

COUNTRY REPORT

LAO PEOPLE'S
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017



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Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic
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$$5 + 4 = 9$$

$$4 + 3 = 7$$

$$6 + 3 = 9$$



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ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASLO	National Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
DESB	District Education and Sports Bureau
ECD	early childhood development
ECDI	Early Child Development Index
ECE	early childhood education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
ICT	information and communication technology
Lao PDR (the)	the Lao People's Democratic Republic
LSIS	Lao Social Indicator Survey
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MICS-EAGLE	MICS-Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VEDC	village education development committee



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the education-related findings from the second Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS-II)¹ undertaken in 2017. It combines this analysis with policy and practice recommendations from two workshops and multiple consultations with relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) and development partners. Education-related data from the survey are analysed in terms of a series of key research questions concerning early childhood education (ECE), access and completion at primary and secondary levels, literacy, information and communication technology (ICT) skills, child labour, early marriage, and parental involvement, as well as how data and education sector planning can make schools better places to learn. Each chapter concludes with two types of recommendations: direct recommendations, which are directly relevant to findings from the LSIS-II and overall recommendations, which relate to the wider enabling environment.

What is the current status of early learning and its relationship to primary education?

Starting education early is very important to equitable educational outcomes. Investing in ECE pays off as it increases the likelihood of children attending primary school and narrows the inequality gap by giving stronger weight to education than to the child's socioeconomic background. Children who attend ECE are better prepared to enter primary school. Only 12 per cent of children not attending ECE are on track in terms of literacy-numeracy, a figure that lifts to 53 per cent for those who do attend. This is why it is important that ECE is not only free, as it is in government-run facilities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), but also accessible across the country. Children living in rural areas are less likely to attend ECE and this is further complicated in rural areas without road access. In some provinces in the south, less than 20 per cent of children attend ECE, while 66 per cent attend in the capital, Vientiane.

To meet the demand for ECE, it is important to promote cost-effective and alternative delivery modes of ECE in rural and remote communities, and where funds are available, the construction of pre-primary classrooms, while also ensuring the supply of ECE teachers. Furthermore, the quality of ECE being offered to children must be evaluated by a system of assessment of child developmental levels, which has already been introduced by MoES.

To successfully evaluate quality, it is also important to develop a multisectoral and holistic early childhood development (ECD) policy, as well as to undertake more research on cost-effective options to expand access to and improve the quality of ECE services, while also supporting the smooth transition of children from ECE to the early grades of primary education.

What factors are most associated with access and completion of each cycle of education?

The analysis of data related to access and completion of various levels of education highlights strong, underlying socioeconomic factors; poverty is named as a key factor contributing to inequalities. There is also strong inequality across ethnic groups, as children from non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups have lower attendance rates than those belonging to the Lao-Tai ethnolinguistic group. For example, at primary level, 94 per cent of children from the Lao-Tai group attend primary school but only 83 per cent of children from Mon-Khmer families do. Most of this inequality across ethnolinguistic groups is explained by socioeconomic differences, such as wealth and place of residence. Rurality is also seen to be a disadvantage for children, as it increases the likelihood of children being out of school, especially in the case of upper secondary education, where rural children are five times less likely to attend school than those in urban areas, even when controlling for regional differences and parental wealth.

It is therefore important to develop a strategy that includes higher budget allocations for disadvantaged districts to reduce disparities in attendance rates at primary and secondary levels among some ethnolinguistic groups, as well as lower attendance rates due to socioeconomic status, remoteness and region. Student allowances can help bridge this gap if the most disadvantaged students are selected in an objective manner.

Completion would likely benefit from improved teaching conditions, more effective teacher training and continuous professional development support for teachers and school leaders, especially in contexts where students' mother tongue is not Lao and when teaching children with disabilities. Training should also include school principals, who should be equipped with leadership and management skills, as well as capacity to better involve community and parents. Strengthening the implementation of the school cluster system, in which teachers support each other, is another important way to make teaching more effective.



What skills do students have after graduation?

Access to education is not enough; quality should also be assured. Literacy rates show 60 per cent of young people who only attended primary school² do not have the necessary skills to read simple sentences. This is very problematic and calls for closer monitoring of and support to students and teachers to assure quality of teaching and learning. Although there has been much progress both in decreasing illiteracy and in bridging the gender gap, women are still 6 percentage points behind men, even among younger generations.

In terms of ICT, very few young people aged 15 to 24 years in the Lao PDR carry out ICT activities. Only 11 per cent of young men and 9 per cent of young women use any ICT skills. Education is key in fostering ICT development. Attending upper secondary education multiplies by five the chances of young people using ICT skills when compared to those who only attended lower secondary education.

Illiteracy can be fought with the creation of informal literacy programmes, which should target areas where literacy rates are lowest, particularly where there are concentrations of females from ethnic groups other than Lao-Tai. ICT skills can also be improved with the provision of more ICT training for teachers and students, especially in rural areas, as well as the development of an overall ICT strategy/master plan.

How do child labour and early marriage impact participation in education?

Many external factors influence children's educational outcomes, particularly child labour and child marriage. Although both children in and out of school participate in child labour at similar rates, out-of-school children are much more involved in hazardous work activities and should be protected. LSIS-II found that 37 per cent of out-of-school children were engaged in hazardous labour, while only 27 per cent of children attending school were similarly engaged.

In the case of early marriage, girls are much more likely to be affected than their male counterparts, and protection and education are needed to make sure girls have an equal chance to remain in school and thrive. Early marriage and literacy skills are closely linked. The odds of young women being literate are 25 per cent higher if they do not marry early compared to women who marry before they turn 15.

Recommendations to directly address these issues include the expansion of awareness-raising on the negative impacts of child labour, especially in hazardous circumstances, and the incorporation of risks and dangers of child labour into the school curriculum. In the case of child marriage, the Family Law, which forbids marriage under 18 years of age, should be enforced, but there is also room for enhancing awareness among secondary school principals and parents of the need to accept young women who are mothers or married as students if they wish to return to school.

How do parental involvement at home and engagement at school vary?

Another key factor to assure success in education is parental engagement. Parents with a higher level of education attend celebrations and sporting events and go to school to discuss their child's performance three times more often than parents who did not attend primary school. However, LSIS-II found that only 40 per cent of schools have a functioning governing board, meaning either a village education development committee (VEDC) or parents' association. Home environments also vary strongly across socioeconomic lines. Wealthier or highly educated parents provide their children with three or more books to read seven times as often as poorer or more poorly educated parents.

More parental engagement can be achieved by strengthening community engagement through in-service training for school principals and encouraging the participation of parents through VEDCs. Furthermore, it is important to document and disseminate success stories of active VEDCs and principals who have successfully engaged parents in the school and in their children's learning.

What is needed in terms of data and policy to make schools a better place to learn?

Evidence-based policy recommendations require the appropriate tools for research and evaluation. It is important to guarantee quality data to highlight challenges and best

practices, which include data access issues highlighted by policymakers and education specialists. There must be more readily available data on teachers and principals, as well as information on student learning outcomes. Also, data availability is not sufficient to ensure sound decision-making as data users also need to be equipped with the capacity to understand and analyse available data.

The Lao government's current Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) (2016–2020) provides the policy framework for education development by MoES. However, the current plan is more aspirational in nature and not firmly linked to available education sector financing. Also, provincial and district involvement in the plan's development was not optimal.

While efforts to address data and ESDP design issues are already underway within MoES, recommendations include the establishment of a functional large-scale national assessment of key milestones/grades and national curriculum, as well as the inclusion of more ECE and other data, including disability, in the Education Management Information System (EMIS). Some areas need more data, namely inclusive education and ICT development. Moreover, it is important to pay more careful attention to how available data is used, especially at school and district levels and to draft more realistic goals for the next ESDP (2021–2025) in terms of what can be achieved within available budgets.

Conclusion

Conducted in 2017, LSIS-II identified a range of education-related issues and barriers that prevent Lao children and young people from achieving their right to quality education as defined under Sustainable Development Goal 4. These include issues related to access and attendance at all levels of the education system, as well as concerns such as child labour and early marriage. While the ESDP (2016–2020) addresses many of these issues at the policy level, much remains to be done at the implementation level. Full implementation of several of the recommendations, which were the result of customization and policy workshops and subsequent consultations with the government – for example, construction of more secondary schools and dormitories in rural areas –

are limited at this point due to budget constraints. Nonetheless, the recommendations do highlight the need to better target these disadvantaged areas and groups more precisely through initiatives that utilize existing budgets.

The education-related findings from LSIS-II have already been used for the ESDP midterm review as well as development of the new draft ECE policy. It is hoped that the findings, analysis and recommendations contained in this report, together with other data, will be a useful resource to inform both education policy and practice, including development of the next ESDP (2021–2025), which will provide a framework for further education development in the Lao PDR.

INTRODUCTION

The MICS-EAGLE (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey-Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity) is UNICEF's global initiative to provide systematic in-depth data analysis that supports governments for evidence-based policy planning, monitoring and advocacy. In the case of the Lao PDR, the second Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS-II) was used for data analysis.

The resulting LSIS-II EAGLE initiative, a joint project between the MoES, the Lao Statistics Bureau and UNICEF, makes the Lao PDR the first country to embark on MICS-EAGLE. This country report contains an analysis of the education-related findings of this initiative, organized around several research questions, which include both descriptive and regression analysis, to better understand the challenges identified by policymakers and experts.

The report also contains significant input from MoES and MoLSW, as well as development partners, in terms of recommendations regarding policy and practice related to the LSIS-II findings on education. This input was the result of two workshops (August 2018 and June 2019) held to review and add to the findings and recommendations, as well as individual consultations with key staff from various departments

within the two ministries and from development partners. The consultations used education-related findings from LSIS-II relevant to each respondent to elicit policy- and practice-related recommendations. These were then used as a basis for discussion among key stakeholders in the second workshop and further refined as a result.

The Lao PDR's engagement with LSIS-II EAGLE came at a particularly strategic time, informing the midterm review of the current Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) (2016–2020).³ The ESDP calls for expansion and reform of the national education system through improved infrastructure, updated curriculum and improved quality of teaching and learning. Findings from LSIS-II were used extensively throughout the ESDP review process, serving to foster debate and equip policymakers with necessary evidence-based analysis.

This report aims to provide relevant information and insights, along with recommendations related to the education policy and data questions and findings discussed during the two workshops and the consultation process. It is hoped that this report, including the policy and practice recommendations, will serve to inform development of the next ESDP (2021–2025) as well as other future planning and policy frameworks.





CHAPTER 1

What is the current status of early learning and its linkage to primary education?

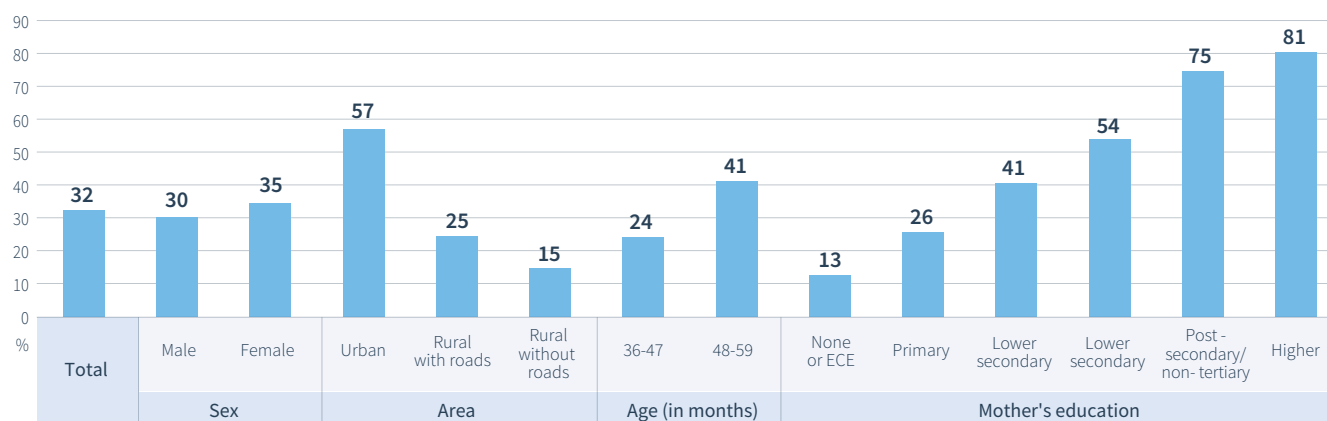
Early learning provides tremendous advantages to children for their future education and equips them with skills for life. Enrolling early in school allows children to learn more effectively and to be better prepared for primary education. It is particularly important, for example, for children from poorer backgrounds or for those belonging to ethnic groups who do not speak the school language (Lao) at home. The Lao PDR first enacted legislation for the provision of ECE in 1975,⁴ but despite its numerous benefits, ECE enrolment remains low. Recent efforts have been made in the country to address this, such as making ECE free of charge under the 2015 Education Law and the establishment of an ECE department under MoES in 2017.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

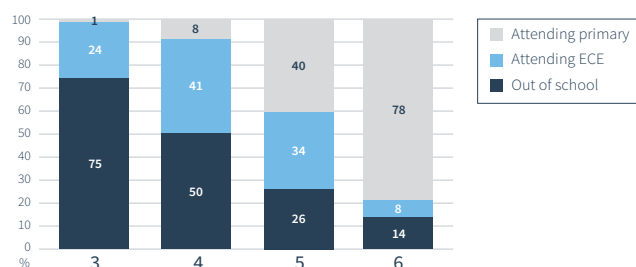
Who attends early childhood education?

Just over 30 per cent of all children aged 3 to 4 years attend ECE.⁵ As Figure 1 shows, early learning is much more common in urban areas, reaching most children in the age bracket; however, it remains rare in rural areas, especially in more remote areas without roads. Although more than half of children aged 36 to 59 months in urban areas are enrolled in some sort of ECE, this is the case for only one quarter of children in rural areas with road access and a mere 15 per cent of those in rural areas without roads.

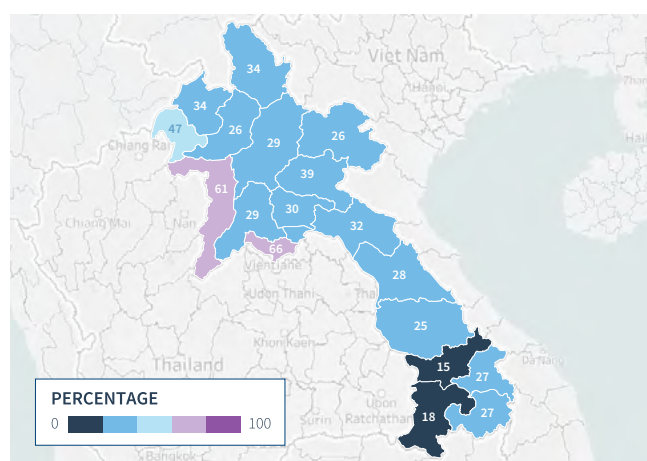
FIGURE 1: **ECE attendance rate, by sex, area, age and mother's education**



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 2: **Level attended among children aged 3 to 6 years⁶**

Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 3: **ECE attendance rate, by province**

Source: LSIS-II, 2017

Children growing up in families with poorly educated mothers are also much less present in ECE. Only 13 per cent of boys and girls whose mothers did not complete primary school attend ECE, compared to 80 per cent of children whose mothers have a tertiary diploma.

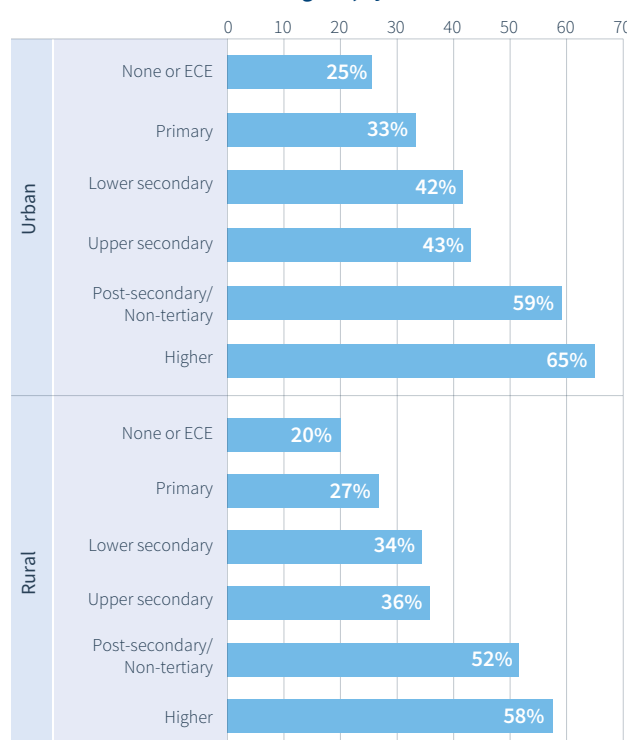
ECE attendance increases with age (Figure 2). Although only 24 per cent of children aged 3 years attend this level of education, over 34 per cent of four-year-olds do. Among children aged 5 years, which is one year younger than the official entry age for primary education, only one-third are enrolled in ECE programmes. However, at this age, another 40 per cent are already attending primary education, which leads to a total of 76 per cent of all children in that age group being in either an ECE programme or in primary school.

It is clear that the number of children in school increases with age, as does the number of children attending primary education. For ECE, however, the figures are more complex. Between the ages of 3 and 4 years, more children enrol in ECE, but when they turn 5, many move onto primary education. By the age of 6, four-fifths of children are enrolled in primary school and only 8 per cent in ECE.

ECE attendance also varies considerably from region to region. Fewer than one in five children aged 5 years are enrolled in ECE facilities in Champasak and Saravane Provinces, while two-thirds are enrolled in the capital area of Vientiane. Overall, ECE is better accessed in the north, where over one quarter of children attend in the year before they turn 6, the statutory age for entering primary education.

Regression analysis of ECE attendance (controlling for individual and household characteristics) confirms most of the findings from the descriptive statistics. Except for gender, all other socioeconomic variables have some influence as to which children attend ECE and which do not. Poorer and rural children have less chance of attending ECE, as do those whose mothers are less educated or whose parents belong to non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups.

ECE attendance is also strongly influenced by the location of children and the ECE opportunities in the place where they live, as seen in Figure 3. Children living in rural areas are less likely than urban children to attend ECE. Furthermore, wealth and mother's education also significantly impact the chances of attending an ECE facility. When both factors are combined in the analysis, the picture is even more concerning. Only 20 per cent of children of mothers with fewer years of education and living in rural areas are likely to attend ECE, while 65 per cent of those in urban areas and living with highly educated mothers are expected to attend some form of early childhood education (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: **Likelihood of attending ECE, by area and mother's education**

Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

Do children of ECE school age attend ECE schools?

Some of the children not attending ECE stay at home, but many are already enrolled in primary education, which, unlike most early education, is often provided free by the government. Among children aged 5 years, about one-third are enrolled in ECE, while 40 per cent are already enrolled in primary schools despite the official age to start primary school being 6 years old (Figure 5). This may signal parental preference for early enrolment in primary schools over ECE classes, but also the fact that ECE may be unavailable in certain areas, requiring parents to enrol their children directly into primary school.

There is some gender imbalance in attendance rates as girls attend both ECE and primary education at slightly higher rates than boys. The largest differences, however, can be found when comparing children by socioeconomic background. Children whose mothers have more education attend both ECE and primary education more often. There is also a big advantage to children from families in wealthier quintiles, where over 90 per cent are in school, compared to less than 60 per cent attending ECE or primary education from the poorest quintile. Among ethnic groups, the largest ethnic group, Lao-Tai, has a strong advantage in attendance

FIGURE 5: **Level of education attended by children aged 5 years, by sex, area, region and mother's education**

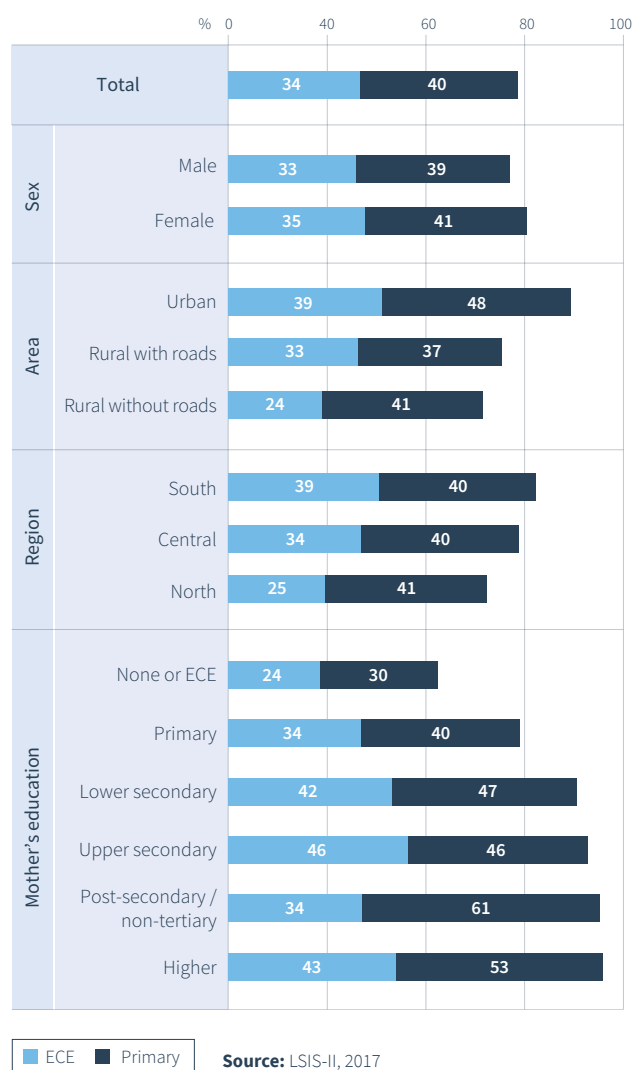
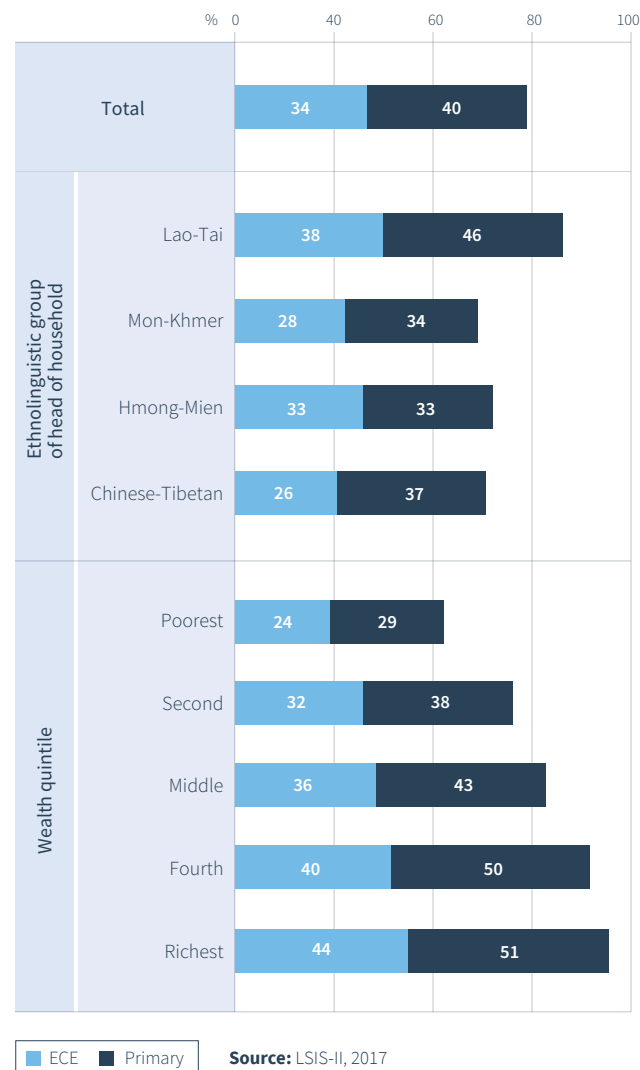


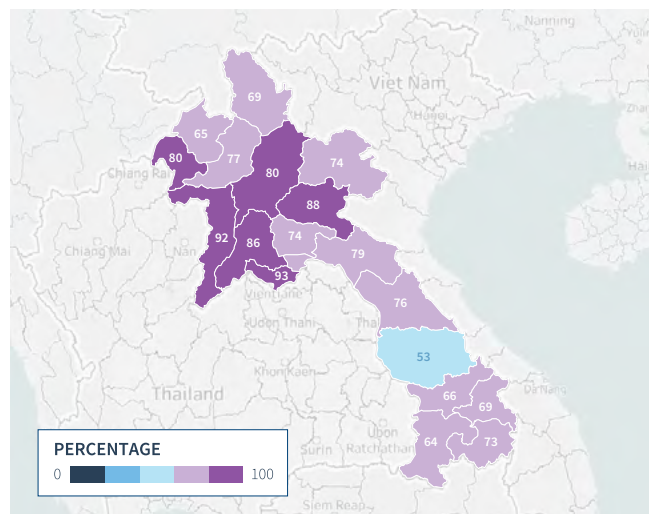
FIGURE 6: **Level of education attended by children aged 5 years, by ethnolinguistic group and wealth quintile**



in both primary and secondary education. This starts early in school, by families sending a larger percentage (84 per cent) of their children to either ECE or primary school, while the other ethnicities have combined attendance rates for both levels of education varying between 66 per cent and 70 per cent (Figure 6).

When looking into how total organized learning, combining ECE and primary education, is dispersed across the country, there is a clear divide between the northern and southern provinces, as seen in Figure 7. Several provinces in the north and areas surrounding the capital city stand out with high attendance rates in both ECE and primary education. In contrast, the south lags behind, with Savannakhet Province barely putting half of its children in either ECE or primary education by the age of 5.

FIGURE 7: Participation rate in organized learning, by province



Source: LSIS-II, 2017



RESEARCH QUESTION 3:

How do students transition to primary education?

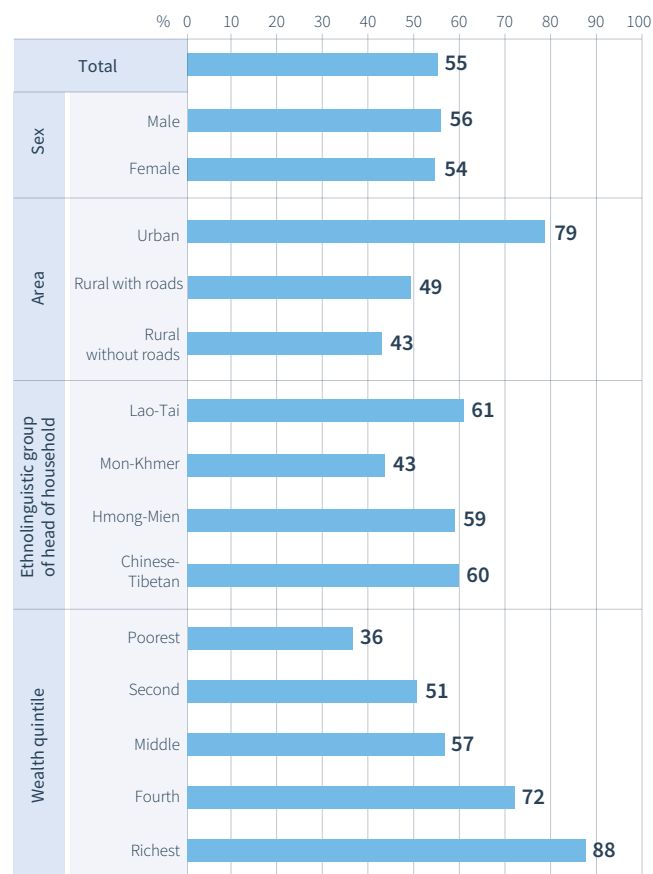


School readiness measures the number of children attending first grade of primary school who attended ECE the previous year. Across the country, the level of school readiness is above 50 per cent. However, there are strong inequalities, particularly in terms of socioeconomics and location.

As seen in Figure 8, in the first year of primary school, twice as many children from the richest quintile have attended ECE as compared to those from the poorest quintile, and many more urban children had attended ECE than did children from rural areas. There is also extreme variation between provinces. Figure 9 shows that in Xayabury Province, 90 per cent of children starting primary school came from an early learning programme, while only 25 per cent of those in Savannakhet Province had previously attended ECE.

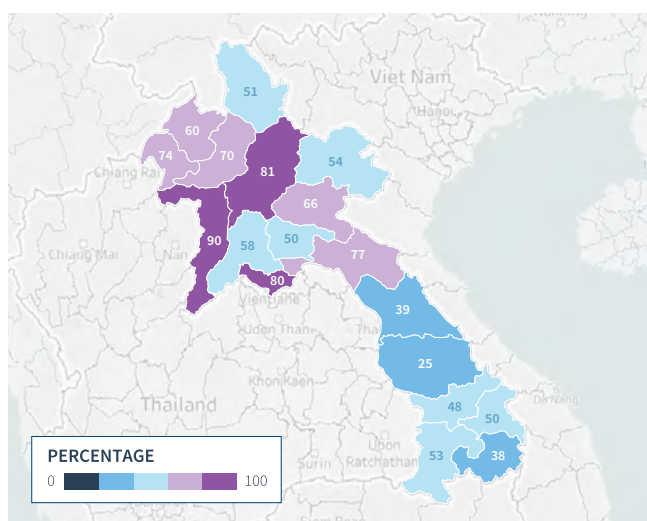
It is important to highlight that ECE is extremely important not only to increase attendance in primary education, but also to avoid repetition, as most repetition happens in the initial years of primary education (see Research Question 10). Although the ECE attendance rates of non-Lao speaking ethnicities are not very different from the Lao-Tai group, boosting participation of Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Mien and Chinese-Tibetan children in ECE can lead to better results for those groups at higher levels of education. This would be particularly beneficial to narrow the gap in primary and secondary education that is due to language skills.

FIGURE 8: **Percentage of children attending first grade who attended ECE in the previous year, by sex, area, ethnolinguistic group and wealth quintile**



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 9: **School readiness, by province**



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

RESEARCH QUESTION 4:

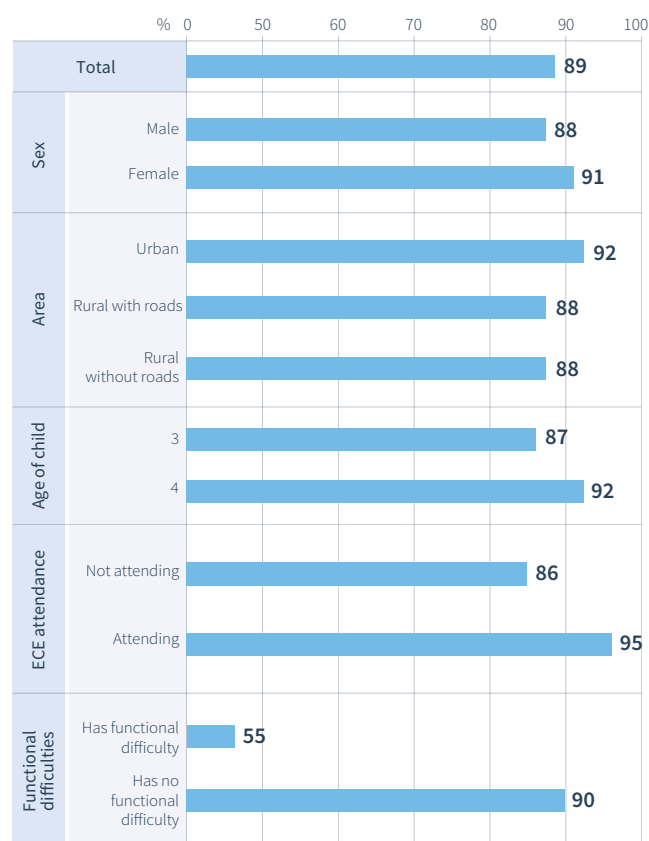
How does ECE relate to child development?

Child development can be measured using a series of variables including social, quantitative and reading skills. LSIS-II asked parents 10 questions about their children's development. The combination of their responses provides a rich understanding of which children struggle the most in their early development, and helps clarify the underlying factors required to assist multidimensional child development.

Around 89 per cent of Lao children aged 3 to 4 years are on track in the Early Child Development Index (ECDI)⁷ and the gap between genders or areas of residency is relatively narrow (Figure 10). Nevertheless, two areas show larger gaps. First, children attending ECE are 7 percentage points ahead of those who are not in school. Moreover, fewer children with functional difficulties, who comprise about 3 per cent of the total, are considered developmentally on track. Only 55 per cent of children with functional difficulties excel in at least three of the four domains measured by the index, while 90 per cent of children without a functional difficulty excel in these domains.

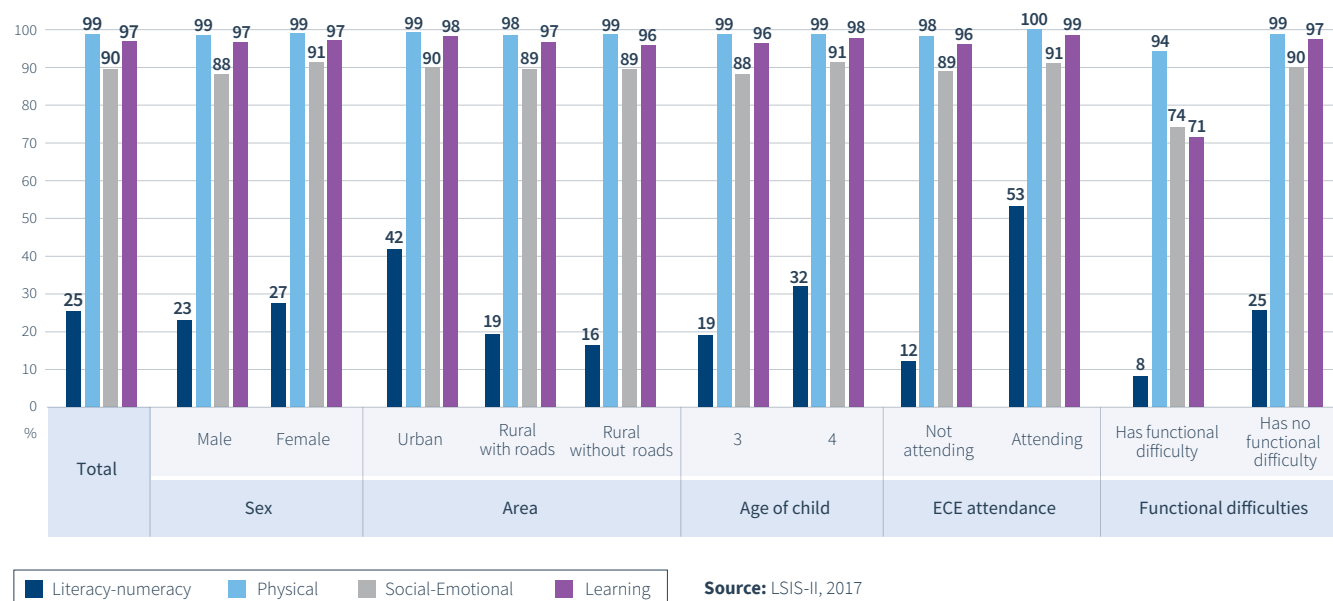
Most children in the Lao PDR are developmentally on track in their physical aptitude (such as easily picking up objects), their social-emotional skills (such as attentiveness and sociability) and their capacity to learn (measured by their ability to follow directions and act independently). Almost 90 per cent of children aged 3 to 4 years across the country excel in each of those three capacities, as Figure 11 shows.

FIGURE 10: Percentage of children aged 3 to 4 years developmentally on track in ECDI



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 11: Percentage of children aged 3 to 4 years developmentally on track in various domains



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

Nevertheless, the 3 per cent of children with functional difficulties fall behind in terms of their social-emotional skills and learning capacity; this requires particular attention, especially as the vast majority of these children do not attend ECE.

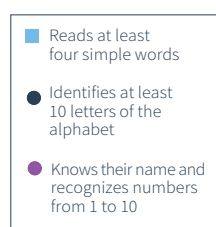
Despite most children succeeding in these three sets of development metrics, many more children fail to fully develop the necessary abilities in literacy-numeracy. Only one quarter of 3- to 4-year-olds, and only one eighth of those not attending ECE, are on track in literacy-numeracy. Younger children and those in rural areas also have more difficulty acquiring the expected competencies in terms of literacy-numeracy.

The indicator for literacy-numeracy consists of a combination of three capacities expected from children: reading four simple words, identifying at least 10 letters of the alphabet and knowing their name, and recognizing numbers from 1 to 10. Children aged 3 to 4 perform differently across those three metrics of development, as Figure 12 demonstrates. While 34 per cent across the country know their names and the numbers, only 21 per cent can read four simple words. The most disadvantaged children in this aspect are children from rural areas, those whose mother tongue is not Lao, poorer children and, most importantly, those not attending ECE. Name and number recognition, for

instance, jumps from 21 per cent among those not attending ECE to 61 per cent for those who are. This further reinforces the need for early education and the role it has in equipping children with the necessary skills to start primary school.

Most of the socioeconomic characteristics affecting literacy-numeracy skills occur together. For example, children from rural areas are more likely to be poor and less likely to attend school. In order to unpack the relationship between literacy-numeracy skills and various individual and household factors, a regression analysis was conducted to understand which factors play the most important role when all variables are accounted for. When controlling for all factors, being from a rural area or belonging to an ethnic group that does not speak Lao at home surprisingly does not decrease the learning outcomes for literacy-numeracy. The analysis suggests that the factors that more strongly and significantly explain inequality in child development are mother's education and ECE attendance (Figure 13). Only 10 per cent of children not attending ECE and whose mothers did not attend primary education are developmentally on track in literacy-numeracy skills. Nevertheless, this figure is boosted to 31 per cent if they attend ECE. Even among children whose mothers attended higher education, enrolment in ECE more than doubles their chances of developing the expected skills in literacy-numeracy.

FIGURE 12: Percentage of children aged 3 to 4 years developmentally on track in literacy-numeracy



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

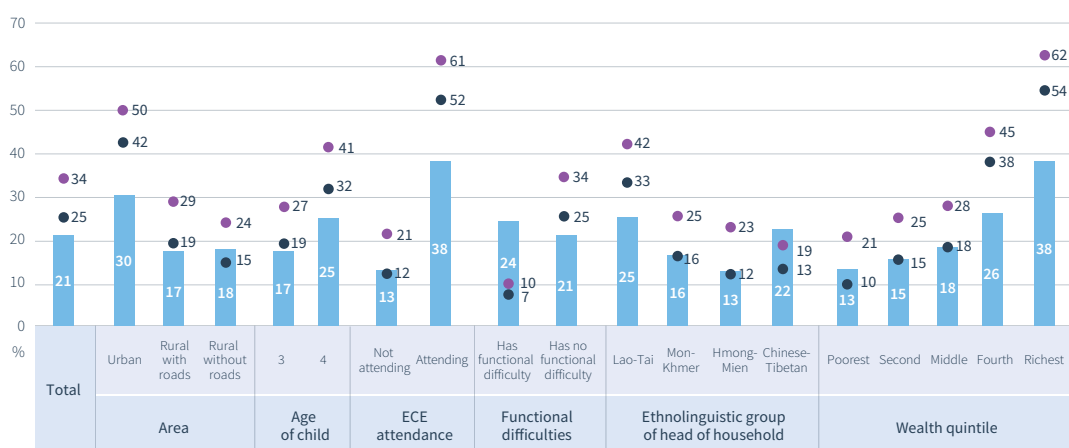
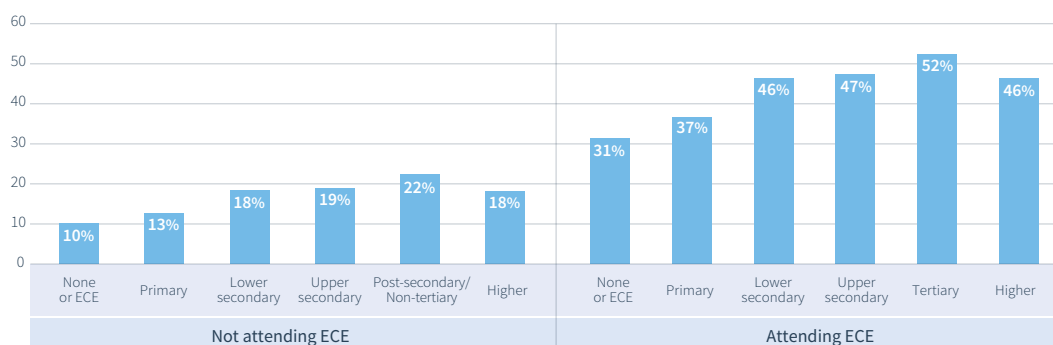


FIGURE 13: Likelihood of children aged 3 to 4 years being developmentally on track in literacy-numeracy, by school attendance and mother's education

Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.



RESEARCH QUESTION 5:

How is support for learning connected to child development?

Children need the support of their parents and other adult members of the household to thrive. This can take many forms. In LSIS-II, it was measured by the engagement of at least one adult member of the household in a series of activities in the three days preceding the interview. The activities include reading books, telling stories, singing songs, taking children outside, playing with children, and helping them with naming and counting.

However, adult engagement in these learning and stimulating activities is very unequally distributed. Across the country, 44 per cent of children aged between 3 and 4 years had household members engage with them in at least four activities on the list, as Figure 14 shows. On the other hand, 17 per cent of children in the same age bracket could not rely on this sort of support in any of the six activities on the list.

The number of children without adult engagement in learning activities is much higher among poorer families, as well as those living in rural areas and among children who do not attend ECE. Among children who attend ECE, 64 per cent had

adult members of the household help them with four or more activities, while only 35 per cent of children not in ECE were likely to receive this support. It is striking that children who are already disadvantaged due to not attending ECE are also receiving less parental and adult support.

When controlling for various socioeconomic variables, gender and age, it is notable that an increase in the number of activities adults engage in significantly increases children's ECDI (Figure 15). Children whose adult household members do not engage with them in stimulating activities have an 82 per cent chance of being developmentally on track, while this increases to 94 per cent among those whose household members engage in all six activities. Adult engagement has an even more significant impact on literacy-numeracy development, which is the most difficult to acquire of the four development domains highlighted in the previous section. Engaging in six, rather than zero, learning activities more than doubles the chances of children being developmentally on track in literacy-numeracy, even when education attendance and socioeconomic background are considered.

FIGURE 14: Percentage of children aged 3 to 4 years with whom an adult engaged in activities that promote learning

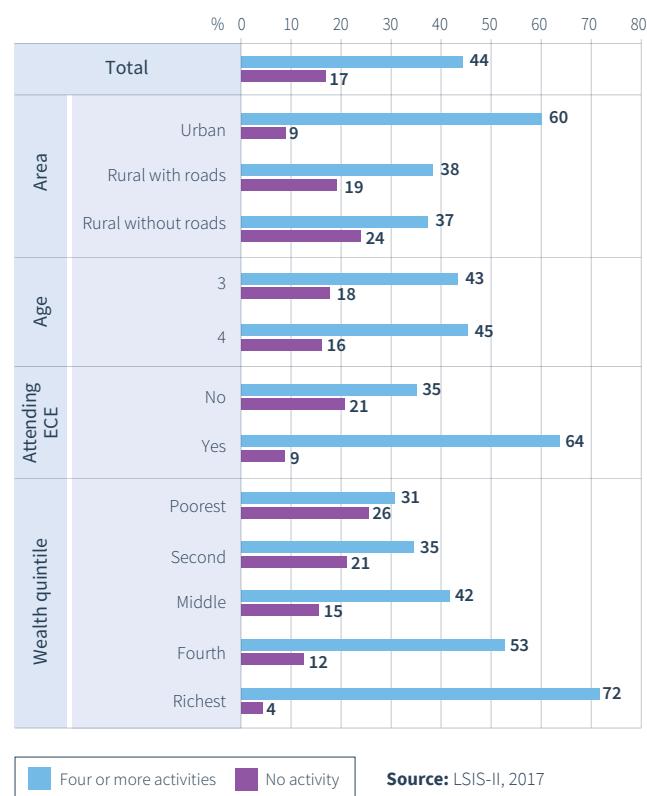
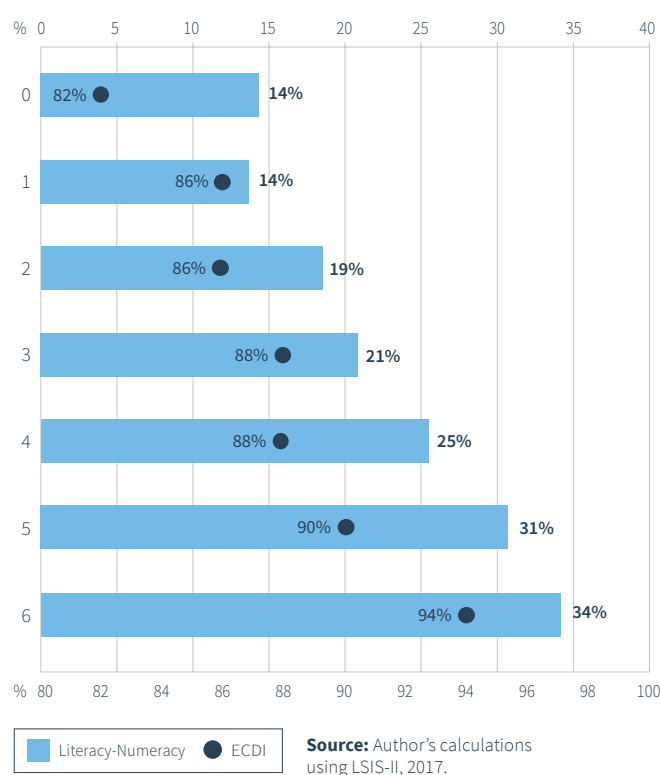


FIGURE 15: Likelihood of children aged 3 to 4 years being developmentally on track in literacy-numeracy and ECDI, based on number of learning activities with an adult in the household



SUMMARY



- Access to ECE is very unequal in the country, primarily across socioeconomic lines and province of residence. ECE attendance ranges from less than 20 per cent in some southern provinces to 66 per cent in the capital. Children of mothers with a higher education degree are two to three times more likely to attend ECE than children of uneducated mothers.
- Early learning is much more common in the urban areas, reaching most children aged 3 to 4 years; however, it remains rare in rural areas, especially those without roads. Although more than half of children aged between 36 and 59 months in urban areas are enrolled in some sort of ECE, this is the case for only one quarter of children in rural areas with road access and a mere 15 per cent of those in rural areas without roads.
- Many children start primary school early instead of attending ECE. Five-year-olds across the country are more likely to attend primary school than ECE.
- Child development is on track in many dimensions. Over 90 per cent of children are developmentally on track in physical, social-emotional and learning domains. Nevertheless, only 25 per cent of children aged 3 to 4 years are on track in literacy-numeracy. This means that almost 250,000 children⁸ aged 3 to 4 years fail to meet the expected level of development in this dimension.
- ECE is crucial to ensure that children learn more and better: 12 per cent of children not attending ECE are on track in literacy-numeracy, but this is boosted to 53 per cent for those who attend ECE. Among children of less educated mothers, attending ECE more than triples their chances of being on track in literacy-numeracy when controlling for socioeconomic background. ECE doubles the chances of richer children being developmentally on track in literacy-numeracy and triples the chances of poorer children.
- Inequality in access to ECE is further aggravated by inequality in stimulus at home. Of parents whose children are attending ECE, 64 per cent engage in at least four stimulating activities with them, compared to only 35 per cent of parents whose children do not attend ECE. Engaging in learning activities with children more than doubles their chances of being developmentally on track in literacy-numeracy.

POLICY/PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Directly relevant recommendations

Recommendation 1: Promote cost-effective and alternative delivery modes for ECE in remote areas, including community-based preschools, and where funds are available, construct more pre-primary classrooms, particularly in rural areas without road access

While the majority of village communities have access to a primary school (or at least an incomplete school),⁹ only approximately 26 per cent¹⁰ have a pre-primary classroom attached. The main constraint that limits construction is budget issues, though parental attitudes towards ECE can also limit enrolment even when ECE facilities and teachers are available.

Recommendation 2: Recruit more ECE teachers to extend ECE coverage, especially in rural and remote areas

Teacher quotas are also constrained by budget issues, as well as some difficulty in recruiting qualified ECE teachers to work in remote communities.

Recommendation 3: Implement the system of assessment of child development levels introduced to kindergartens and pre-primary schools more effectively

While a system for assessing individual child development has been introduced, it is not being applied in many ECE facilities. Reasons for this need to be clearly identified and barriers to effective implementation addressed.

Recommendation 4: Integrate best practices from community-based models into the mainstream formal system where possible and appropriate

Both the ECE Department and the Department of General Education within MoES, supported by development partners, are implementing community-based models in some areas – e.g., community playgroups and school-readiness programmes. However, lessons learned regarding parental involvement could be applied more widely.

Recommendation 5: More actively involve VEDCs beyond primary level to engage schools, communities and parents in ECE

VEDCs generally focus on primary schools and are often not active. VEDC training needs to cover their role in supporting ECE, particularly in promoting enrolment and parental engagement.

2. Overall recommendations

Recommendation 6: Develop a holistic, government-led ECD policy (including ECE) that engages with schools, communities and parents

The draft ECE policy developed by MoES can include specific linkages to health, child protection and other areas to make it more holistic. Coordination among ministries for ECD also needs to be strengthened.

Recommendation 7: Conduct more research on cost-effective options to expand access to and improve the quality of ECE services, and support the smooth transition of children from ECE to the early grades of primary education

Limited research has been conducted in this area in the Lao PDR; findings could be used to inform policy development and boost awareness-raising within communities of the importance of ECE.



CHAPTER 2

What factors determine access and attendance at each cycle of education?

Schools should guarantee that all children enrol and graduate from basic education. In the Lao PDR, ECE starts with three-year-old children, basic education starts at age 6 in primary school, 11 in lower secondary school, and 15 in upper secondary school. In every cycle of education, some students drop out before graduating from the last grade of the cycle. It is important to ensure that all children have access to education and that dropouts are reduced by creating an environment where students enter and remain in school until graduation at the end of the educational cycle.

This chapter, as well as Chapter 3, will shed light on the profile of students attending primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. Various demographic as well as socioeconomic characteristics of children attending school are identified and described. This will enable a more detailed understanding of which children are part of the educational system and which ones are left out.

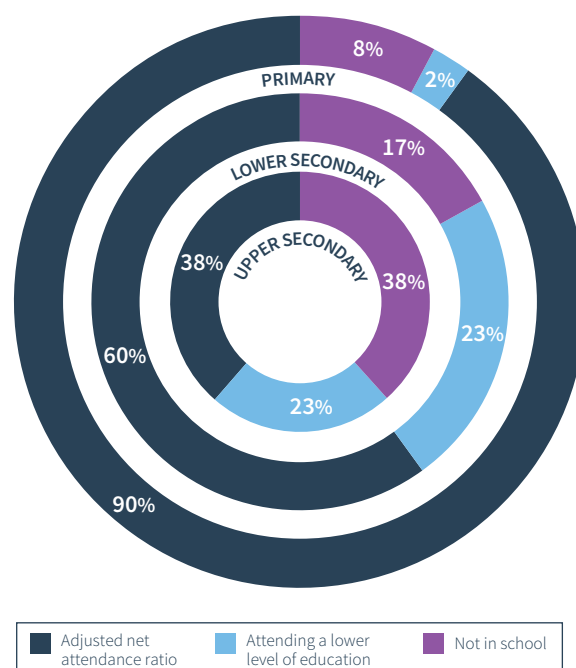
RESEARCH QUESTION 6:

What is the current status of school attendance in the Lao PDR?

About 90 per cent of Lao children of primary school age attend school and another 2 per cent attend ECE, leaving 8 per cent outside of the formal education system, as seen in Figure 16. This positive figure falls sharply when children enter lower secondary education. Only 60 per cent Lao children in the appropriate age bracket are expected to attend lower secondary education. Of those remaining, 23 per cent attend school at primary level despite their age, while 17 per cent are out of school.

As adolescents move on to upper secondary education, many more are left behind, and the adjusted net attendance rate falls further in comparison to lower secondary education. Of those aged between 15 and 17 years, when students are expected to attend upper secondary education, only 38 per cent do so. An approximately equal number are not in education and the remaining 23 per cent are still attending classes at primary or lower secondary levels.

FIGURE 16: Adjusted net attendance rate, by level of education



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

RESEARCH QUESTION 7:

Who attends primary education? Who is left behind? Who should be targeted to improve access to education?

Primary education in the Lao PDR is comprised of five grades, with students being expected to start at age 6 and graduate by age 10. Although 89 per cent of primary school age children attend primary school, the extent varies widely in relation to location, socioeconomic background and ethnolinguistic characteristics (Figure 17).

Lao boys and girls are almost equally represented in primary education; however, other socioeconomic factors have a large impact on attendance. While over 95 per cent of urban Lao children attend primary school at the appropriate age, less than 90 per cent do so in rural areas. Net attendance in primary education is higher among those living in the northern provinces than in central and southern regions.

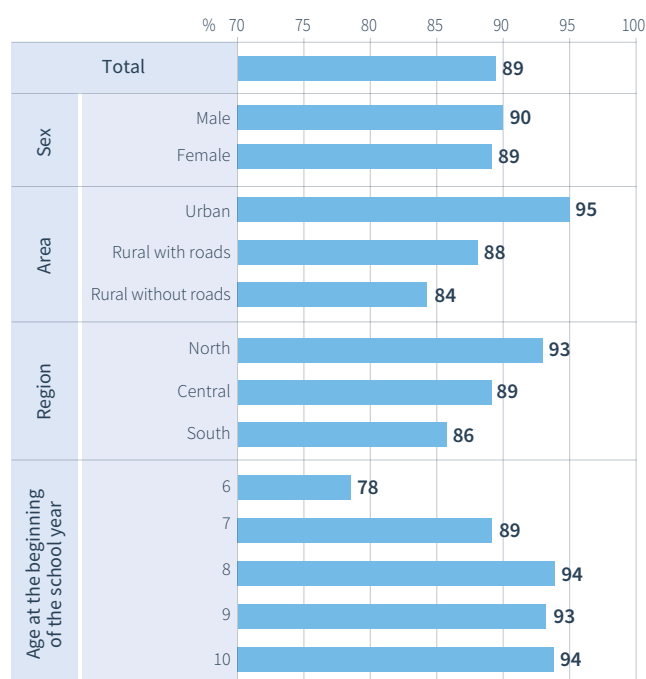
Another point of inequity in primary education is the age at which children enter primary education. The attendance rate in primary education of those aged 6 is 78 per cent. This means that over 20 per cent of six-year-olds who are supposed to attend primary education are not enrolled in primary school. The issue of late entry into primary education needs to be addressed in order to increase the primary attendance rate.

Figure 18 shows the age distribution of students in Grade 1 of primary school. Only 38 per cent of children in Grade 1 are at the official age. In contrast, about 33 per cent are younger than the official age when starting and 29 per cent of children are at least one year older than what would be expected at the beginning of the school year.

Inequalities between urban and rural areas are even more pronounced in age distribution than they were for the attendance rate. Only 11 per cent of urban children in Grade 1 are over-age, while 41 per cent of those in rural areas without road access are over-age. Socioeconomic background also plays a strong role. Only 8 per cent of children from the richest wealth quintile attending Grade 1 are over-age, while 50 per cent of children from the poorest families in the same grade are older than the official age.

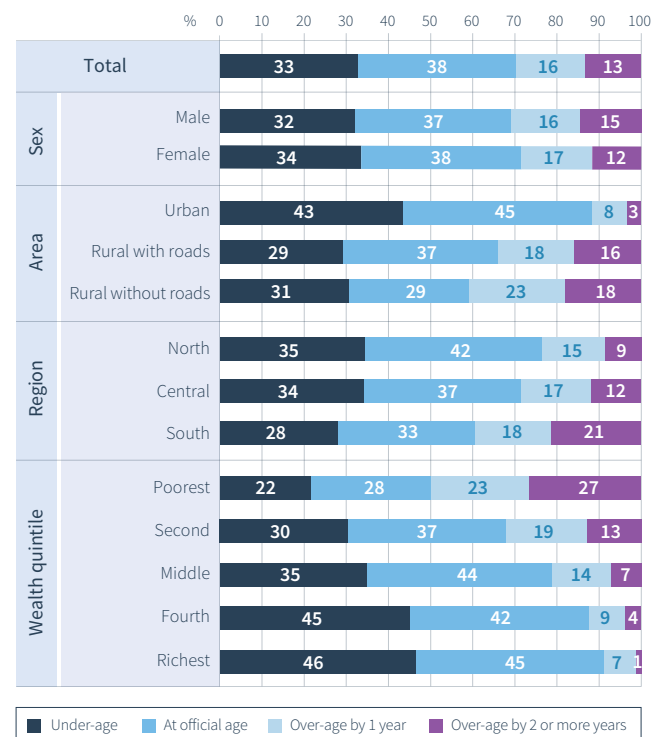
Socioeconomic background is also important to analyse school attendance. Less than 80 per cent of the poorest quintile of primary school age children are in school, while 95 per cent of children from the two richest quintiles are in primary education at the appropriate age.

FIGURE 17: Primary adjusted net attendance rate, by sex, area, region and age

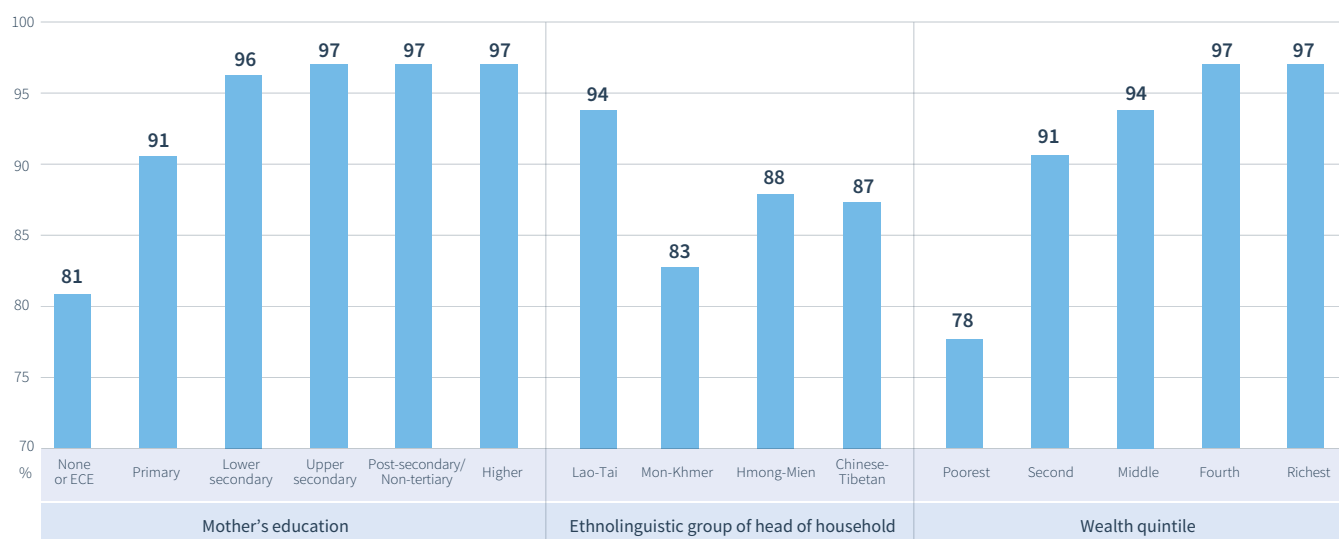


Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 18: Age distribution in Grade 1 of primary school, by sex, area, region and wealth quintile



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

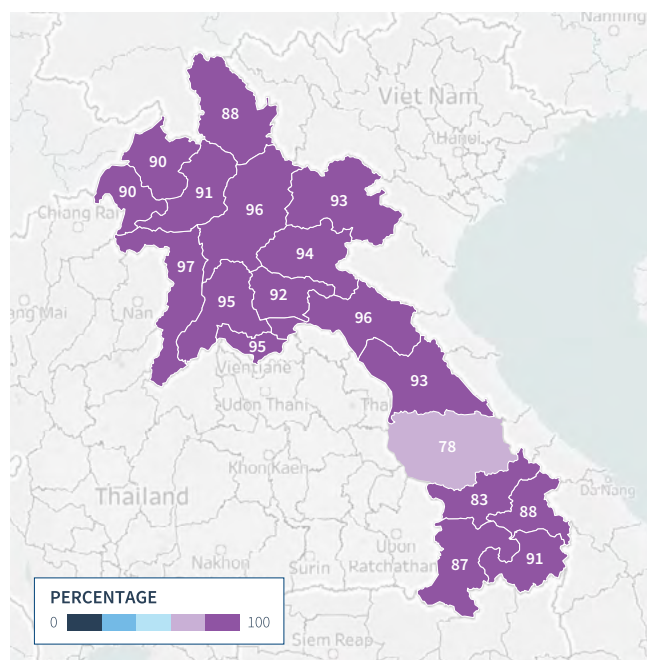
FIGURE 19: **Primary adjusted net attendance rate, by mother's education, ethnolinguistic group and wealth quintile**

Source: LSIS-II, 2017

Some stark differences can also be seen when contrasting the attendance rates of children according to their mother's education (Figure 19). Only 80 per cent of children whose mothers did not finish primary education attend primary school. The figure rises to over 90 per cent for mothers who have a primary education. Nevertheless, the premium for maternal education seems to be capped for mothers whose highest education level is beyond lower secondary. University-educated women and those whose highest achievement is lower secondary education seem to send their children to primary school at similar levels.

Different ethnolinguistic communities have unequal attendance rates at primary level. The Lao-Tai group, the largest in the country, is also the one whose children attend primary schools at the highest rate. On the other hand, Mon-Khmer communities are less well represented in primary education, with only slightly over four-fifths of their children of official school age¹¹ attending primary schools.

Finally, when disaggregating the country in provinces rather than the three regions (north, central, south), the inequalities become more pronounced, as seen in Figure 20. Most provinces have high attendance rates at primary level, except for the southern provinces and Phongsaly Province in the far north.

FIGURE 20: **Primary adjusted net attendance rate, by province**

Source: LSIS-II, 2017

RESEARCH QUESTION 8:

Who attends lower secondary education? Who is left behind? Who should be targeted to improve access to education?

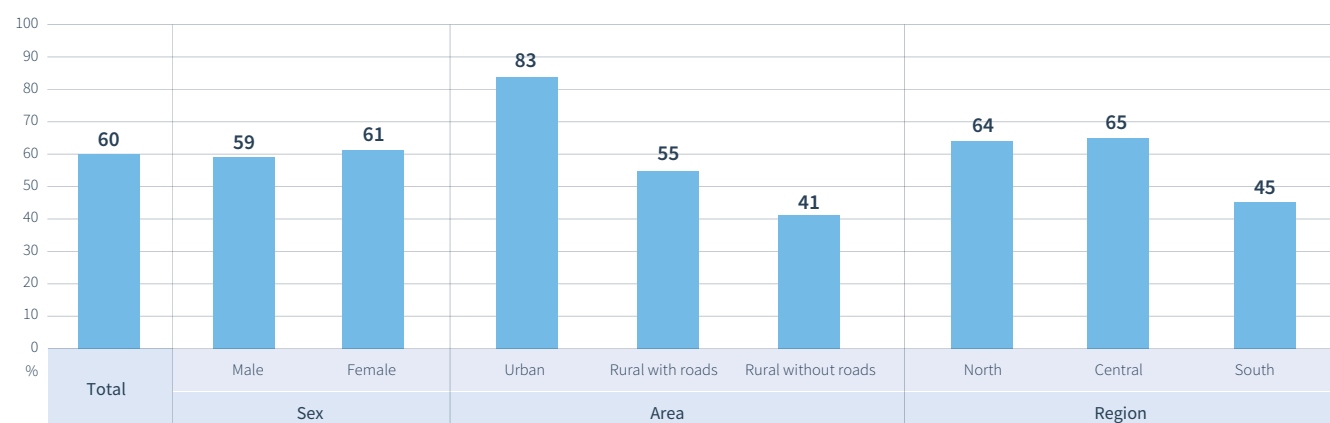
The overall adjusted net attendance rate for lower secondary education is about 60 per cent. Despite lower overall attendance at lower secondary level, the impact of sociodemographic, economic and ethnic characteristics on school participation seem to be similar to those at the primary level. When it comes to gender differences, more girls than boys attend lower secondary school at the official school age, although this pattern is reversed in primary education.

The gap in attendance between urban and rural lower secondary students is greater than in primary education, as just under half of all rural children are enrolled in lower secondary level, in contrast to over 80 per cent of urban children.

Figure 21 reveals that although the northern region of the Lao PDR shows much higher levels of primary school attendance than the centre, the two regions are on par at lower secondary level. Attendance rates in the southern provinces, however, are behind in lower secondary education. In fact, less than half of the children of official school age in the south attend lower secondary school.

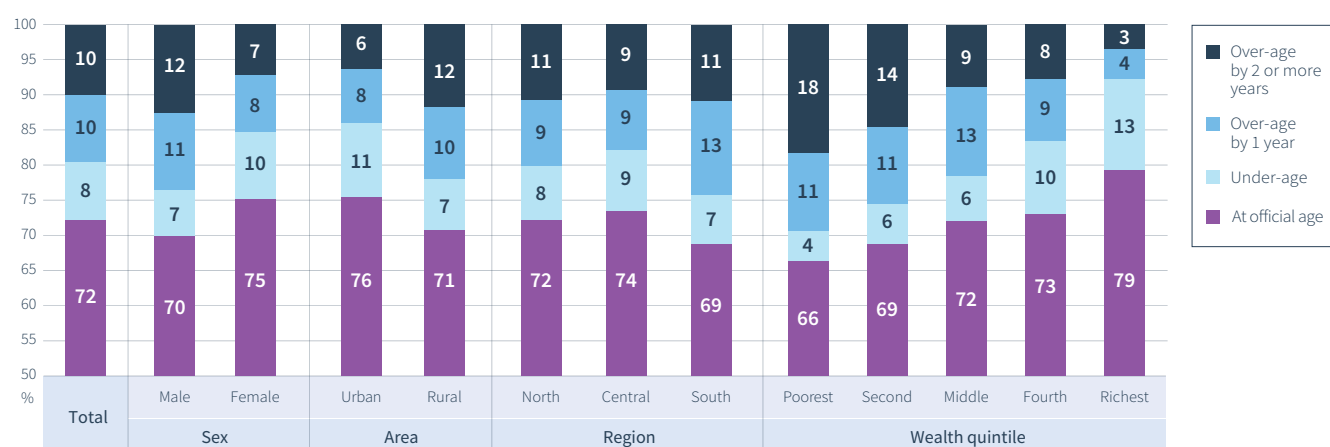
As Figure 22 shows, the age distribution of children in lower secondary education becomes even more accentuated – 20 per cent of all children studying at that level are older than the official age and 10 per cent are two years older than what would be expected. Wealth seems to be a large factor affecting age distribution, following the same pattern as for primary education.

FIGURE 21: Lower secondary adjusted net attendance rate, by sex, area and region

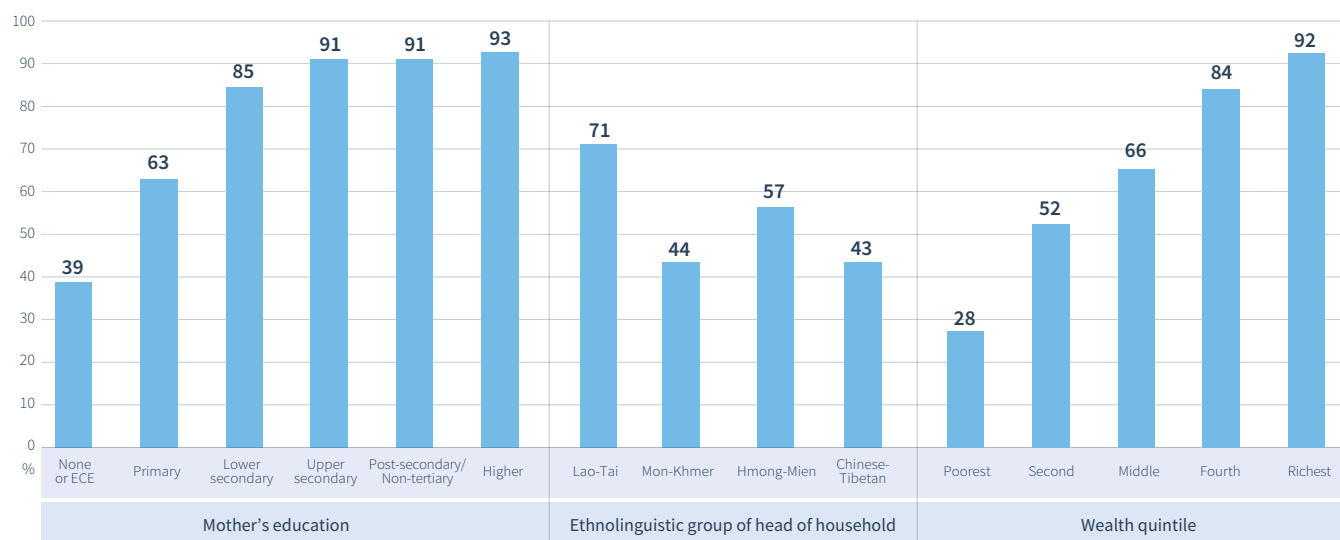


Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 22: Age distribution in lower secondary, by sex, area, region and wealth quintile



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

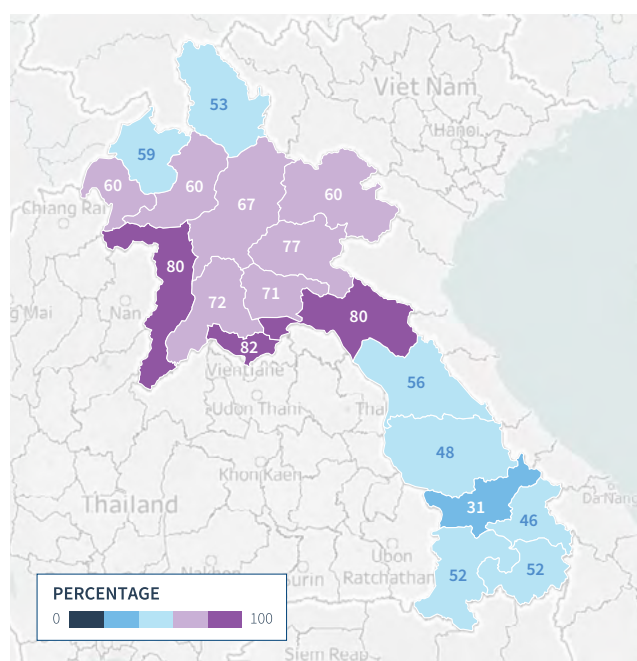
FIGURE 23: **Lower secondary adjusted net attendance rate, by mother's education, ethnolinguistic group and wealth quintile**

Source: LSIS-II, 2017

Socioeconomic status is also linked to strong differences in attendance, as over 90 per cent of the richest quintile of children attend lower secondary education, while less than 30 per cent of the poorest quintile attend (Figure 23). Mother's education also affects secondary school attendance in line with wealth: the children of poorly educated mothers are less likely to attend lower secondary education than the children of better-educated mothers. Nevertheless, there is seemingly some kind of capping mechanism at play, as children of tertiary-educated mothers attend lower secondary school to the same extent as those of upper secondary-educated mothers.

Comparing ethnolinguistic groups, lower secondary attendance demonstrates a similar pattern to primary education, with Lao-Tai communities showing much higher ratios than the others. However, the percentage gap in attendance between Lao-Tai and the other three ethnolinguistic groups is greater at this level than at primary level.

Finally, as seen in Figure 24, lower secondary education has much wider gaps in rates of attendance between provinces, with the north showing higher rates across the board, except again for Phongsaly Province. The south has rates below 60 per cent everywhere, with Saravane Province standing out in particular, with an adjusted net attendance rate of only 31 per cent.

FIGURE 24: **Lower secondary adjusted net attendance rate, by province**

Source: LSIS-II, 2017

RESEARCH QUESTION 9:

Who attends upper secondary education? Who is left behind? Who should be targeted to improve access to education?

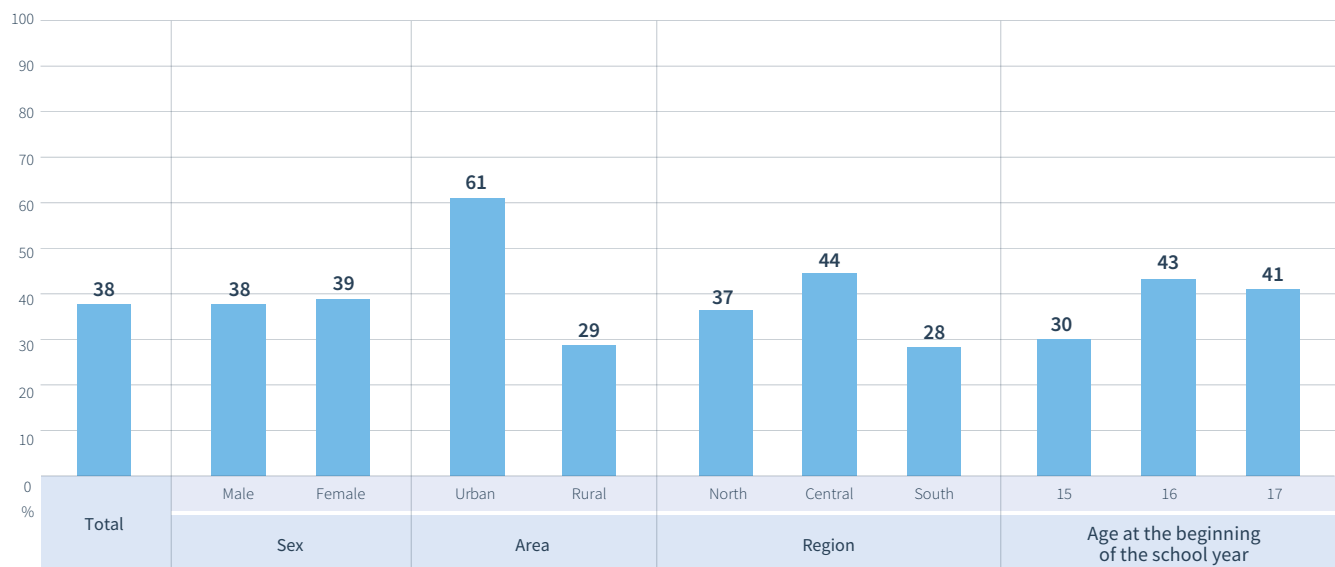


In the Lao PDR, only 38 per cent of children of upper secondary school age attend upper secondary school or a higher level of education (Figure 25). There is virtually no gender gap, as male and female students attend upper secondary school at approximately similar levels. There are, however, strong inequalities between urban (61 per cent) and rural areas (29 per cent), which are much greater for upper secondary attendance than they are for primary and lower secondary levels. For upper secondary level, urban students attend at twice the rate of rural students, highlighting a significant divide in the country.

The regional disparity also changes in relation to earlier levels of education. Although students in the south have lower attendance levels, as was the case for primary and lower secondary, the central region now shows better results than the north. As shown earlier, children from the north are most likely to attend primary school. Yet, they are less likely than children from the central region to attend upper secondary education.

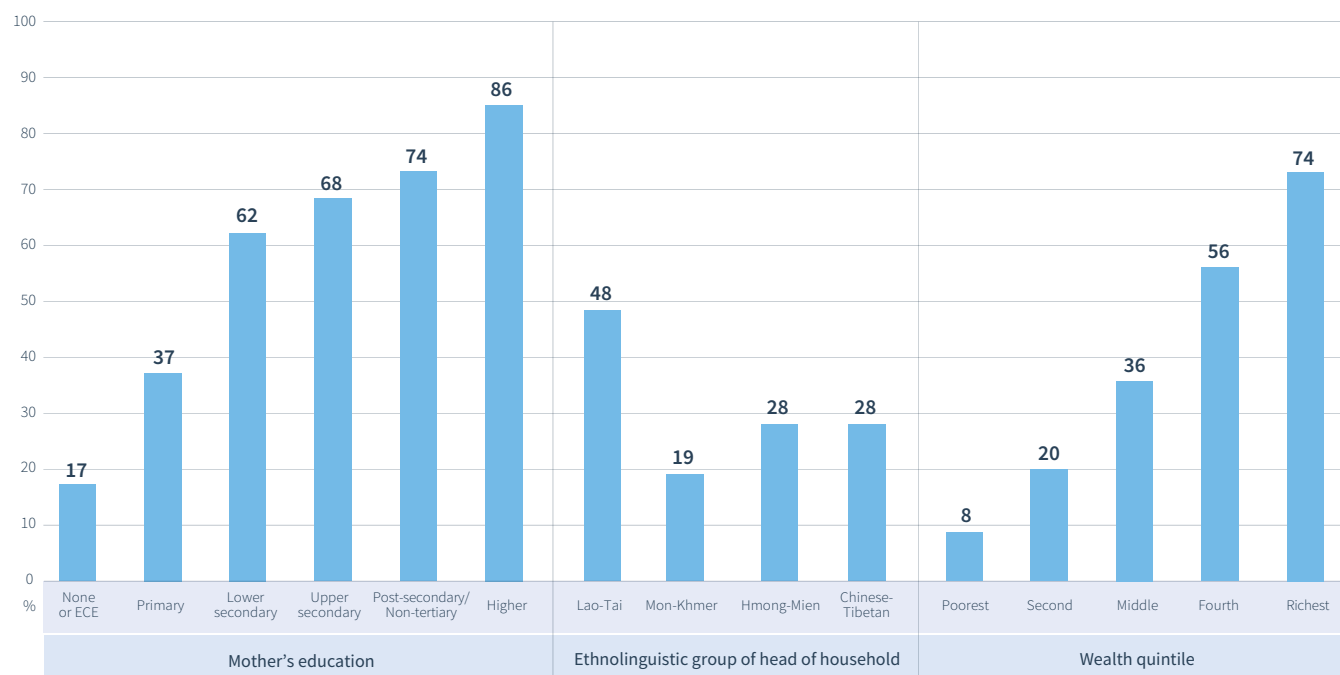
When comparing students by age at the beginning of the school year, attendance increases between those aged 15 and 16 years, as many who were still in lower secondary enter upper secondary education. However, it decreases slightly between 16 and 17 years of age as fewer students enter upper secondary education at that age than those who drop out of school.

FIGURE 25: Upper secondary school adjusted net attendance rate, by sex, area, region and age



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 26: Upper secondary adjusted net attendance rate, by mother's education, ethnolinguistic group and wealth quintile

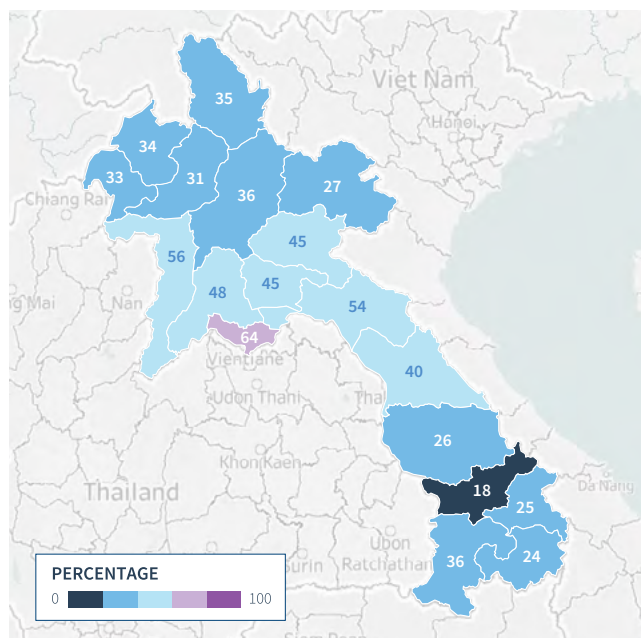


Source: LSIS-II, 2017

As with other levels of education, socioeconomic variables play a strong role in attendance, and children with more educated mothers are more likely to stay in school long enough to attend upper secondary education (Figure 26). The Lao-Tai group also has a much higher attendance rate compared to other ethnic groups, at almost 50 per cent. The socioeconomic differences between students can also be seen in their upper secondary attendance levels, with student attendance from wealthier families nine times higher than those in the lowest wealth quintile. Overall, the impact of socioeconomic background increases significantly from primary and lower secondary education to upper secondary education. Wealth and family background become much more defining variables of inequity and inequality, making the division between more and less privileged students even wider.

Upper secondary education provides a different picture in terms of regional inequality than do primary and lower secondary education. Although more children in the central region reach higher education than in the south, the northern region falls behind the central region, showing adjusted net attendance rates well below 40 per cent (Figure 27). Again, Saravane Province in the south stands out as an outlier with an adjusted net attendance rate of just 18 per cent, well below that of any other southern province.

FIGURE 27: Upper secondary adjusted net attendance rate, by province



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

SUMMARY



Primary school level

Although attendance rates in primary education are high across the country, this masks significant inequalities. Attendance is 11 percentage points higher for urban children than for children in rural areas without roads, and 7 points higher for children from the north than from the south. However, the most significant source of inequality is across socioeconomic lines. Only 78 per cent of children from the poorest families go to primary school, while over 97 per cent of those from the richest families do. Moreover, poorer and richer children attend school at different ages. Only 8 per cent of children in the richest quintile attend primary school beyond the official age, while half of children from the poorest quintile are older than the official school age.

Lower secondary school level

Access to lower secondary education is much lower compared to primary education, and socioeconomic inequality widens, putting rural, southern and non-Lao-Tai children at a disadvantage relative to their counterparts.

Again, the most significant determinant of inequality is poverty. Only 28 per cent of children from the poorest quintile attend lower secondary education, while over 90 per cent of children from the wealthiest quintile attend. Moreover, children from the wealthiest quintile are more than twice as likely to attend lower secondary school as children from the poorest quintile, even when controlling for other variables.

Upper secondary school level

At upper secondary level, inequality persists, limiting access for children who are poor, rural, or belong to non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups. Only 8 per cent of poor children are likely to attend school at this level versus 74 per cent of children from the richest quintile. In urban areas, children from wealthier families are over four times as likely as the poorest children to attend upper secondary, and this rises to almost six times as likely in rural areas. This calls for increasing investment in upper secondary schools in rural areas such as the development of boarding schools, more partnerships with private providers and better transportation systems.

POLICY/PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIMARY LEVEL

1. Directly relevant recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop a school-based in-service teacher training system and improve teaching approaches for multigrade classes

With multigrade classes making up an estimated 26.6 per cent of the total number of primary school classrooms,¹² and teachers not well prepared to teach multigrade classes, this undoubtedly impacts enrolment, as well as the quality of teaching and learning. This is especially the case for teachers who are working in small schools with low enrolment, where one teacher may be required to teach several grades.

Recommendation 2: Build capacity and improve the skills of teachers who work with children whose first language is not Lao

The LSIS-II survey found that children from non-Lao-Tai ethnolinguistic groups have lower attendance rates and higher repetition rates, particularly at primary level. One key contributing factor is that teachers, who are often from different ethnic groups than their students, are not equipped to teach these children, especially in early primary grades when these children most need support.

Recommendation 3: Use affirmative funding¹³ to support children who are disadvantaged in terms of socioeconomic background, ethnicity and location

The ESDP midterm review, which was informed partly by the findings from LSIS-II, called for further research to better understand the range of factors underlying low completion rates, particularly at secondary level. At primary and lower secondary levels, it recommended that more attention be given to support children from disadvantaged groups (poverty, ethnicity, location) through affirmative funding.

2. Overall recommendations

Recommendation 4: Activate VEDC and the school cluster system, especially in rural/remote areas

While all primary schools are mandated by MoES to have a VEDC with clearly defined roles, these committees are not active in many schools and communities. Through their involvement in both the community and school, they can play a major role in addressing issues identified by the LSIS-II findings, including low enrolment and high dropout rates. School clusters are also mandated by MoES, where teachers in a group of schools located in the same area can provide mutual support to address issues such as how to teach children who do not speak Lao as their first language and how to more effectively teach multigrade classes.



LOWER SECONDARY LEVEL

1. Directly relevant recommendations

Recommendation 1: Build/renovate more lower secondary schools and dormitories for underserved areas and ensure they are safe and secure

Findings from LSIS-II highlight the limited access to lower secondary education, particularly for children in rural areas, from non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups (who live in rural and remote areas) and those living in the south. The main constraint faced by MoES relates to budget – costs related to construction and for the provision of additional teachers.

Recommendation 2: Conduct more research on disadvantaged ethnic groups to more clearly identify barriers and needs, including communities in border regions

This is recommended more as a prerequisite to expanding access to lower secondary schools. This will help inform initiatives undertaken to address access and retention issues related to disadvantaged ethnic groups at this level, particularly for those in the Mon-Khmer and Hmong-Mien related groups identified by LSIS-II as requiring a special focus.

2. Overall recommendations

Recommendation 3: Enhance training and monitoring for lower secondary teachers as well as school directors

Although not a direct finding from LSIS-II, the need for in-service training for teachers, as well as improved monitoring of their performance, is necessary in order to reduce the dropout rate and increase the completion rate for this level.

Also, as one of the key factors identified by LSIS-II was socioeconomic status, improving the quality of lower secondary education may contribute to parents from the lower wealth quintile giving education for their children a higher priority than is currently the case.

Recommendation 4: Implement the school cluster system for lower secondary level

The cluster system for lower secondary has already been officially approved by MoES but has not yet been fully implemented. As with primary level, the cluster system enables teachers from different schools located in the same area to provide mutual support and training that hopefully translates into providing higher quality education.

Recommendation 5: Conduct assessment of classes/ subjects not covered by qualified teachers and recruit secondary teachers to reduce subject-specific shortages

As classes at lower secondary level are subject specific, the shortage of teachers qualified in particular subject areas is often cited by the District Education and Sports Bureaus (DESBs) as one of the main constraints to the provision of quality education at this level. Consequently, teachers who did not major in the subjects taught are assigned to teach those classes, resulting in lower quality of instruction and thus contributing indirectly to the lower completion rates referred to in the LSIS-II findings.

UPPER SECONDARY LEVEL

1. Directly relevant recommendations

Recommendation 1: Build more upper secondary schools and dormitories for underserved areas

As with lower secondary schools, LSIS-II found that access to upper secondary education was limited for those in rural and particularly remote areas. Similarly, the main constraint is limited budget available for both construction and provision of

teachers. In addition to noting the limited attendance at upper secondary level in rural and remote areas, LSIS-II also found that attendance at upper secondary level was lower in southern provinces than the national average. This suggests that greater investment is needed at this level in rural areas, particularly in the south.



CHAPTER 3

What factors determine repetition, drop outs and completion from primary to upper secondary levels?

While Chapter 2 focused on findings related to access and completion by level of education (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary), this chapter analyses several related aspects across all three levels. These include grade repetition, dropout rates, completion and absenteeism. Regression analysis is used to more clearly identify underlying factors, particularly socioeconomics, that contribute to findings from LSIS-II relevant to these aspects.

RESEARCH QUESTION 10:

Which students repeat grades? At which grades do children fail to progress?

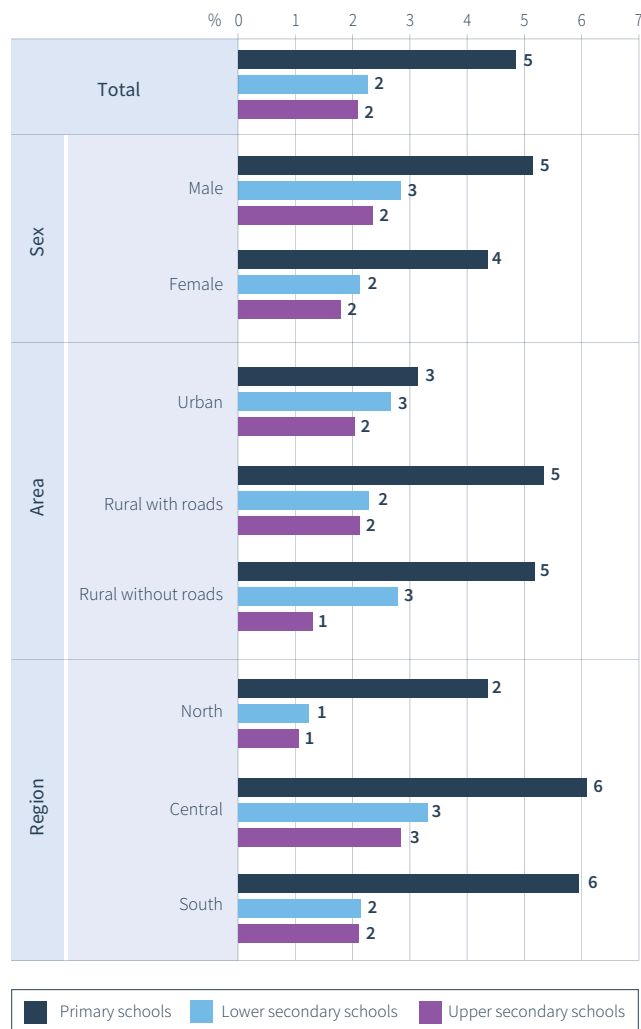
Although the dropout rate is relatively low at primary level, Figure 28 shows that repetition rates are high, and indeed higher than in more advanced levels of education. Slightly more than 5 per cent of children repeat a grade in primary education, but they are less than 3 per cent likely to do so in secondary school.

Repetition at secondary level is uncommon across the country overall, but the north fares much better than the other two regions. Central areas have much higher repetition rates in secondary school, despite also having higher attendance rates at this level. In contrast, the south has a very high repetition rate in primary education in addition to its already relatively low attendance rate at that level of education.

When investigating repetition per grade, the figures are relatively low except for the first grade of primary education, a grade repeated by 14 per cent of all students (Figure 29). This points to a difficult start for most children at the beginning of their education and requires specific policy action.

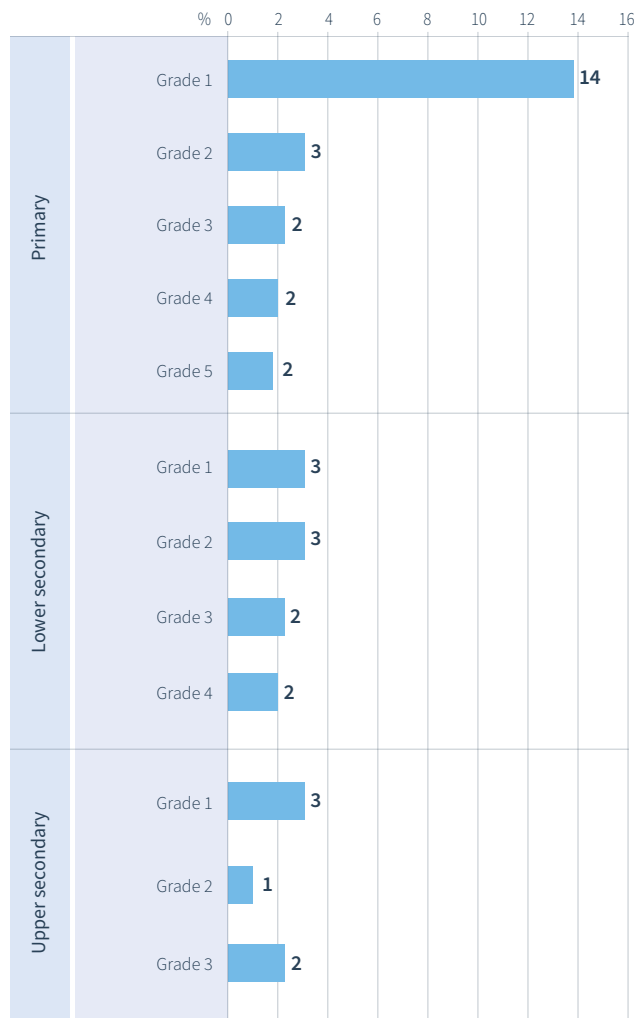
Starting school seems to be particularly complicated for children who enter primary education before the official entry age. Although 30 per cent of children who do not repeat Grade 1 of primary education entered school early (24 per cent at age 5 and 6 per cent at age 4 or younger), 43 per cent of those who repeated that grade also entered school early. This suggests that younger children have a harder time adapting to school, but it also suggests that parents may be sending their children to primary school instead of ECE facilities that would be more appropriate for their age.

FIGURE 28: Repetition rate, by sex, area and region



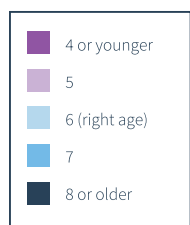
Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 29: Grade repetition, by grade

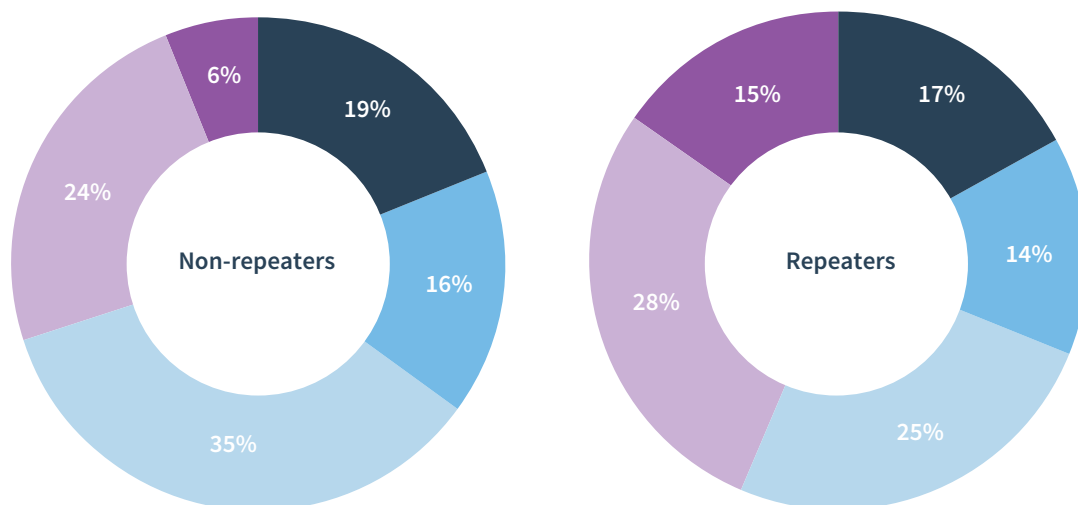


Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 30: Repeaters of Grade 1, by age



Source: LSIS-II, 2017



RESEARCH QUESTION 11:

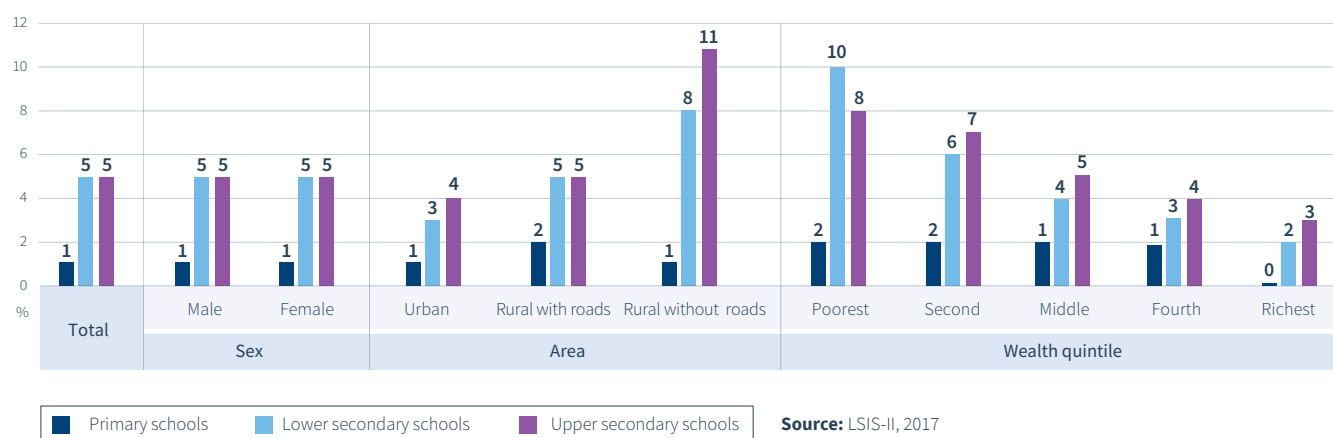
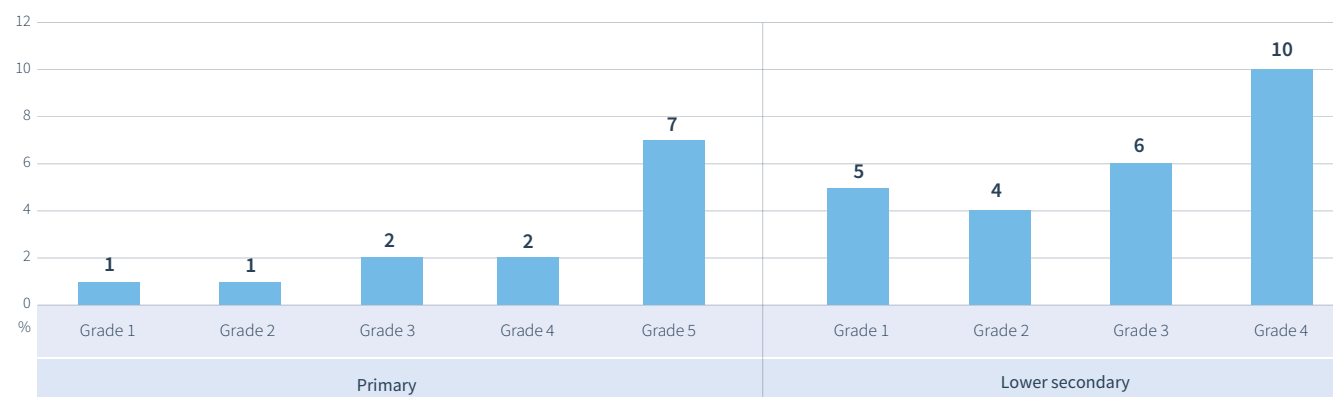
What is the profile of students who drop out?

Some of the students enrolled in education drop out without completing the education cycle. The dropout rate¹⁴ is low in primary education, at less than 2 per cent, and although it increases to almost 5 per cent in the two levels of secondary school, it remains very low (Figure 31). This relative rarity, however, masks the diversity of conditions faced by children of different backgrounds. The wealthier a child's family is, the lower the risk of dropping out at any level of education. This difference is more obvious in secondary than in primary education. In lower secondary education, for instance, dropout rates are five times higher among the poorest families than those from the richest quintile.

Rurality also plays a significant role in creating a strong disadvantage for children's education, particularly those in

rural locations where there is no road access. The dropout rate is somewhat higher in rural areas than in urban areas for all education levels. Nevertheless, when comparing rural areas by road access,¹⁵ the difference is striking: twice as many students drop out from upper secondary schools in rural areas without road access than those who do in the same areas with a road.

Figure 32 shows that most of the students who do not proceed to the following grade attended the last grade of either primary or lower secondary education. Most of them completed the education level, but did not start the following level. Despite high repetition rates shown in the first grade of primary education, a clear majority of students do not drop out and eventually progress to the second grade.

FIGURE 31: **Dropout rates, by sex, area and wealth quintile**FIGURE 32: **Non-transition rates, by grade in primary and lower secondary**

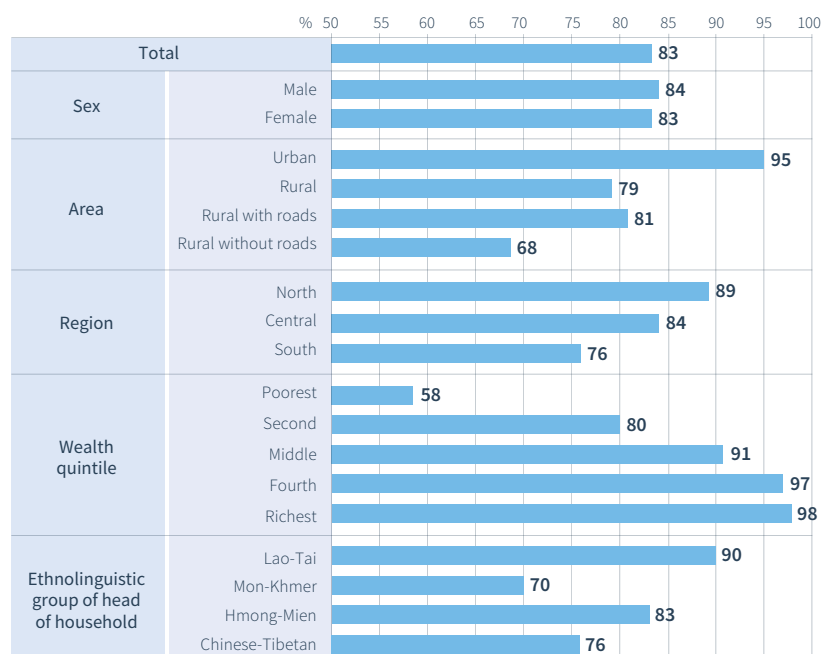
RESEARCH QUESTION 12:

How many students complete each level of education?

Over 80 per cent of children are expected to complete primary education, with parity for boys and girls, as seen in Figure 33.¹⁶ Children in northern and urban areas are more likely to complete primary education than those in rural or southern provinces. Wealth and ethnicity are also determinants of completion rates at primary level as richer children and those belonging to the Lao-Tai ethnolinguistic group have a higher likelihood of completion.

Children from Lao-Tai ethnolinguistic groups speak Lao at home, which can be a decisive advantage at school, particularly in earlier levels of education. In contrast, children from communities that speak other languages may find it more difficult to learn in schools. In this context, extended, targeted support for non-Lao speaking children is key to assure equitable learning and progress.

FIGURE 33: Primary completion rate, by sex, area, region, wealth quintile and ethnolinguistic group



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

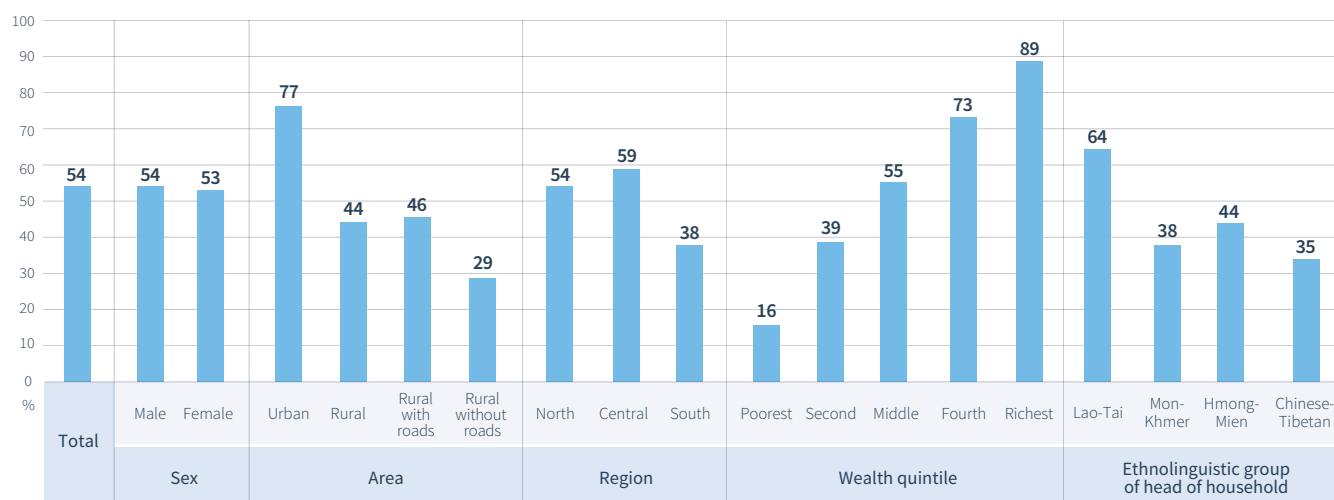


Gender equality remains high in lower secondary school completion much as it was in primary. The adjusted net attendance rate at this level is 54 per cent for boys and 53 per cent for girls (Figure 34). Regional disparities seem less significant in secondary school, although socioeconomic and ethnicity characteristics are still strong factors behind dissimilar performance among groups, as Lao-Tai children have completion rates 20 percentage points higher than all other ethnic groups. Overall, only about half of Lao students

complete lower secondary, a much lower rate than those who complete primary education.

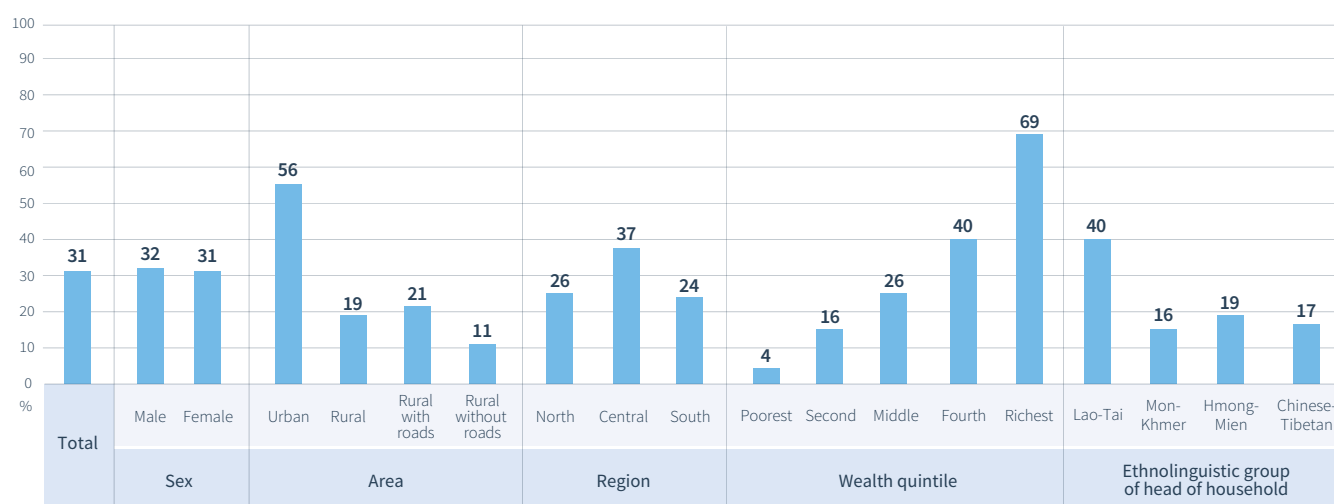
Figure 35 shows that the upper secondary completion rate is similar to other levels of education, and the same groups that appear to be advantaged at the other education levels seem to also have an advantage here. Children who are urban and from wealthier families complete upper secondary school at higher rates, as do those from the Lao-Tai group.

FIGURE 34: Lower secondary completion rate, by sex, area, region, wealth quintile and ethnolinguistic group



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 35: Upper secondary completion rate, by sex, area, region, wealth quintile and ethnolinguistic group



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

RESEARCH QUESTION 13:

Why are students absent from school?

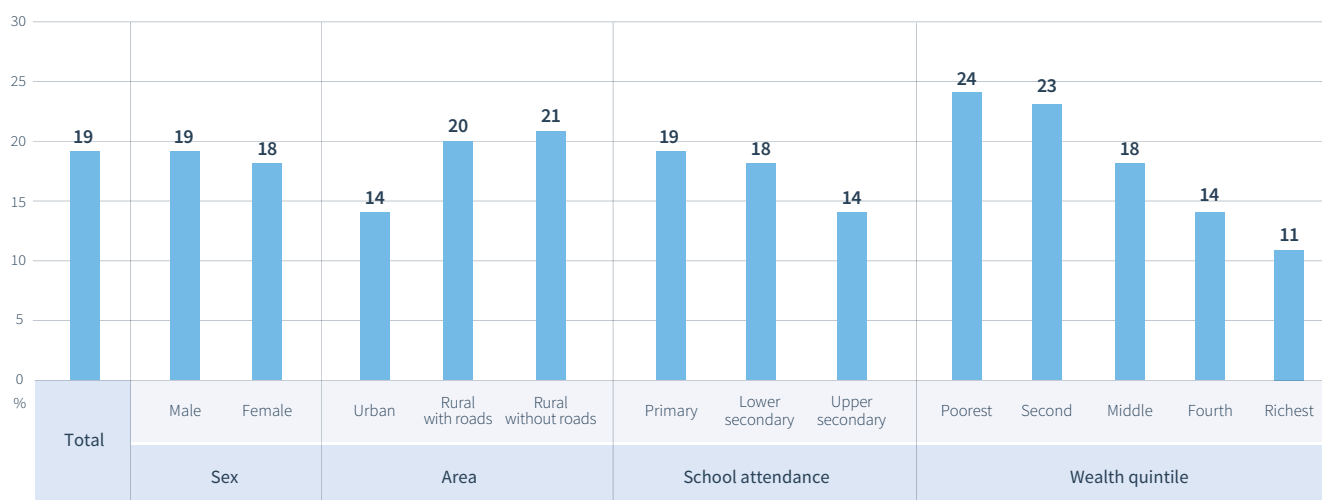
Students fail to attend school for many individual reasons, although in some cases, absenteeism can be due to school closure. Reasons for the school not being open vary from natural and man-made disasters to teacher absence. Overall, in the Lao PDR, 19 per cent of children aged between 7 and 14 years could not attend class due to the absence of teachers or school closure (Figure 36).

Children in poorer families and rural locations often have issues preventing them from attending school. Among poorer

families, 24 per cent of such children face these difficulties, while only 11 per cent of children from the wealthiest families do. Interestingly, primary schools were more often closed or had teachers not attend than secondary schools.

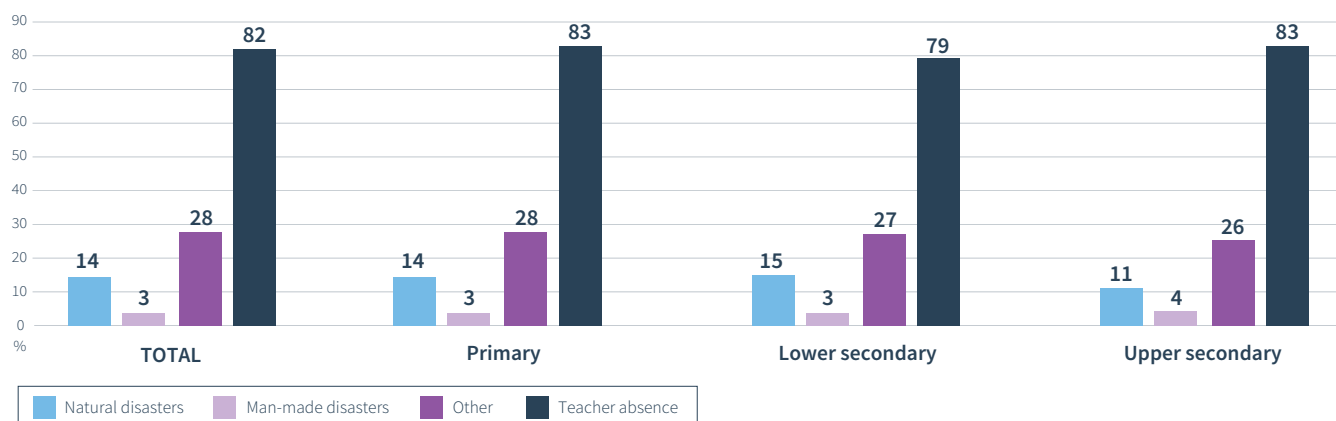
As seen in Figure 37, the main reason preventing children from attending school is teacher absence (82 per cent), which is found across all levels of education, while other reasons only make up 28 per cent. Natural and man-made disasters are relatively rare preventers of school attendance.

FIGURE 36: Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years unable to attend class in the last year due to teacher's absence or school closure



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

FIGURE 37: Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 unable to attend class in the last year due to various reasons



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

RESEARCH QUESTION 14:

How does individual background affect school attendance?

Various factors contribute to children's attendance and completion of a given education level. Girls and boys are not necessarily equally likely to enrol in primary education and children from a certain ethnic background may have more difficulties in attending or remaining in school. Place of residence, parental education and the socioeconomic background of the family are also important factors to consider when discussing a child's likelihood of being in school.

However, as those variables are often interlinked, it is necessary to measure how statistically significant the impact of individual and household characteristics is on education outcomes compared to other factors. The expected attendance rates for various groups have been calculated using regression models, taking into account all of the factors affecting school attendance.¹⁷

How does socioeconomic background affect primary education?

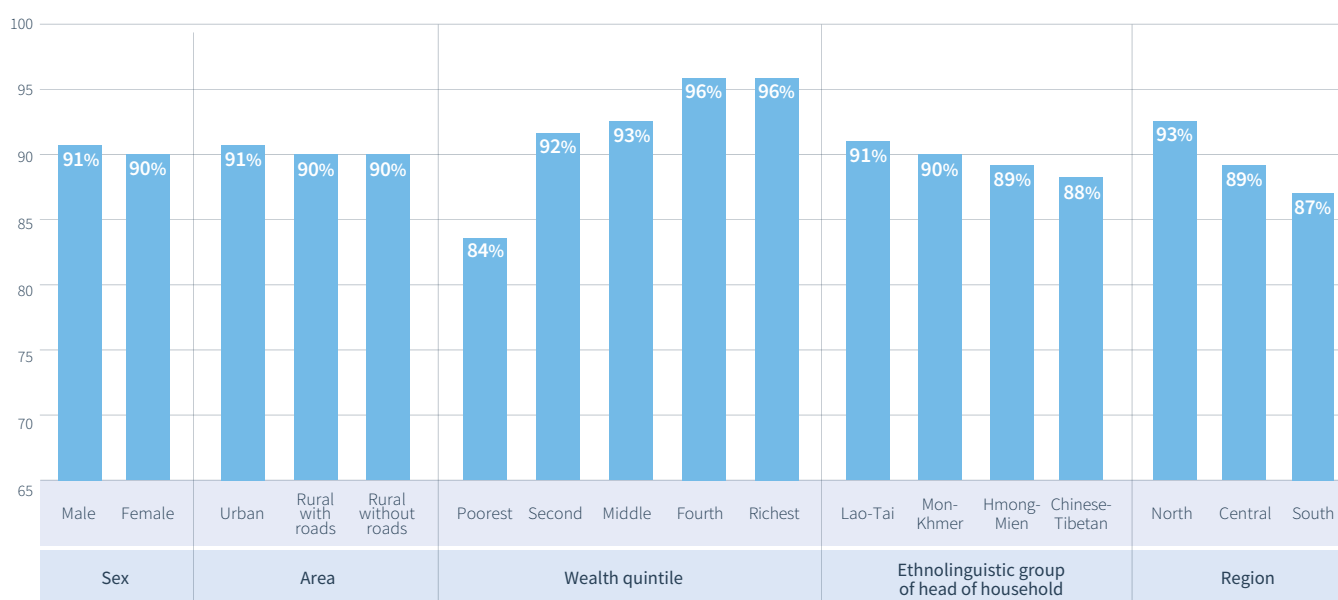
Figure 38 summarizes the expected adjusted net attendance rate for various groups based on regression analysis for children of primary school age (between 6 and 10 years old). This chart confirms what was shown in the descriptive statistics, pointing to an almost non-existent gender gap,

which is also not significant when controlling for other variables. One decisive factor pushing children out of school seems to be region of residence, more than it being a rural or urban area, as rurality is not significant. Indeed, when controlling for other factors, 87 per cent of children in the south are expected to be in primary education compared to 93 per cent of those in the north.

Interestingly, although there are differences in school attendance across ethnolinguistic groups in the descriptive statistics, these are not significant in the regression analysis. This means that the main reason why children from non-Lao-Tai ethnolinguistic groups are attending school in lower numbers is due to their relative poverty, more than their ethnicity.

Indeed, attendance rates are not very different between the top four wealth quintiles. However, the bottom quintile fares much worse than all the others. The possibility of the poorest children being out of school is four times greater than that of children from the richest quintile, and this explains why poorer groups such as rural children and those belonging to Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Mien and Chinese-Tibetan groups demonstrate less favourable outcomes in the descriptive statistics.

FIGURE 38: **Expected primary adjusted net attendance rate, by wealth quintile, ethnolinguistic group and region**



Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.

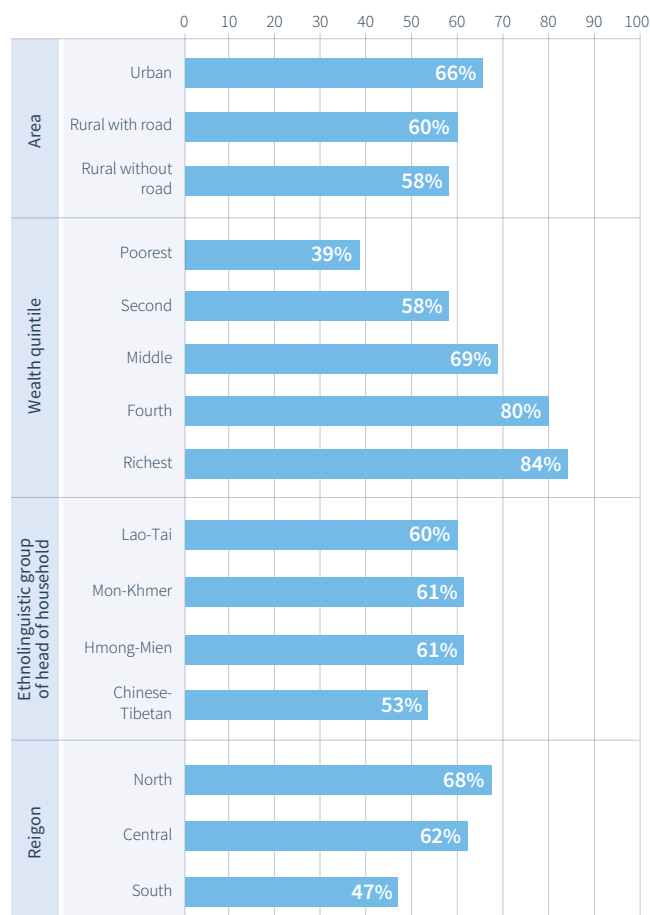
How does socioeconomic background affect lower secondary education?

As seen in Figure 39, this level of education shows a much clearer division across regions, with children in the north having a higher chance of attending school than those from the central region, and children from the south having a lower chance of attending compared to the others. Wealth quintiles also have a clear, significant and very large impact on children's school attendance. At one extreme, the likelihood of children in the poorest quintiles being in lower secondary education at the appropriate age is only 39 per cent, compared to 84 per cent for the richest quintiles. Rurality, on the other hand, despite the differentials shown in the descriptive statistics in Chapter 1, does not seem to affect the chances of children being out of school, controlling for wealth, ethnicity, mother's education and area. It is possible that region of residence plays a more important role regardless of whether or not children reside in rural or urban areas of the province.

How does socioeconomic background affect upper secondary education?

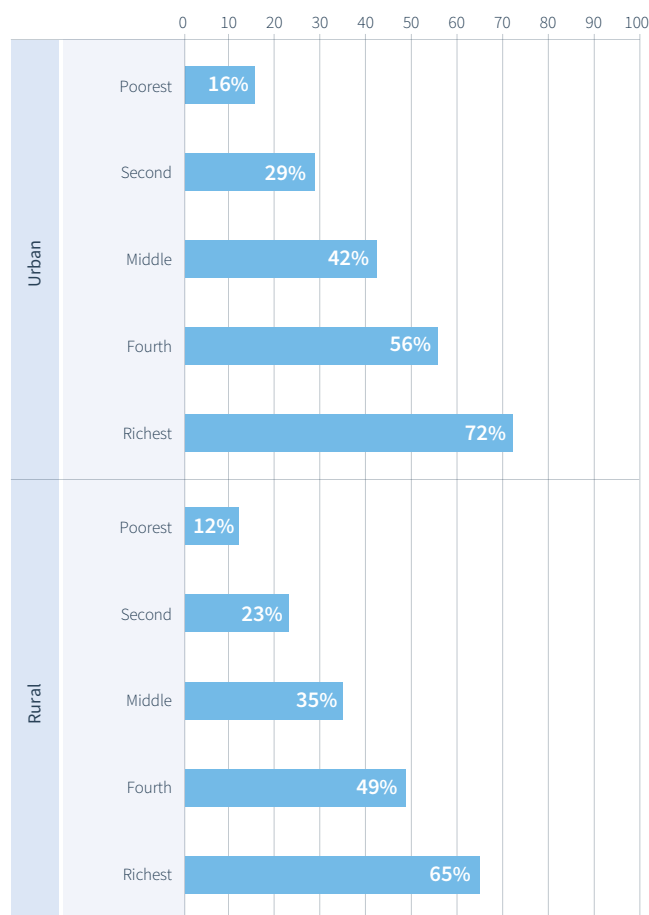
Many children aged between 15 and 17 years, who should be enrolled in upper secondary education, are out of school (Figure 40). Various factors drive this to different extents. The most significant determinant of all seems to be household wealth, as children in the poorest quintile have a much lower likelihood of attending school than those in the richest quintile. Furthermore, many of the children from the poorest quintile have uneducated mothers, which further increases their chances of being out of school. When comparing across urban and rural areas, as well as wealth quintiles, the differences are significant. The rural and poor have only a 12 per cent probability of being in upper secondary education, while 72 per cent of the richest children in urban areas are enrolled at upper secondary level.

FIGURE 39: Expected lower secondary adjusted net attendance rate, by area, wealth quintile, ethnolinguistic group and region



Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.

FIGURE 40: Expected upper secondary adjusted net attendance rate, by wealth quintile and area



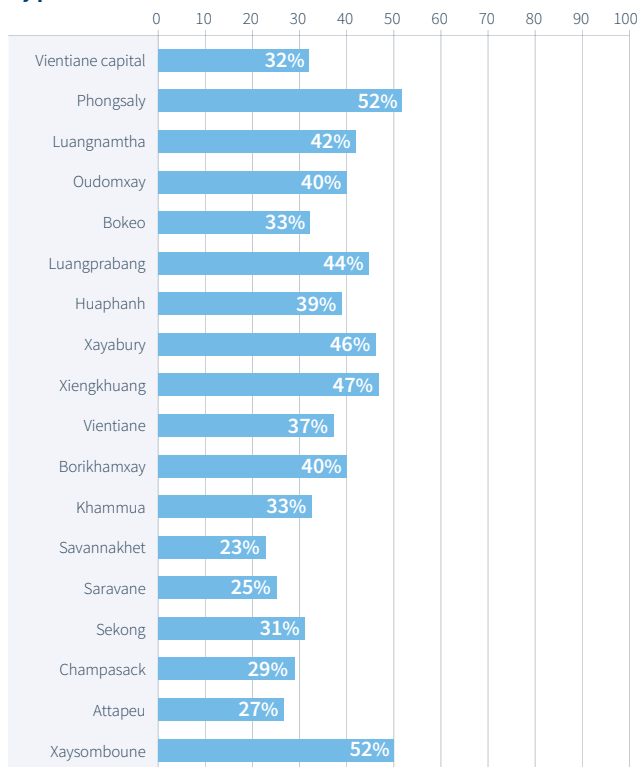
Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.



Figure 41 shows that differences are also strong across provinces. When controlling for socioeconomic factors, many provinces have upper secondary adjusted net attendance rates that are similar to or better than that of the capital,¹⁸ although others are worse. Overall, children living in the south have a lower chance of attending upper secondary school, compared with the central region, and factors like relative wealth and urbanization favour children who are residents of the capital.

The descriptive statistics suggest that ethnolinguistic communities that speak languages other than Lao may find themselves at a disadvantage in education. However, regression analysis shows a different pattern. Children from the Mon-Khmer group have a higher likelihood of attending upper secondary school than Lao-Tai children, and the other two ethnic groups have a pattern not significantly different from ethnically Lao-Tai children. It is likely that the factors pushing adjusted net attendance rates down for non-Lao-Tai children are socioeconomic and location variables, and not the ethnic group to which they belong.

FIGURE 41: **Expected upper secondary adjusted net attendance rate, by province**



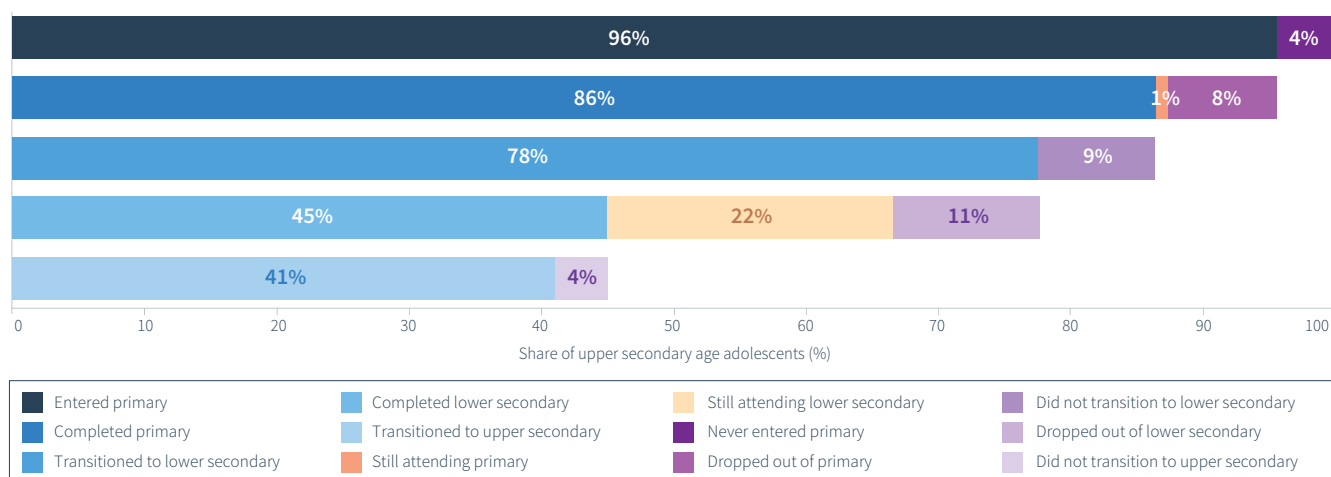
Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.

Overall picture – Pathway analysis

The pathway analysis in Figure 42 summarizes many of the ideas developed across chapters 2 and 3. The vast majority of children in the Lao PDR enter primary education (96 per cent), and a relatively large percentage complete primary education (86 per cent) and transition into lower secondary education (78 per cent). A large gap, however, can be seen in the transition to upper secondary school, as a high percentage of students fail to transition at the right age and are still attending lower secondary school despite being at an age when they should attend upper secondary school (22 per cent). Another sizeable percentage of students in lower secondary education complete this level without moving onto upper secondary school (11 per cent).

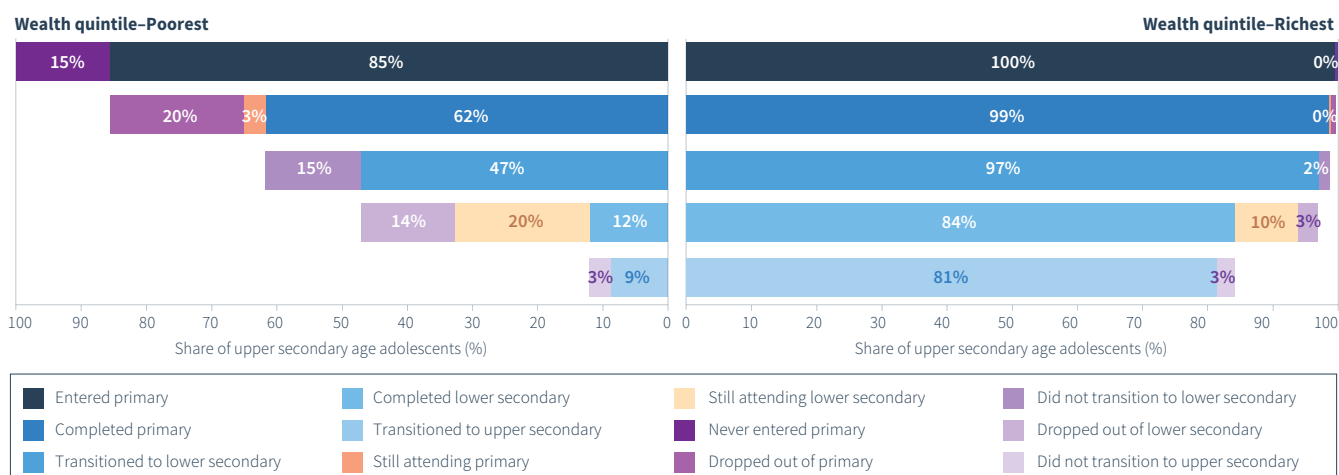
It is important to understand socioeconomic conditions in more detail, because this is the biggest source of inequality between students. Students from the wealthier quintiles fare much better than poorer students across the board in all levels of education (Figure 43). Children from the top one fifth of wealth distribution drop out and repeat less often and transition in much larger numbers to higher levels of education. Almost all children from wealthier families start and conclude primary education, while 15 per cent of poorer children will never attend primary school and only 62 per cent will complete it. The inequality continues as they advance in their education and the divide becomes even more pronounced at upper secondary level. A total of 81 per cent of students from wealthier families transition into upper secondary education, while only 9 per cent of poorer students make this transition.

FIGURE 42: Pathway analysis



Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.

FIGURE 43: Pathway analysis, by wealth quintile



Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.

SUMMARY

- Attendance is 90 per cent in primary education, which is very high. However, 80,000 children aged between 6 and 10 years are out of school or still attending ECE. At lower secondary level, attendance drops to 60 per cent, the number of children out of school rises to 140,000 and another 100,000 are still in primary school. Upper secondary marks a further decrease in attendance, falling to only 38 per cent, with 170,000 children out of school between ages 15 and 17 and another 110,000 attending a lower level than they should for that age bracket. Overall, almost 400,000 children are out of school in the Lao PDR.
- While not so much of an issue at secondary levels, grade repetition in Grade 1 of primary school is very high, reaching 14 per cent, while less than 3 per cent of children repeat any other grade. An aspect that should be given more attention is children's age when beginning primary education. Around 43 per cent of Grade 1 repeaters started primary education before the official age.
- Wealth is a key factor in completion at all levels. Almost 100 per cent of children from wealthier families complete primary education at the appropriate age, while less than 60 per cent of children from poorer families do. Even when poorer children attend lower secondary school, their chances of succeeding are much lower, as their completion rate is five times lower than their richer counterparts. At upper secondary level, socioeconomic inequality is also a major factor, and completion rates are more than 17 times higher for richer children than for poorer children.
- As the heatmap in Figure 44 shows, the clearest determinant of school attendance is wealth. Across all levels of education, poorer children of both sexes from all areas, ethnolinguistic groups and provinces are less likely to attend school. The educational opportunities for poorer children worsen in secondary school; they are half as likely to attend lower secondary school and five times less likely to attend upper secondary school than their counterparts.
- The dropout rate is also very unequal across socioeconomic groups. Almost no children from the richest quintiles drop out in primary school and 2 per cent drop out in secondary schools. In contrast, the dropout rate is 2 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, for primary and lower secondary education among poorer children.
- Two ethnic groups require further attention at lower secondary school level, calling for targeted approaches: Mon-Khmer and Hmong-Mien, because these are the only two ethnic groups who are clearly disadvantaged even when controlling for socioeconomic background, location and gender. However, although Lao-Tai children attend upper secondary education in higher numbers than non-Lao-Tai children, there is no significant correlation between school attendance and ethnicity at this level of education. This means that the reasons why non-Lao-Tai have low attendance at this level of education is actually explained by factors other than their ethnicity. For example, being from a rural area or having fewer resources and belonging to a poorer family can impact attendance.
- Evidence also reveals large regional disparities in education access and completion. Most of the provinces with lower access and completion indicators are in the south (such as Saravan, Savannakhet and Xekong Provinces), while Phongsaly Province in the north is also behind. Nevertheless, the regression analysis shows that much of the difference in attendance across provinces can be better explained by levels of family wealth.
- Teacher absenteeism is a very significant issue in the Lao PDR, across all levels of education and across schools educating children of various socioeconomic backgrounds. Overall, about one fifth of all students aged between 7 and 14 years report not being able to attend class due to teacher absence. This is the case of roughly one quarter of poorer children and one tenth of those from wealthier families. Indeed, teacher absence is the reason put forward by over 80 per cent of children reporting not being able to attend class in the previous year.

FIGURE 44: **Heatmap of marginal effects of various child and household characteristics on school attendance (by percentage point) in the Lao PDR***

Variable		Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
Sex	Female		3%	
Area	Rural with roads		-6%	-7%
	Rural without roads		-10%	-15%
Wealth index quintile	Poorest	-10%	-54%	-58%
	Second	-4%	-33%	-47%
	Middle	-2%	-19%	-34%
	Fourth		-6%	-18%
Province	Phongsaly	10%	43%	29%
	Luangnamtha	10%	40%	15%
	Oudomxay	11%	37%	13%
	Bokeo	8%	27%	
	Luangprabang	12%	41%	18%
	Huaphanh	12%	39%	12%
	Xayabury	12%	36%	19%
	Xiengkhuang	12%	47%	23%
	Vientiane	10%	29%	
	Borikhamxay	10%	34%	12%
	Khammua	8%	15%	
	Savannakhet		9%	-9%
	Saravane			-8%
	Sekong	8%	21%	
	Champasack			
	Attapeu	8%	12%	
	Xaysomboune	11%	44%	27%
Ethnolinguistic group	Mon-Khmer	-2%	-5%	-8%
	Hmong-Mien	-7%	-15%	-10%
	Chinese-Tibetan	-3%	-23%	
Mother's education	Post-secondary			
	Upper secondary			-18%
	Lower secondary			-16%
	Primary			-25%
	None or ECE	-5%	-22%	-33%

* Age and age squared were omitted from the table. Non-significant values (variables that do not significantly impact attendance) are left blank. Positive values mean that the variable increases attendance while negative values mean they decrease attendance. The base category (the one each variable is compared to) is: male, urban, from the capital province, Lao-Tai and higher-educated mother.

Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.

POLICY/PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Directly relevant recommendations

Recommendation 1: Focus on developing a strategy led by the Teacher Allocation Committee and the Planning and Budgeting Committee to reduce disparities as a means of meeting overall ESDP (2016–2020) outcomes that includes higher budget allocations for disadvantaged districts¹⁹

LSIS-II found disparities in attendance rates at primary and secondary levels among some ethnolinguistic groups. Disparities in attendance rates were also found at these levels due to socioeconomic status, remoteness and region. Addressing these disparities will require strategies to prioritize children from these communities.

Recommendation 2: Use student allowances at primary and lower secondary levels to better target the most-disadvantaged students

Introduced by prime ministerial decree in 2018, these allowances were trialled by pilot intervention in a limited number of districts in the 2018/2019 school year. However, implementation of the decree would benefit from guidelines clarifying the student selection process and specifying fewer criteria for selection, as well as prioritization of those criteria, in order to ensure more effective targeting. As the budget is limited, the use of data, including from LSIS-II, is needed to more objectively identify the most disadvantaged students for allowances.

Recommendation 3: Ensure compulsory education is truly free – currently families are often required to pay additional fees

LSIS-II findings highlighted that the clearest determinant of school attendance is wealth – for example, the survey found that children from the poorest quintile are half as likely to attend lower secondary school and five times less likely to attend upper secondary school than children from the wealthiest quintile. Although compulsory education has been declared free, and schools are provided with block grants (on a per capita enrolment basis), there is quite widespread anecdotal evidence that some teachers are still charging fees from students and that schools are also requesting additional funds from families to support various of its activities. Explicitly forbidding the charging of "extra fees" by teachers would contribute to improving equity in access to education, particularly for poorer families.

Recommendation 4: Improve DESB monitoring and assessment of teachers (including absenteeism) to ensure they teach well and also follow regulations/fulfil responsibilities

Teacher absenteeism was cited by about one-fifth of all students aged between 7 and 14 years as the reason why they had not been able to attend class over the previous school year. Taking steps to reduce this may contribute to lower dropout and repetition rates at all levels.

2. Overall recommendations



Recommendation 5: Ensure school principals have leadership and management skills, as well as capacity to involve community and parents

Strengthening school management is a priority of MoES as much depends on effective management, including equitable access and the quality of education provided. A well-managed school can contribute significantly to reducing repetition and dropout rates, as well as increasing completion rates.





CHAPTER 4

What skills do students have after graduation?

Educational attendance does not guarantee learning. Some students may attend school for several years and yet fail to acquire the skills that would be expected from their level of education. Poor teaching, lack of parental support and insufficient incentives are some of the factors behind low learning outcomes. This chapter investigates which children are falling behind in learning.

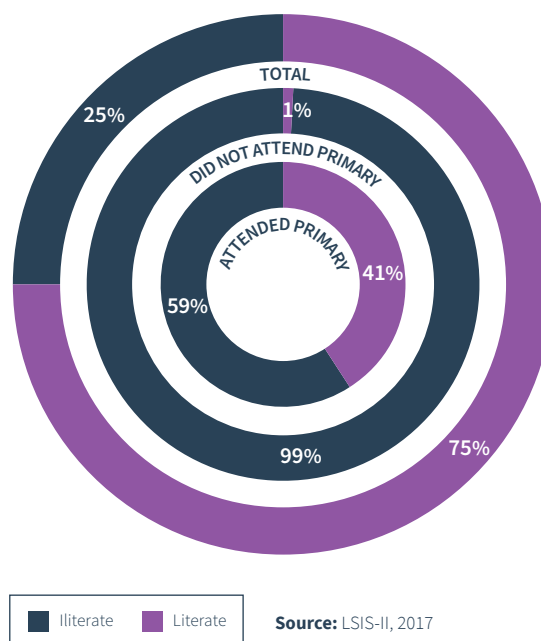
RESEARCH QUESTION 15:

What is the relationship between education background and literacy?

Figure 45 shows that only three quarters of people in the Lao PDR aged between 15 and 30 years are able to read and write, almost all having acquired these skills by attending school. In contrast, the one quarter of its young adults who are illiterate are divided into two groups: those who have never been to school and those who are illiterate despite having completed primary education.

Strikingly, 59 per cent of those aged 15 to 30 years who only attended primary school²⁰ were found to be illiterate, pointing to flaws in the capacity of schools to equip young people with the right skills. In the Lao PDR, the number of illiterate adults exceeds the number of adults who have never attended school, indicating that education should focus on quality as well as access.

FIGURE 45: Literacy and education of adults aged 15 to 30 years



Among the poorest families, 29 per cent of young adults never attended school and the highest level of education of over 44 per cent is primary school (Figure 46). Nonetheless, most of those having attended and graduated from primary education in the bottom 60 per cent of wealth distribution are not considered literate.

Illiteracy has decreased rapidly across generations, reaching 11 per cent for men and 17 per cent for women in the youngest age bracket, which is consistent with increasing attendance rates in all levels of education.

Nevertheless, although the gender gap in attendance rates is narrow or often favours girls over boys, literacy rates tell a different story. Women in their late thirties and forties have much higher rates of illiteracy than men, as seen in Figure 47. This gender gap decreases when examining younger cohorts, but it is still very wide.

This trend is not explained by primary education, where the rates of attendance of girls is similar to that of boys. Female illiteracy must come from factors other than only school attendance. Some of these factors will be discussed in more detail in Research Question 19.

FIGURE 46: Literacy and education of adults aged 15 to 30 years, by wealth quintile

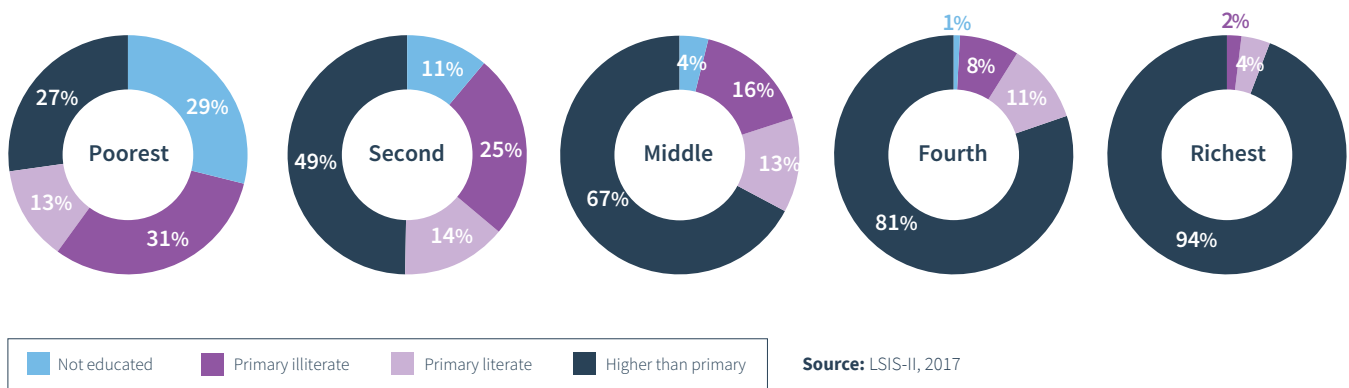
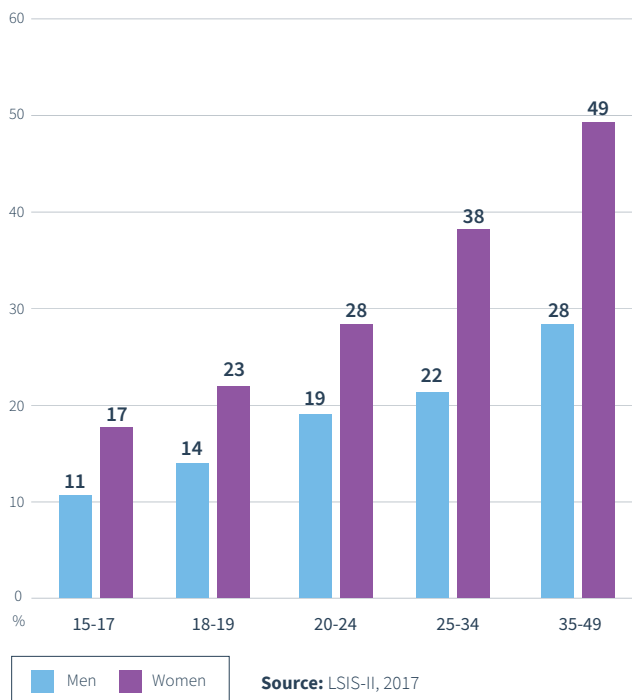


FIGURE 47: Illiteracy, by age and sex



RESEARCH QUESTION 16:

Are adolescents and youth equipped with sufficient ICT skills?

Increasingly, jobs require training in information and communication technology (ICT). Young people should acquire essential ICT skills to efficiently perform jobs requiring these skills when they finish school. LSIS-II asked young people aged 15 to 24 about computer-related activities and their use of 9 ICT skills in the previous 3 months.

As shown in Figure 48, only 11 per cent of male and 9 per cent of female respondents carried out at least one activity.

Furthermore, there are strong differences between those residing in rural and urban locations and especially across educational groups. Figure 49 demonstrates that education seems to be the key factor to explain regular use of ICT skills, as almost no one without a lower secondary qualification performs computer-related activities, while the majority of tertiary-educated young people do so.

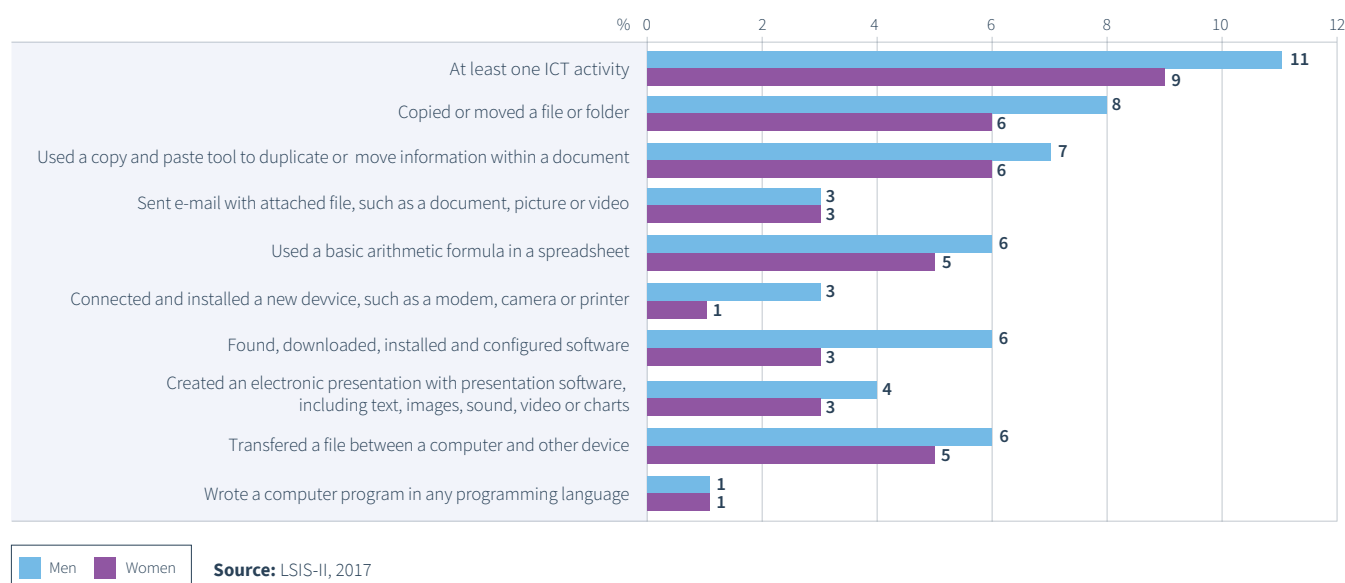
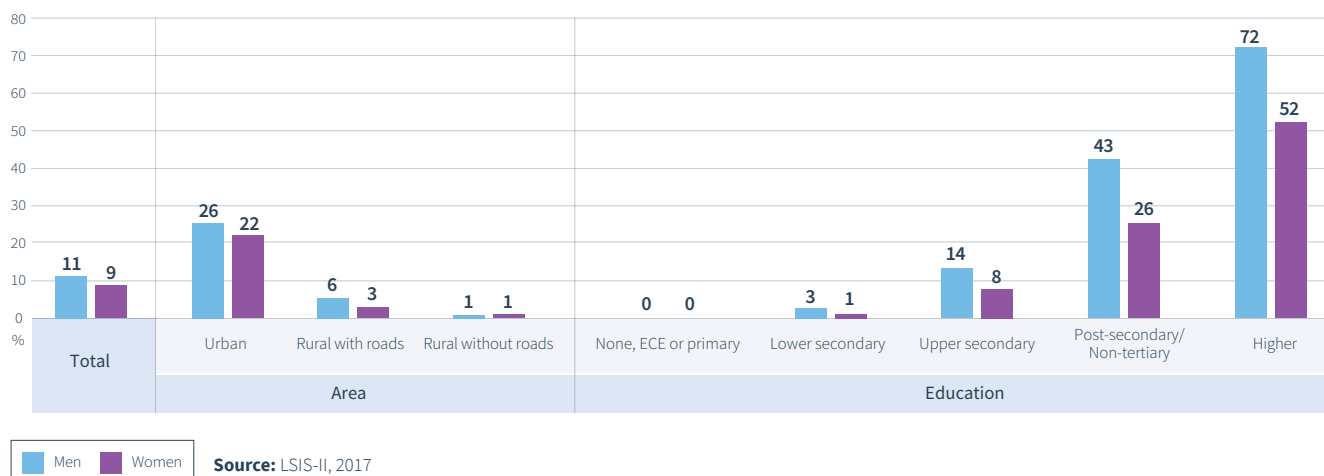
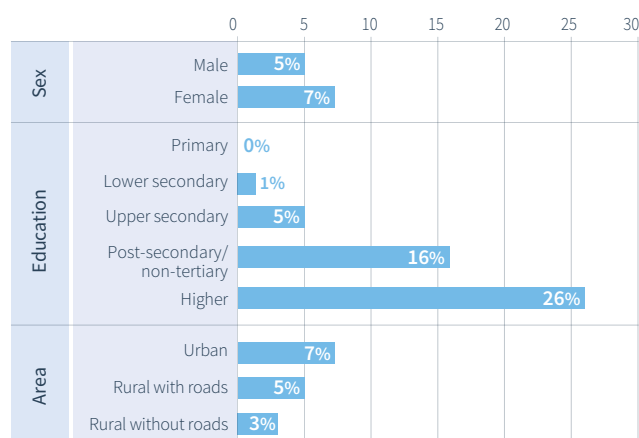
FIGURE 48: **Percentage of adolescents and youth aged 15 to 24 years who carried out ICT activities**FIGURE 49: **Percentage of adolescents and youth aged 15 to 24 years performing at least one ICT activity in the last three months**

FIGURE 50: **Likelihood of performing at least one ICT activity among adolescents and youth aged 15 to 24 years, by sex and level of education**



Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017

The regression analysis shown in Figure 50 confirms rurality, socioeconomic disadvantage and lower education level all contribute to a lower possibility of using ICT skills at work. Nevertheless, ICT use does not vary much across most regions, which points to the level of education and wealth being stronger predictors of skills used at work than the location where the work takes place. Controlling for other factors, women are more likely than men to use ICT skills, as are more educated people. On the top end of the distribution, the chances of a university-educated young person using ICT skills is 26 per cent, while it is negligible among those who did not attend primary school.

SUMMARY



- There are over 300,000 illiterate youth aged 15 to 24 years in the Lao PDR. Although some of these individuals did not attend school, most did and yet did not learn how to read. Indeed, almost 60 per cent of young people who only attended primary education are illiterate. In order to reduce illiteracy, it is important to focus not only on out-of-school children and young people, but also on children who attend primary school and do not learn to read, which are more numerous than those out of school.
- Much progress has been made in reducing illiteracy and in bridging the gender gap. Half of women aged between 35 and 49 years are illiterate, while only 17 per cent of those aged between 15 and 17 years are illiterate. Nevertheless, women are still 6 percentage points behind men, even among the younger generation.
- Very few young people in the Lao PDR carry out ICT activities. In fact, only 11 per cent of young men and 9 per cent of young women (aged 15 to 24 years) use any of a list of ICT skills. Education is key to fostering ICT penetration. Attending upper secondary education multiplies by five the chances of young people using ICT skills when compared to those who only attended lower secondary education. Furthermore, attending higher education multiplies by five again the chances of using ICT, compared to young people who only attended upper secondary education.



POLICY/PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Directly relevant recommendations

Recommendation 1: Target areas where literacy rates are lowest, particularly where there are concentrations of females from non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups, through non-formal programmes that deliver literacy courses

Based partly on LSIS-II findings related to gender and ethnicity, the ESDP midterm review recommended a more effective targeting of literacy courses to reach females from non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups. This would help address the significant gender gap in literacy identified by LSIS-II.

Recommendation 2: Conduct a screening test for children who leave primary school to determine if they have sustainable literacy skills; use the results as a basis for further decision-making at local, subnational and national level as appropriate

Using the findings from LSIS-II that as many as 60 per cent of students who had attended only primary

education at some point and did not go on to lower secondary school were illiterate, the ESDP midterm review also recommended that some kind of screening test be given to those leaving primary school in order to assess literacy levels. This would not be for any kind of certification, but to gather more precise information for use in decision-making related to the teaching of literacy.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen learning of ICT skills among teachers and secondary level students, particularly in non-urban areas

LSIS-II found that ICT skills were more evident among young people in urban than rural areas. However, even when ICT is taught, particularly in rural secondary schools, teachers also lack the ICT knowledge and skills required to effectively impart them to their students.

2. Overall recommendations

Recommendation 4: Expand the network of community learning centres with permanent staff at the village level

While community learning centres have been established previously in rural areas, they have often not been sustainable due to being staffed by volunteers who leave when the project providing the funding ends. Assigning permanent staff to these centres in rural areas increases the likelihood of these continuing to function in the future.

Recommendation 5: Improve quality of equivalency courses and acceptance of equivalency certificates in formal schools – recognition and accreditation are needed

Non-formal equivalency courses target those who never attended or dropped out of the formal education system, including primary and secondary levels.

However, those who have completed equivalency courses and wish to return to formal education often find that their equivalency certificates are not accepted by the schools they want to enter, due to concerns regarding the quality of these courses and the applicant's actual educational level. Addressing this quality concern would also contribute to addressing issues related to literacy, as well as dropout and completion rates identified by the LSIS-II findings.

Recommendation 6: Develop an overall ICT strategy/master plan to inform ICT development, both within the education sector as well as more widely

Currently, there is no overall strategy to guide ICT development within education. While ICT is mentioned in the ESDP as an activity under secondary education, there is no strategy to guide future ICT development, both within the education sector, as well as for the country overall.²¹



CHAPTER 5

How do child labour and early marriage impact participation in education?

As previously shown, multiple factors affect school attendance, ranging from socioeconomic to cultural factors. This chapter examines in detail how child labour and early marriage are associated with school attendance.

RESEARCH QUESTION 17:

What is the profile of child labour in the Lao PDR?

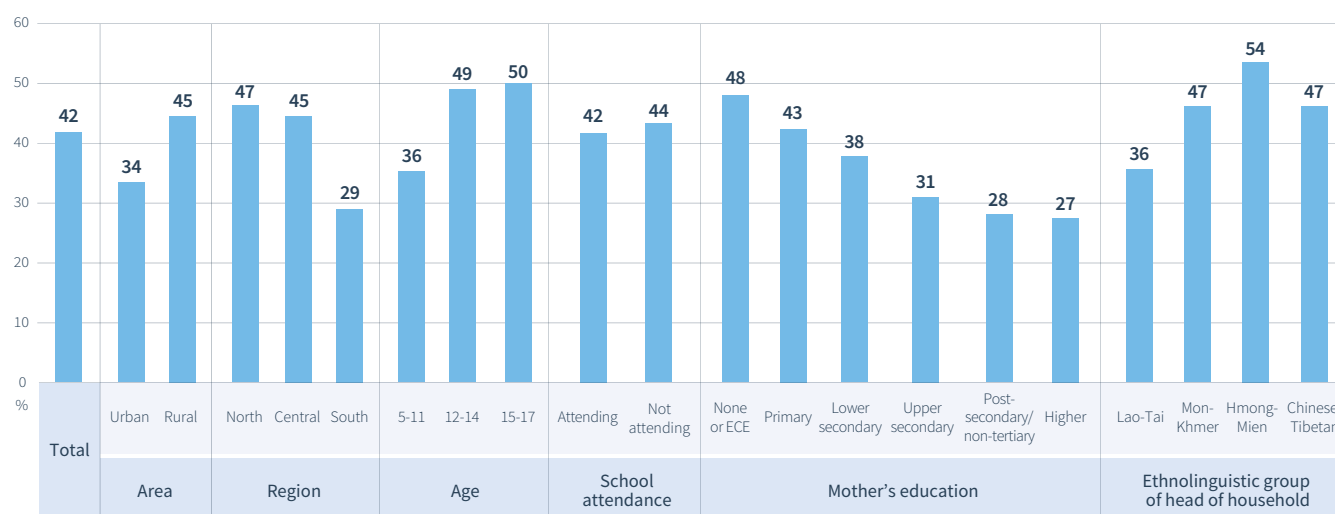
Child labour refers to children working either (a) under hazardous conditions or (b) in economic activities or household chores for more hours²² than would be expected from those in their age group. Many Lao children stay out of school to engage in work activities, while others are able to combine school with work, even work under hazardous conditions. In the Lao PDR, about 42 per cent of all children aged between 5 and 17 years perform work that is not appropriate for their age, as seen in Figure 51. Children from rural areas and those belonging to non-Lao-Tai groups are more engaged in child labour, ranging from 45 per cent to 54 per cent. Children with poorly educated mothers are also more likely to be working than those whose mothers have completed secondary or tertiary education. In contrast with what would be expected from education indicators, data shows that there are fewer children working in the southern provinces where attendance and completion rates are lower.

Overall, child labour increases with age, and impacts half of children aged between 12 and 17 years. This is due in part to an increase in the number of children engaging in work under hazardous conditions, which involves 16 per cent of children under 11, but 48 per cent of those between 15 and 17 years old. On the other hand, child labour in economic activities decreases steadily from younger to older cohorts. In part, this can be explained by older cohorts having a higher threshold in the number of hours needed for a certain economic activity to be defined as child labour: Between the ages of 5 and 11, even one hour of economic activity is considered child labour, while an adolescent older than 15 needs to work for 43 hours a week for it to be considered child labour.

Household child labour is rare compared to other types. Although it involves slightly more girls than boys, there is no gender imbalance when it comes to working in economic activities or under hazardous conditions. However, more importantly, older children are much more likely to work under hazardous conditions than younger ones, which requires further attention, especially given that those children ideally should be enrolled in upper secondary education.

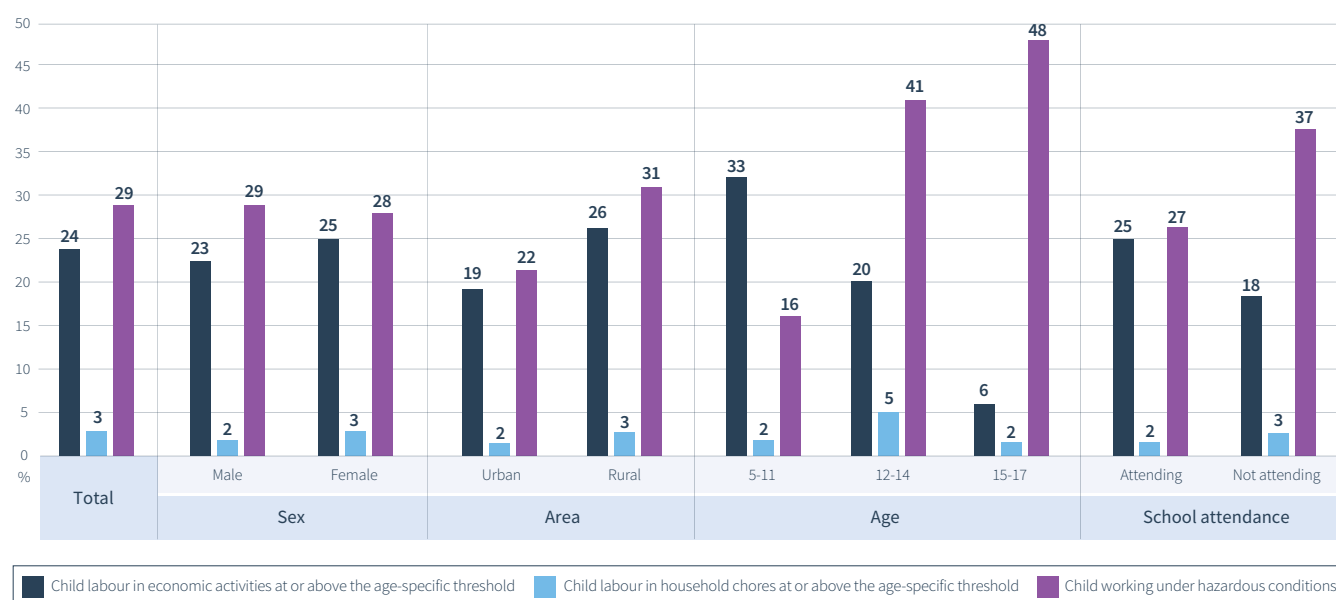
Interestingly, more children attending school engage in economic activities than those not attending school. On the other hand, out-of-school children have much higher rates of performing work under hazardous conditions. Overall, both of those modalities of child labour balance out and there is little difference in the share of child workers in and out of school, as shown in Figure 51. Figure 52 provides descriptive data for three categories of child labour.

FIGURE 51: Prevalence of child labour, by area, region, age, school attendance, mother's education and ethnolinguistic group



Source: LSIS-II, 2017.

FIGURE 52: Types of child labour, by sex, area, age and school attendance



Source: LSIS-II, 2017.

RESEARCH QUESTION 18:

Which children marry early?

While a revision to the Family Law of 1990 states that only those 18 years and above are entitled to legally marry in the Lao PDR,²³ LSIS-II found that girls and boys marry at different rates and have different characteristics that affect their likelihood of marrying early. Among those aged between 15 and 25 years, 2 per cent of men and 8 per cent of women were married before they turned 15, and by the time they reach 18 years of age, 7 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women will marry. In the case of both girls and boys, coming from a rural area or a background other than the Lao-Tai ethnic group are factors strongly associated with higher early marriage rates.

Education plays a critical role in preventing early marriage for both boys and girls. Children who have had upper secondary education or higher have a much lower rate of early marriage than their counterparts with no education or only primary education. For instance, as Figure 53 shows, 35 per cent of boys with no education married before their eighteenth birthday, and 14 per cent of those with primary education did so, but only 3 per cent of those with an upper secondary education married early. The gap is even bigger for girls, with 57 per cent of girls with no education and 45 per cent of girls with primary education married before age 18, but the rate decreases to 14 per cent when girls have upper secondary education (Figure 54). For both genders, the Hmong-Mien group stands out for its very high rates of child marriage, especially before the age of 15, where their rate of early marriage is almost twice that of other ethnic groups.

Besides being extremely prevalent, early marriage does not seem to be falling fast when the results are compared across generations. The share of women married before the age of 15 seems to gravitate to around 10 per cent for all cohorts between 20 and 30 years old, while the share of those marrying before 18 varies between 21 per cent and 28 per cent for the same cohorts (Figure 55). This suggests that there needs to be much improvement in the prevention of early marriage, particularly across groups most at risk.

FIGURE 53: Percentage of married men aged 19 to 25 years, by area, education and ethnolinguistic group

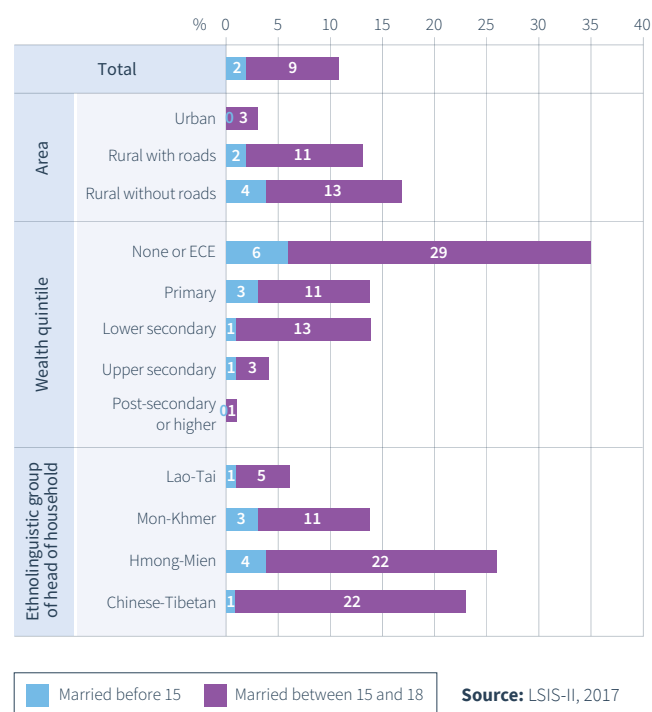


FIGURE 54: Percentage of married women aged 19 to 25 years, by area, education and ethnolinguistic group

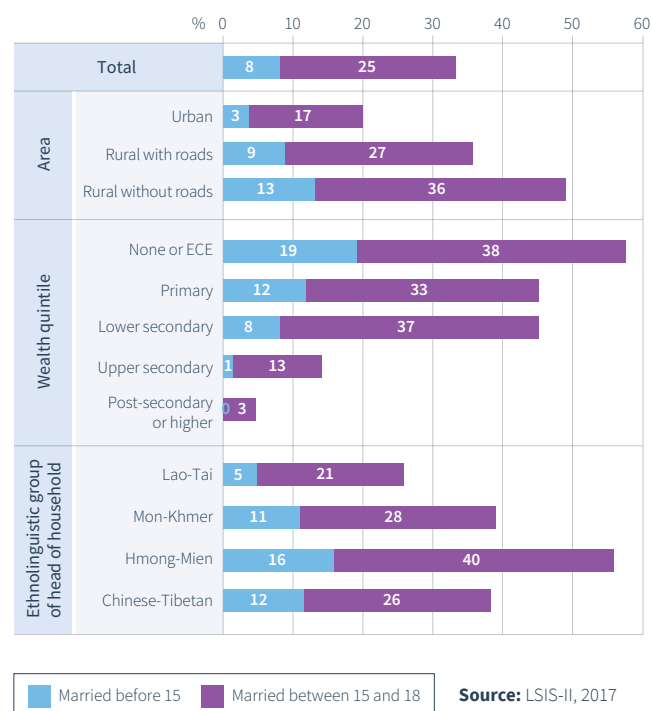
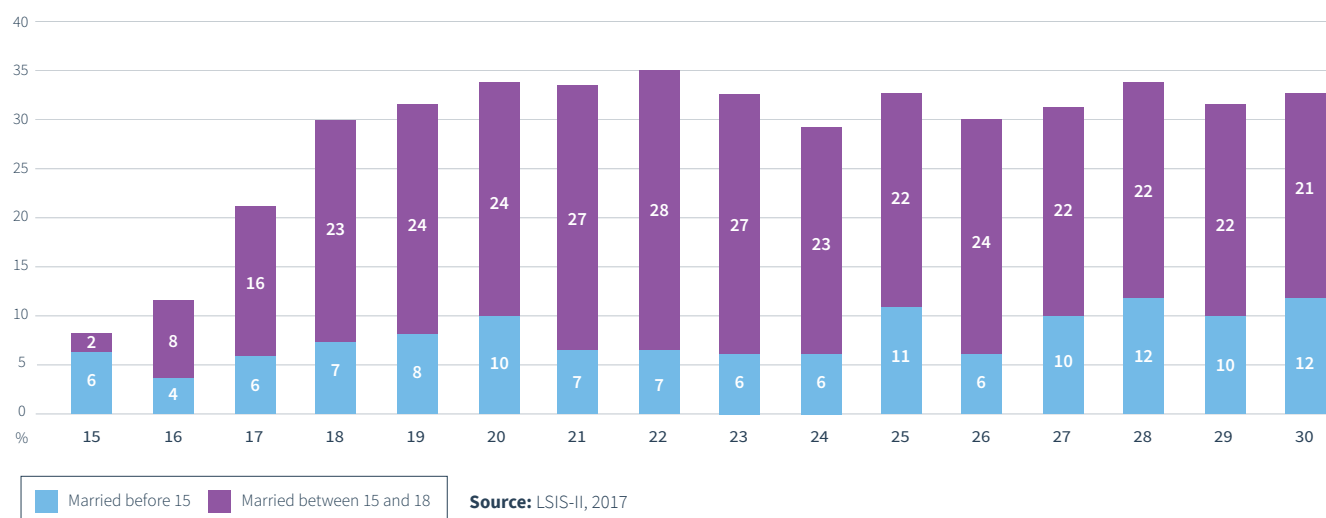


FIGURE 55: Percentage of women married before the age of 15 and between the ages of 15 to 18



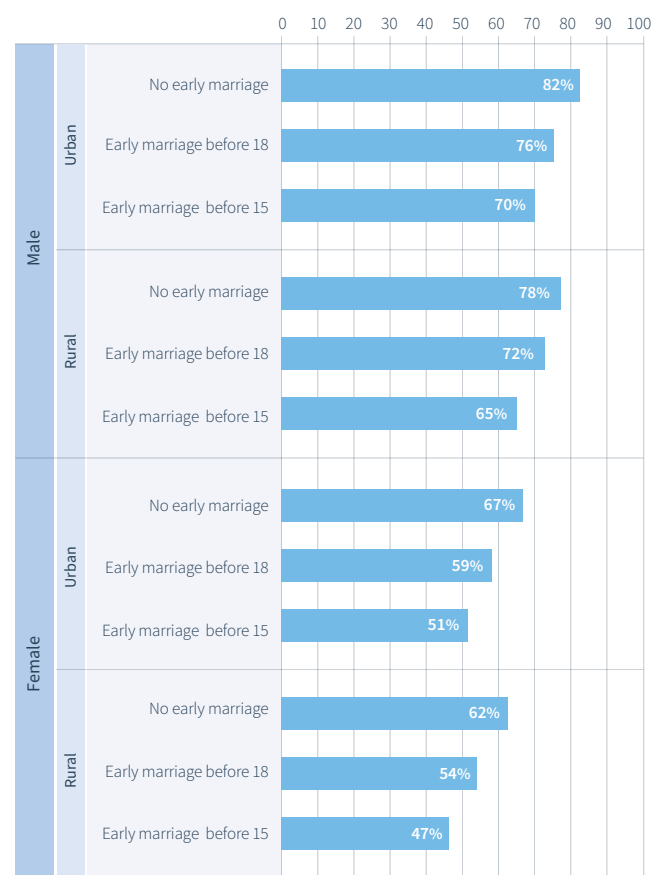
RESEARCH QUESTION 19:

How does child marriage affect female literacy?

Previous analysis showed a large gender gap in the literacy rate between women and men. Regression analysis shows that various factors impact literacy rates and the most important results are shown in Figure 56. People belonging to non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups have a much lower literacy rate, as do poorer people. Interestingly, child marriage does have a stronger relationship in explaining female illiteracy than male illiteracy. Indeed, the literacy rate is much lower for women who married early, both before age 15 or before age 18, regardless of location.



FIGURE 56: Likelihood of literacy, by sex, area and age of first marriage



Source: Author's calculations using LSIS-II, 2017.

SUMMARY



- Child labour is very widespread in the Lao PDR – there are over 800,000 children working between the ages of 5 and 17 years, which corresponds to 40 per cent of the total. Child labour is concentrated in rural areas and among non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups, but is present throughout the country.
- There is no clear link between school attendance and child labour. However, a more visible relationship exists between working under hazardous conditions and school attendance. Around 37 per cent of children out of school work under hazardous conditions, while only 27 per cent of those in school work under similar conditions.
- Early marriage is also very common, especially among girls and less educated children in general. Around 35 per cent of young men and 57 per cent of young women who did not attend primary school marry early. Yet, less than 2 per cent of youth attending a level higher than upper secondary marry before the legal age.
- Early marriage and literacy skills are closely linked. The odds of young women being literate increase by 25 per cent if they do not marry early, compared to girls marrying before they turn 15. This creates a double burden given that girls and poorer children are both more likely to marry early and less likely to be in school.

POLICY/PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Directly relevant recommendations

CHILD LABOUR

Recommendation 1: Expand awareness-raising of the negative impacts of child labour, especially in hazardous circumstances

More needs to be done to address the issue of child labour in the Lao PDR, particularly raising awareness within communities of the dangers of hazardous working conditions, as well as enforcing the existing laws. While MoLSW has child labour as one of their areas of focus, they are constrained by limited staffing²⁴ and financial resources.

Recommendation 2: Incorporate risks and dangers of child labour and vocational-related activities into the school curriculum

Currently, the issue of child labour does not appear to be mentioned in the primary or secondary curriculum. However, with curriculum revision underway, at least at primary level, there is scope to integrate information regarding child labour into the mainstream subjects being taught, so that children are more aware of their rights and of the dangers inherent to child labour.

2. Overall recommendations

Recommendation 6: Develop child labour-related legislation that is consistent with that of other ASEAN countries

While there are laws that relate to the labour force, this legal framework has gaps and needs to be consistent with the laws related to child labour of other ASEAN member countries. For example, migration and human trafficking are not adequately covered under Lao labour laws.

Recommendation 7: Include references to child labour issues in policies in other sectors, particularly in education

The issue of child labour is missing from the policies of ministries (other than MoLSW), including MoES. This issue could be considered for inclusion in the next ESDP (2021–2025).

EARLY MARRIAGE

Recommendation 3: Enforce the revised Family Law, which has been amended to remove approval for marriage under the age of 18 in special cases (Article 9 in the 2008 Revision)

While the initial Family Law passed in 1990 allowed for marriage between the ages of 15 to 18 in “special cases,” an amendment in 2008 removed that exemption. Currently, marriage is only legal for those aged 18 years and older. However, the question remains as to how this law should be enforced, given that the Lao PDR has one of the highest rates of early marriage in the region.

Recommendation 4: Expand awareness-raising to prevent early marriage, including among boys and men, and adolescent pregnancy, especially through organizations such as the Lao Women's Union and Youth Union

While this is occurring to some extent, more needs to be done to raise awareness of these issues and the negative impacts they can have, especially on girls and young women. LSIS-II data identified those most at risk because they belong to non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups and due to their socioeconomic status, and awareness-raising efforts should target them.

Recommendation 5: Increase awareness among secondary school principals as well as parents of the need to accept young women who are mothers or married as students if they wish to return to school

Anecdotal evidence indicates that when young women who are mothers or married wish to return to school, they often face a lack of acceptance from their parents and community, and school principals refuse to enrol them. More needs to be done to change societal attitudes and encourage schools to be proactive in welcoming these students back into school, and allowing them to continue their education to avoid the education challenges identified in the findings of LSIS-II.

Recommendation 8: Conduct more up-to-date research on child labour in the Lao PDR to inform policy and practice

Despite the new LSIS-II module on child labour, more studies exploring the issue are needed. The last major study on child labour in the Lao PDR was conducted in 2010²⁵ and currently little is being done to address the issue of child labour. A new study is required to identify the main issues, their underlying causes, and the extent and range of child labour. This can then inform future planning as well as actions to address the issue.





CHAPTER 6

How do parental involvement at home and engagement at school vary?

In addition to education, parental involvement is crucial for child development. Children learn more and faster in a challenging and stimulating home environment with support from their parents. This section will look into parents' engagement in their children's education and school management, including the learning environment in which children grow up.

RESEARCH QUESTION 20:

How do parents participate in children's education?

At both primary and secondary school levels, parental involvement with school management is low. Fewer than one fifth of parents whose children are attending primary or secondary school claim to have had a meeting involving their child's school. This is in part due to only one-third of schools at all levels of education having a governing board,²⁶ as seen in Figure 57. Although at higher levels of education, such as upper secondary, around 40 per cent of students go to schools where those governing bodies exist, they are more uncommon at lower levels, particularly early childhood and primary education.

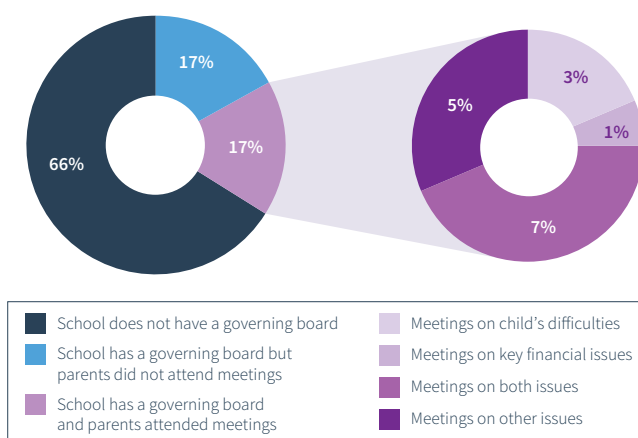
Students with more educated parents are more often in schools with a governing board open to parents. This is further reinforced by the fact that mothers with higher levels of education tend to engage more and attend more meetings with school principals and governing bodies.

Figure 58 demonstrates that regional inequality can also be seen in levels of parental involvement. Schools in urban areas and those in the north and centre of the country are more likely to have governing bodies open to parents. Parents whose children attend these schools attend meetings at the school more often and are more supportive of their children's education.

A similar picture emerges when contrasting children whose parents actively participate in school events or meet with

teachers to those who do not (Figure 59). Participation in school celebrations or sporting events is much more popular than meetings at the school, with almost 40 per cent of Lao children having their parents attend such events. Better-educated parents and those in more advantaged regions attend more often. Meetings with teachers to discuss their children's progress occur more often as the students grow older, with parental participation in secondary school being higher than in ECE and primary school levels.

FIGURE 57: Type of parental engagement in school

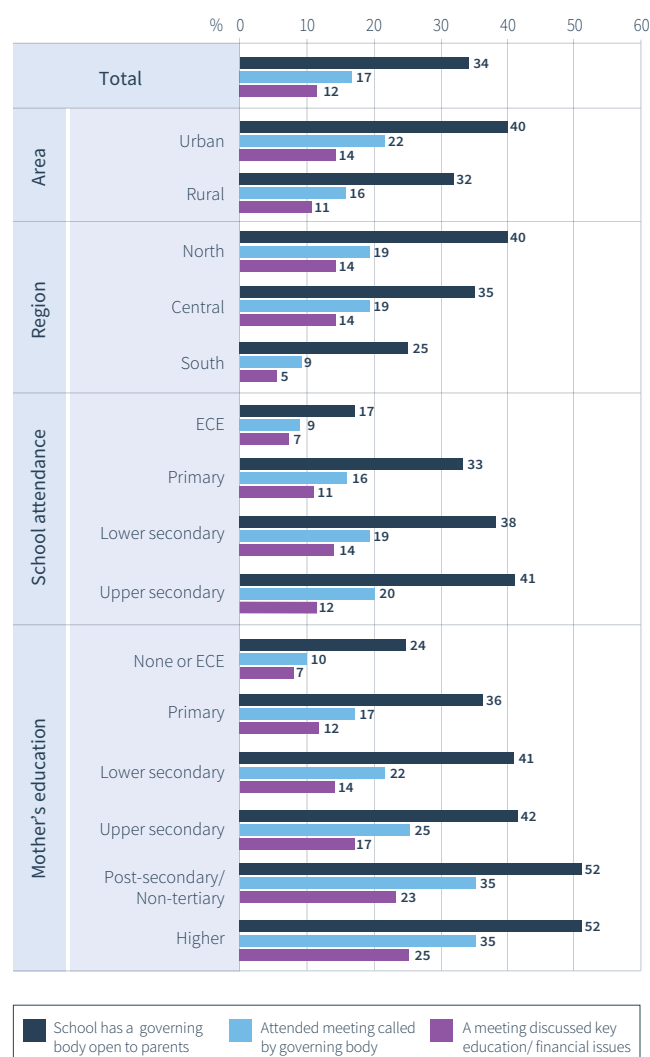


Source: LSIS-II, 2017

Socioeconomic background is a key variable in identifying the main factors contributing to parental participation in school. This starts with the fact that the schools attended by children from wealthier families are more likely to have active governing bodies, more so than in schools attended by children from poorer families. Higher socioeconomic status enhances the conditions for parental engagement and results in many more parents attending meetings in schools.

As Figure 60 shows, among the reasons why parents get involved with their children's school, the most important is to attend celebrations or sporting events. Over 60 per cent of the wealthier parents and about 25 per cent of those from poorer backgrounds reportedly attend such events. In contrast, the least popular reason for parental presence in school is to discuss education or financial issues, which ranges between 7 per cent and 18 per cent depending on their wealth quintile.

FIGURE 58: Parental involvement in school management last year, by area, region, school attendance and mother's education



Source for all charts on this page: LSIS-II, 2017

The dimension that has the narrowest inequality between children from richer and poorer quintiles is attending progress meetings. Although wealthier parents attend such meetings more often to discuss their children's performance, the gap between them and parents from lower quintiles is narrower than for other types of meetings.

FIGURE 59: Parental involvement in school activities last year, by area, region, school attendance and mother's education

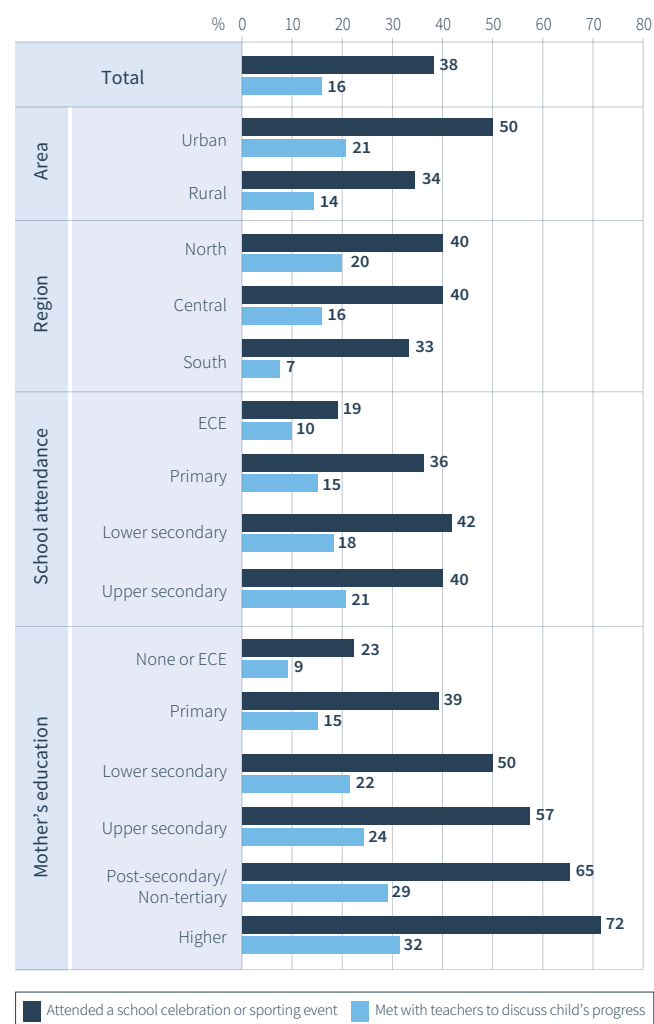
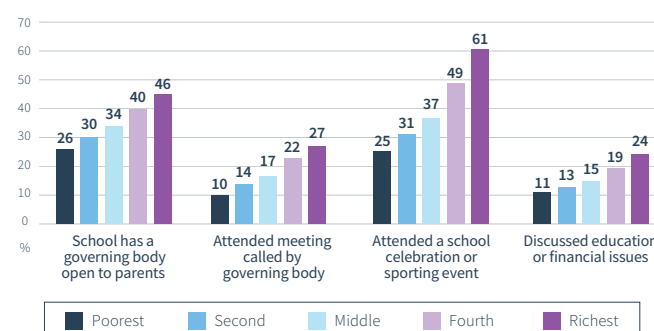


FIGURE 60: Parental involvement in school management and activities in the last year, by wealth quintile



RESEARCH QUESTION 21:

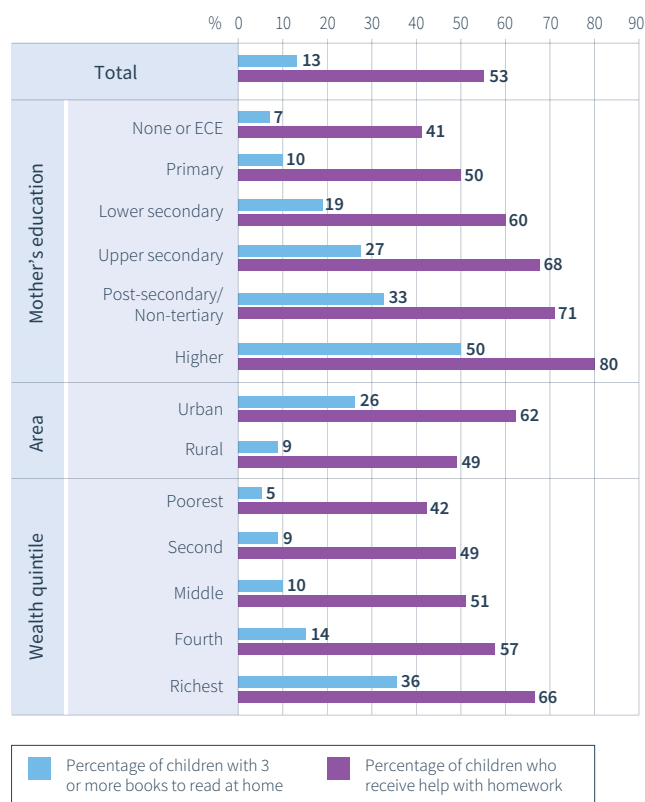
How does the learning environment differ from child to child?

A learning environment includes not only the school setting and classrooms, but also how stimulated children are at home. LSIS-II provides two variables for assessing the quality of a home learning environment for children. The first concerns the number of children who have at least three books to read at home, while the second examines whether parents help their children with homework.

Only 13 per cent of children can count on having more than three books at home, as seen in Figure 61. This figure is very low for the bottom 80 per cent of the wealth distribution quintile, but increases to 36 per cent of those in the wealthiest quintile. Even more important than material wealth is the mother's education level. Less than 10 per cent of those whose mothers have a primary education or less have three or more books at home, compared to half of tertiary-educated mothers.

Besides the material advantage of possessing more books in their homes, children with more educated mothers also received more help with homework. Although only between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of poorer or uneducated mothers help their children with homework, 80 per cent of university-educated mothers do. Although the national picture shows that a slight majority of parents help their children with homework, this is not the case with certain groups, particularly those living in rural areas, the less privileged and those whose mothers have lower levels of education.

FIGURE 61: **Learning environment, by mother's education, area and wealth quintile**



Source: LSIS-II, 2017

SUMMARY

- Two-thirds of schools do not have a governing board open to parents. However, half of children whose mothers attended higher education go to schools with such boards, while less than one quarter of schools where children whose parents are not educated have governing boards or committees. Parental engagement is very important to students' success in their studies. The most disadvantaged children are also the ones whose parents are less engaged. Higher-educated parents attend celebrations and sporting events, as well as go to school to discuss their child's performance three times more often than parents who did not attend primary school. Although household wealth is also correlated with parental engagement, parents' education level is the most strongly associated with their engagement.
- Home environment also varies strongly across socioeconomic lines. Wealthier or highly educated parents provide their children with three or more books to read seven times as often as poorer or poorly educated parents, of whom only 5 per cent have more than three books at home. Moreover, while over four-fifths of parents who attended higher education help their children with homework, only two-fifths of parents who did not attend primary school help their children. As a result, parental education and activities to encourage social and behavioural change need to be strengthened to raise parents' awareness of the importance of supporting their children's learning, not only in school but also at home.

POLICY/PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Directly relevant recommendations

Recommendation 1: Strengthen the engagement of the community through school principals (one of their key responsibilities)

Effective school management includes strengthening relationships with parents and the community through regular meetings with parents, ensuring teachers are keeping parents updated on their children's progress, inviting parents to join school-based activities, and other means. As this is one of principals' key responsibilities, their in-service training should focus on ways to accomplish this.

Recommendation 2: It is important to strengthen the functionality and capacity of VEDCs and also encourage the participation of parents through VEDCs

While all primary schools are mandated by MoES to have a VEDC, LSIS-II data suggests that these committees are often inactive or only play a minimal role in the relationship

between the school and the community. Strengthening the functioning of VEDCs (and Parent Associations at secondary level) through training, study visits and other means needs to be more of a priority for DESBs with support from MoES and Development Partners.

Recommendation 3: Include practical ways of engaging parents more as part of in-service training for teachers

In-service training for teachers often focuses more on aspects of teaching methodology and tends to ignore training in ways to better engage parents in the learning process. LSIS-II data shows that approximately 16 per cent of parents overall met with teachers to discuss their children's progress. Training needs to be given to teachers on ways to engage more with parents, including giving them advice on how they can more effectively support their children's learning at home.

2. Overall recommendations

Recommendation 4: Document and disseminate "success stories" of active VEDCs and principals who have successfully engaged parents in the school and in their children's learning.

LSIS-II data indicates that while overall, parental engagement in their children's schooling and learning is low, there is a significant percentage of parents

who do provide books for their children to read at home and who do help them with their homework (see Figure 61 above). Documenting some of these success stories could provide a useful resource for in-service training for principals, parents, teachers and committee members as recommended above.



CHAPTER 7

What is needed in terms of data and policy to make schools better places to learn?

LSIS-II findings highlighted many specific issues related to education. The subsequent two workshops – a customization workshop in 2018 and a policy workshop in 2019 – focused on two aspects of the wider enabling environment, both of which are critical: 1) Quality data, which provide the necessary foundation for informed, evidence-based decisions; and 2) the ESDP, which provides a framework and mandate for the recommendations included in this report. These aspects have the potential to support actions taken to address issues raised by LSIS-II, close data gaps and improve the overall policy framework (specifically, the ESDP).

This chapter examines both of these key aspects in more detail as well as including related recommendations, particularly those that came out of the policy workshop in June 2019. Many of the questions presented in the LSIS-II EAGLE Country Report Customization Workshop, which was held in Vientiane in 2018, remain unanswered due to the lack of available data. During the workshop, participants identified several data gaps that need to be addressed by the Lao education sector. Of the issues put forward as priorities, the three most crucial relate to teachers, school management staff and students' skills.

RESEARCH QUESTION 22:

What education data is missing for evidence-based policy and monitoring?

Many issues highlighted in the workshop deserve careful attention and analysis. However, there is insufficient data to fully understand them. Participants asked multiple questions that have yet to be answered due to a lack of data.

One source of missing data regards information relating to **teachers' training and qualifications**. As highlighted in the customization workshop, the Lao education sector would benefit from collecting more data on how teachers teach and whether this meets the minimum quality standards. Besides monitoring how teachers transmit learning in the classroom, it is also important to collect data on teachers' working conditions and their perceptions of the school system. Pedagogical practices are vital for a well-functioning educational system and they can only be assessed in light of quality data. In addition, it is important to enhance data availability on teacher's professional development pathways and how these are supported by schools and principals.

There is also a notable gap concerning data on **principals and managerial decisions** taken at the school level. Management practices need to be understood in detail as a means of comparing performance across schools and highlighting actions from principals that lead to better outcomes.

Managerial data provide a useful tool for rewarding successful practices and learning from less effective ones. During the customization workshop, participants questioned the lack of available data on monitoring and evaluation of principals, as well as school development planning.

Furthermore, evaluation and monitoring of schools needs to combine data on teachers and principals with experiential information. A sound evaluation of the school system should unite research with perceptions from stakeholders at the school and community levels.

Another area that needs more data is **learning and skills** related to learning outcomes. Much of the skills analysis in this report is based on reading and writing skill levels identified through LSIS-II data on adult literacy. Nevertheless, the complexity of learning and the increasing need for skills in the labour market call for a much broader measurement of students' competencies beyond self-declared literacy. In the Lao PDR, several types of learning assessments are already taking place at various levels, although not yet systematically.²⁷ One of those assessments was launched as the National Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO)²⁸ survey in 2006 and 2009 (Grade 5) and 2011 and 2017 (Grade 3). The assessment evaluates students on their abilities in mathematics and the Lao language. However, the frequency of the ASLO survey is insufficient and the data are not freely available for use in planning and implementation. In addition to these large-scale assessments, it is also important to strengthen classroom and formative assessments.

RESEARCH QUESTION 23:

What should be done differently in designing the next ESDP (2021–2025)?

The main reason why most of the recommendations in this report relate to practice rather than policy is due to the fact that MoES already has a comprehensive framework in place – the ESDP – which currently covers the period 2016–2020. The ESDP addresses all subsectors and outlines their main objectives, headline activities and expected outcomes. It is an aspirational document that discusses most of the education-related issues identified in LSIS-II. As 2020 marks the end of the current phase, work has already started on preparations for the next ESDP, which will cover the period 2021–2025.

In 2018, a midterm review of the ESDP was undertaken, which used, among other sources, data from LSIS-II. Some of the recommendations from that review that relate directly to the education-related findings of LSIS-II have been included in this report. Consultations with MoES and development partners as part of this LSIS-II process included discussions on the current ESDP as well as recommendations for changes that those interviewed said they would like to see incorporated in the next ESDP. These recommendations were then further reviewed and discussed at the policy workshop in June 2019. The following recommendations reflect the relevant outputs from those discussions.



POLICY/PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

DATA

Recommendation 1: Establish a systematic and sustainable large-scale national assessment on key milestones/grades and national curriculum, complemented by an international or regional assessment effort and enhance the periodicity, depth and availability of the ASLO initiative

Efforts to develop an overall framework for the ASLO are already underway, led by the Research Institute for Educational Sciences (within MoES) with support from development partners, including UNICEF. Participants at the policy workshop also expressed the view that standardized testing should reflect the Lao curriculum rather than being based solely on international testing content.

Recommendation 2: Include more ECE and other data including disability in EMIS

EMIS currently only has limited data on ECE and no data on disability; these data are needed to better inform planning. Discussions are currently underway within MoES regarding how these and other data might best be collected and included in the EMIS database.²⁹

Recommendation 3: Commit more attention to how data is used, as well as data analysis, especially at school and district levels

There has been a tendency in the past at school and district levels to see EMIS as a data collection effort to meet the needs of higher levels, particularly MoES, rather than to inform and support local-level planning. Training is needed for school principals and DESB staff on how to use data more effectively in their planning.

Recommendation 4: Link different databases, including EMIS, Project Management and Implementation Support, Technical and Vocational Education and Training-EMIS, etc.

Discussions are already underway within MoES on how these different databases can be linked so that a wider range of information can be more readily accessed.

EDUCATION SECTOR DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Recommendation 1: Set more realistic goals for the next ESDP (2021–2025) in terms of what can be achieved within available budgets

It is generally accepted that the current ESDP is more aspirational than realistic, particularly in terms of available budgets. There was a consensus among respondents within MoES and from development partners that the next plan needs to consider what can actually be done within the specified time frame and budget available.

Recommendation 2: Involve the Provincial Education and Sports Service and DESB levels more in development of the next ESDP

While the ESDP has been integrated into internal planning and monitoring within MoES in Vientiane, in the consultations several respondents expressed the view that the current ESDP was largely developed within the Ministry with limited involvement of provincial and district education departments. They also felt that the ESDP wasn't well known at provincial and district level, and that more needed to be done to ensure their participation in, input to, and awareness of this policy framework.

Recommendation 3: Incorporate inclusive education more definitively in the next ESDP, as it gets limited mention in the current plan

The current ESDP makes only very limited mention of inclusive education, mainly in relation to teacher training and the (now expired) Inclusive Education Policy. Given that many of the findings identified by LSIS-II relate to issues around inclusion, it was felt that the next ESDP should give greater prominence to inclusive education.

Recommendation 4: Prioritize more policy/content related to ICT skills development in the next ESDP

In the current ESDP, ICT is only mentioned twice as an activity under secondary education. Given the importance of ICT in young peoples' futures, it was felt that the topic should be given greater prominence in the next plan.

Recommendation 5: Undertake a rigorous analysis of the impact of school block grants on quality improvements and student outcomes (learning achievement, completion, gender equity, improvement in participation of disadvantaged children, etc.) to guide policymakers on potential revisions that will improve the return on investment

This recommendation comes from the ESDP midterm review report but was echoed in discussions with MoES and development partner stakeholders during the consultation process. The provision of school block grants is a relatively new initiative in the Lao PDR and the impact of this on schools has yet to be comprehensively studied. Given the high level of budget investment, an impact study would be very helpful in assisting decision makers to improve the effectiveness of this important initiative.



CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

The second Lao Social Indicator Survey in 2017 identified a range of education-related issues and barriers that prevent Lao children and young people from achieving their right to quality education as defined under Sustainable Development Goal 4. These have been further analysed to identify underlying causative factors, particularly related to socioeconomic status, ethnicity and location. These findings were then further reviewed by a range of stakeholders, particularly within MoES and among development partners, and several recommendations were made.

In terms of **access to education**, across all levels, there are strong socioeconomic and regional inequalities in the Lao PDR, evidenced by the percentage of children and young people who are out of school. ECE attendance is low nationwide, and on the supply side, this requires investment in ECE facilities and provision of teachers, particularly in rural and remote areas, with equitable access for especially disadvantaged groups of children. On the demand side, parents – particularly less educated ones – and communities need a better understanding of the importance of ECE for their children's development.

Around 89 per cent of children in the Lao PDR were found to be on track in the ECDI, with no significant gaps in terms of gender or locality. However, LSIS-II did find larger gaps between children who do and do not attend ECE, as well as children with functional disabilities, who score much lower than other children on the ECDI.

At primary school level, initial attendance rates were found to be reasonably high overall, though this does mask local differences due to socioeconomic status, which suggests that greater investment is needed in reaching those who are disadvantaged socioeconomically. At lower and upper secondary levels, participation was found to be low, particularly in rural and more remote areas, where there are a limited number of schools and dormitories. Ethnicity was also found to be a factor in access at secondary level, with Mon-Khmer and Hmong-Mien ethnic groups having notably low enrolment rates. LSIS-II also found that age appropriateness was an issue at all levels, with children either under-age (particularly in early grades at primary level) or, more commonly, older than the usual age for a given educational level, from primary through upper secondary.

The **quality of education** was also found to be an important factor in terms of high repetition rates in early primary grades, as well as in low literacy levels, low transition rates to the next

education level, and high dropout rates at all levels. Students from low socioeconomic and non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups featured prominently in this data, which also indicates that child labour and early marriage are factors that need to be addressed for those of secondary school age. Parental engagement both with the school and in terms of supporting their children's educational development at home was also found to be low among these groups, suggesting that more targeted approaches will be needed in future.

While LSIS-II did not directly explore **governance and management** (other than through the existence of functioning school committees and parental engagement with these), subsequent workshops and consultations with stakeholders at the central level of government identified a number of issues indirectly related to the survey findings. These included weak education management at the school and district level (including insufficient monitoring of principals and teachers), as well as information gaps and limited budgets for education development.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the recommendations relate more to the implementation of policy, rather than proposing completely new policies. Most of the recommendations directly concern education findings from LSIS-II, while some, such as a more focused and feasible ESDP, speak to improving the enabling environment. The majority of the direct recommendations relate to improving education access and quality for disadvantaged groups identified through the analysis of LSIS-II data – those from poorer families, those living in more rural and remote areas, and those from certain ethnic groups. Several of the more direct recommendations are not fully feasible at this point due to budget limitations and require more targeted and limited implementation, such as construction of more secondary schools and dormitories in rural areas. Nonetheless, the recommendations do highlight the need to start targeting these disadvantaged groups more precisely through initiatives that utilize existing budgets.

The education-related findings from LSIS-II have already been used for the ESDP midterm review as well as development of the new draft ECE policy. It is hoped that together with other data, the findings, analysis and recommendations contained in this report will be a useful resource to inform both education policy development and practice. This includes development of the next ESDP, which will provide a framework for further education development in the Lao PDR beyond 2020.



ENDNOTES

1. This survey is part of the MICS-EAGLE (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey-Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity), a global UNICEF-supported initiative that provides systematic in-depth data analysis to support governments for evidence-based policy planning, monitoring and advocacy, using the most recent MICS and other household survey data sets.
2. This includes those who attended but then dropped out.
3. http://www.dv-international.la/fileadmin/files/south-and-southeast-asia/documents/ESDP_2016-2020-FN.pdf
4. https://olc.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/3-A_global_history_of_early_childhood_care_and_education_Background_paper_EFAGlobalMonitoringReport2007UNESCO_0.pdf
5. ECE attendance is calculated as the percentage of children aged 36 to 59 months who are attending an ECE programme. This includes community play groups, kindergartens (which offer three years of education), and pre-primary classes (one year).
6. Calculations for ECE at age 3 and 4 use the Child Questionnaire, while calculations for primary education and ECE at ages 5 and 6 use data from the Household Questionnaire.
7. Percentage of children aged 36 to 59 months who are developmentally on track in at least three of the following four domains: literacy-numeracy, physical, social-emotional, and learning.
8. The total number of children is calculated based on population estimates for each age provided by the United Nations Statistics Division.
9. An incomplete school usually offers two or three primary grades only, often with a single teacher, and is linked to a complete school in a neighbouring village.
10. EMIS data, 2018.
11. Official school age is considered at the beginning of the school year.
12. World Bank, 'Lao PDR: School autonomy and accountability, Saber Country Report,' 2016.
13. Affirmative funding, or additional funding targeting particularly disadvantaged groups and the challenges they face, was one of the recommendations from the 2018 midterm review of the ESDP. The report emphasized that affirmative funding should be based on research that estimates the cost of strategies to address these challenges; Ministry of Education and Sports, 'ESDP (2016–2020): Mid-Term Review Report', 2018.
14. The method used for estimating the dropout rate for a given education level consists of dividing the number of children who do not currently attend school, but did attend a given academic level in the previous year by the total number of students who attended that academic level in the previous year.
15. Rurality and road access is defined at the level of the village: If a village is considered to be rural with no road access, all children and adults living in that village will be put in the same location category.
16. Completion rate is calculated as the percentage of children aged 3 to 5 years above the intended age for the last grade of a given education cycle who have completed that grade. For example, for primary school, completion rate is calculated as the number of children aged between 14 and 16 years that completed primary education divided by the total number of children in that age group.
17. All regressions included controls for age, gender, rural/urban area, wealth quintile and mother's education. Some regressions included controls for region, others for province.
18. Differences in chances of attending between the capital and other provinces are not significant for provinces showing lower chances.
19. Ministry of Education and Sports, 'ESDP (2016–2020), Mid-Term Review Report,' 2018.
20. This includes those who dropped out of primary school at some point.
21. While there was a five-year national ICT strategy document approved in 2007, it was never renewed or updated after it expired.
22. The threshold for an activity under non-hazardous conditions to be considered child labour is: at least one hour of economic work or 28 hours of unpaid household services per week for children aged 5 to 11 years; at least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of unpaid household services per week for children aged 12 to 14 years; at least 43 hours of economic or unpaid household services per week for children aged 15 to 17 years.
23. Family Law Revision #112, 18 August 2008.
24. MoLSW currently has only 78 inspectors at the provincial level throughout the country, with responsibility for dealing with all labour issues.
25. Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Lao Statistics Bureau and International Labour Organization, 'Report on the National Child Labour Survey 2010 of Lao PDR', 2012.
26. Generally known as a village education development committee at primary level and a parents' association at secondary level.
27. The Research Institute for Educational Sciences (within MoES) is currently leading the development of a student learning outcomes assessment framework.
28. <http://nada.uis.unesco.org/nada/en/index.php/catalogue/126>
29. Although it was not mentioned in the consultations and workshops, UNICEF does have a module on Child Functioning, which could be a useful source of information if added to the next round of LSIS.

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