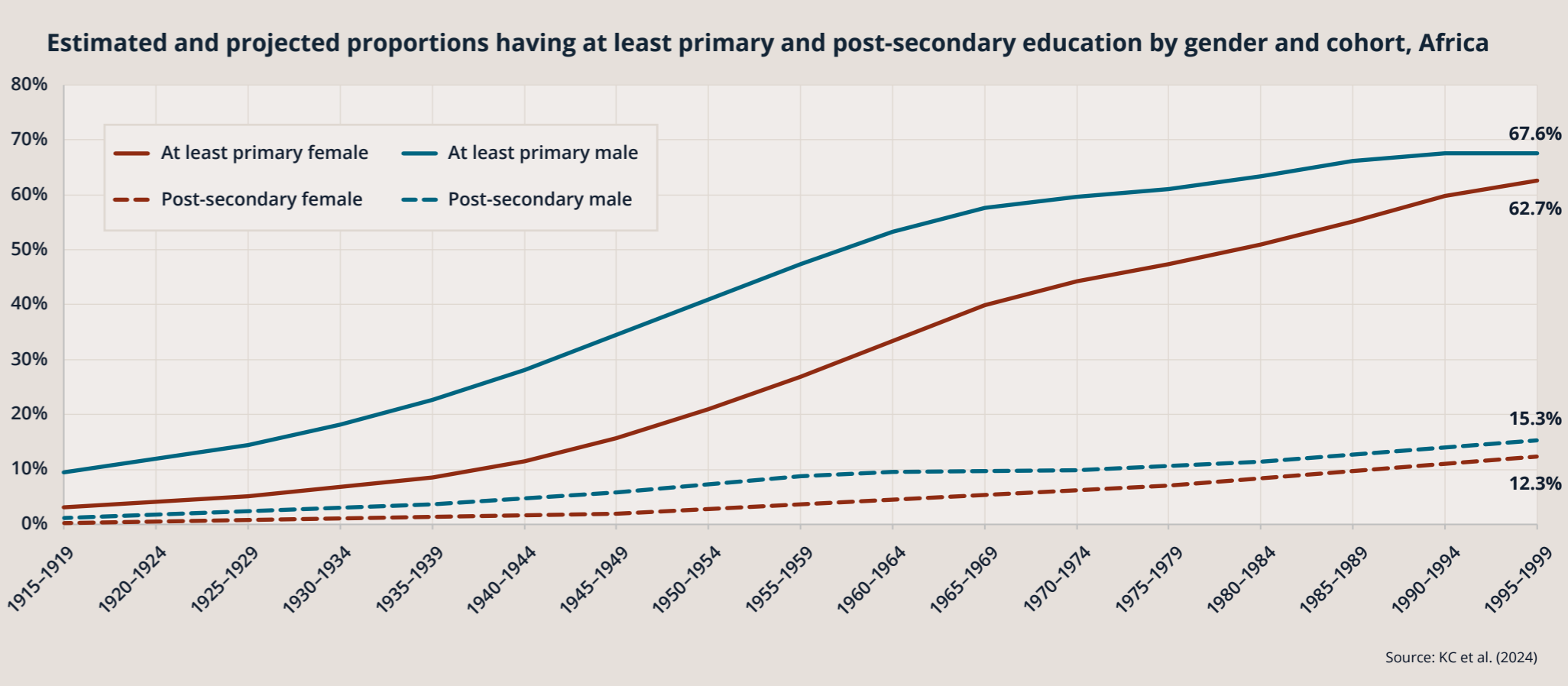
A demographic dividend arises when the demographic structure of a population changes in such a way that the productive members of a population (those who work and produce more than they consume) make up a higher proportion of the total population. Since this can result in a boost in economic growth and poverty reduction it has been labelled a dividend.

Originally, the concept of a demographic dividend was developed with respect to changes in the age structure, based on the fact that typically people of working age are more productive than children and older adults. This effect is captured by changes in the age support ratio (ASR, see red line in figure). Recent scientific

The combined changes in age and education/skills structures of the African population are shown in the blue line in the figure which is labelled as "Productivity-weighted Support Ratio (PWSR)." It shows a much stronger increase over time than the age support ratio because during the 1980s and 1990s the African adult population had much lower levels of education/skills than today. The steep increase in the PWSR under Further Progress implies a strong potential boost in economic growth and poverty reduction, with the support ratio reaching around 2.5 by 2070.

Under Stalled Progress, by contrast, slower fertility decline and more limited improvements in education and skills would substantially dampen this dynamic. By 2070, the PWSR support ratio would be considerably lower, at around 1.5, thus severely limiting the potential for a demographic dividend and reducing the scope for sustained growth and poverty reduction.

The gender gap in education narrows but does not disappear



Over recent decades, Africa has made significant progress in expanding girls' access to education. Younger cohorts show rapidly increasing completion of primary and secondary schooling among women, reducing the gender gap that historically disadvantaged girls. As shown in the cohort-based estimates in this data sheet, more girls today are acquiring the skills needed to participate in the labor market, improve their health outcomes, and exercise greater autonomy over childbearing decisions.

Despite this encouraging progress, important disparities remain. In many countries, boys still complete secondary and post-secondary education at higher rates than girls, particularly in rural areas and among poorer families. The gen-

der gap is also visible in the quality of learning, with inequalities in literacy and numeracy outcomes often rooted in classroom conditions, social norms, and unequal support for girls' education.

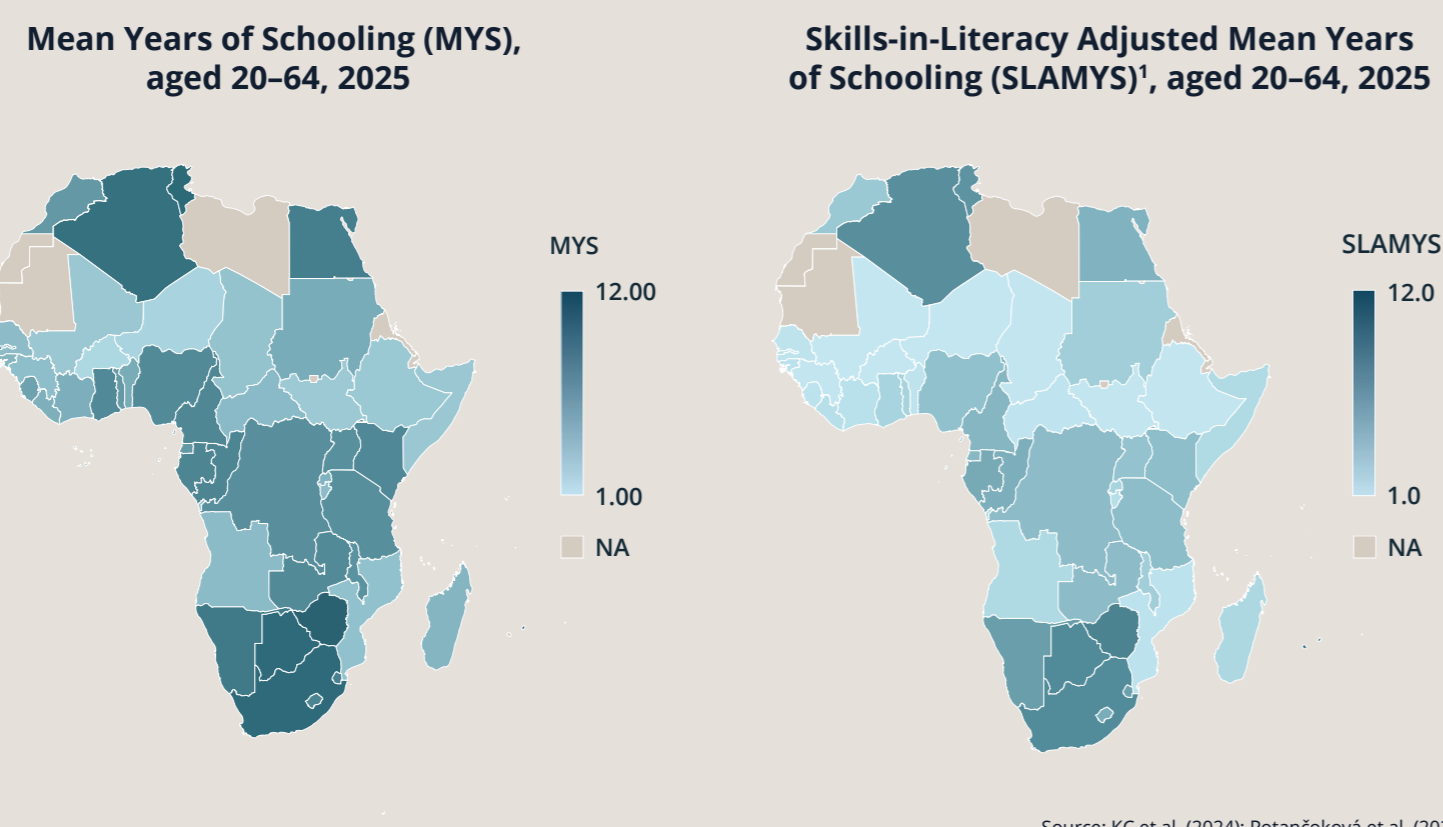
Closing these remaining gaps is essential. When women achieve the same educational and skill levels as men, societies benefit from higher productivity, stronger human capital formation, and faster progress in the demographic transition (World Bank, 2012). Sustained investment in girls' schooling will help ensure that Africa fully captures the social and economic returns linked to women's education and empowerment.

Wide gaps persist across Africa, both in education levels and quality

Mean Years of Schooling (MYS) is the most commonly used indicator to assess educational attainment across countries. It measures how many years of formal education adults have completed on average and provides an essential overview of historical progress in expanding access to schooling. Yet, additional years spent in school do not necessarily translate into stronger literacy and numeracy skills. Learning outcomes vary widely depending on the quality of education systems, the resources available to schools, and the learning environment children encounter.

Because of this mismatch between schooling and actual skills, MYS can significantly overstate human capital in contexts where education systems struggle to ensure effective learning. This is particularly relevant in many African countries, where rapid expansion of access has not always been accompanied by improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, two countries with similar MYS may differ dramatically in the competencies of their working-age populations.

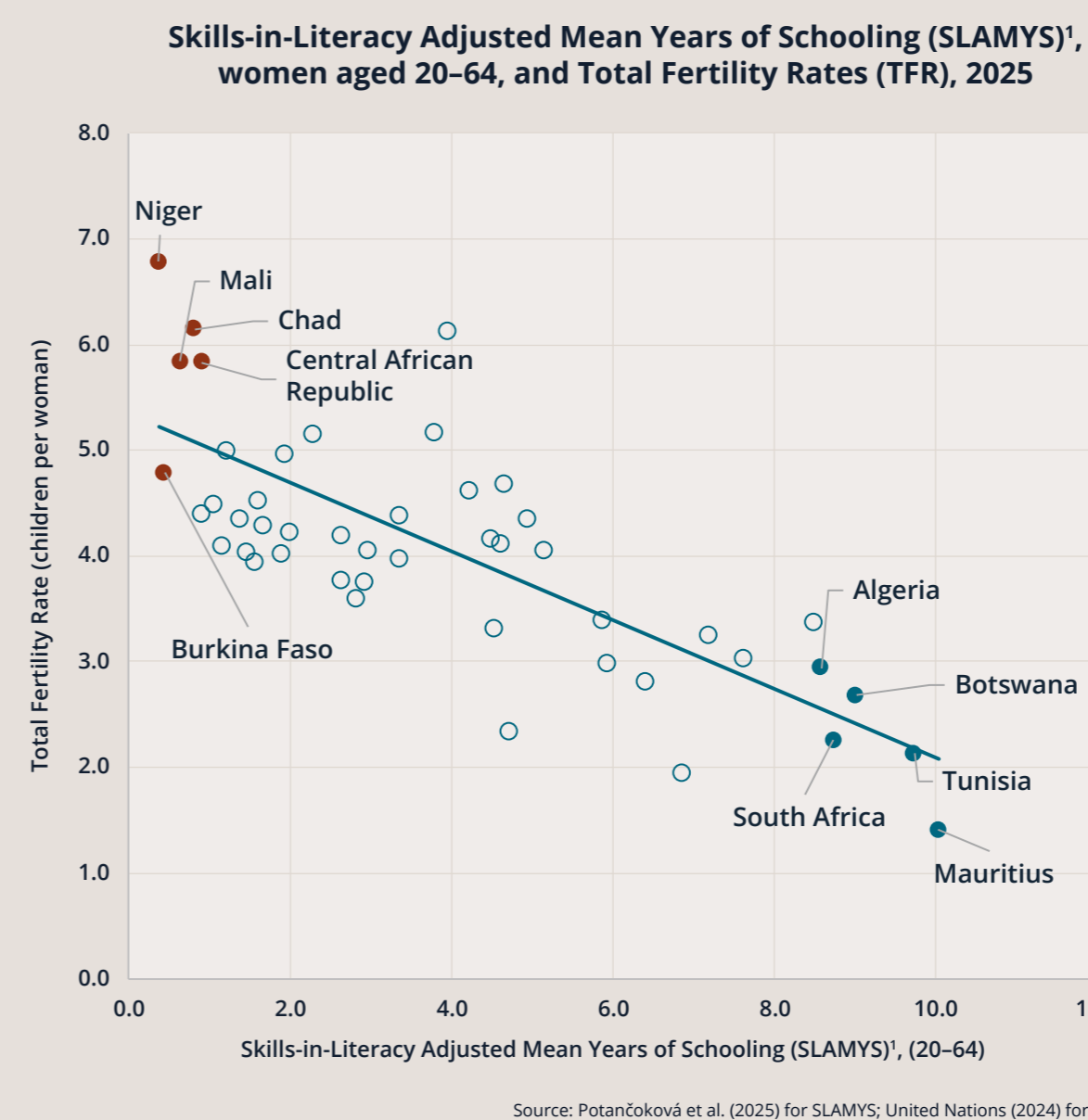
To better capture the knowledge and abilities that matter for productivity, the Skills-in-Literacy Adjusted Mean Years of Schooling (SLAMYS) indicator was developed (Lutz et al., 2021). SLAMYS can be understood as MYS adjusted by a skill factor derived from direct assessments of adult literacy. This adjustment reflects how effectively years of schooling translate into actual competencies. Importantly, the indicator is expressed relative to a benchmark, typically the OECD average. As such, SLAMYS is not an absolute measure like MYS, but a relative one that reflects both the quantity and the effectiveness of education. This means that a given number of years of schooling contributes differently to human capital depending on the learning outcomes achieved. In contexts



where education is lower, each year of schooling translates into fewer effective skills.

Results show that while average formal schooling has increased impressively in Africa, the gains in skills have been far more uneven. In 2025, sub-Saharan Africa's SLAMYS level was similar to that of Latin America in 1970. Meanwhile, some countries such as Zimbabwe show how improvement in skills is possible even when progress in years of schooling has been slower. These differences matter because skills are strongly tied to economic performance, health outcomes, labor market adaptability, the ability to adopt new technologies, and the capacity to respond to climate change. The comparison between schooling and skills provided by SLAMYS makes clear that expanding enrolment alone is not sufficient, and that improving education quality is equally important.

Education is a key determinant of fertility levels

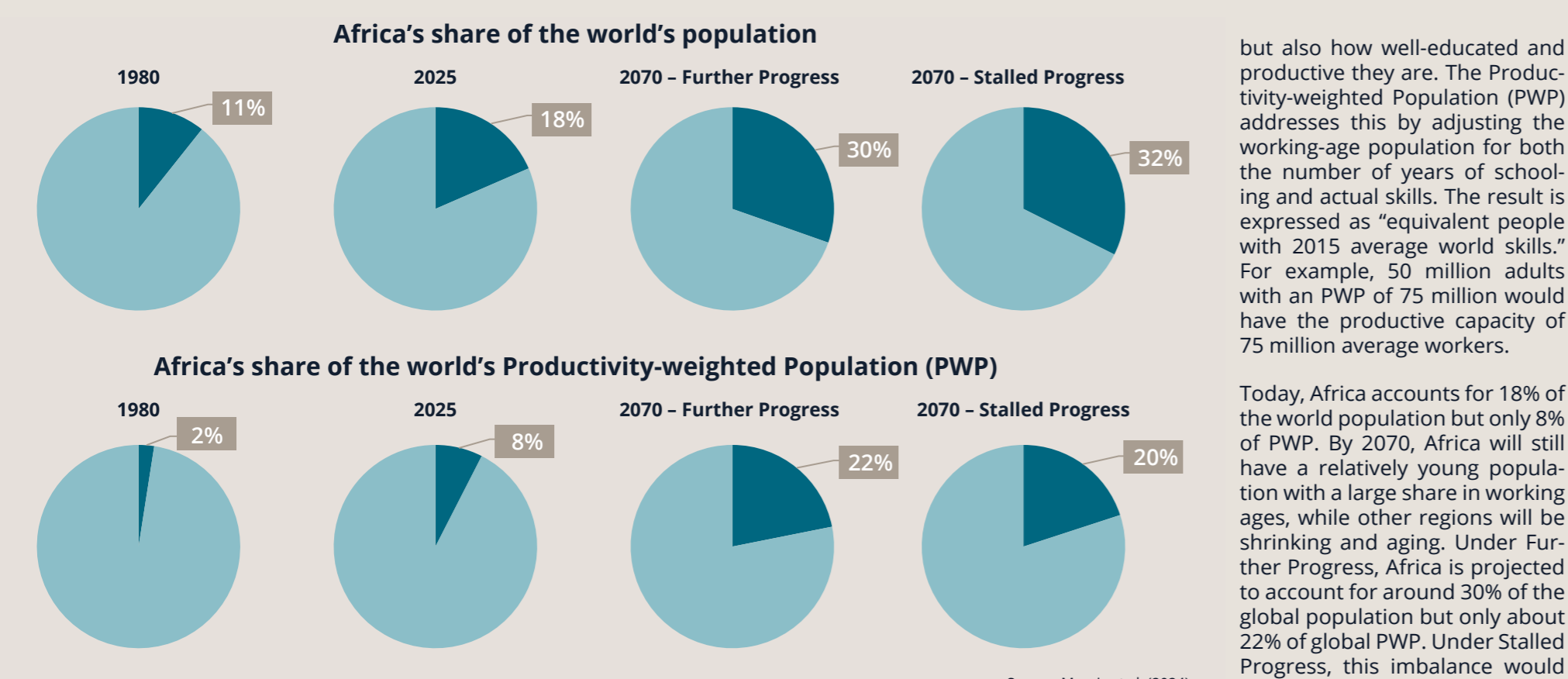


There is a well-established association between higher levels of female education and lower fertility (Caldwell, 1980). As girls stay longer in school, they tend to marry later, gain greater autonomy in reproductive decision-making, and have improved access to information and services related to sexual and reproductive health. Education also increases women's participation in the labor market, which raises the opportunity costs of early and repeated childbearing. At the household level, more education encourages parents to invest more resources in each child's well-being and learning, contributing to a shift in preferences toward smaller families. Education strengthens cognitive skills and enhances ability to plan ahead, which reinforces these pathways.

Education not only influences individual choices but also shapes social norms. Research shows that where more-educated women are present in a community, preferences for smaller families tend to diffuse to women with less education as well (Adhikari et al., 2024). In Africa, strong empirical evidence demonstrates that fertility ideals and behaviors shift toward fewer children within all education groups as the overall education level in their surroundings increases.

This relationship is clearly visible in this figure, which shows fertility levels plotted against Skills-in-Literacy Adjusted Mean Years of Schooling (SLAMYS). Countries with the highest SLAMYS have among the lowest total fertility rates, while countries with the lowest SLAMYS maintain much higher fertility. This highlights that not only access to schooling, but also the quality of learning is related to fertility outcomes.

Africa's share of the global Productivity-weighted Population remains below its share of world population



Africa's share of the world population has risen from about 11% in 1980 to 18% today, and is expected to reach nearly one third by 2070, reflecting its later demographic transition and slower fertility decline. While the rest of the world's population is projected to shrink before the end of the century, Africa's population will continue to grow, although at slower speed.

Yet, population size alone does not capture a region's economic, social, or geopolitical weight. What matters is not only how many people there are,

but also how well-educated and productive they are. The Productivity-weighted Population (PWP) addresses this by adjusting the working-age population for both the number of years of schooling and actual skills. The result is expressed as "equivalent people with 2015 average world skills." For example, 50 million adults with a PWP of 75 million would have the productive capacity of 75 million average workers.

Today, Africa accounts for 18% of the world population but only 8% of PWP. By 2070, Africa will still have a relatively young population with a large share in working ages, while other regions will be shrinking and aging. Under Further Progress, Africa is projected to account for around 30% of the global population but only about 22% of global PWP. Under Stalled Progress, this imbalance would be even more pronounced: Africa's share of the global population would rise further, to around 32%, while its share of PWP would reach only about 20%. Thus, although Stalled Progress leads to a higher share of the global population, it results in a lower share of the human-capital-weighted population. Accelerated progress in both education access and education quality is therefore essential to narrow this gap and to transform Africa's demographic growth into economic and social strength.

Scenarios

Further Progress: This scenario represents a continuation of global historical trends without major disruptions or breakthroughs. Fertility continues to decline gradually, mortality improves steadily, and education expansion continues along the global trend. This scenario corresponds to SSP2 under the SSP Approach (Shared Socioeconomic Pathways as widely used in the Climate Change Research Community, KC et al., 2024). Given that past education expansions in Africa have been slower than on the global average, this implies rather optimistic assumptions of progress in Africa. Under this scenario, the Total Fertility Rate declines from 4.5 children per woman in 2020-25 to 2.24 in 2065-70. Life expectancy at birth increases from 62.1 to 71.9 years. Mean Years of Schooling for the population aged 20 to 64 rise from 6.64 to 10.65 years.

Stalled Progress: This scenario assumes fragmented development (SSP3), as well as stalled social and economic progress. Fertility remains relatively high in many low- and middle-income countries, associated with much slower educational progress and limited access to family planning, while mortality improvements are also slower. Under this scenario, the Total Fertility Rate declines from 4.5 children per woman in 2020-25 to 3.37 in 2065-70. Life expectancy at birth increases only slightly, from 62.1 to 64.4 years. Mean years of schooling for the population aged 20 to 64 rise from 6.64 to 8.16 years. Adult attainment still increases due to the momentum of past expansions among young cohorts but stalls for subsequent cohorts.

All specific numerical assumptions for these scenarios are given in KC et al. (2024) and can also be found for all countries and years on the website of the Wittgenstein Centre Human Capital Data Explorer (2024).

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