
1-2024

Understanding the education profiles of eight Latin American countries

GIRL Center

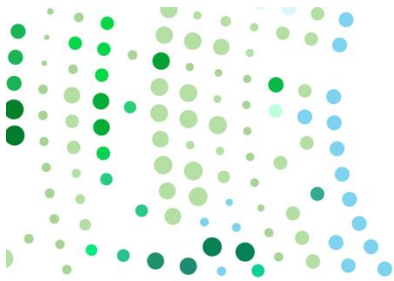
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GIRL Center. 2024. "Understanding the education profiles of eight Latin American countries," GIRL Center Research Brief no. 15. New York: Population Council.

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UNDERSTANDING THE EDUCATION PROFILES OF EIGHT LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

The GIRL Center

Background

Despite significant progress in improving primary enrollment and attainment for girls in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in recent years, gender disparities in education persist and hinder opportunities for girls. Educational attainment for girls has plateaued in numerous countries, with only a few making significant strides in narrowing the gender gap in attainment. Moreover, attainment alone does not always translate to improved learning.¹ Gender-related barriers such as school environments that are not conducive to learning and the experience of violence, early and forced marriage, and early childbearing, as well as a lack of support for girls' education impede attainment and learning.

The Population Council's GIRL Center was commissioned by a private grantmaking foundation to conduct a scoping review and analysis to identify investment opportunities in East and Southern Africa and Latin America. The donor aimed to identify countries with both a need to advance girls' education and skills and existing traction with potential for significant systemic progress in a 5-year period. Multiple rounds of research and discussion helped the foundation determine specific countries of future investment.

This brief contains profiles of 8 Latin American countries (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Peru, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia²) with the aim to summarize insights on key education indicators, school environment, gender-related barriers to education, and policies related to education.

Data was aggregated from June to December 2022 from the following sources:

- The Adolescent Atlas for Action (A3) - <https://a3.popcouncil.org/>
- The Evidence for Gender and Education Resource - <https://egeresource.org/power-in-numbers/>
- UNESCO Institute of Statistics - <https://tcg.uis.unesco.org/>
- UNICEF Data Warehouse - https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/
- Freedom in the World - <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>

Across these 8 countries, there are almost 84 million children between the ages of 0 to 18 years old and more than 47 million who are adolescents between the ages of 10 to 19 years old. The brief presents important national statistics; however, these often overshadow the nuanced realities at subnational and local levels.



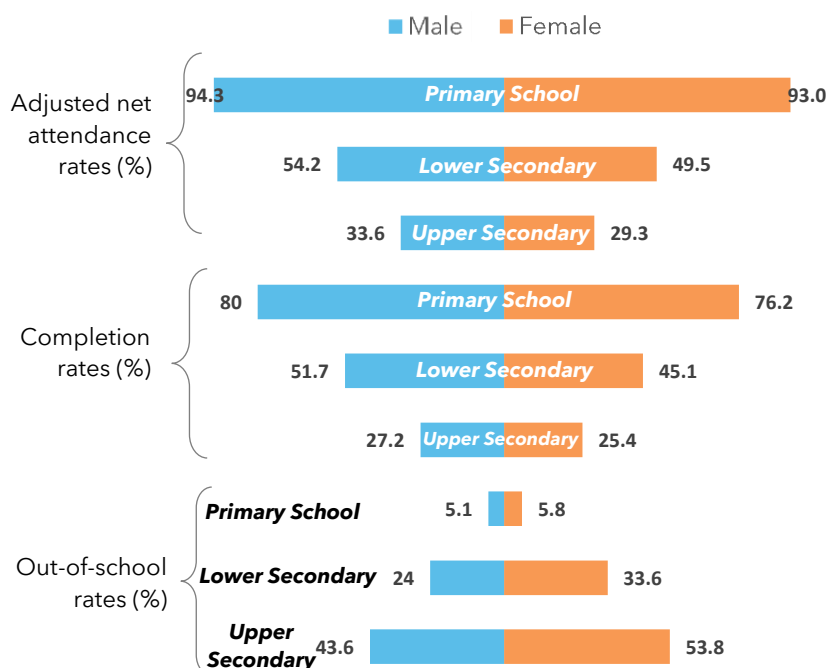
¹ Psaki, Stephanie, Nicole Haberland, Barbara Mensch, Lauren Woyczynski, and Erica Chuang. 2022. "Policies and interventions to remove gender-related barriers to girls' school participation and learning in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review of the evidence," *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 18(1): e1207.

² The brief on East and Southern Africa can be accessed here: <https://doi.org/10.31899/sbsr2024.1000>

Guatemala

Despite being the largest economy in Central America, Guatemala shows some of the highest levels of poverty in the region, disproportionately affecting rural and indigenous populations. Since 2015, the country has experienced political instability, which has affected public investments in education due to corruption and inconsistent evidence-based planning. The country's public education system offers 9 years of free education guaranteed in legal frameworks (6 at the primary and 3 at the secondary level). Guatemala invests 3.1% of government expenditure on education (as % of GDP), compared to a regional LA average of 4.4%. The country has the largest proportions of indigenous people (44%), followed by Bolivia (41%), and Mexico (19%). As a multilingual and multicultural country with a colonial history, implementing consistent intercultural bilingual education policies is key. According to the most recent data available, the country has the lowest net attendance rates and highest out-of-school rates for lower and upper secondary school for all youth, with large gender gaps disfavoring girls. Barriers to improving education prospects for girls include poverty, rural exclusion, discrimination against indigenous populations, negative gender norms and harmful practices like child marriage.

KEY EDUCATION INDICATORS



NATIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED POLICIES

That exist:

- ✓ Primary education is compulsory.
- ✓ Primary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Beginning lower secondary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Education policy specifically includes a commitment to students with disabilities.
- ✓ Sex/Sexuality education is mandated.
- ✓ Comprehensive sexuality education framework is the national standard, but inconsistently delivered by the public education system.
- ✓ There are no policies banning pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers in schools.

That do not exist:

- Lower secondary education is compulsory.
- Corporal punishment in schools is not legal.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Estimated Pupil-Teacher Ratio

- Primary - 20:1
- Secondary - No data

Percent of female teachers by teaching level

- Primary - 66%
- Secondary - 52%



Schools without sanitation facilities: No data

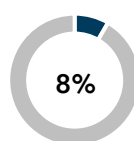


Schools without drinking water: 19%

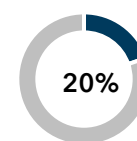


Primary schools with access to electricity: 84%

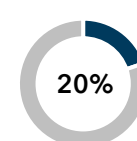
GENDER-RELATED BARRIERS



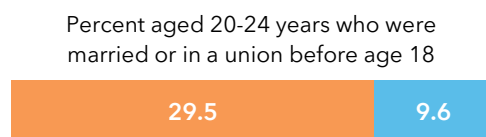
Percent of women who ever experienced sexual violence



Percent of women who ever experienced physical violence



Percent aged 20-24 years who had a first birth before age 18



Percentage of children (aged 5-17 years) engaged in child labor

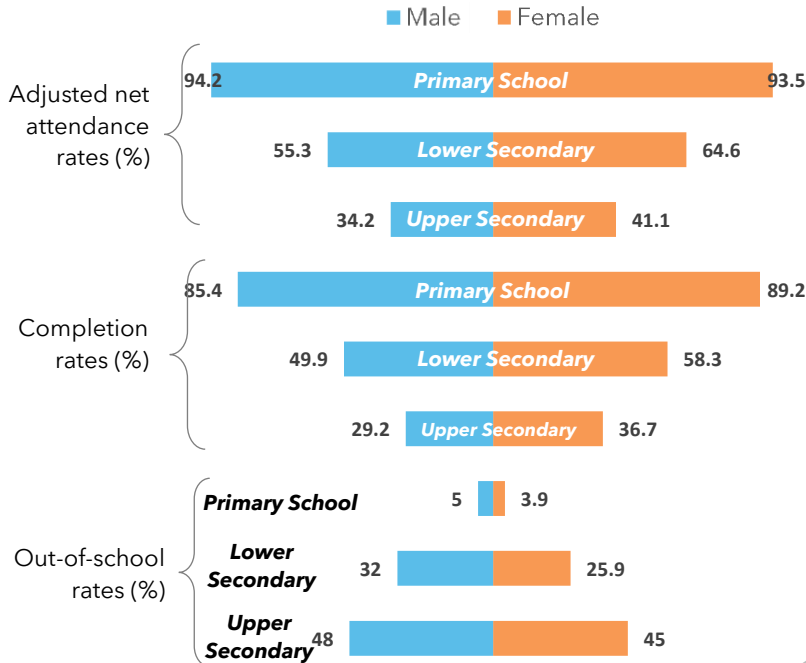


Female Male

Honduras

Honduras is coming out of a decade-long political crisis fueled by corruption in public spending. Plans are underway to adapt gender mainstreaming in the education reform planned for 2023-2030. However, the entire stability of the country continues to be threatened by institutional weakness, corruption, violence, and impunity. The public education system in Honduras offers 9 years of free education guaranteed in legal frameworks (6 at the primary and 3 at the secondary level). The country invests 6.4% of government expenditure on education (as % of GDP), which is higher than the regional LA average of 4.4%. Honduras has a relatively low proportion of indigenous population (7%) compared to countries like Guatemala (44%) or Bolivia (41%). However, it has the second highest proportion of rural population (41%) after Guatemala (48%). Honduras reports some of the highest rates of early pregnancy in the region (73/1000 live births), and aside from Nicaragua the highest rate of early union (34% of women aged 20-24 who were first in marriage or union prior to age 18).

KEY EDUCATION INDICATORS



NATIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED POLICIES

That exist:

- ✓ Primary education is compulsory.
- ✓ Primary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Beginning lower secondary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Education policy specifically includes a commitment to students with disabilities.
- ✓ Sex/Sexuality education is mandated.
- ✓ Comprehensive sexuality education framework is the national standard, but inconsistently delivered by the public education system.
- ✓ There are no policies banning pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers in schools.

That do not exist:

- Lower secondary education is compulsory.
- Corporal punishment in schools is not legal.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Estimated Pupil-Teacher Ratio

- Primary - 26:1
- Secondary - No data

Percent of female teachers by teaching level

- Primary - 76%
- Secondary - 60%



Schools without sanitation facilities: No data

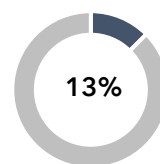


Schools without drinking water: 19%

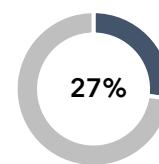


Primary schools with access to electricity: 84%

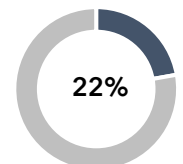
GENDER-RELATED BARRIERS



Percent of women who ever experienced sexual violence



Percent of women who ever experienced physical violence



Percent aged 20-24 years who had a first birth before age 18

Percent aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18



Percentage of children (aged 5-17 years) engaged in child labor

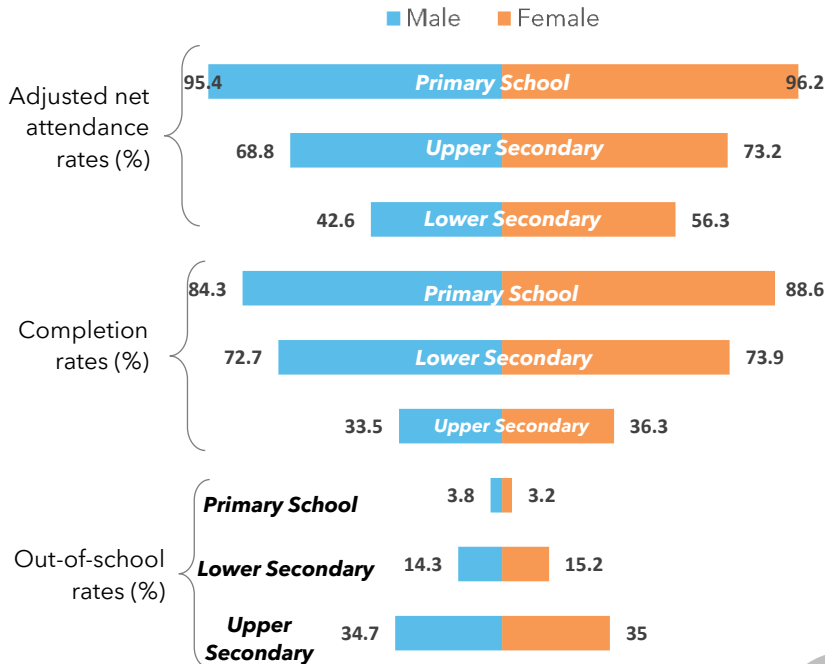


Female Male

El Salvador

The government's fight against criminal gangs has been the priority for the current administration. During the pandemic, El Salvador set an example by expanding access to technology for all students, equipping them with tablets and computers. El Salvador's public education system offers 9 years of free education guaranteed in legal frameworks (6 at the primary and 3 at the secondary level). The country invests 4.1% of government expenditure on education (as % of GDP), which is slightly lower than the regional LA average of 4.4%. Although El Salvador has invested in closing gender gaps and tackling barriers that disfavor girls' access to public education, comprehensive sexuality education and gender mainstreaming has been inconsistently delivered.

KEY EDUCATION INDICATORS



SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Estimated Pupil-Teacher Ratio

- Primary - 28:1
- Secondary - 30:1

Percent of female teachers by teaching level

- Primary - 74%
- Secondary - 55%



Schools without sanitation facilities: 6.8%



Schools without drinking water: 3.6%



Primary schools with access to electricity: 98.4%

NATIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED POLICIES

That exist:

- ✓ Primary education is compulsory.
- ✓ Primary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Lower secondary education is compulsory.
- ✓ Beginning lower secondary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Corporal punishment in schools is not legal.
- ✓ Education policy specifically includes a commitment to students with disabilities.
- ✓ Sex/Sexuality education is mandated, but inconsistently delivered.
- ✓ There are no policies banning pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers in schools.

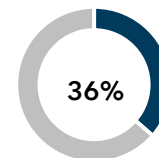
That do not exist:

- There is a policy commitment to support menstrual hygiene management in schools.
- Comprehensive sexuality education is the national standard.

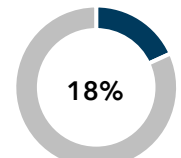
GENDER-RELATED BARRIERS



Percent of women who ever experienced sexual violence

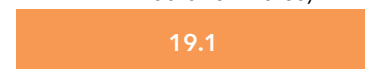


Percent of women who ever experienced physical violence



Percent aged 20-24 years who had a first birth before age 18

Percent aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (no data for males)



Percentage of children (aged 5-17 years) engaged in child labor

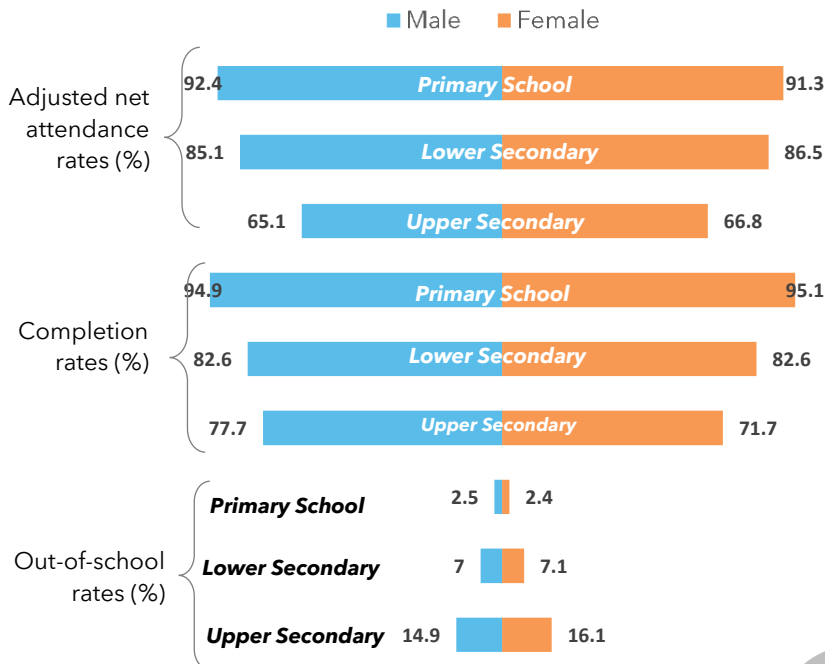


Female Male

Peru

Peru has faced political instability since 2011, with high levels of polarization and lack of trust in all government branches. Peru's proportion of indigenous population (12%) is among the highest in the region after Guatemala, Bolivia, Mexico, and Colombia. Child marriage is more prevalent in rural areas, where poverty is widespread. The country implements a National Gender Equality Policy (PNIG) led by the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP). The policy recognizes gender discrimination generates inequality, limits the exercise of fundamental rights and development opportunities for women. Peru's public education system offers 11 years of free education guaranteed in legal frameworks (6 at the primary and 5 at the secondary level) and invests 4% of government expenditure on education (as % of GDP), which is somewhat lower than the regional LA average of 4.4%. There is a need to catalyze ongoing efforts to improve educational prospects for girls in upper secondary and address gender-based violence as a key barrier to girls' education.

KEY EDUCATION INDICATORS



NATIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED POLICIES

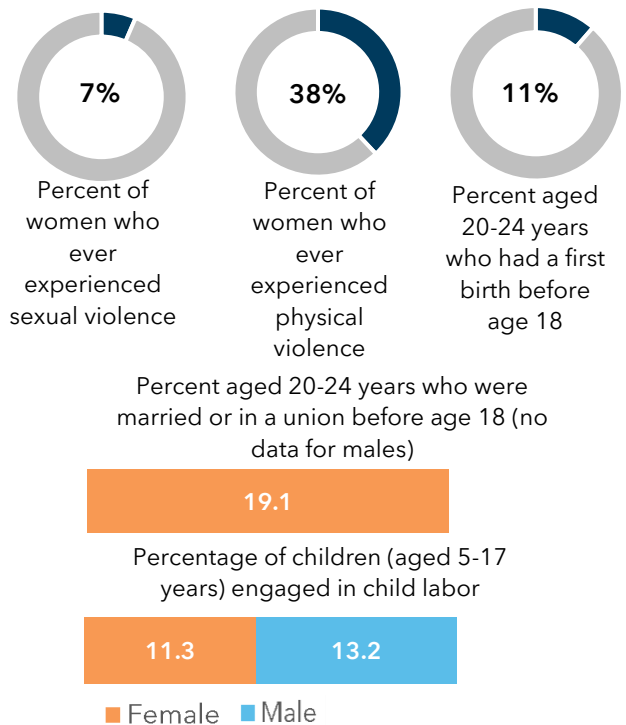
That exist:

- ✓ Primary education is compulsory.
- ✓ Primary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Beginning lower secondary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Education policy specifically includes a commitment to students with disabilities.
- ✓ Sex/Sexuality education is mandated.
- ✓ Comprehensive sexuality education is the national standard.
- ✓ There are no policies banning pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers in schools.

That do not exist:

- Lower secondary education is compulsory.
- Corporal punishment in schools is not legal.
- There is a policy commitment to support menstrual hygiene management in schools.

GENDER-RELATED BARRIERS



SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Estimated Pupil-Teacher Ratio

- Primary - 17:1
- Secondary - No data

Percent of female teachers by teaching level

- Primary - 68%
- Secondary - 46%



Schools without sanitation facilities: 3.1%



Schools without drinking water: 15%

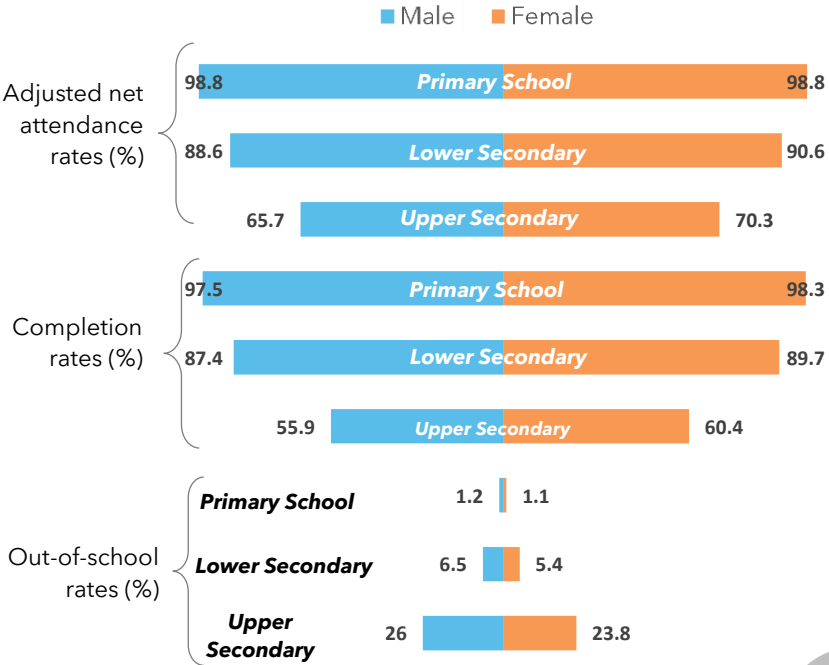


Primary schools with access to electricity: 83%

Mexico

Mexico is considered a regional leader in education reforms and recently launched a new framework to enhance quality and expand access to public education. This framework ensures a steady education trajectory for all students, prioritizing indigenous and rural children and youth. Only 2 in 10 indigenous students complete secondary education, with gender barriers disproportionately affecting indigenous girls in southern states. Despite progress, Mexico continues to fight high levels of gender-based violence, organized crime, child marriage, and adolescent pregnancies. After Guatemala and Bolivia, Mexico has one of the largest proportions of indigenous people (19%). Mexico's public education system offers 9 years of free education guaranteed in legal frameworks (6 at the primary and 3 at the secondary level). The country invests 4.3% of government expenditure on education (as % of GDP), which is slightly lower than the regional LA average of 4.4%. Since 2014, Mexico has been working on a National Strategy to Prevent Adolescent Pregnancy (ENAPEA). The strategy outlines various groups and subgroups as targets and identifies coordinating bodies. Mexico has been neglected from international philanthropy. Although gender gaps disfavor boys, levels of gender-based violence are among the highest in the region.

KEY EDUCATION INDICATORS



NATIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED POLICIES

- That exist:**
- ✓ Primary education is compulsory.
 - ✓ Primary education is tuition free.
 - ✓ Lower secondary education is compulsory.
 - ✓ Beginning lower secondary education is tuition free.
 - ✓ Education policy specifically includes a commitment to students with disabilities.
 - ✓ Sex/Sexuality education is mandated.
 - ✓ Comprehensive sexuality education is the national standard.
 - ✓ There are no policies banning pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers in schools.
- That do not exist:**
- Corporal punishment in schools is not legal.
 - There is a policy commitment to support menstrual hygiene management in schools.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

- Estimated Pupil-Teacher Ratio
- Primary - 26:1
 - Secondary - 18:1
- Percent of female teachers by teaching level
- Primary - 69%
 - Secondary - 52%



Schools without sanitation facilities: 6.2%

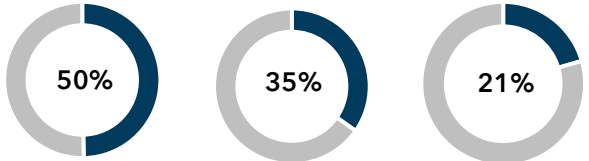


Schools without drinking water: 16%



Primary schools with access to electricity: No data

GENDER-RELATED BARRIERS



Percent of women who ever experienced sexual violence: 50%

Percent of women who ever experienced physical violence: 35%

Percent aged 20-24 years who had a first birth before age 18: 21%

Percent aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (no data for males)



Percentage of children (aged 5-17 years) engaged in child labor

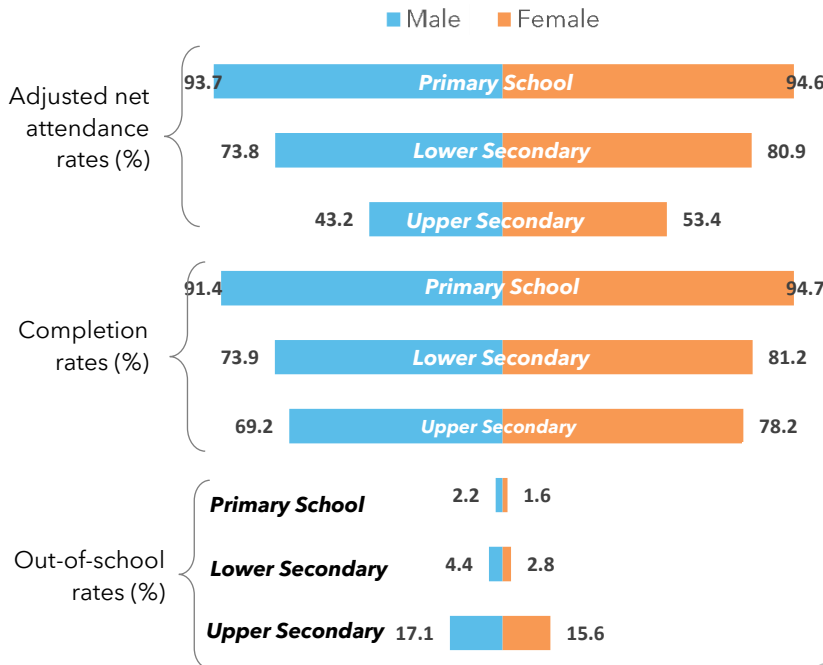


Female Male

Colombia

Colombia has advanced its democratic transition after the recent Peace Agreements. The country has a great need to support displaced and conflict-affected communities, who are largely afro-descendent and indigenous. After Guatemala, Bolivia and Mexico, Colombia has one of the largest proportions of indigenous population (13.6%). Colombia's public education system offers 9 years of free education guaranteed in legal frameworks (6 at the primary and 3 at the secondary level). The country invests 4.9% of government expenditure on education (as % of GDP), which is notably higher than the regional LA average of 4.4%. There is a government Department for Gender Equity that works along six lines, defined by the National Advisory Board for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES) in 2013: (1) cultural transformation and peace building; (2) economic autonomy and access to assets; (3) participation in power scenarios and decision making; (4) health and sexual and reproductive rights; (5) gender focus in education; and (6) a comprehensive plan to guarantee women a life free of violence.

KEY EDUCATION INDICATORS



NATIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED POLICIES

That exist:

- ✓ Primary education is compulsory.
- ✓ Primary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Lower secondary education is compulsory.
- ✓ Education policy specifically includes a commitment to students with disabilities.
- ✓ Corporal punishment in schools is not legal.
- ✓ Sex/Sexuality education is mandated.
- ✓ Comprehensive sexuality education is the national standard.
- ✓ There are no policies banning pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers in schools.

That do not exist:

- Beginning lower secondary education is tuition free.
- There is a policy commitment to support menstrual hygiene management in schools.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Estimated Pupil-Teacher Ratio

- Primary - 24:1
- Secondary - 27:1

Percent of female teachers by teaching level

- Primary - 78%
- Secondary - 50%



Schools without sanitation facilities: 22%

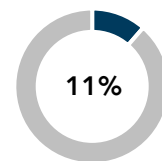


Schools without drinking water: 26%

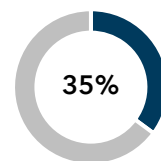


Primary schools with access to electricity: 86%

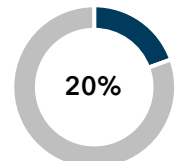
GENDER-RELATED BARRIERS



Percent of women who ever experienced sexual violence



Percent of women who ever experienced physical violence



Percent aged 20-24 years who had a first birth before age 18

Percent aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18



Percentage of children (aged 5-17 years) engaged in child labor

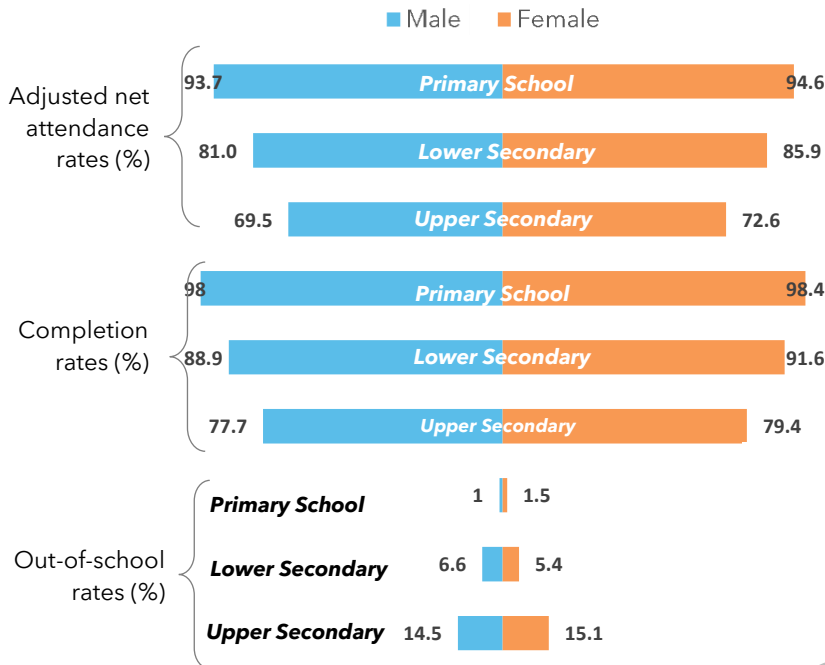


■ Female ■ Male

Ecuador

Ecuador is known as one of the lead reformers of the education sector in the region. Ongoing challenges include corruption in all levels of government and gang violence. The Constitution and the country's legal and policy frameworks recognize sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, youth rights and the right to personal integrity, including a life free from violence. Preceded by Guatemala (48%) and Honduras (41%), Ecuador has a high proportion of rural population (36%) in the region. Ecuador's public education system offers 9 years of free education (6 at the primary and 3 at the secondary level). The country invests 3.7% of government expenditure on education (as % of GDP), compared to a regional LA average of 4.4%. Ecuador has made significant efforts to improve educational prospects for all youth, including closing gender gaps that disfavor girls, but the proportion of out-of-school youth is still high in upper secondary.

KEY EDUCATION INDICATORS



NATIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED POLICIES

That exist:

- ✓ Primary education is compulsory.
- ✓ Primary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Lower secondary education is compulsory.
- ✓ Beginning lower secondary education is tuition free.
- ✓ Education policy specifically includes a commitment to students with disabilities.
- ✓ Corporal punishment in schools is not legal.
- ✓ Sex/Sexuality education is mandated.
- ✓ There are no policies banning pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers in schools.

That do not exist:

- Comprehensive sexuality education is the national standard.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Estimated Pupil-Teacher Ratio

- Primary - 28:1
- Secondary - 28:1

Percent of female teachers by teaching level

- Primary - 78%
- Secondary - 59%



Schools without sanitation facilities: 11%

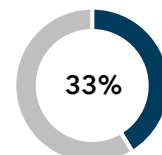


Schools without drinking water: 7%

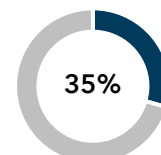


Primary schools with access to electricity: 79%

GENDER-RELATED BARRIERS



Percent of women who ever experienced sexual violence

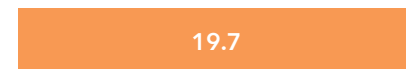


Percent of women who ever experienced physical violence



Percent aged 20-24 years who had a first birth before age 18

Percent aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (no data for males)



Percentage of children (aged 5-17 years) engaged in child labor

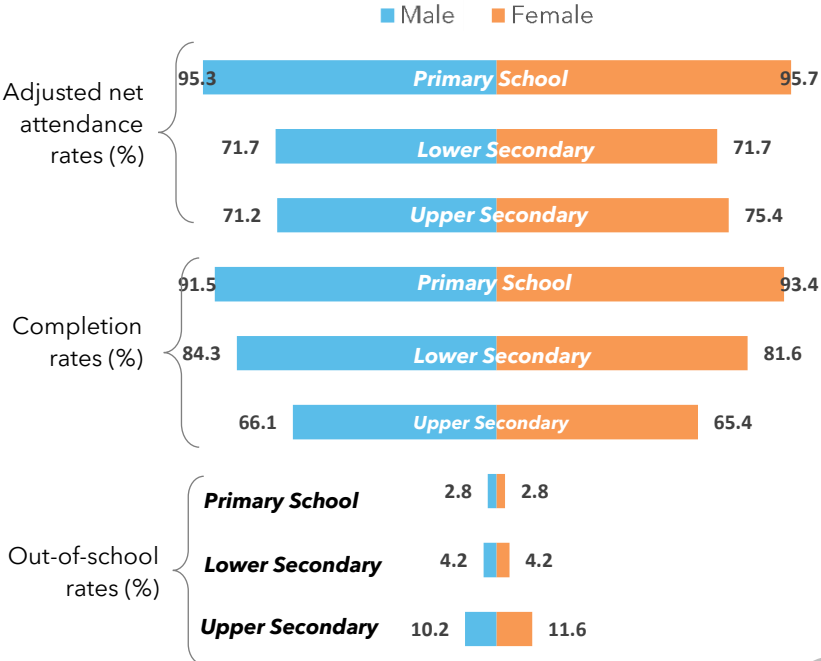


Female Male

Bolivia

Bolivia is a regional leader on bilingual intercultural education and GBV approaches in indigenous settings. After Guatemala (44%), Bolivia has the highest proportion of indigenous population (41%). Bolivia’s public education system offers 11 years of free education guaranteed in legal frameworks (6 at the primary and 5 at the secondary level). The country invests 9.8% of government expenditure on education (as % of GDP), a notably large figure compared to the regional LA average of 4.4%, making Bolivia one of the largest spenders on education in the region. Bolivia has made significant progress in education, although adolescents still face difficulties in upper secondary. Gender gaps that disfavor girls are still observed. Girls who become pregnant are frequently forced to marry or enter into a union, even when it is the result of sexual violence, and they are withdrawn from school to avoid bringing shame on the family. Child marriage in Bolivia is more prevalent among Quechua-speaking communities, the Aymara people and Afro-descendants.

KEY EDUCATION INDICATORS



NATIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED POLICIES

- That exist:**
- ✓ Primary education is compulsory.
 - ✓ Primary education is tuition free.
 - ✓ Lower secondary education is compulsory.
 - ✓ Beginning lower secondary education is tuition free.
 - ✓ Education policy specifically includes a commitment to students with disabilities.
 - ✓ Corporal punishment in schools is not legal.
 - ✓ Sex/Sexuality education is mandated.
 - ✓ There are no policies banning pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers in schools.
- That do not exist:**
- There is a policy commitment to support menstrual hygiene management in schools.
 - Comprehensive sexuality education is the national standard.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

- Estimated Pupil-Teacher Ratio
- Primary - 21:1
 - Secondary - 22:1
- Percent of female teachers by teaching level
- Primary - 65%
 - Secondary - 52%



Schools without sanitation facilities: 23%

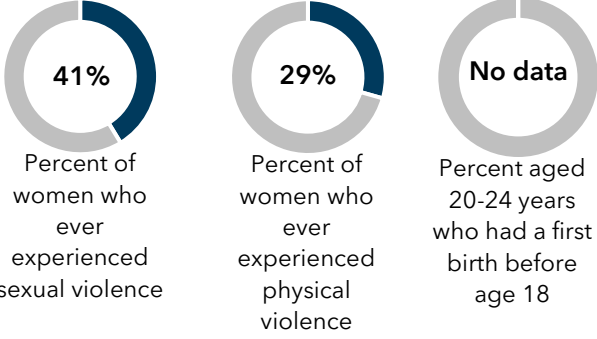


Schools without drinking water: 9%



Primary schools with access to electricity: 71%

GENDER-RELATED BARRIERS



Percent aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (no data for males)



Percentage of children (aged 5-17 years) engaged in child labor



Female Male