

# *Empowering Girls and Enhancing Learning in DRC*

Note 1 of 3  
June 2021

## **Snapshot of the Basic Education Gender Gap**

Progress, challenges, and variation across DRC

Melissa Adelman  
Iva Trako  
Eliot Faron de Goër  
Maroua Sallami

## Key messages

**Enrollment rates at both primary and secondary levels have improved drastically since the official end of war in the early 2000s. While these trends have led to a narrowing of the gender gap in primary, girls remain less likely to attend secondary school than boys.** The share of children enrolled in school at every age from 6 to 17 years old has increased since 2000, and the gender gap through early adolescence has closed. However, by middle adolescence, around ages 13-14, enrollment rates start falling, much faster for girls than boys. Despite the fact that the girls' net secondary enrollment rate has more than tripled since 2000, for every boy enrolled in secondary school, there are only 0.64 girls, one of the lowest gender parity indices in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**The proportion of out-of-school children has also declined steadily since 2000, but the absolute number has not decreased as much due to population growth.** In 2017, among school-age children aged 6-17 years old, an estimated 6.7 million were out of school, roughly 3 million fewer than in 2000 (INS 2017; MICS 2017). Girls account for about 54 percent of out-of-school children, and the majority of them are adolescents who were in school at some point. Over the past two decades the out-of-school population has shifted significantly from children who never participated in the formal schooling system to those who enrolled for some time and dropped out. Further breakdown of out-of-school children reveals that girls are both more likely to have never attended school and more likely to drop out of school compared to boys.

**While a relatively high proportion of girls reach the end of primary, transition rates between primary and secondary school are lower and favor boys significantly.** Primary completion rates have soared to the point where two thirds of children ages 14 to 16 in 2017 completed grade 6—and a narrow gender gap of less than 1 percentage point. This represents important progress compared to two decades ago, when only 24 percent of children aged 14 to 16 had completed grade 6, with a gender gap of 3 percentage points. Progress remains to be made, however, at the secondary level, as less than a third of young adults ages 20 to 22 in 2017 have completed grade 12, and girls lag behind boys by about 10 percentage points—a gap that has increased over recent years. Disaggregation by urban versus rural setting magnifies the gender gap greatly, and shows that rural girls are particularly vulnerable to dropping out.

**National averages mask complex variation in gender gaps across provinces.** While girls' secondary net enrollment for girls is lower in 21 of the 26 provinces, this gender gap is 10-20 percentage points in seven of these provinces, over 20 percentage points in two (Maniema and Tanganyika), and under 10 points in the other 12. One unusual province is Mai-Ndombe, which across both primary and secondary levels has substantially higher enrollment rates for girls than for boys. Better understanding these provincial variations could in some cases offer insights into how to improve gender parity at the secondary level - for example, identifying the economic, cultural, geographic, and other factors that have led to a 24 percentage point gap in favor of boys in Tanganyika, while its provincial neighbor to the south, Haut-Katanga, has a 0.3 percentage point gap in favor of girls.

**Among primary and lower secondary students, average learning levels are low, but there is no evidence of gender differences in average learning outcomes.** Results from the 2019 PASEC show that by the end of primary school, only 27 percent of students passed the language competency threshold, and a mere 18 percent passed the math threshold. In addition, student assessment data from different sources show an absence of statistically significant differences in test scores across genders, both in math and in language evaluations.

**Box 1: Empowering Girls and Enhancing Learning - Note Series on Gender**

In recognition of the critical role human capital plays in a country's development, and given that the country ranks 164<sup>th</sup> out of 174 countries on the 2020 Human Capital Index, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has set education investment as an urgent priority for the country (The World Bank, 2020). The current administration's signature policy is free public primary schooling, which took effect in September 2019. Full implementation of the policy is expected to cost over US\$1B per year, more than doubling recent levels of public spending on primary education. Reducing financial constraints to and strengthening the quality of primary education are critical to equitably increasing DRC's human capital.

Tackling gender inequalities in education is equally important to breaking intergenerational cycles of low human capital accumulation, accelerating the demographic transition, and powering an equitable economic transformation. The purpose of this note series is to provide a rigorous fact base on education gender gaps, their determinants, and promising solutions, through a series of three snapshot notes:

*Note 1. Snapshot of the Gender Gap*

*Note 2. Supply and Demand Side Determinants of the Gender Gap*

*Note 3. Policy Implications and Practical Solution to Addressing the Gender Gap*

Note 1 "***Snapshot of the Gender Gap***" provides a broad diagnostic of the gender gap in access and quality of basic education, how it has evolved in recent years, and how it varies within the country.

Note 2 "***Supply and Demand Side Determinants of the Gender Gap***" identifies both the supply and demand side barriers, focusing in particular on two critical factors that currently limit girl's education and empowerment:

- (i) quality of service delivery (supply side); and
- (ii) household financing and cultural norms (demand side).

Note 3 "***Policy Implications and Practical Solutions to Addressing the Gender Gap***" identifies several policy recommendations that hold promise for keeping girls in school and learning. This last note uses evidence from literature reviews and interventions that have proven effective in DRC or other relevant contexts for tackling constraints to girls' education.

## Table of Contents & List of Figures

### Table of Contents

Key messages.....	ii
Table of Contents & List of Figures .....	iv
1. Enrollment Rates Show Promising Trends in Access to Education.....	1
2. Out of School Children Are Disproportionately Girls .....	6
3. Girls Survive Less Time in School Than Boys .....	11
4. Learning Outcomes are Poor Across Genders .....	1
References.....	4
Appendix.....	5

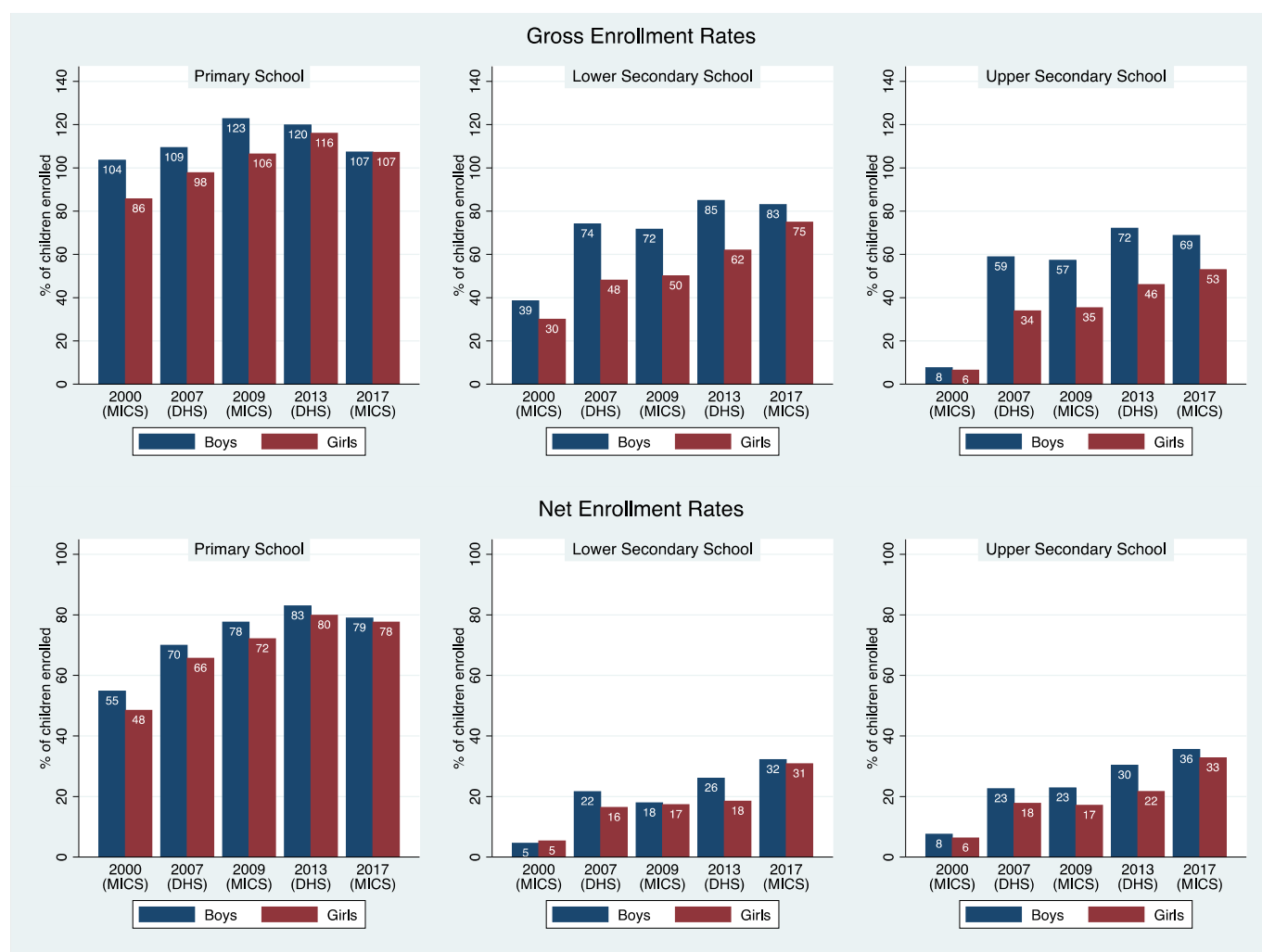
### List of Figures, Tables and Boxes

Figure 1: Trends in gross and net enrollment rates, by educational level, 2000-2017 .....	1
Figure 2: Trends in enrollment rates, by gender-age, 2000-2017.....	2
Figure 3: Primary net enrollment, by province and gender, 2017 .....	3
Figure 4: Secondary net enrollment, by province and gender, 2017 .....	4
Figure 5: Gender parity in Gross Enrollment Rates, by education level .....	5
Figure 6: Trends in out-of-school children, by age group and gender, 2000-2017 .....	6
Figure 7: Trends in dropouts vs. never attended, by age group and gender, 2000-2017.....	7
Figure 8: Breakdown of school status, by age group and gender, 2000-2017.....	8
Figure 9. Out-of-school children (6-17 years old), by province and gender, 2017 .....	8
Figure 10: Out-of-school children - Dropouts vs never attended, by province and gender, 2017 .....	9
Figure 11: Out-of-school children, DRC vs SSA, by educational level, 2017 .....	10
Figure 12: Trends in completion rates, by school level and gender, 2000-2017.....	11
Figure 13: Kaplan-Meier Survival Rates, by grade, gender, and setting, 2017.....	12
Figure 14: Proportion of children of completion age to have completed each school level, 2017/18 .....	13
Figure 15: Lower and upper secondary completion rates, DRC vs SSA, by gender.....	14
Figure 16: Gender gap in learning outcomes, by gender and location, 2019 .....	1
Figure 17: PASEC language and math test scores, DRC vs SSA, by gender 2019.....	2
Figure 18: MICS math and language test levels, by gender, 2017 .....	7
Table A.1. Breakdown of Enrollment Status by Age Group, 2017.....	6
Box 1: Empowering Girls and Enhancing Learning - Note Series on Gender .....	iii
Box 2: The DRC compared to Sub-Saharan Africa: Access to education across genders .....	5
Box 3: The DRC compared to Sub-Saharan Africa: Out of School Children .....	10

# 1. Enrollment Rates Show Promising Trends in Access to Education

**Enrollment rates at each level of basic education have improved significantly between 2000 and 2017, for both boys and girls.** At the primary level, net enrollment has increased by 50 percent, from 52 to 78 percent, and girls have caught up to boys in terms of both gross and net enrollment (**Figure 1**). Despite starkly lower access at the secondary level, enrollment rates have increased even faster over the same period, with lower secondary net enrollment increasing six-fold from 5 to 31 percent and upper secondary net enrollment increasing five-fold from 7 to 34 percent. Overall, in 2017 about 87 percent of school-age children (6-17 years old) were enrolled in school, compared to 58 percent around two decades earlier.

**Figure 1: Trends in gross and net enrollment rates, by educational level, 2000-2017**



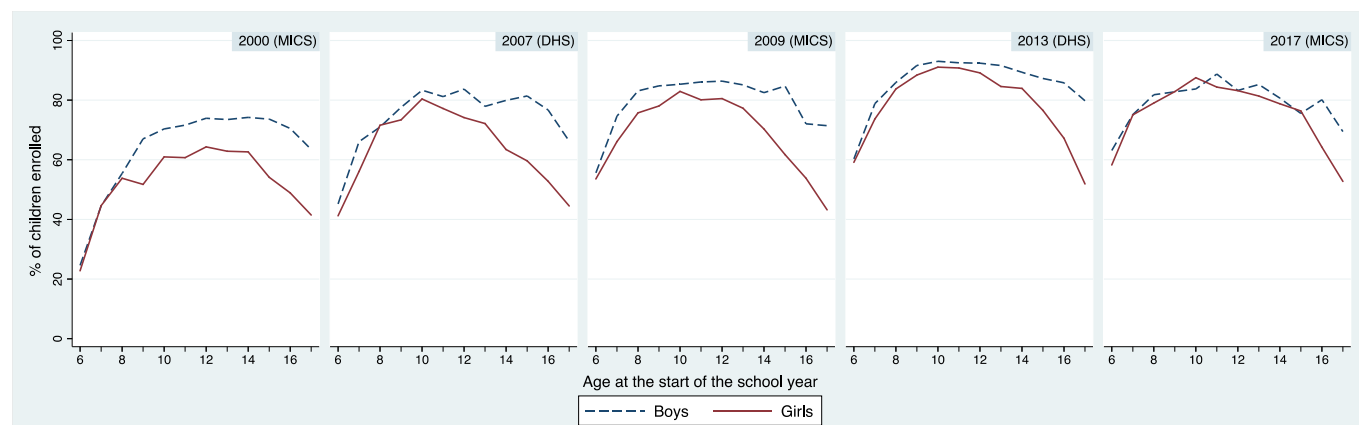
Note: MICS 2000-01, 2009-10, and 2017-18 surveys are used for 2000, 2009 and 2017 data points respectively. DHS 2007 and 2013-14 are used for 2007 and 2013 data points respectively. Because of different survey methods, comparisons across surveys may be imperfect.

**Although the gender gap in access has essentially disappeared at the primary level, it persists at the secondary level, as enrollment rates decline much more rapidly for adolescent girls than boys.<sup>1</sup>** For both genders, late school entry and high rates of repetition contribute to high shares of students being overage for their grade, and gross enrollment that is roughly double net enrollment in secondary school.

<sup>1</sup> Official school ages in DRC are as follows: Primary (ages 6-11), Lower Secondary (ages 12-13), Upper Secondary (ages 14-17), Post-Secondary (ages 17+).

The large gender gaps in gross enrollment rates in both lower (8 percentage points) and upper secondary school (16 percentage points) suggest that many older adolescent boys are still in school compared to girls. A disaggregated look at age-specific enrollment rates confirms this. The share of children enrolled in school at every age from 6 to 17 years old has increased since 2000 (as seen in the upwards shift of the curves in **Figure 2**), and the gender gap through early adolescence has closed (as seen in the tightening of the curves). However, by middle adolescence, around ages 13-14, enrollment rates start falling, much faster for girls than boys.

**Figure 2: Trends in enrollment rates, by gender-age, 2000-2017**

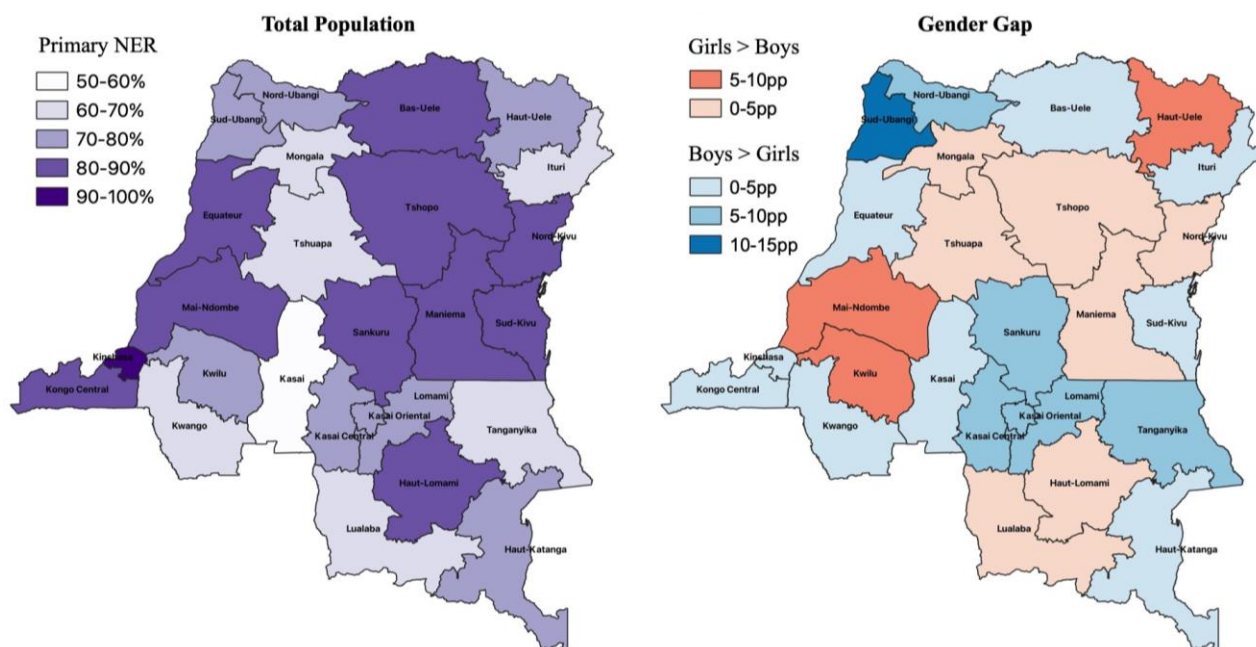


Note: MICS 2000-01, 2009-10, and 2017-18 surveys are used for 2000, 2009 and 2017 data points respectively. DHS 2007 and 2013-14 are used for 2007 and 2013 data points respectively. Because of different survey methods, comparisons across surveys may be imperfect.

**Enrollment rates and gender gaps vary substantially across DRC's provinces, with primary enrollment ranging between 58 and 92 percent, and some provincial gender gaps favoring girls while others favor boys.** The highest enrollment rates are found in the capital province of Kinshasa (at 92 percent) and its neighboring provinces, as well as in Eastern DRC (between 80 and 90 percent). Conversely, Kasai and Ituri consistently score the lowest on enrollment rates, at 58 and 65 percent respectively. Overall, southern and central provinces have lower enrollment rates in primary compared to the rest of the country (**Figure 3**)

In terms of the gender gap in primary enrollment, there is no immediately obvious provincial pattern. In the majority of provinces (16 of 26), the gender gap is less than +/-5 percentage points and statistically insignificant. Of the remaining 10 provinces, girls' primary net enrollment is lower than boys' by 5 to 15 percentage points in seven (Sud-Ubangi, Nord-Ubangi, Sankuru, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Lomami and Tanganyika).<sup>2</sup> However, there are also provinces where girls are more likely to attend primary school compared to boys: girls' primary net enrollment is higher than boys' by 5 to 10 percentage points in three provinces (Haut-Uele, Mai-Ndombe, and Kwilu).

<sup>2</sup> Only gender differences in Kwilu are statistically significant at the 10% level. Differences of means across genders in enrollment rates in Kasai Central, Lomami, and Tanganyika are however not statistically significant at conventional levels.

**Figure 3: Primary net enrollment, by province and gender, 2017**

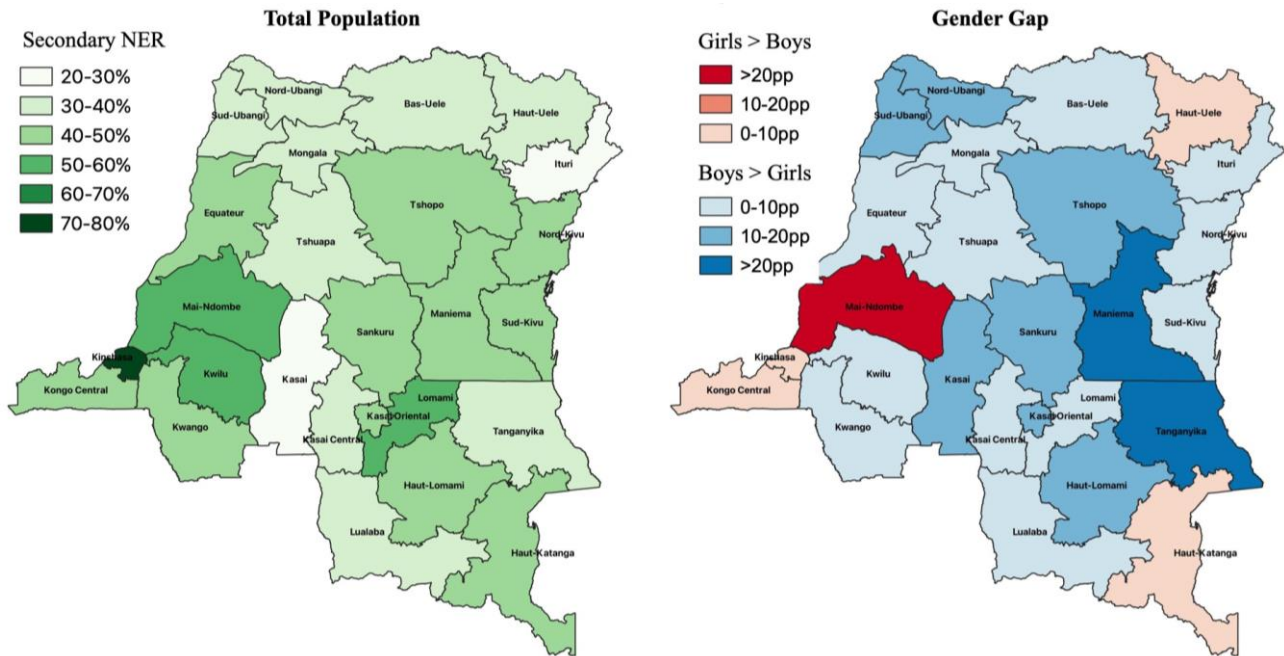
Note: Only primary school aged children (6-11) are used for this analysis. Source: MICS 2017-18.

**At the secondary level, only four out of 26 provinces have an overall secondary net enrollment rate above 50 percent - Kinshasa, Mai-Ndombe, Kwilu and Lomami – and gender gaps are much starker.** The combined (lower and upper) secondary net enrollment rate is higher than the individual lower and upper rates due to substantial numbers of upper secondary-age children (14-17 years old) being enrolled in lower secondary (**Figure 4**). As with primary level, the two provinces with the lowest secondary enrollment are Kasai and Ituri (both under 30 percent). An additional nine provinces have rates between 30 and 40 percent, while the remaining 11 have rates between 40 and 50 percent.

The gender gap in favor of boys is also more significant at the secondary level: net enrollment for girls is lower in 21 of the 26 provinces. This gender gap is 10-20 percentage points in seven of these provinces, and over 20 percentage points in two (Maniema and Tanganyika). One unusual province is Mai-Ndombe, which across both primary and secondary levels has substantially higher enrollment rates for girls than for boys. Haut-Uele shows similar trends, despite both provinces being two of the least populous in the country.<sup>3</sup> Better understanding these provincial variations could in some cases offer insights into how to improve gender parity at the secondary level - for example, identifying the economic, cultural, geographic, and other factors that have led to a 24 percentage point gap in favor of boys in Tanganyika, while its provincial neighbor to the south, Haut-Katanga, has a 0.3 percentage point gap in favor of girls.

<sup>3</sup> Mai-Ndombe has a statistically significant gender gap at the 1% level; the gender difference in Haut-Uele is not statistically significant.

Figure 4: Secondary net enrollment, by province and gender, 2017



Note. Only secondary school aged children (12-17) are used for this analysis. Source: MICS 2017-18.



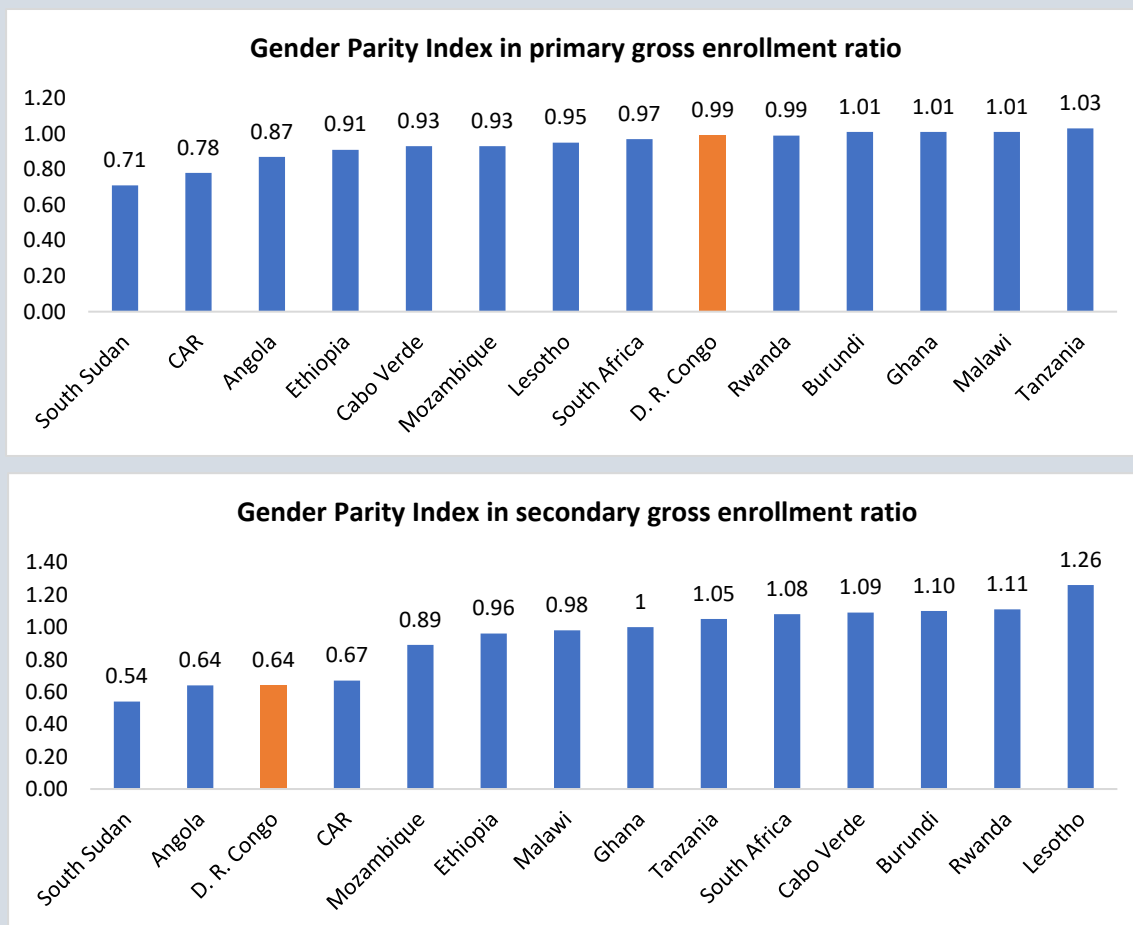
**Box 2: The DRC compared to Sub-Saharan Africa: Access to education across genders**

Despite these recent improvements, access to secondary education in DRC is still low compared to other neighboring countries, especially for girls. DRC’s experience is in line with Sub-Saharan African trends: enrollment rates have boomed, and the gender gap has closed at the primary level, but much remains to be done at the secondary level, where both absolute numbers and gender parity are lacking (World Education Forum, 2015). However, secondary gender gaps in DRC are bigger than SSA averages.

In 2007, 45.3 percent of enrolled primary students were girls in the DRC, versus 47.1 percent on average in SSA; by 2013, the DRC had surpassed the SSA average with 49.2 percent of primary students being girls. In secondary, however, the DRC still lags behind its neighbors. The share of girls among students increased from 35.7 percent in 2007 to 40.2 percent, not enough of an improvement to reach the SSA average of 45.7 percent in 2013 (The World Bank, 2018).

More recent data also indicate that the gender parity index in primary has improved, but there are still substantial gender differences in secondary education (Figure 5). In 2020, for every boy in primary school there was a roughly equal number of girls, while in secondary, for every boy, there were only 0.64 girls. Boys continue to be more likely than girls to enroll in secondary school. While the gender mix in lower and upper secondary has improved recently, DRC has one of the lowest gender parity indexes (GPI) in secondary compared to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Figure 5: Gender parity in Gross Enrollment Rates, by education level**



Source: UNESCO UIS Global Education Monitoring Report 2020

## 2. Out of School Children Are Disproportionately Girls

The proportion of school-age girls and boys (6-17 years old) who are out of school has declined steadily between 2000 and 2017, but the absolute number of out-of-school children has not decreased as much due to population growth. Among primary school-age children (6-11 years old), the out-of-school rate decreased from 48 to 22 percent between 2000 and 2017 and is now almost equal between girls and boys (Figure 6).<sup>4</sup> Among secondary school-age children, the out-of-school rate decreased from 35 to 24 percent (31 to 17 percent among 12-13 year olds and 38 to 28 percent among 14-17 year olds).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, DRC's population has nearly doubled since 2000, so in absolute numbers, the total number of children and youth (6-17 years old) has fallen from very roughly 9-10 million in 2000 to 6.7 million in 2017.<sup>6</sup> While the gender gap has shrunk, a much larger share of girls in secondary level are out of school than boys (27 vs. 21 percent).

**Figure 6: Trends in out-of-school children, by age group and gender, 2000-2017**



Note: MICS 2000-01, 2009-10, and 2017-18 surveys are used for 2000, 2009 and 2017 data points respectively. DHS 2007 and 2013-14 are used for 2007 and 2013 data points respectively. Because of different survey methods, comparisons across surveys may be imperfect. Primary school age is 6-11 years old, lower secondary school age is 12-13 years old, and upper secondary school age is 14-17 years old.

**Girls account for about 54 percent of out-of-school children, and the majority of them are adolescents who were in school at some point.** The proportion out-of-school children is higher for girls at all ages, but increases sharply with age, especially beyond lower secondary. For instance, the share of out of school children of primary and lower secondary ages (6-13 years old) was very similar among both genders (i.e. around 1 in 5 are out of school), but by the time children reach upper secondary age / mid-adolescence (14-17 years old) more than one-third of girls are out of school compared to less than one-fourth of boys. This represents approximately 1.5 million secondary school-age girls and 1.1 million boys (see Appendix). These results indicate that both boys and girls are missing out on education, but adolescent girls are clearly worse affected.

**Over the past two decades the out-of-school population has shifted significantly from children who never participated in the formal schooling system to those who enrolled for some time and dropped**

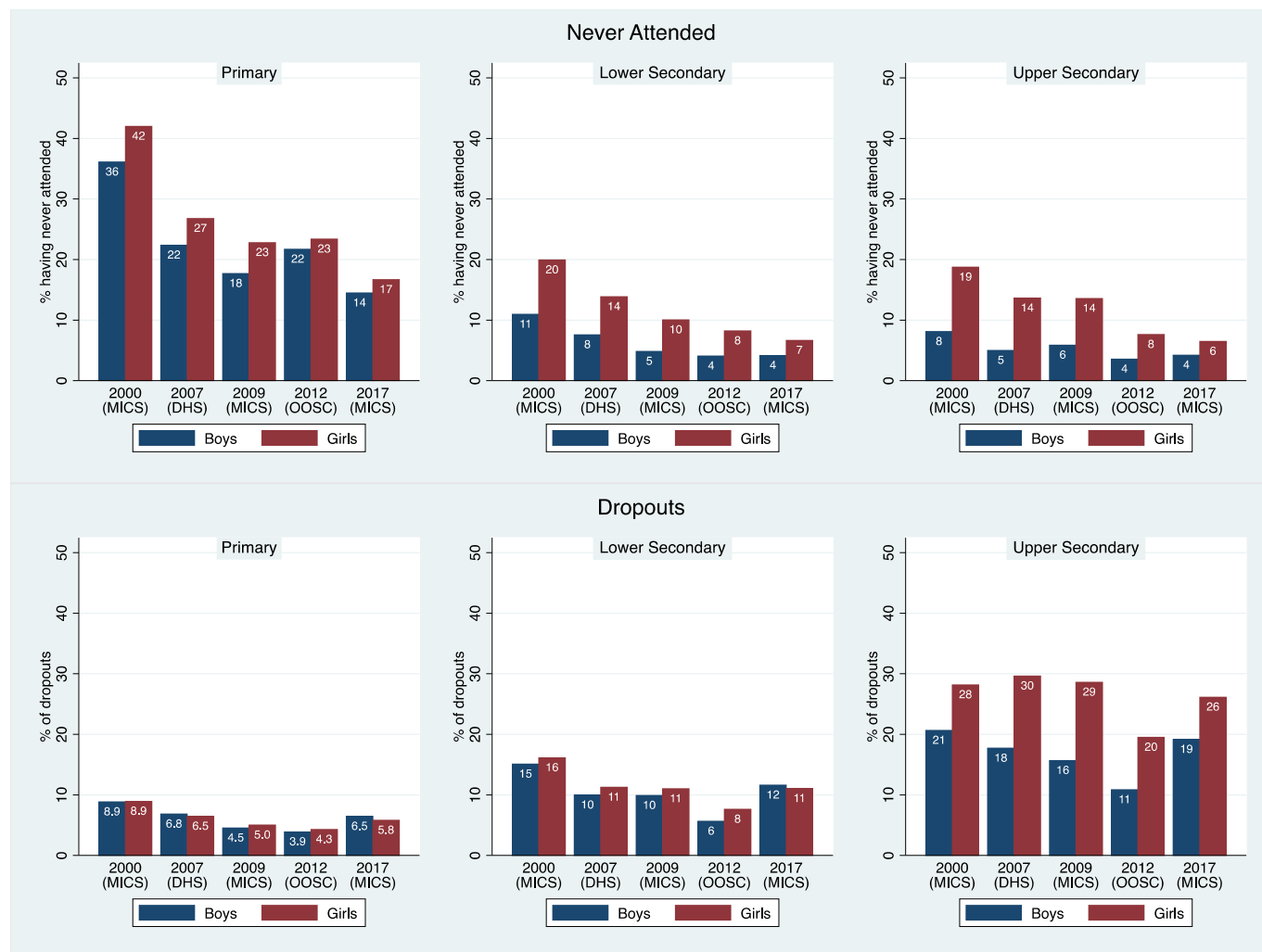
<sup>4</sup> [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#)

<sup>5</sup> Out of school rates and net enrollment rates at the secondary level might not add up to 100 percent since children of secondary school age still enrolled in primary school is counted neither as enrolled in the NER, nor as not enrolled in the out of school rate.

<sup>6</sup> These are rough estimates, due to the lack of reliable population data in both time periods.

out (Figure 7). On the one hand, the share of children aged 14-17 years old who have never attended school has fallen from 8 to 4 percent for boys and 19 to 6 percent for girls between 2000 and 2017. On the other hand, dropout rates have remained high and unchanged during the same period, leading to about one-third of girls aged 14-17 being out of school, a full 10 percentage points more than boys. Taken together, these results reflect important progress in terms of access to at least primary education, but at the same time they indicate that the education system is failing to retain children in school. Supporting students, especially girls, to remain in school is therefore one of the most immediate opportunities for improving educational outcomes.

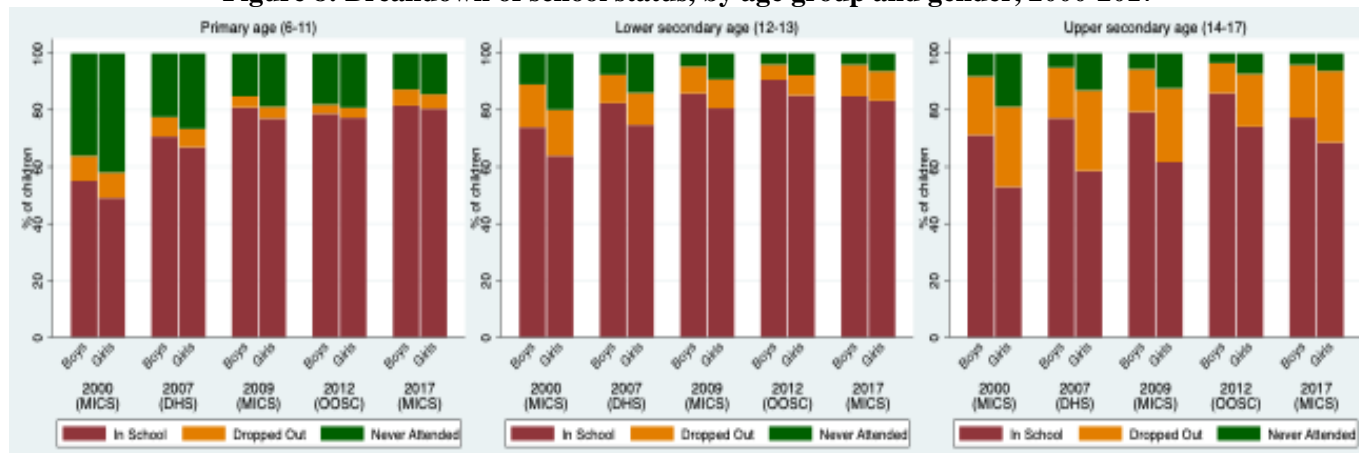
Figure 7: Trends in dropouts vs. never attended, by age group and gender, 2000-2017



Note: MICS 2000-01, 2009-10, and 2017-18 surveys are used for 2000, 2009 and 2017 data points respectively. DHS 2007 and 2013-14 are used for 2007 and 2013 data points respectively. Because of different survey methods, comparisons across surveys may be imperfect. Primary school age is 6-11 years old, lower secondary school age is 12-13 years old, and upper secondary school age is 14-17 years old.

**Further breakdown of out-of-school children reveals that girls are both more likely to have never attended school and to drop out of school compared to boys (Figure 8).** Fewer girls than boys enter school (17 percent of primary school-age girls have never attended versus 14 percent of boys; 7 percent of secondary school-age girls have never attended versus 4 percent of boys), and the dropout rate is also higher among girls, especially by upper secondary school-age (26 percent of girls compared to 19 percent of boys). This is more than double the dropout rate of girls at lower secondary school-age (11 percent). For every 100 girls aged 14 to 17, 33 will not be attending school. Of those 33 girls, 26 will have dropped out before reaching upper secondary, and 7 will have never stepped foot in school.

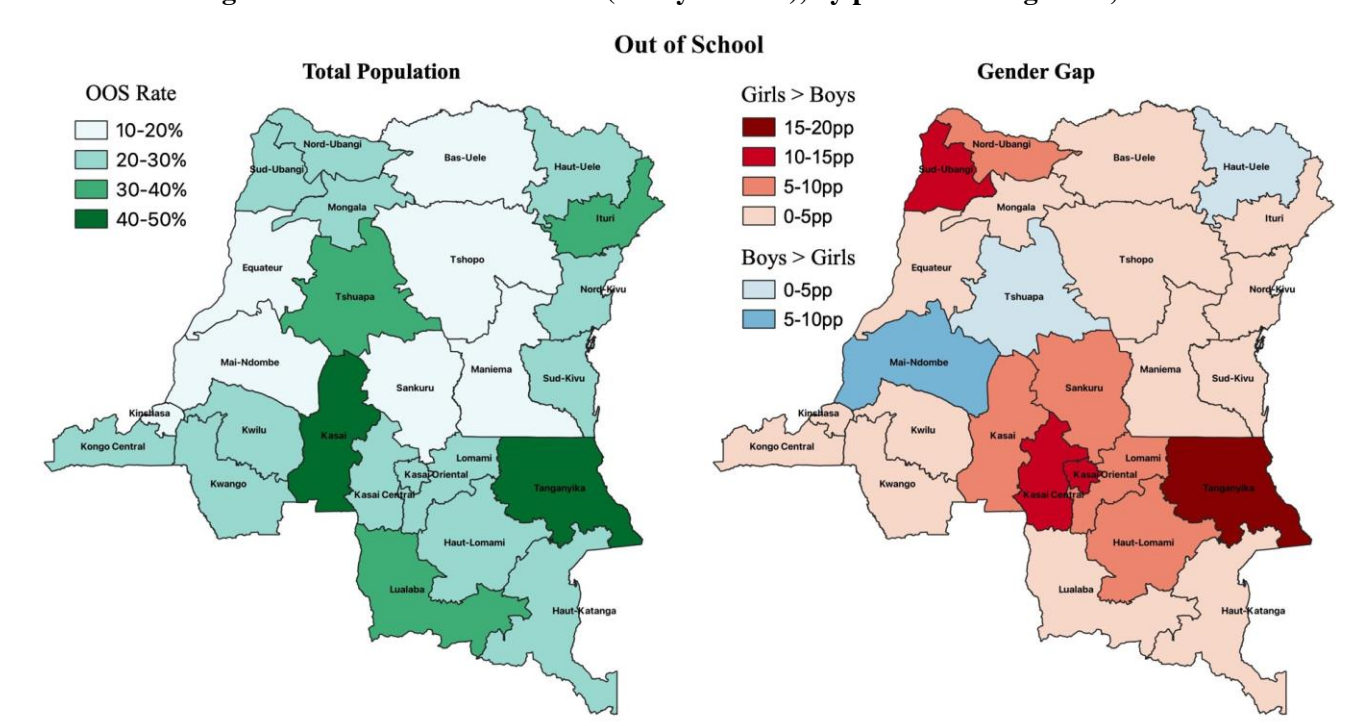
**Figure 8: Breakdown of school status, by age group and gender, 2000-2017**



Note: MICS 2000-01, 2009-10, and 2017-18 surveys are used for 2000, 2009 and 2017 data points respectively. DHS 2007 and 2013-14 are used for 2007 and 2013 data points respectively. Because of different survey methods, comparisons across surveys may be imperfect.

**The share of out-of-school children varies across the country, but in 23 of 26 provinces a greater percentage of girls are out of school than boys (Figure 9).** In 2017, in Kasai and Tanganyika, around 40 percent of school-age children were out-of-school, followed by Ituri (36 percent), Tshuapa (35 percent), and Lualaba (34 percent). In the remaining 21 provinces, the out-of-school rate was below one-third, with Kinshasa (11 percent), Sankuru (15 percent), and Bas-Uele (16 percent) boasting the three lowest out-of-school rates in the country. The gender gap in out-of-school children is widespread across DRC, with 5-20 percentage points more girls out of school than boys in 9 provinces (the gap is 0-5 percentage points in 12 other provinces). In particular, Tanganyika not only has one of the highest out-of-school children rates in the country, but it also has the highest gender gap (16 percentage points), followed by Kasai Oriental (12 percentage points), Sud-Ubangi (14 percentage points), and Kasai Central (13 percentage points).

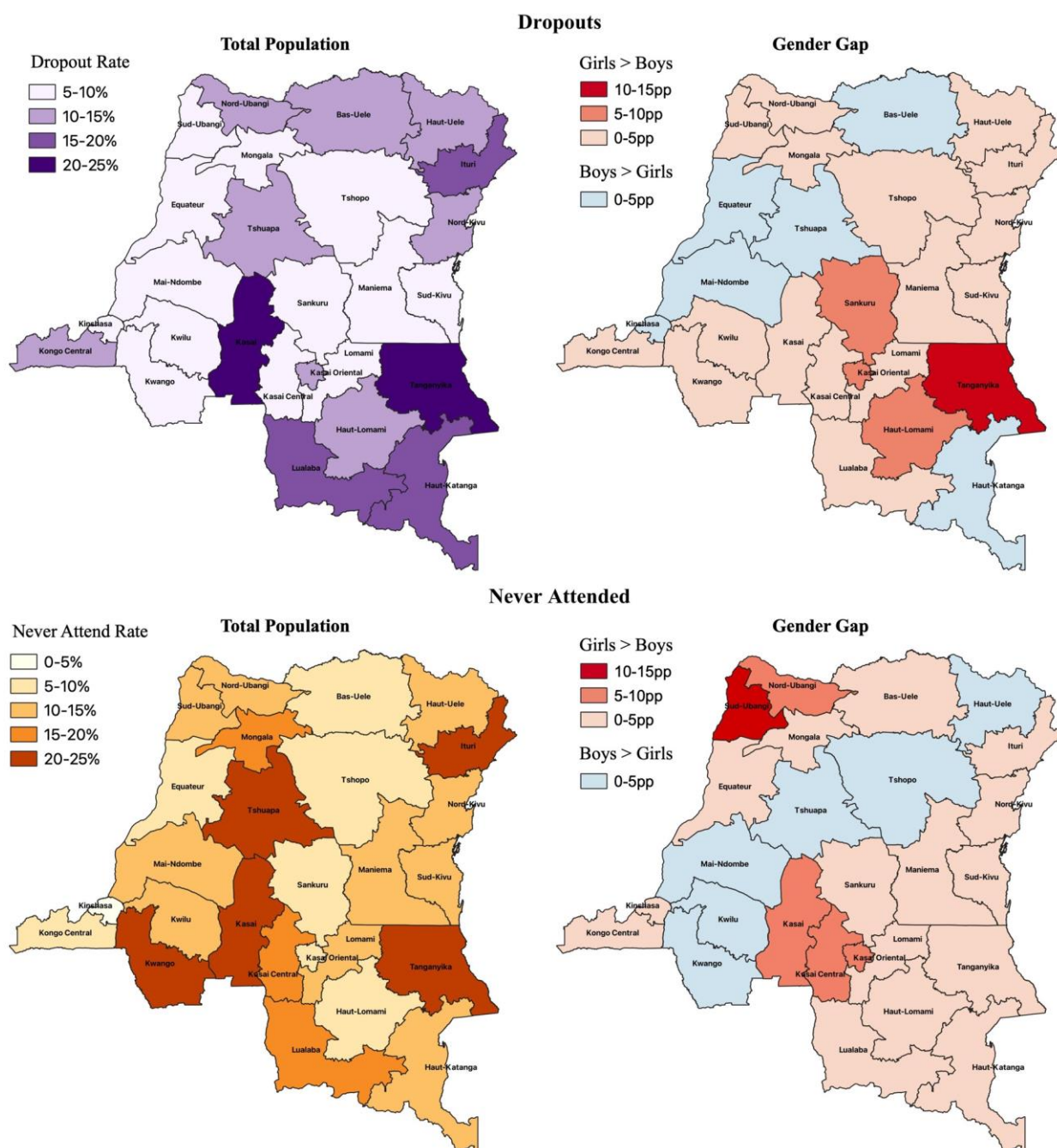
**Figure 9. Out-of-school children (6-17 years old), by province and gender, 2017**



Note: All primary and secondary school-aged children (6-17) are used for this analysis. Source: MICS 2017-18.

The composition of out-of-school children, in terms of those who never attended versus dropped out, varies across provinces, as do gender gaps (Figure 10). The high out-of-school rate in Tanganyika is driven by a high share of dropouts among girls (12.5 percentage points higher than boys), while the high out-of-school rate in Sud-Ubangi, Kasai Central and Kasai Oriental is driven by high never attendance rates for girls. For example, in Sud-Ubangi, the dropout gender gap is only 2.1 points, but the never attended gap is 13 points. Moreover, the most populous and prosperous province, Kinshasa, has no dropout gender gap and a very narrow never attended gap (1.8 percent of boys and 3.1 percent of girls). These results suggest that constraints to girls' education vary within the country, and that this heterogeneity should be taken into account when attempting to address such constraints.

Figure 10: Out-of-school children - Dropouts vs never attended, by province and gender, 2017



Note: All primary and secondary school-aged children (6-17) are used for this analysis. Source: MICS 2017-18.

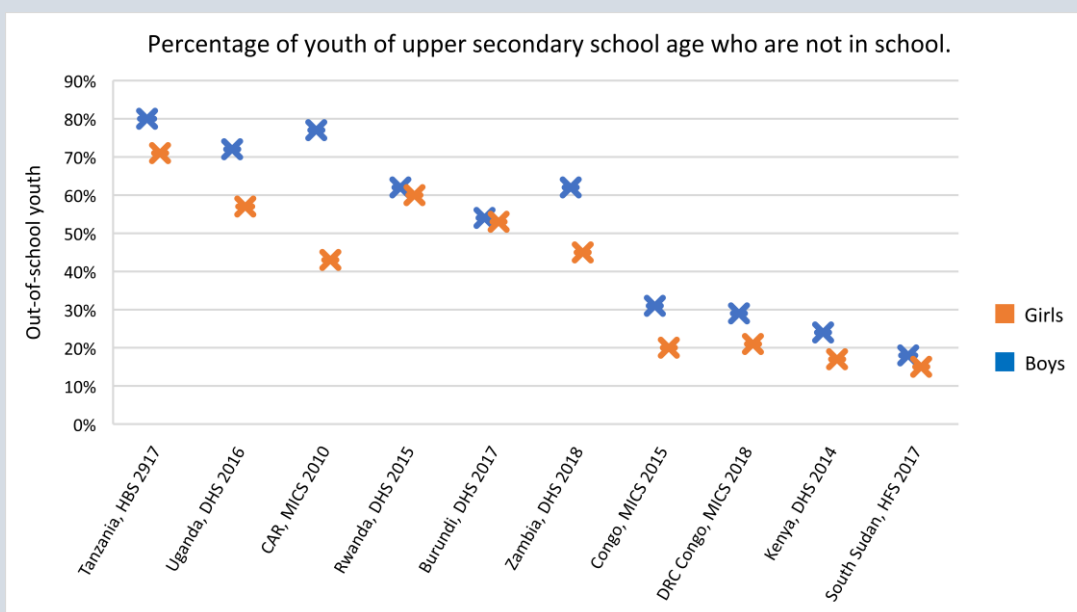
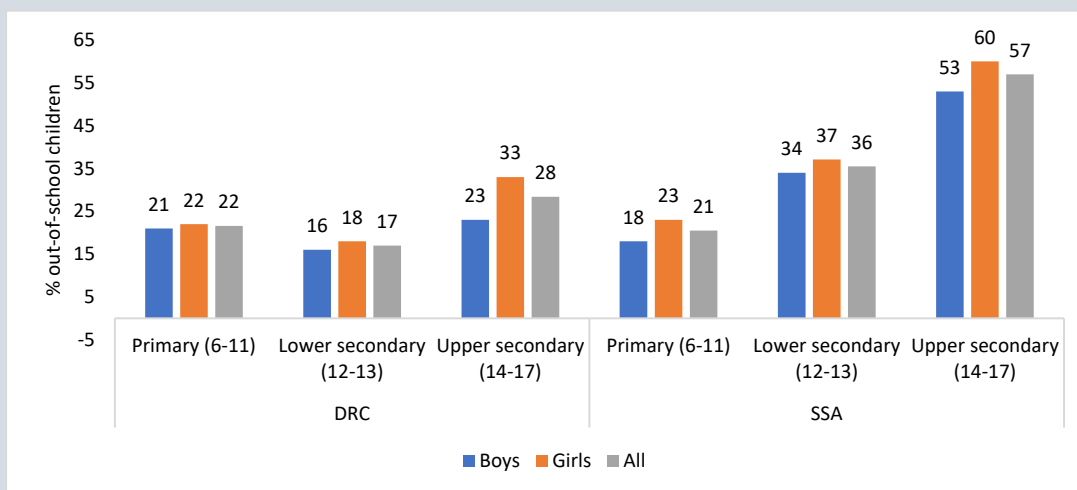
**Box 3: The DRC compared to Sub-Saharan Africa: Out of School Children**

**Compared to the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), fewer adolescents are out of school in DRC, but gender gaps are bigger.** 20.5 percent of primary school-age children in SSA were out of school, totaling an estimated 34.5 million (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018). In DRC, the proportion of primary out of school children was 1.1 point higher that same year. The gender gap, however, is smaller in DRC than on the rest of the continent: 4.9 percentage points in SSA, but only 1.4 points in DRC in 2017.

For adolescents, however, out of school rates in DRC are relatively lower compared to the SSA average. Among lower secondary school-ages (12 and 13), 35 percent of children are out of school in SSA, compared to only 16.7 percent in DRC. The gender gap in DRC is lower, too, by one percentage point (3.1 in SSA, 2 in DRC). Among 14-17 year olds (upper secondary school-age in DRC), 57 percent are out of school in SSA, but only 28.4 percent in DRC. The gender gap, however, is higher in DRC (9.3 percentage points) than SSA (7.2 points).

Overall, the DRC boasts a lower out of school rate than the rest of the continent: 22.7 percent of the children aged 6 to 17 are out of school, versus 31.7 percent of sub-Saharan African children. And the gender gap is lower in the DRC too, at 3.8 points, against 5 for SSA.

**Figure 11: Out-of-school children, DRC vs SSA, by educational level, 2017**

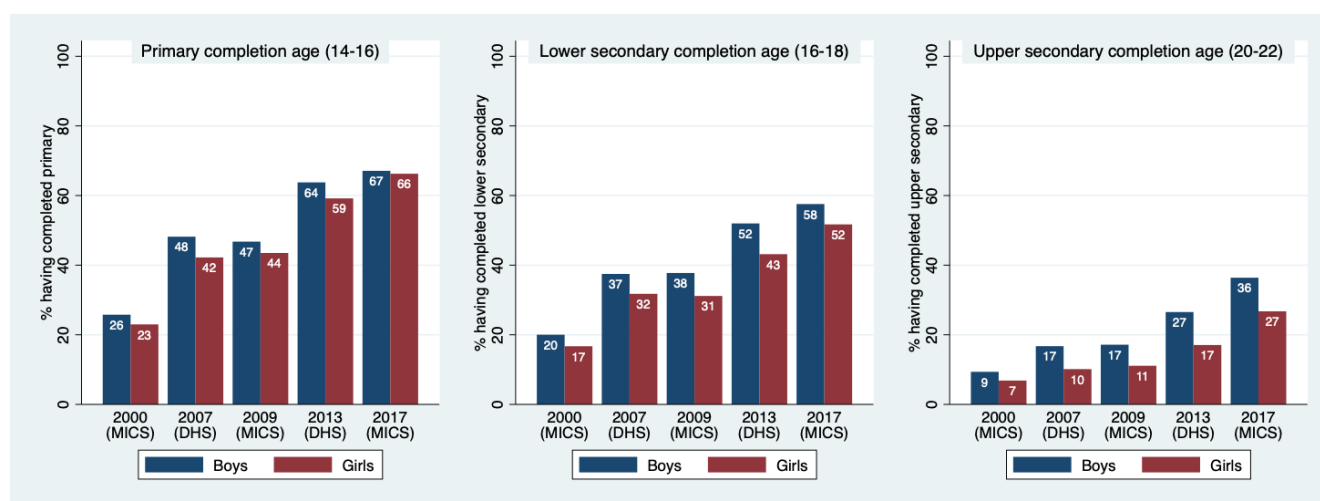


Source: UNESCO UIS 2018, MICS 2017-18, UNESCO [World Inequality Database on Education \(WIDE\)](#)

### 3. Girls Survive Less Time in School Than Boys

Since 2000, the share of girls and boys enrolled in basic education has not only increased, but they have also become more likely to complete their schooling. Primary completion has soared to the point where two-thirds of children aged 14-16 (3 to 5 years above the official primary completion age) in 2017 have completed grade 6—and essentially no gender gap (less than 1 percentage point). However, girls' and boys' trajectories start to diverge after primary school. At the lower secondary level, completion has also risen rapidly, nearly tripling between 2000 and 2017. Yet the gender gap has not closed, and 12 percent more boys complete lower secondary than girls (58 versus 52 percent). This disparity is even starker for upper secondary: only one-third of young adults aged 20-22 in 2017 have completed grade 12, and girls lag behind boys by 9.6 percentage points (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Trends in completion rates, by school level and gender, 2000-2017**



Note: MICS 2000-01, 2009-10, and 2017-18 surveys are used for 2000, 2009 and 2017 data points respectively. DHS 2007 and 2013-14 are used for 2007 and 2013 data points respectively. Because of different survey methods, comparisons across surveys may be imperfect.

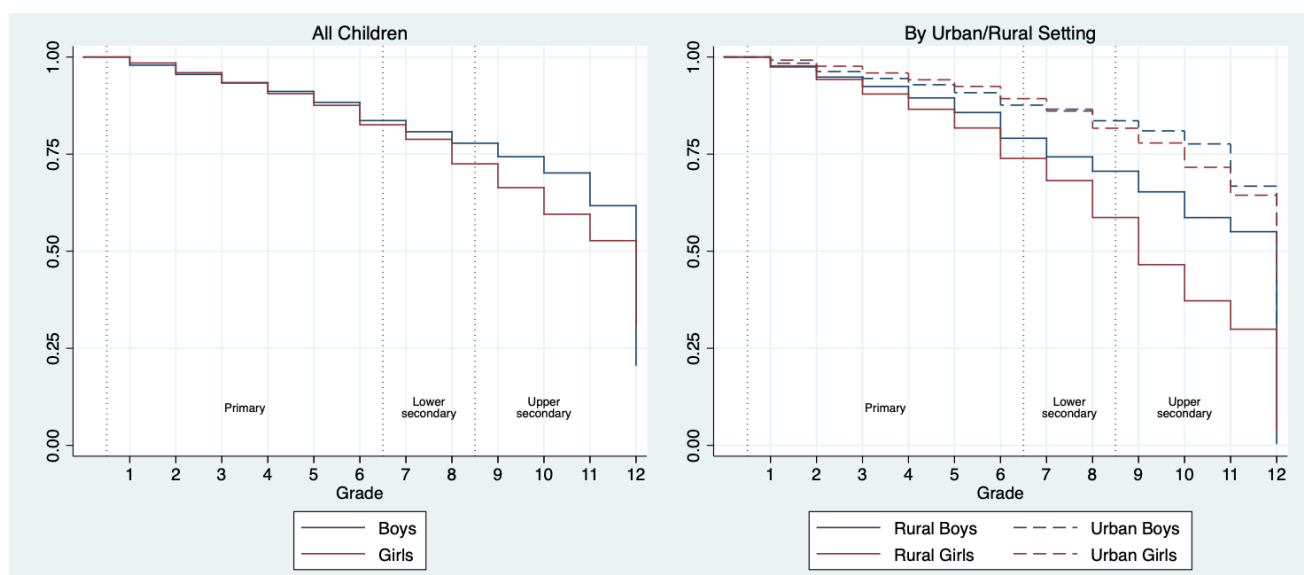
**Girls are less likely than boys to make the transition from primary to lower secondary school, and this likelihood is even lower for completing the full cycles of lower and upper secondary, creating persistent gender gaps in educational attainment.** Transition rates between primary and lower secondary show that more than two-thirds of children that start primary school finish grade 6, but girls are 9 percentage points less likely to complete the cycle and go onto lower secondary.<sup>7</sup> While a relatively high proportion of girls reach the end of primary, transition rates between primary and secondary school are lower and favor boys significantly. In particular, less than half of young adult males (46 percent) and less than one-third of young adult females (29 percent) have completed upper secondary, indicating that girls are 17 percentage points less likely than boys to complete grade 12 and have any possibility of going on to post-secondary education. Despite recent success in bringing more children to school, DRC is struggling to retain these children in secondary, and this failure is disproportionately affecting girls.

**Survival analysis shows a large gender gap in the chances a child has of going all the way from grade 1 to grade 12, with particularly pivotal points in the transition from primary to lower secondary and again during upper secondary.** In 2017, boys have a higher projected survival curve than girls do, with

<sup>7</sup> MEPST Annuaire Statistique 2017-18.

an increasing gender gap as grades pass (Error! Reference source not found.13).<sup>8</sup> While both genders have similar survival rates until the end of primary school, the gap widens significantly in favor of boys after grade 6, which corresponds to the transition from primary to lower secondary school. In addition, the survival gender gap widens during secondary school. The largest survival gap is experienced in grade 10, the second year of upper secondary school, where the gender gap is just under 15 percentage points. By the end of secondary school, boys are 13.8 percentage points more likely than girls to reach grade 12 (61 and 46 percent respectively).<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 13: Kaplan-Meier Survival Rates, by grade, gender, and setting, 2017**



Note: All primary and secondary school-aged children (6-22) are used for this analysis. Horizontal (red) lines represent the first grade of each education level. Kaplan-Meier survival rates are used to represent the cumulative probability of surviving from grade 1 to 12. Each grade cohort is plotted according to their probability of completing a grade, and a failure event is characterized by the child dropping out of school. Source: MICS 2017-18.

**Disaggregation by urban versus rural setting magnifies the gender gap greatly and shows that rural girls are particularly vulnerable to dropping out.** Error! Reference source not found. shows that among children in urban schools, the gender gap in primary narrowly favors girls over boys, but it is not statistically significant. However, this gap reverts to an advantage for boys after grade 6, when children enter lower secondary school. In rural schools, the gender gap is large from the start, and by the end of primary school, girls' survival rate is already 12.6 percentage points lower than boys'. Overall, rural girls are 23 percentage points less likely than rural boys to enter grade 12. Comparing the interaction of gender and setting yields even more extreme differences in survival rates. Rural girls are 45.7 percentage points less likely than urban boys to accede to the last grade of secondary (69 percent survival rate for urban boys and 24 percent for rural girls). The median survival time in school also varies drastically from one gender-setting to another: urban boys have a median survival to grade 12 (the last grade of upper secondary), while the median survival time for rural girls is only 8<sup>th</sup> grade (the last grade of lower secondary).

**Gender disparities in completion rates differ substantially between regions, but in general boys are more likely than girls to complete their schooling across educational levels.** At all levels, Kinshasa has

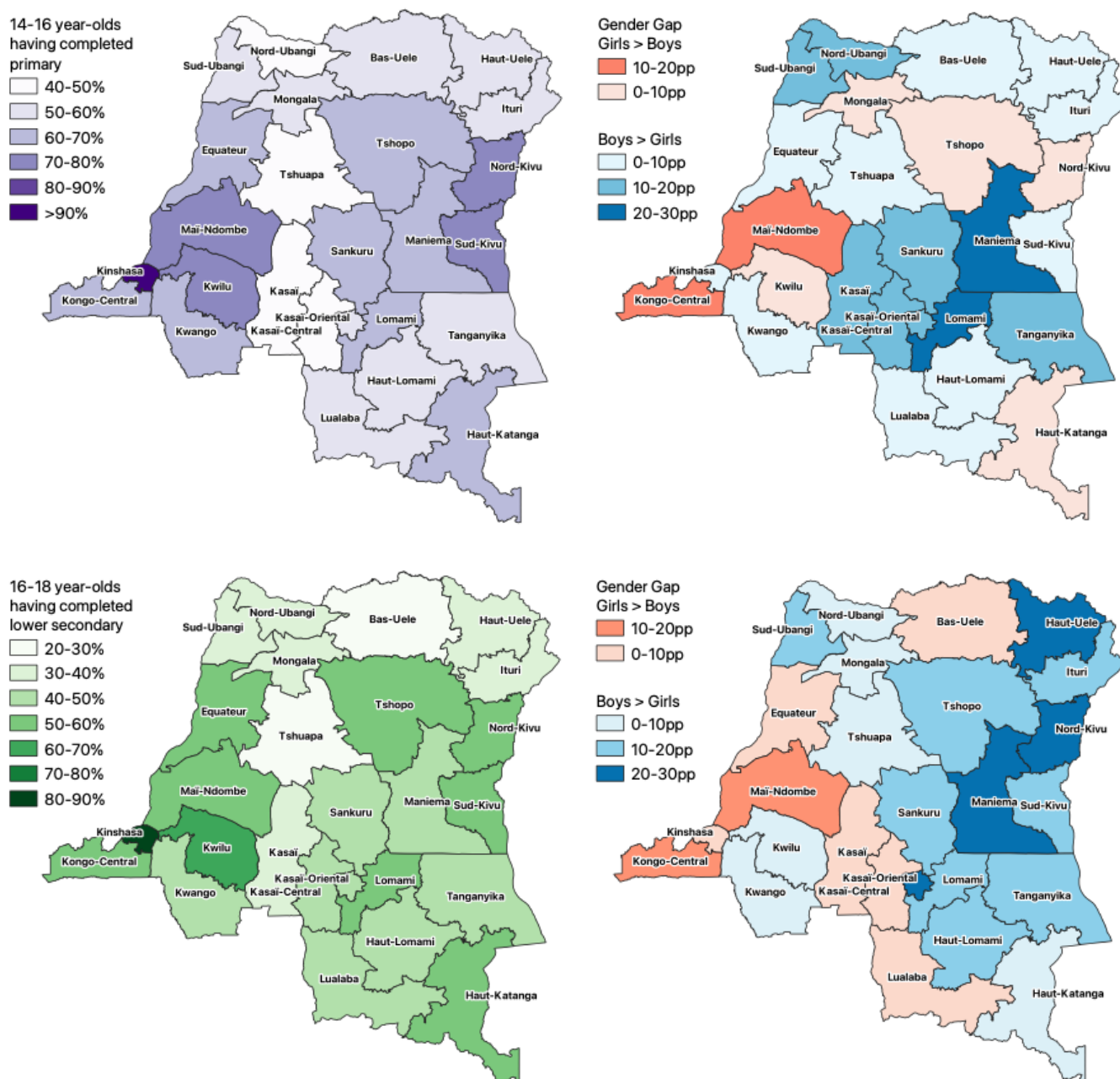
<sup>8</sup> Kaplan-Meier survival rates are used to represent the cumulative probability of surviving from grade 1 to 12. Each grade cohort is plotted according to their probability of completing a grade, and a failure event is characterized by the child dropping out of school.

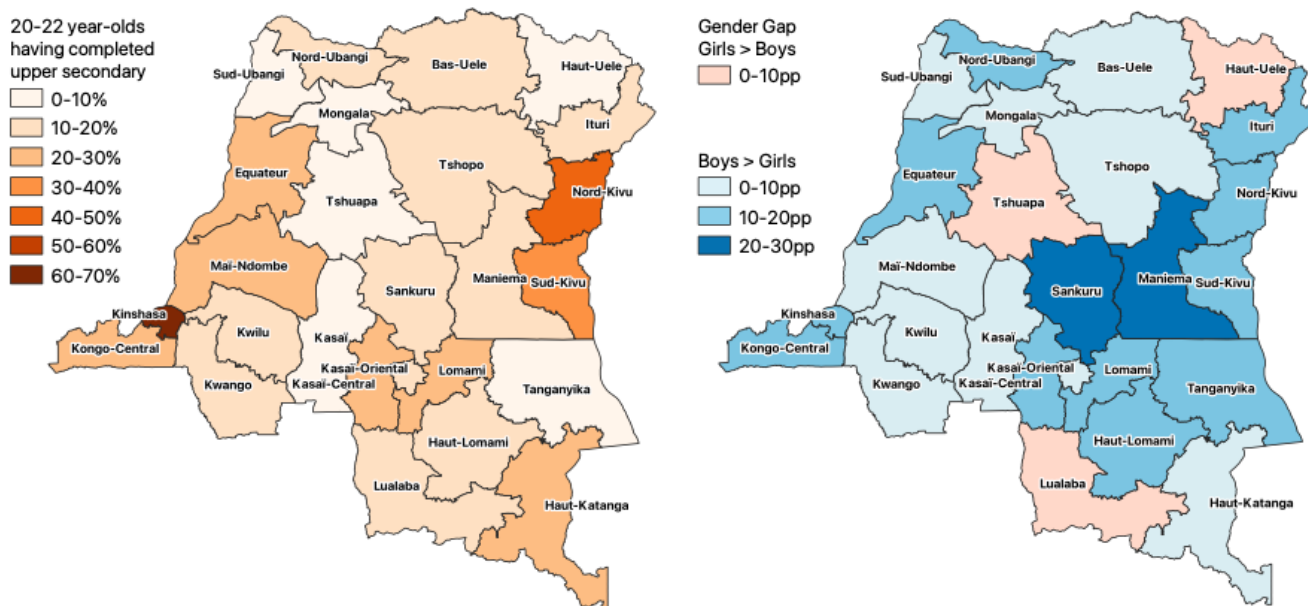
<sup>9</sup> These estimates are in line with the DRC government's estimates of only 28 percent of cohorts making it to the end of secondary in 2015 (République Démocratique du Congo, 2015).



the largest share of population having completed their age-relevant grade (**Figure 14**). Completion rates in primary and lower secondary level are higher for boys than girls in most of the provinces, but in at least seven provinces, girls aged 14 to 18 are more likely than boys of the same age group to have completed primary or lower secondary school. For instance, while in Maniema boys are at least 20 percentage points more likely to complete primary or lower secondary compared to girls, in Mai-Ndombe and Congo Central girls are 15 percentage points more likely than boys to complete either primary or lower-secondary level. While primary and lower secondary completion rates tend to favor girls aged 20 to 22 in several provinces, gender disparities at the upper secondary favoring boys are higher and more widespread across the country. In particular, there are only three provinces (Haut-Uele, Tshuapa, and Lualaba) where girls are slightly more likely than boys to complete upper secondary level. For instance, the highest gender gap in favor of girls completion rate in upper-secondary is found in Haut-Uele, at 4 percentage points, while the highest gender gap in favor of boys is found in Maniema, as 24 percentage points.

**Figure 14: Proportion of children of completion age to have completed each school level, 2017/18**





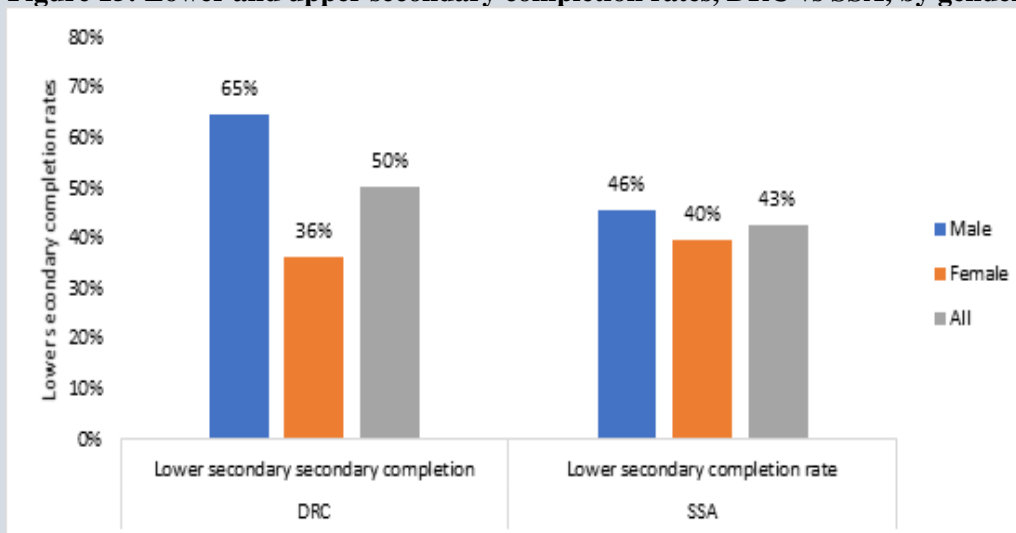
Note: Completion rates are calculated using 3 to 5 years above the official completion age Source: MICS 2017/18

**Box 4: The DRC compared to Sub-Saharan Africa: Completion rates**

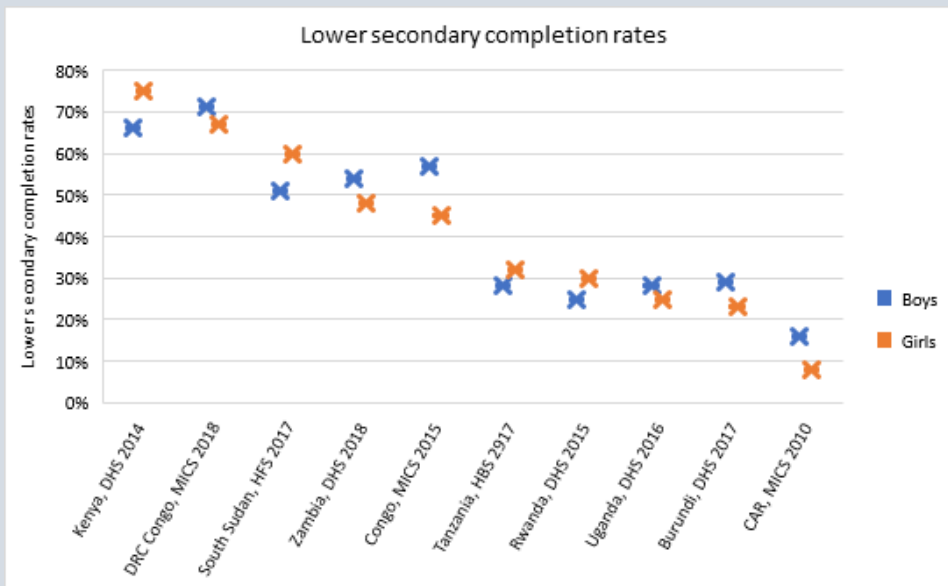
**The DRC performs better than the average secondary completion rates in sub-Saharan Africa.** 68 percent of children aged 14 to 16 in SSA in 2017 had completed primary, against 70 percent for DRC (World Bank, 2017). The DRC also outperforms its neighbors at the lower secondary level, with 50 percent of 16- to 18-year-olds having completed grade 8, against only 43 percent in SSA.

Despite these relatively encouraging levels of Congolese population having attained primary and lower secondary, the gender gap remains large at the lower secondary level. 65 percent of boys aged 16 to 18 have finished grade 8, and only 36 percent of girls. Despite a large advantage among its neighbors for boys' completion rates, Congolese girls have lower completion rates at the lower secondary level than the SSA average (40 percent vs 36 percent).

**Figure 15: Lower and upper secondary completion rates, DRC vs SSA, by gender**



Note: This graph contains data from the year 2014. SSA = Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding high income countries) Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators.



Note: Lower secondary completion rate is measured as percentage of (i) young people aged 3-5 years above lower secondary school graduation age and (ii) young people aged 15-24 years, who have completed lower secondary school. Source: UNESCO [World Inequality Database on Education \(WIDE\)](#)



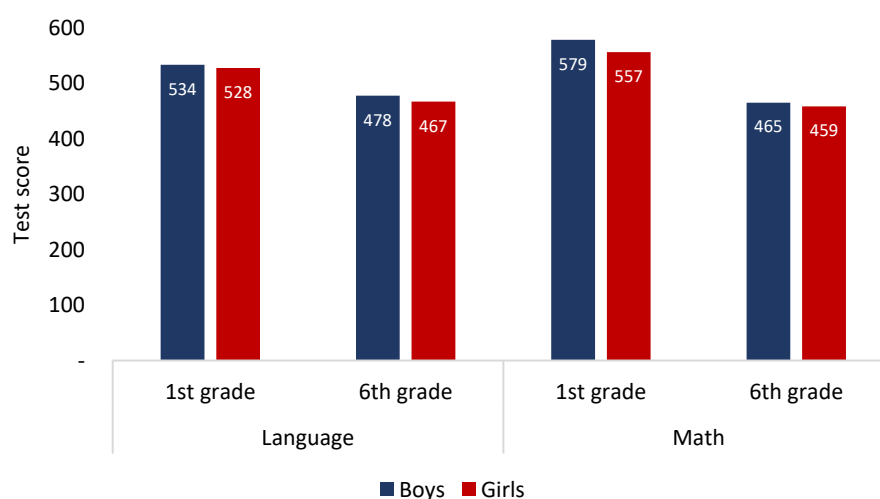
Note: Upper secondary completion rate is measured as percentage of (i) young people aged 3-5 years above lower secondary school graduation age and (ii) young people aged 20-29 years, who have completed lower secondary school. Source: UNESCO [World Inequality Database on Education \(WIDE\)](#)

## 4. Learning Outcomes are Poor Across Genders

While the DRC does not have any national student exams prior to grade 6, three recent learning assessments provide data on the learning levels of primary and lower secondary school-age children: (i) MICS household survey data; (ii) EGRA (reading) and EGMA (Math) 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade assessments, and (iii) PASEC language and math tests administered to students at the start and at the end of their primary schooling.<sup>10</sup>

**Average learning levels are low for both genders, and the DRC faces a learning crisis.** Results from the 2019 PASEC show that 42 percent of students assessed were above the competency threshold for language and 77 percent for math at the start of primary. However, by the end of primary school, only 27 percent of students cleared the language competency threshold, and a mere 18 percent passed the math threshold. Similarly, results from the 2018-19 EGRA/EGMA assessment show that 64 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> graders are unable to read a single word of simple text in French, and 63 percent are unable to correctly answer a single multiplication problem. Overall, these results indicate that the primary schooling system is failing to ensure that all students learn.

**Figure 16: Gender gap in learning outcomes, by gender and location, 2019**



Source: PASEC 2019 Summary Report.

**Among primary and lower secondary students, there is no evidence of gender differences in average learning outcomes.** PASEC results do show that primary boys start off with higher skills than girls, particularly in math (CONFEMEN, 2019). However, by the end of primary school, the mathematics gap has been substantially lowered, the reading gender gap is only slightly larger than it began, but neither is statistically significant (**Figure 16**). EGRA/EGMA results also show no statistically significant difference in test scores across genders, in either math or language, for 2<sup>nd</sup> and for 4<sup>th</sup> graders.<sup>11</sup> In the MICS assessments, none of the differences across gender in math test score for children aged 7 to 14 are statistically significant (see Appendix V). Similarly, the MICS French reading test does not highlight any

<sup>10</sup> MICS is nationally and provincially representative of the population. PASEC is nationally representative of the student population. EGRA is provincially representative of the student population in nine provinces covered by the assessment.

<sup>11</sup> During the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester of the 2018-19 school year, 1,781 schools in 9 provinces of DRC evaluated mathematics and language skills for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders using the EGMA and EGRA assessments, respectively. The surveyed provinces are Kinshasa, Equateur, Sud-Ubangi, Nord-Ubangi, Tshuapa, Mongala, Kasai Central, Lomami, and Tanganyika.

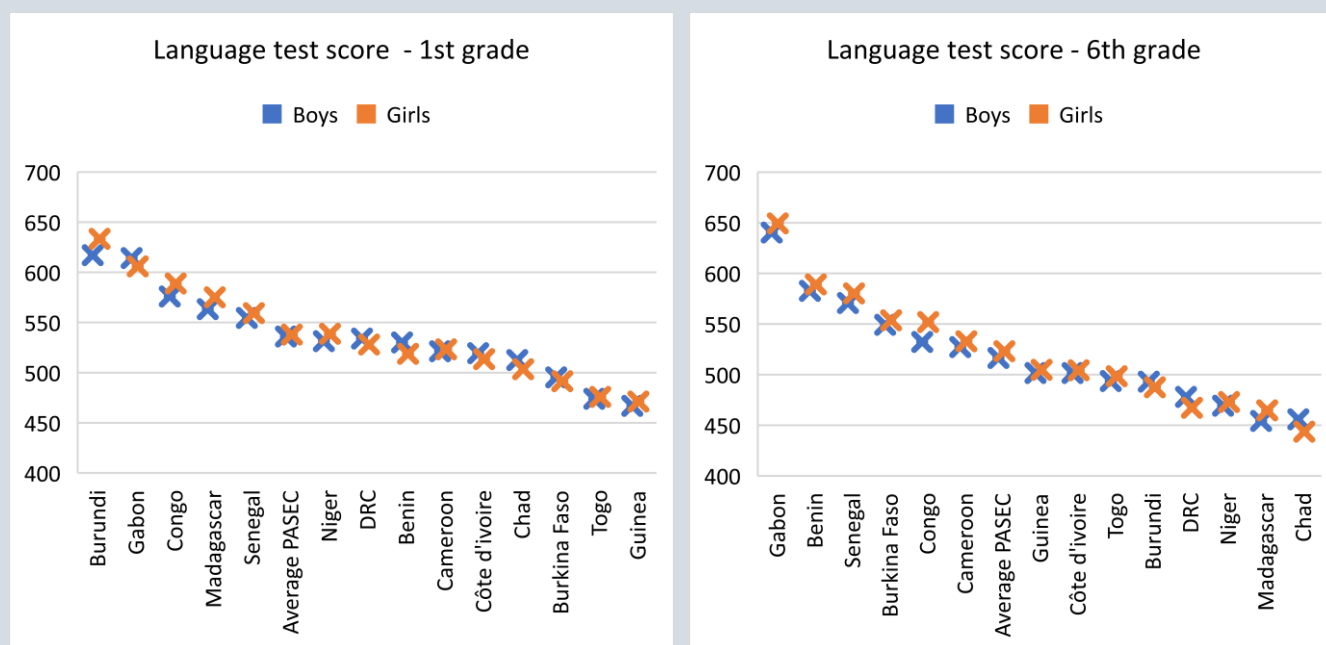
particular gender gap: boys perform better than girls in 3 out of the 5 language categories, but girls outperform boys in French, and most of these differences are statistically insignificant (see Appendix).<sup>12</sup>

**Among out-of-school children, boys perform slightly better than girls, likely due to the fact that they are more likely to have attended school at some point.** Among out-of-school children, MICS data show slight gender disparities in reading and comparing numbers that are statistically significant at the 10% level. These differences in test scores are plausibly a result of girls being more likely than boys to have never attended school. Indeed, among out-of-school children, 52 percent of boys in the sample have attended school at some point in time, against only 46 percent of girls. Boys have on average more years of education than girls, even when comparing non-enrolled children, which could explain these differences in test result.

**Box 4: The DRC compared to Sub-Saharan Africa: Learning outcomes**

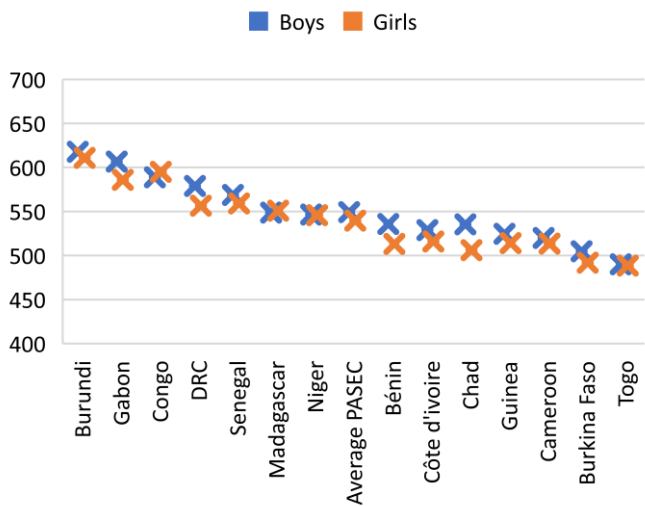
**For children surveyed during their first year of primary school, DRC learning outcomes are very similar to PASEC averages in language and mathematics.** However, children do not gain as many skills while in school, and DRC scores near the bottom of its Francophone peers on learning levels of grade 6 students. Only Niger, Madagascar and Chad perform worse in reading, and Niger, Cote d’Ivoire and Chad in mathematics.

**Figure 17: PASEC language and math test scores, DRC vs SSA, by gender 2019**

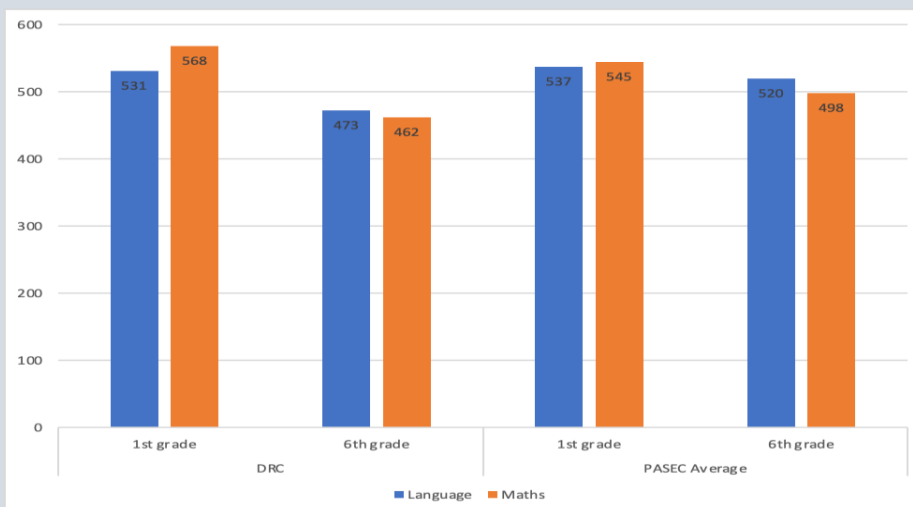
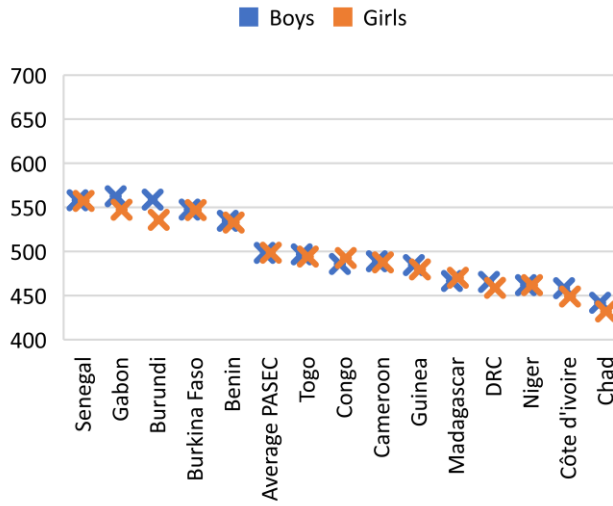


<sup>12</sup> In the DRC, local languages are integrated in the early years of the national curriculum, but the survey respondents in the MICS 2017 data were only asked to answer a French reading test. Basic competency tests EGRA (Evaluation des Compétences Fondamentales en Lecture: reading) and EGRM (Evaluation des Compétences Fondamentales en Mathématique: mathematics) were administered in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade: the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade reading was done in Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba, while the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading test was taken in French.

Mathematics test score - 1st grade



Mathematics test score - 6th grade



Note: PASEC (2019) compared learning outcomes at the first year and last year of primary school in 14 francophone African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Congo, DRC, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Niger, Senegal, Chad and Togo.

## References

- Children, G. I. o. O.-o.-S., 2013. *National Survey on the situation of out-of-school children and adolescents*, s.l.: s.n.
- CONFEMEN, 2019. *PASEC 2019: Qualité des Systèmes Éducatifs en Afrique Subsaharienne Francophone*, s.l.: Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs de la CONFEMEN.
- Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel (ESPS), 2015. *Rapport National de l'Évaluation de l'Éducation Pour Tous (EPT) en République Démocratique du Congo*, s.l.: s.n.
- Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'Éducation (PAQUE), 2020. *Évaluation de Référence des Compétences Fondamentales en Lecture et en Mathématiques des Élèves de 2ème et 4ème Année*, s.l.: s.n.
- République Démocratique du Congo, 2015. *Stratégie Sectorielle de l'Éducation et de la Formation 2016-2025*, s.l.: s.n.
- The World Bank, 2018. *Democratic Republic of Congo Systematic Country Diagnostic: Policy Priorities for Poverty Reduction and Shared Prosperity in a Post-Conflict and Fragile State*, s.l.: s.n.
- The World Bank, 2020. *The Human Capital Index 2020 Update : Human Capital in the Time of COVID-19*, Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34432>  
License: CC BY 3.0 IGO: World Bank .
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018. *New education data for SDG4: Focus on out-of-school children*. [Online]  
Available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/new-education-data-sdg-4-and-more>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2020. *Global education monitoring report 2020: inclusion and education: all means all*, s.l.: s.n.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2021. *World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE)*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.education-inequalities.org/>
- World Education Forum, 2015. *Sub-Saharan Africa Education for All: 2015 Regional Review (Full Synthesis Report)*, s.l.: s.n.

## Appendix

### Appendix I. Indicator Definitions

Indicator	Definition
Gross Enrollment Rate	Total enrollment in primary (secondary) education, regardless of age, expressed as a % of the eligible primary (secondary) school-age population
Net Enrollment Rate	% of primary (secondary) school-age children currently enrolled in primary or secondary (secondary or higher) school
Out of School Rate	% of primary (secondary) school-age children who are not currently attending any school
Completion Rate	% of children aged 14 to 16 (20 to 22) having completed primary (secondary) school
Survival Rate	Probability a child will reach a given grade

### Appendix II. Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ASA	Advisory Services and Analytics
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSCR	Document de Stratégie pour la Croissance et la Réduction de la Pauvreté
EGMA	Évaluation des Compétences Fondamentales en Mathématique
EGRA	Évaluation des Compétences Fondamentales en Lecture
EPSP	Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel
ESU	Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et Universitaire
GER	Gross Enrollment Rate
MAS	Ministère des Affaires Sociales
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
NER	Net Enrollment Rate
OOSC	National Survey on Out-of-School Children and Adolescents
PAN/EPT	Plan d'Action National de l'Éducation Pour Tous
PAQUE	Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'Éducation
PER	Public Expenditure Review
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa



## Appendix III. Data Description

Data from this note are from the following sources:

- i) Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) by UNICEF, available for 2000-01, 2009-10 and 2017-18;
- ii) Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) by USAID, available for 2007 and 2013-14;
- iii) National Survey on Out-of-School Children and Adolescents (OOSC) by the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education, available for 2012; and
- iv) Public Expenditure Review (PER) by the World Bank, available for 2012.<sup>13</sup>

For surveys conducted over multiple calendar years (but a single school year), such as MICS and DHS surveys, the data are qualified as coming from the first year of the survey: for example, DHS 2013 is data from the 2013-2014 round of DHS surveys.

## Appendix IV. Additional Tables

**Table A.1. Breakdown of Enrollment Status by Age Group, 2017**

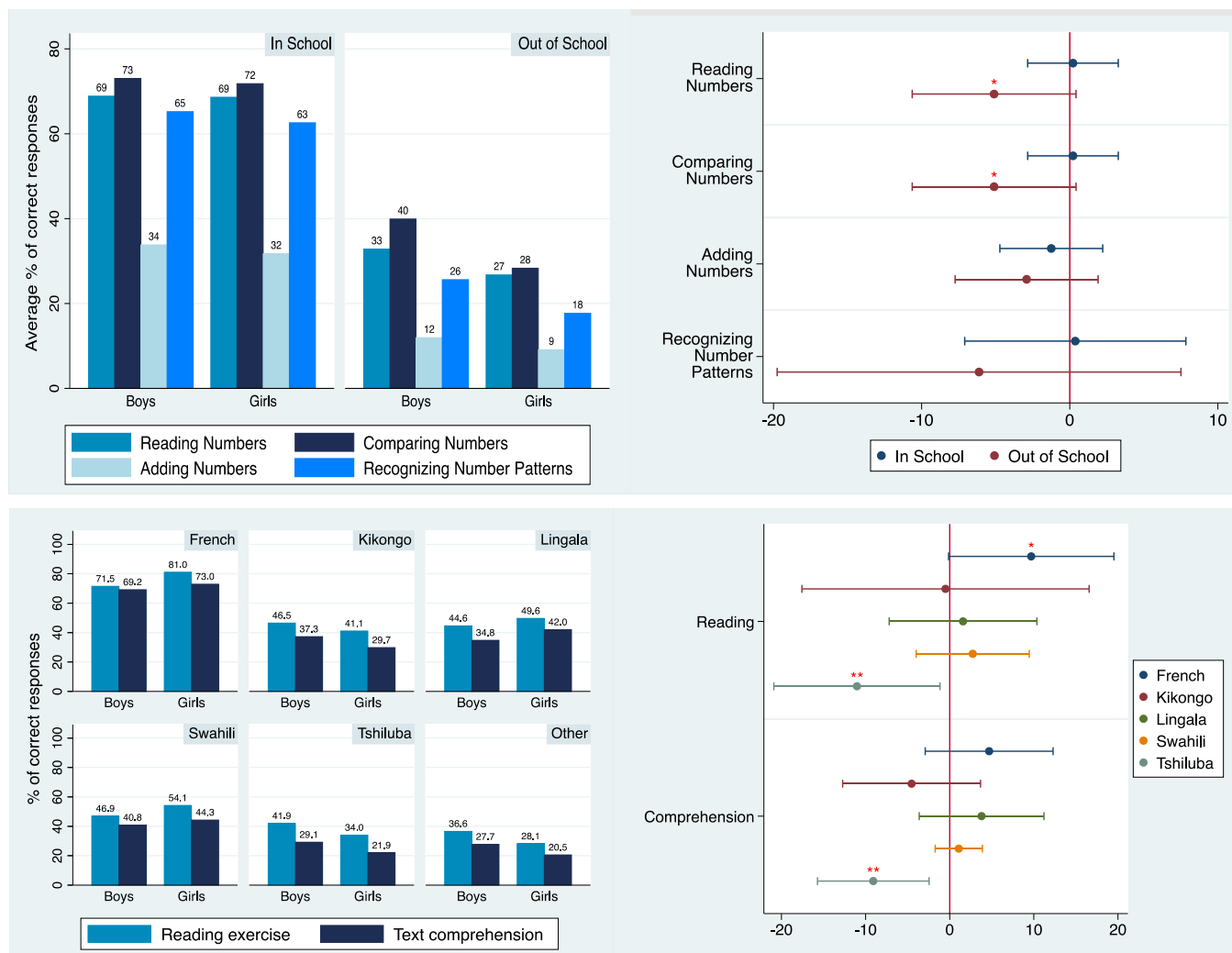
Age Group	Enrollment Status			Total
	In School	Dropped Out	Never Attended	
Primary (6-11)	45.4	3.6	9.0	58.0
--Boys	23.7	1.9	4.3	29.9
--Girls	21.8	1.6	4.6	28.0
Lower Secondary (12-13)	12.9	1.8	0.8	15.5
--Boys	6.5	0.9	0.3	7.7
--Girls	6.4	0.9	0.5	7.8
Upper Secondary (14-17)	19.0	6.1	1.4	26.6
--Boys	9.7	2.5	0.5	12.7
--Girls	9.3	3.6	0.9	13.8
Total	77.4	11.4	11.3	100

Note. All numbers are expressed as percentages. Some rows/columns may not add up to 100 because of rounding. Only children aged 6-17 at the beginning of the 2017 school year are considered. Source: MICS 2017-18.

<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise specified, 2012 data are from the OOSC. PER data are used for authors' calculations as robustness checks.

Appendix V. Additional Figures

Figure 18: MICS math and language test levels, by gender, 2017



Note: Only children aged 7-14 years old were tested for the Math assessment. The graph on the right represents the estimated coefficient and the confidence interval for the gender gap in Language cognition items measured as percentage of correct responses. Negative estimates indicate boys outperforming girls. \* Indicates statistical significance at 10%. \*\* Indicates statistical significance at 5%. \*\*\* Indicates statistical significance at 1%.