

Education Brief

March 2025

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Background

The release of the 2022–23 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS 2022) provides an opportunity to review the situation of children in Mozambique. To this end, UNICEF has produced a series of thematic briefs that present key child-related information from this survey with a view to strengthening evidence-based policy making.



SDG Target 4.1

Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Mozambique faces significant challenges in ensuring equitable access to education and retention of pupils through the phases of education, as well as in providing quality education. There has been progress in expanding access to both primary and secondary schools, but the lack of quality teachers, teaching and learning materials, poverty, and social norms are barriers to further improving the quality of education and levels of education attainment.

The government has introduced a range of policies and strategies to address these issues, including efforts to expand the school network and build more resilient classrooms; provide a school capitation grant and free text books; expand the number of qualified



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teachers; and improve school management through engagement of school councils, school management training and school-level supervision. More recently, the government has introduced basic schools that facilitate the transition from primary to lower secondary education. However, the government needs to plan to accommodate more learners in the education system, given the ongoing growth in the school-age population; improve internal efficiencies to ensure that children move through the system as planned; and take steps to improve the quality of schooling through better targeted and co-ordinated interventions. These actions will require the budgets for education to be increased substantially.

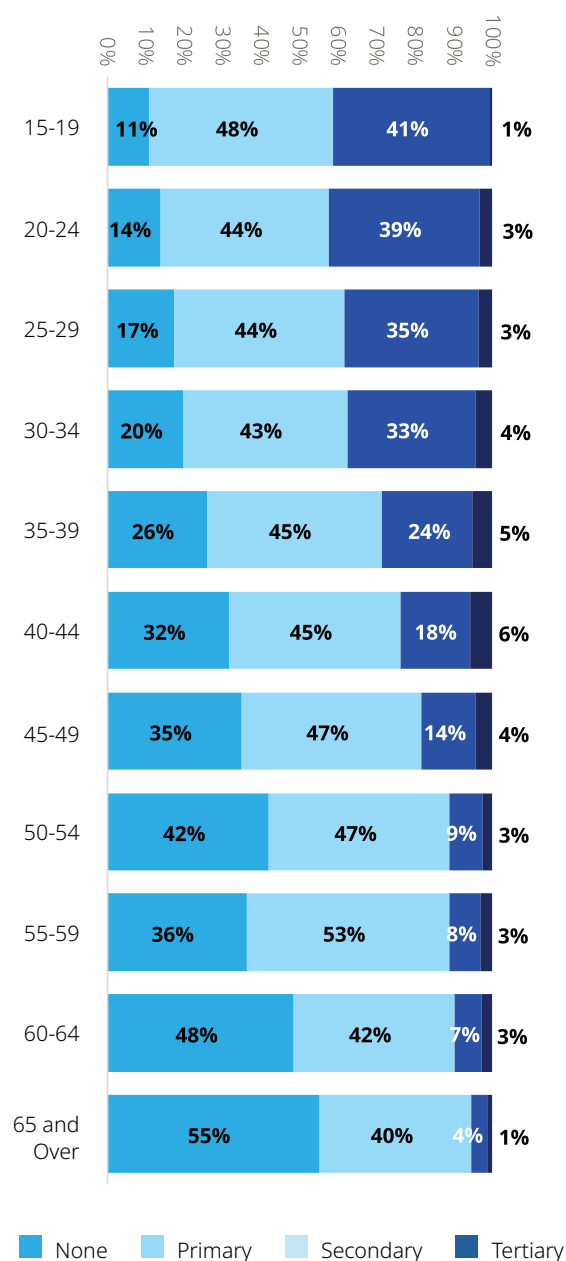
1 Educational attainment in Mozambique

Key fact: In Mozambique, school attendance has improved dramatically over the last 50 years. According to the DHS 2022 data, 53 per cent of adults over 65 years did not attend school, whereas the same applies to only 9 per cent of children aged 15–19 years.

Over the last 50 years, significant progress has been made in expanding access to education. The proportion of the population having attended at least primary school has nearly doubled, from 47 per cent among adults over 65 years old to 91 per cent among young people aged 15–19 years. The proportion of people who have ever attended secondary education has increased tenfold, from 4 per cent among those aged over 65 years to 40 per cent among young people aged 15–19 years. These are significant gains, but there is still a substantial amount of work to do to extend access, and to improve retention – in secondary education in particular. Too many children – especially those from poorer households, rural areas, and the central and northern provinces – do not complete primary education, struggle to remain in secondary education due to a lack of foundational skills gained from poor quality primary education, or lack access to secondary education due to structural and financial barriers.

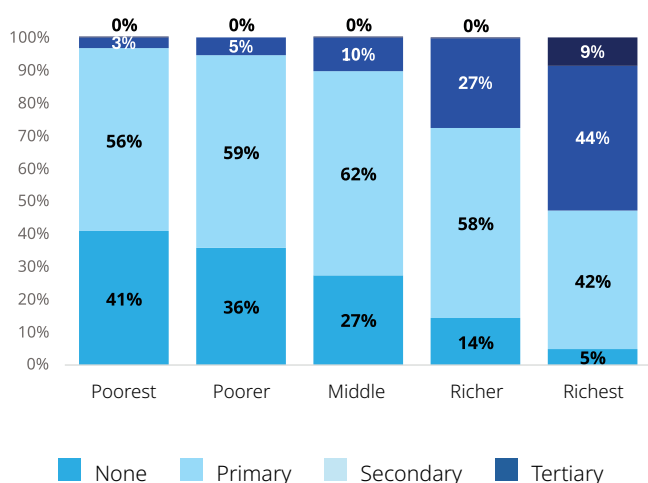
Education is a pathway to a better future. Yet, the DHS 2022 data reveal a stark reality: only 3 per cent of people from the poorest quintile have attended secondary school or higher compared to 52 per cent from the richest quintile. This highlights the enormous barriers children from poorer households face when it comes to educational attainment, which reinforces wealth gaps across generations.

Figure 1: Highest level of education attended, by age (2022)



Exercising right to education shouldn't depend on where a child lives, yet children in rural Mozambique face overwhelming barriers to both accessing and staying in school. As a result, 30 per cent of the rural population in Mozambique has never attended school. Even among those who do start, staying enrolled is a major challenge. DHS 2022 data shows that, while 64 per cent of the rural population have attended primary school, only 16 per cent continued to secondary school,

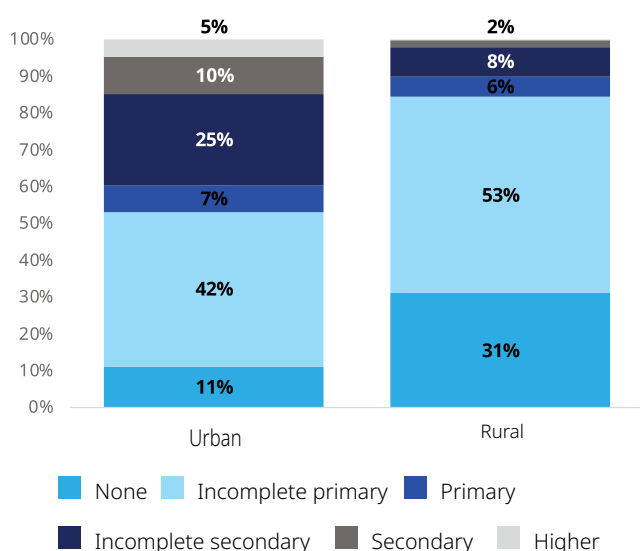
Figure 2: Highest level of educational attended by wealth – whole population (2022)



meaning that just one in four makes this crucial leap. This lack of access and retention in rural areas means that, while 15 per cent of the urban population has completed secondary education or higher, that figure is only 2 per cent for the rural population.

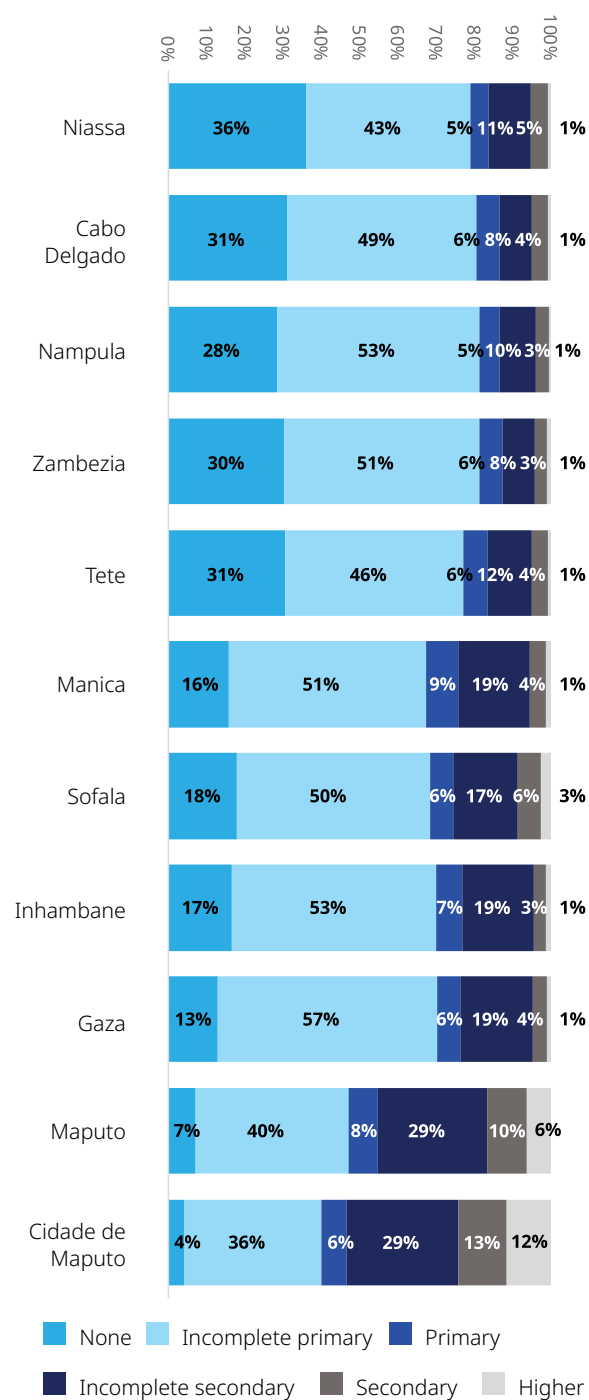
Figure 4 shows that access to these educational opportunities also differs significantly across provinces. The provinces are ordered from north (left) to south (right). Cultural norms that keep girls out of school, socioeconomic pressures that prioritize children's contribution to (household) labour, a lack of perceived returns to education due to a lack of employment

Figure 3: Educational attainment by area – whole population (2022)



opportunities, and a lack of accessible schools, all mean that many children from provinces in the northern region of Mozambique will never attend school, or will drop out during primary education. About a third of the population in the northern provinces have no education whatsoever, while an additional half of the population have only incomplete primary education.

Figure 4: Educational attainment by province – whole population (2022)



2 Children in and out of school

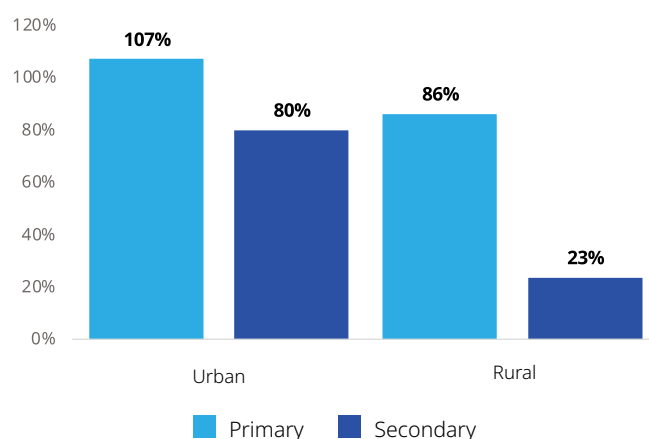
Key fact: According to the DHS 2022, the gross school attendance rate in secondary school is 80 per cent in urban areas, and only 23 per cent in rural areas.

According to the DHS 2022, the gross school attendance rate – the proportion of the school-age population for a specific level of schooling that is attending school – for primary school in urban areas is 107 per cent of the cohort of primary school-aged children. This suggests that either a high number of children are not progressing in line with their age, or that there are children enrolling prior to 6 years old. Both of these situations indicate systemic challenges in the education system. In rural areas, the gross school attendance rate for primary education drops to 86 per cent, which suggests a large number of young children are out-of-school in rural Mozambique. The gap widens further at the secondary level, where 80 per cent of urban children attend school, but only 23 per cent of rural children have the same opportunity. Children in rural areas are therefore missing out on a critical opportunity to realize their full potential.

These urban-rural disparities are replicated across provinces. In the most urban province, Cidade de Maputo, the gross school attendance rates are 112 per cent for primary school, and 95 per cent for secondary school. This stands in stark contrast to the gross school attendance rates in Zambezia, which are 82 per cent for primary school, and only 25 per cent for secondary school. These disparities highlight the lack of opportunities afforded to children from Mozambique's poorer, more rural provinces, and reinforce the regional inequalities.

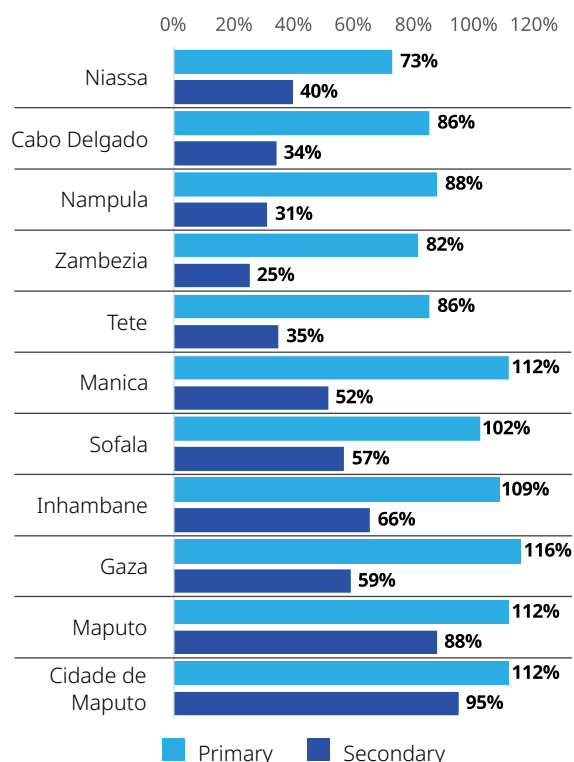
For most households, financial constraints and opportunity costs of education remain significant. Although primary education (and recently also lower

Figure 5: Gross school attendance rate by area (2022)



secondary education) is officially free, costs such as transport, uniforms and basic learning materials remain barriers. In addition, early marriage and pregnancy also contribute to the high dropout rates in the more rural provinces. Another challenge is the language of instruction. Many children in northern Mozambique speak indigenous languages at home, yet Portuguese remains the sole medium of instruction, creating barriers to early learning and literacy.¹

Figure 6: Gross school attendance rate by province (2022)



¹ Benson, C. (2014). Bilingual Education in Africa: An Examination of Language Policy and Learning Outcomes. UNESCO.

3 Gender disparities in education

Key fact: Mozambique has succeeded in mostly eliminating the historical gender disparities in school education, though further work is still needed to address disparities in tertiary education.

The DHS 2022 data on education attainment levels by gender for different age cohorts show how gender disparities have reduced over time. Among children aged 6–17 years, there are very similar rates of school attendance among males and females. Among adults, access to education for both males and females has improved over time, as has a closing of the gender disparities in terms of non-attendance and attendance of primary school. Among adults aged 24 years and older, 38 per cent of females did not attend school compared to 19 per cent of males. However, among adults aged 18–24 years, 16 per cent and 10 per cent of females and males respectively did not attend school, indicating a significant closing of this gender gap. When it comes to completing secondary education, while the gap between males and females has remained constant, at about 5 per cent, the proportion of males and females completing secondary education has improved. Among adults over 24 years, 14 per cent of males and 9 per cent of females completed secondary education, while among 18–24-year-olds, 16 per cent of males and 11 per cent of females completed secondary education. This growth in educational attainment among both boys and girls is an encouraging development.

The Gender Parity Index for gross attendance among 6–24-year-olds shows that marginally more males are enrolled in primary education, there is almost gender parity in secondary school – though slightly in favour of females – and more males than females attend higher education. In all instances, the differences are small.

The high levels of gender parity among the current school-age cohort is further confirmed by the net school enrolment rate by age and gender, which shows that a higher proportion of girls are on track in school – in five of the seven age categories in primary school, and in three of the five age categories in secondary school. Generally, the differences are relatively small.

Figure 7: Educational attainment by gender, 6–17-year-olds (2022)

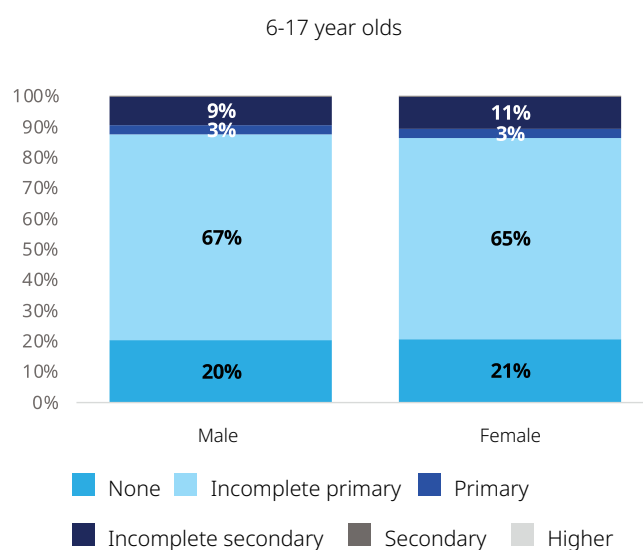
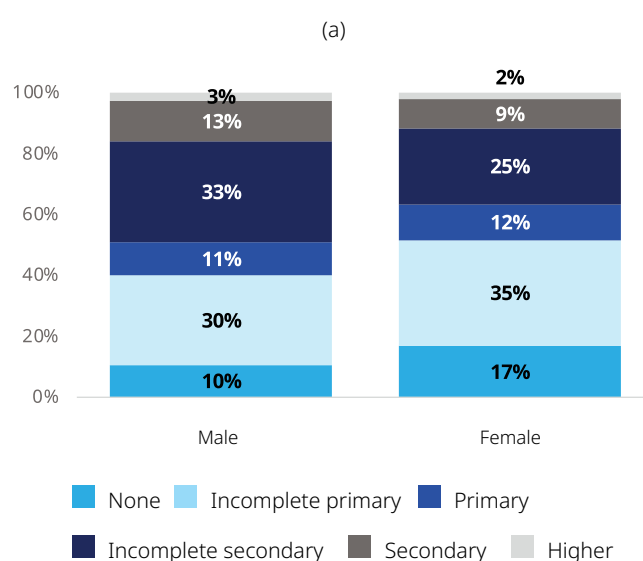


Figure 8: Educational attainment by gender, (a) 18–24-year-olds, and (b) 24-year-olds and older (2022)



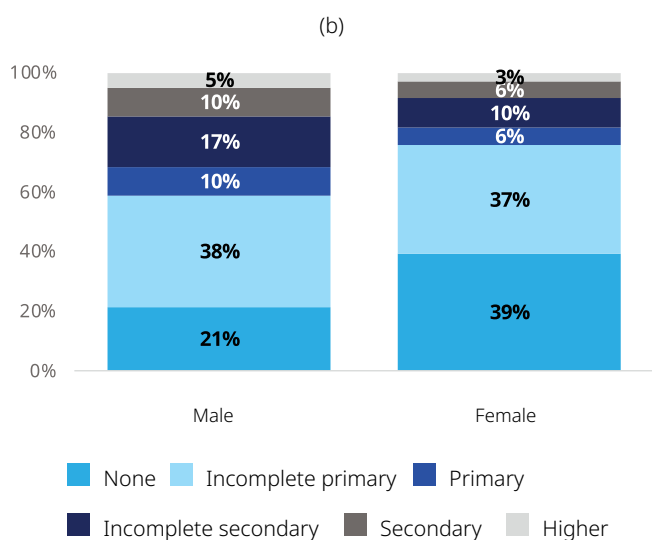
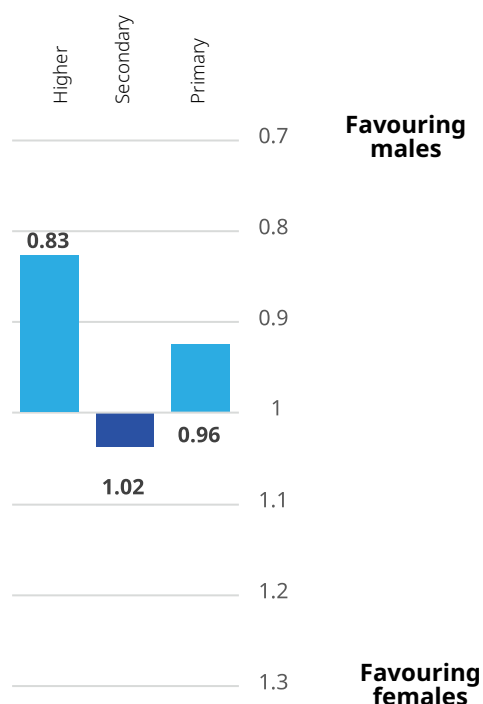


Figure 9: Gender Parity Index (gross attendance), 6–24-year-olds (2022)



The gross school attendance rate for 16-year-olds shows that, in six of the ten provinces, a higher proportion of females is in school than males. The greatest gender disparities in favour of males are in Cabo Delgado (19%), Manica (11%) and Sofala (11%). In these provinces, it is likely that part of the disparity is linked to girls leaving school due to child marriage and early pregnancy. The impact of child marriage on education is discussed in the Ending Child Marriage

brief. The DHS 2022 shows that less than 10 per cent of girls who marry before 16 years of age continue with education. Similarly, only 15 per cent of girls who give birth to their first child before the age of 15 years continue with school.

Figure 10: Net school attendance rate, by child age and gender (2022)

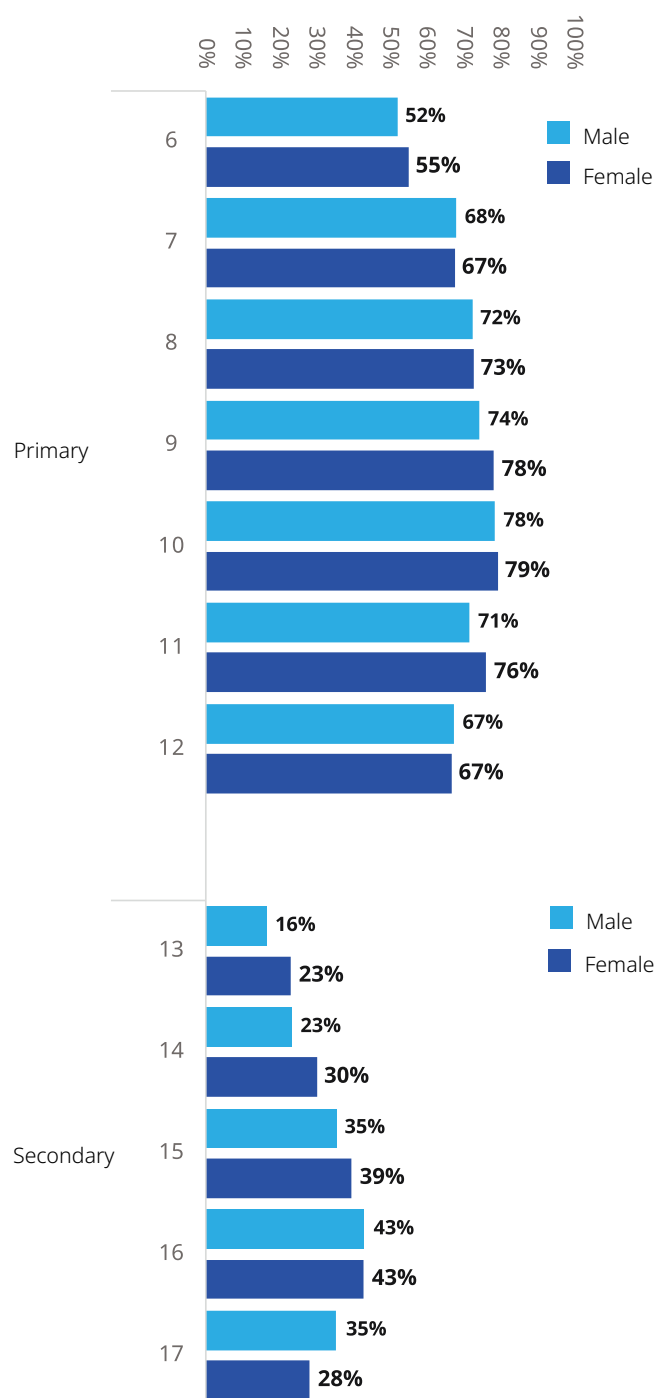
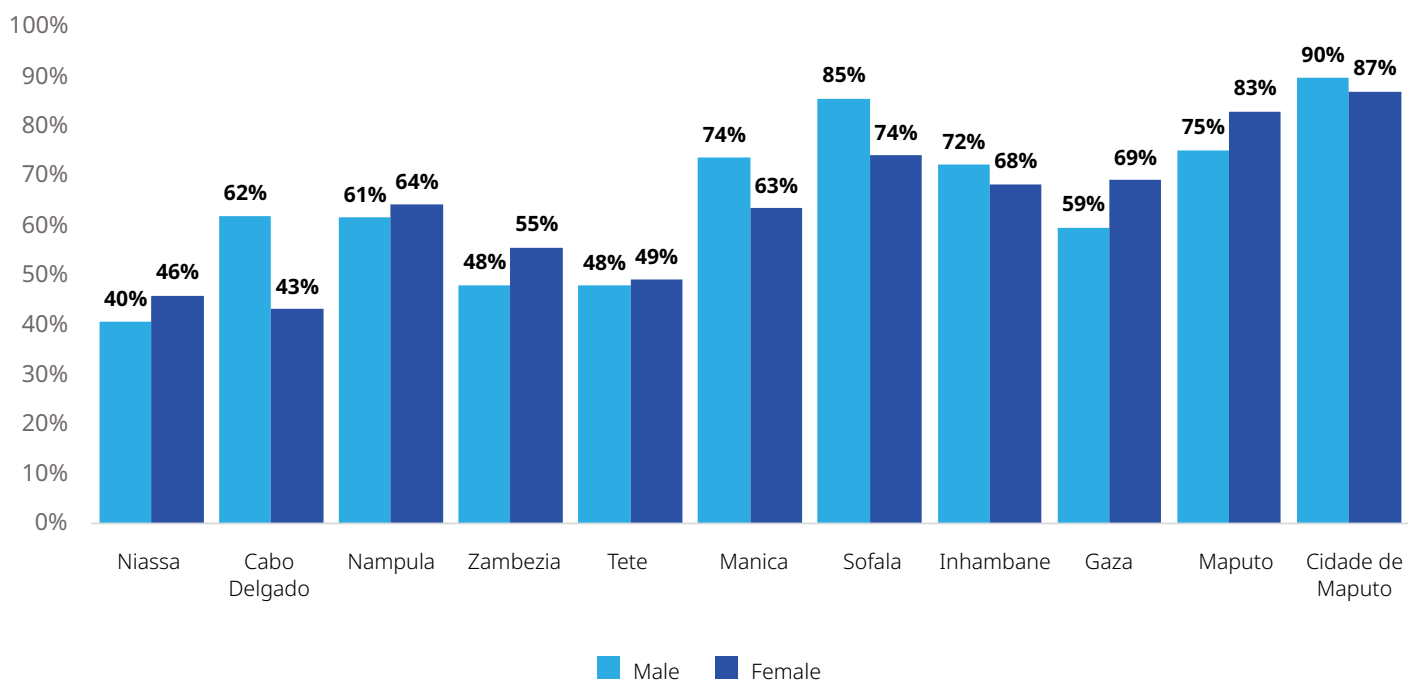


Figure 11: Gross school attendance rate for 16-year-olds, by gender and by province (2022)



4 Health and accessibility factors impacting on education

Key fact: Health and nutrition challenges hinder educational attainment in Mozambique, with anaemia, stunting and functional disabilities linked to poorer learning outcomes and lower rates of primary completion and secondary school attendance.

It is well-established that malnutrition, particularly among infants and young children, can negatively impact brain development and, therefore, future ability to learn.

Anaemia among children under five years of age affects 75 per cent of children in rural areas, and 65 per cent in urban areas. Of all children under five years, 44 per cent suffer from moderate to severe anaemia, while 36 per cent suffer from moderate to severe stunting. The DHS 2022 data show that the presence of both anaemia and stunting impact negatively on early childhood development, including literacy-numeracy and learning, and on education attendance among older children. Of adolescent girls, 31 per cent who are not anaemic progress to secondary education, compared to 23 per cent of their peers suffering from anaemia. The impact of stunting is more pronounced: 45 per cent of non-stunted girls aged 15–19 years attend secondary education, compared to 25 per cent of girls who are stunted. Children being underweight show similar impacts, emphasizing the long-term cognitive and physical impacts of malnutrition on children's capacity to learn.

The DHS 2022 data show that rates of education non-attendance are higher among children aged 5–17 years with functional disabilities than their peers with no disabilities. It is very encouraging that there

is virtually no difference in the attendance rate at primary school between children with and without functional disabilities. However, fewer children with functional disabilities progress to secondary education. This suggests that the limited spread of secondary schools, and the lack of suitable transport support, may be a barrier to these children continuing with secondary education.

Figure 12: Highest education level attended by females aged 15–19 years, by type of malnutrition (2022)

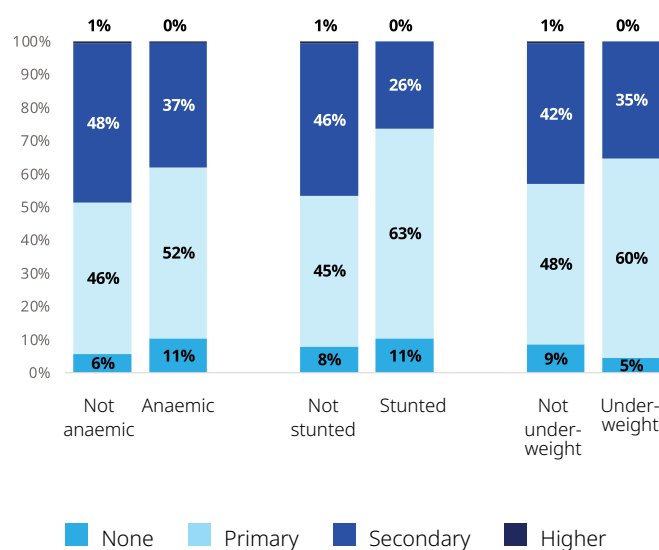
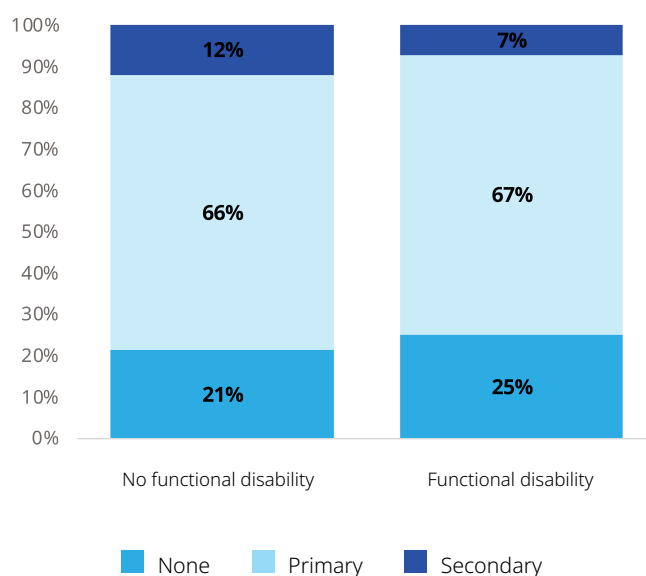


Figure 13: Highest education level attended by children aged 6–17 years, by disability (2022)



Proposed Policy Priorities

Proposed Policy Priorities

To improve access to schooling and strengthen education outcomes, the following policy priorities are recommended:

1. Target investments to reduce regional disparities in education access and attainment through evidence-based and demographic-responsive planning.

To close the gap in educational attainment between provinces, the Government of Mozambique should prioritize investments in underserved regions, particularly the northern and central provinces, where high rates of non-attendance and incomplete primary education, as well as poor rates of transition from primary to secondary education, persist. Planning and resource allocation should be based on evidence, using disaggregated education data and demographic projections to identify areas with the highest current needs and future population growth. This includes expanding the deployment of qualified teachers, building schools in areas with rising school-age populations, improving quality and internal efficiencies to ensure improved transition, and introducing flexible models such as community-based or accelerated learning programmes, to reach over-age learners and those at risk of dropping out.

2. Strengthen education quality from early childhood through the foundational years.

Improving the quality of education is essential to reduce dropout and ensure that all children acquire the skills they need to succeed. Expanding access to pre-primary and early childhood education is critical to equip children with the foundational cognitive, social and emotional skills, and to prepare them for a successful transition into primary school. This should be complemented by maternal and neonatal nutrition interventions to address the triple burden of malnutrition among children under five, and evidence-based parenting interventions that promote

early stimulation, responsive caregiving, and positive discipline. At the primary level, the government should invest in improving teaching quality through the adoption of effective evidence-based practices such as structured pedagogy and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), which help ensure that instruction is adapted to learners' needs. Strengthening in-service teacher training, improving access to quality learning materials, and reinforcing classroom support and supervision, are key to creating an engaging and effective learning environment that keeps children in school and improves learning outcomes.

3. Prevent dropout and improve secondary school retention among adolescent boys and girls.

Efforts to improve adolescent retention in school must respond to the different barriers faced by girls and boys, while recognizing that many interventions can effectively support both. Girls are more likely to drop out due to early marriage and pregnancy, while boys often leave school because of economic pressures or a lack of engagement. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of strategies, including the enforcement of protective laws, provision of sexual and reproductive health education, mentoring, school feeding schemes, scholarships, and transport assistance. Life skills and career guidance can help make education more relevant and motivating for all adolescents. Interventions such as mentoring, re-entry policies, targeted support programmes, and programmes that link adolescents with opportunities to work, should be designed to serve both girls and boys, ensuring an inclusive and gender-responsive approach to reducing dropout, and improving returns to education.

for every child,

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

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For each and every child.

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