

IFPRI Key Facts Series: Education¹

March 2023

This is the first Education Key Facts Sheet in a series of Key Facts sheets that IFPRI produces based on the Integrated Household Surveys (IHS). The purpose of the series is to present data relevant to key policy issues on agriculture, food systems, and development topics in Malawi. Other Key Facts Sheets are available on our website at massp.ifpri.info.

Highlights

- In 2019/20, 88 percent of primary school aged children were in primary school, while only 15 percent of secondary school aged children were in secondary school, either because they were in age-inappropriate classes or not attending school at all.
- Net enrollment rates in both secondary and primary have increased over the decade between 2010/11 and 2019/20.
- Most primary and secondary school students attend a public school.
- More than two-thirds of household members over 14 years of age have no official educational qualifications.
- Between 2010/11 and 2019/20 literacy rates for women increased by 11 percentage points, while for men they increased by 8 percentage points. These differential trends closed – but did not eliminate – an existing gender gap: in the last survey year female literacy rate was 70%, while male literacy rate was 83%.
- In 2019/20 the average annual out-of-pocket expenditure per child attending primary school was MWK 9,371. For secondary school that expense was over 10 times higher at MWK 95,742.
- 51 percent of out-of-pocket secondary school expenditures in 2019/20 went towards paying school fees.
- Lack of money for fees and uniforms is the main reason for dropping out of secondary school, while this is the second most important reason for dropping out of primary school, after lack of interest in school.

Background to the Integrated Household Surveys (IHS)

This analysis uses data from the third, fourth and fifth Integrated Household Surveys (IHS3, IHS4 and IHS5), conducted by the Government of Malawi’s National Statistical Office (NSO). IHS3 was conducted between March 2010 and March 2011 covering a total of 12,271 households, IHS4 was conducted between April 2016 and April 2017, covering 12,447 households while IHS5 was conducted between April 2019 and April 2020, covering 12,288 households. Once appropriately weighted, the IHS surveys are representative of national, district, and urban/rural levels. The analysis uses the survey sampling weights provided by the NSO in order to make the statistics representative of the population of Malawi.² All prices have been adjusted for inflation using NSO’s Consumer Price Index and are reported in April 2019 values.

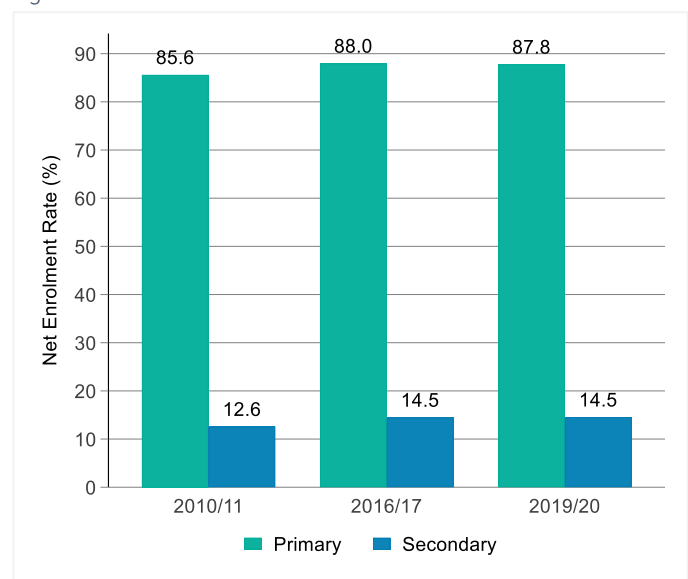
Primary and Secondary School Enrollment Rate

Net Enrolment Rate

Net enrolment rate (NER) shows the number of pupils of official primary or secondary school age attending primary or secondary school as a percentage of the population of official primary (6 to 13 years) or secondary school age (14 to 17 years). The net enrolment rate represents the proportion of pupils who are attending primary (standard 1 to 8) or secondary (form 1 to 4) school at the appropriate age. Figure 1 shows how the primary and secondary school net enrolment rate has changed over the survey years between 2010/11 and 2019/20. The percentage of children aged between 6 to 13 years who were enrolled in primary school increased from 85.6 percent in 2010/11, to 88.0 percent in 2016/17 and 87.8 percent in 2019/20.

Similarly, the secondary school net enrolment rate has also increased over the same period. The proportion of children aged 14 to 17 years who were enrolled in secondary school increased from 12.6 percent in 2010/11, to 14.5 percent in

Figure 1: Net Enrolment Rate



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² Except for Table 4, where we used household sampling weights, we use individual sampling weights throughout the analysis.

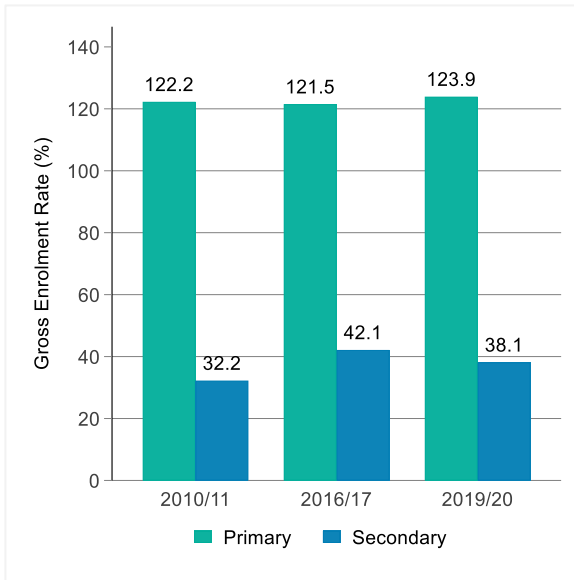
2016/17 and 2019/20. Regardless of the increase in the secondary school net enrolment rate, it can be noted that more than four-fifths of secondary school age-appropriate children are either not in school or attending age-inappropriate classes. Further analysis indicates that, for both primary and secondary, net enrolment rate is higher among females than males, and in urban areas compared to rural areas. The northern region had the highest primary and secondary school enrolment rates compared to any other region in all survey years.

Gross Enrolment Rate

Different from net enrolment rate, the gross enrolment rate (GER) is the number of pupils attending primary or secondary school, regardless of age, expressed as a proportion of the corresponding official school-age-group population at that level of education. Primary school gross enrolment rate increased by 1.7 percent between 2010/11 and 2019/20. As depicted in figure 2 below, primary school gross enrolment rate is over 100 percent, implying that a high proportion of pupils enrolled in primary school are outside the official primary school age range (6 to 13 years).

In the same period, secondary school gross enrolment rate increased from 32.2 percent in 2010/11 to 42.1 percent in 2016/17, then declined to 38.1 percent in 2019/20. Compared to secondary NER, which ranges from 12.9 percent to 14.5 percent, the secondary school GER indicates that more than half of the pupils enrolled in secondary school are outside the official secondary school age range. While the NER for girls is higher than for boys at both school levels, the opposite is the case for GER. This indicates that boys are more likely to repeat classes or start school late compared to their female counterparts.

Figure 2: Gross Enrolment Rate



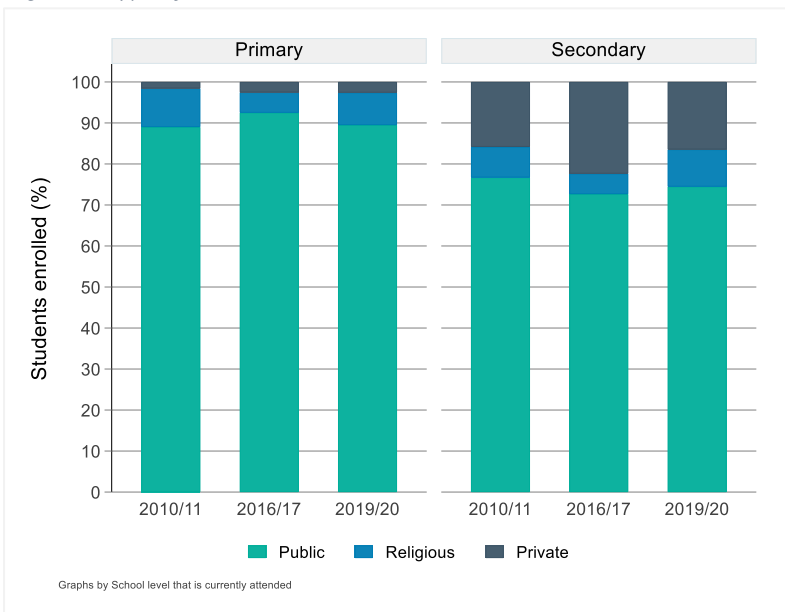
Primary School Starting Age

Of all the household members born after 1988, who were eligible to enroll in primary school in 1994 when free primary education was introduced in Malawi, 48.9 percent, 64.4 percent, and 67.5 percent stated that they started school at the recommended age of 6 years in 2010/11, 2016/17 and 2019/20, respectively.

Types of School Attended

Household members that were attending school at the time of the survey were asked to report the type of school they attend. As shown in figure 3 below, public schools had the highest number of students enrolled in both primary and secondary schools. The proportion of pupils enrolled in public primary school increased from 89.0 percent (2010/11) to 92.5 percent (2016/17) then declined to 89.1 percent (2019/20). A similar trend is observed for secondary school. The proportion of pupils enrolled in public secondary schools increased from 75.9 percent to 71.6 percent and decreased to 73.5 percent in 2010/11, 2016/17 and 2019/20, respectively.

Figure 3: Type of School Attended



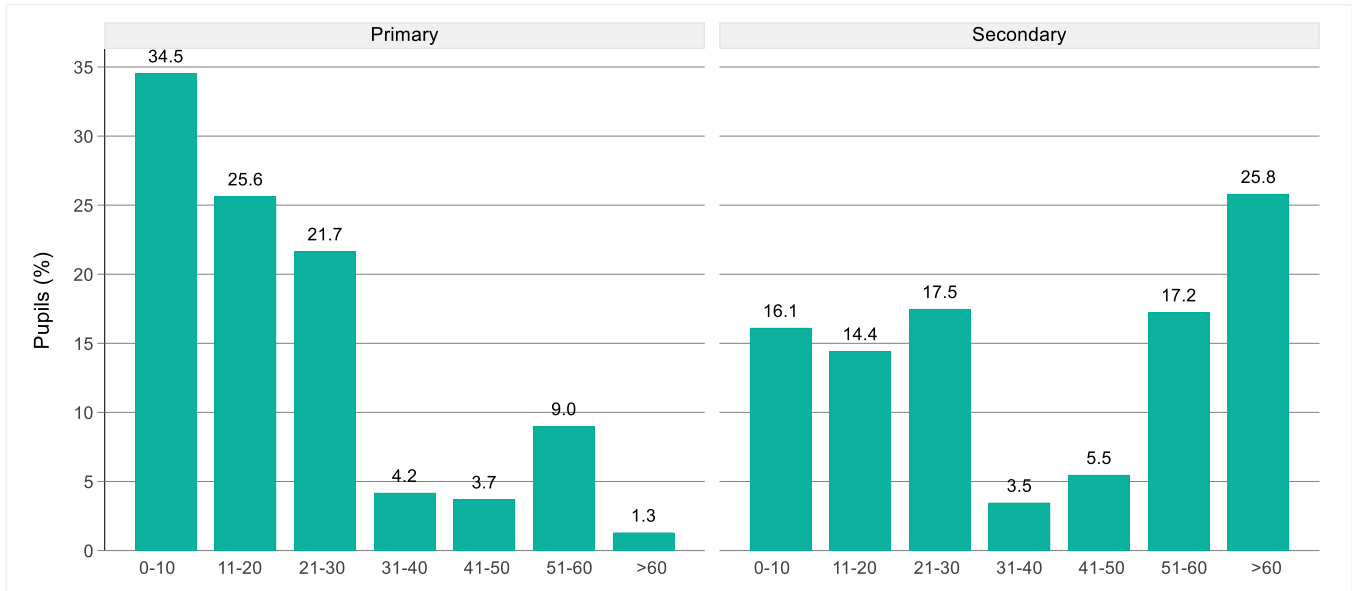
After public schools, religious schools also enroll a significant proportion of primary school pupils. However, the share of pupils attending primary education at a religious school declined from 9.4 percent in 2010/11 to 7.9 percent in 2019/20. Private schools have the lowest – but growing – share of primary school pupils, increasing from 1.5 percent in 2010/11, to 2.5 percent in 2016/17 and 2.6 percent in 2019/20.

Secondary school enrolment at both private and religious schools increased only slightly between 2010/11 and 2019/20. Private schools enrolled 15.7 percent, 22.0 percent, and 16.2 percent secondary students in 2010/11, 2016/17 and 2019/20, respectively. Religious schools had the least share of secondary school pupils attending their schools. Only 7.4 percent, 4.9 percent and 8.9 percent of pupils were enrolled in religious secondary schools in 2010/11, 2016/17 and 2019/20, respectively.

Travel to School in 2019/20

In 2019/20, the majority of primary and secondary school pupils travelled to school by foot (97.7 percent), followed by bicycle (1.2 percent) and bus/minibus (0.8 percent), very few used private vehicles (0.2 percent) and motorcycles (0.1 percent). However, it has been noted that there are rural-urban differences in mode of transport used to get to school. Pupils in rural areas are more likely to walk to school (98.4 percent) as compared to their urban counterparts (93.3 percent). In addition, pupils in rural areas are less likely to use bicycle (1.1 percent), bus/minibus (0.4 percent), private vehicle (0.1 percent) and motorcycle (0.03 percent) as compared to pupils in urban areas (1.8 percent, 3.4 percent, 1.1 percent, and 0.4 percent, respectively).

Figure 4: Daily Travel Time to School 2019/20



As portrayed in figure 4 above 34.5 percent of primary school pupils take 0 to 10 minutes to get to school every day and 1.3 percent of primary school going children take more than an hour to get to school. For secondary school pupils, the highest proportion (25.8 percent) take more than an hour to get to school. On average, rural pupils take roughly the same amount of time to get to school as urban pupils. While it takes an urban primary school pupil an average of 21 minutes to get to school, it takes an average of 23 minutes for a rural primary school pupil to get to school. Urban secondary school pupils travel an average of 32 minutes to school while those in a rural area travel an average of 39 minutes.

Educational Attainment and Literacy

Highest Education Qualification Acquired

Table 1 shows the highest class level ever attended by household members aged 15 and above. More than two-thirds of people aged 15 and above did not have any education qualification in all the survey years. The proportion of people aged 15 and above with a Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education (PSLC) increased from 10.9 percent in 2010/11 to 11.6 percent in 2016/17 and then to 13.4 percent in 2019/20. A similar trend is observed for Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE). Between 2010/11 and 2016/17 and between 2016/17 and 2019/20, there was an additional 1.3 percent and 0.3 percent of people aged 15 and above having an MSCE qualification.

Table 1: Highest Qualification Acquired (percent of household members aged 15 years and above)

	IHS3			IHS4			IHS5		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
NONE	46.3	79.9	74.2	40.7	77.3	69.6	40.1	77.1	70.9
PSLCE	15.1	10.0	10.9	14.3	10.9	11.6	18.8	12.3	13.4
JCE	17.6	6.6	8.5	20.3	7.4	10.1	14.4	5.9	7.3
MSCE	14.9	3.0	5.0	16.1	3.7	6.3	19.2	4.1	6.6
DIPLOMA	5.5	0.5	1.3	7.9	0.7	2.2	5.3	0.5	1.3
DEGREE	0.7	0.0	0.1	0.7	0.0	0.2	2.2	0.1	0.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: The Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education (PSLCE) is awarded after passing final examinations of the last class of primary school (standard 8). The Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) is awarded after passing form 2 examinations of secondary education. The Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) is obtained after passing the final examination of the last class of secondary education (form 4). All examinations are administered by the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB). A diploma is awarded for attaining tertiary education which is a level below a bachelor's degree. Degrees include bachelor's degree, master's degree and PhD which are obtained from a tertiary institution.

However, the trend is different for Junior Certificate of Education (JCE). In 2010/11, 8.3 percent of people aged 15 and above had a JCE qualification. This increased to 9.8 percent in 2016/17, then declined to 7.4 percent in 2019/20. The decline can be attributed to the abolition of the JCE examinations in 2015. They were reinstated in 2020.

There are wide differences between educational qualifications acquired by people residing in urban and rural areas. In all the survey years, there were more people aged 15 and above without any qualifications in rural areas than urban areas. Compared to their urban counterparts, rural household members aged 15 and above are less likely to have acquired PSLC, JCE, MSCE or any other tertiary education qualification.

Figure 5: Highest Education Attainment for Adults Aged 23-35 in 2019/20

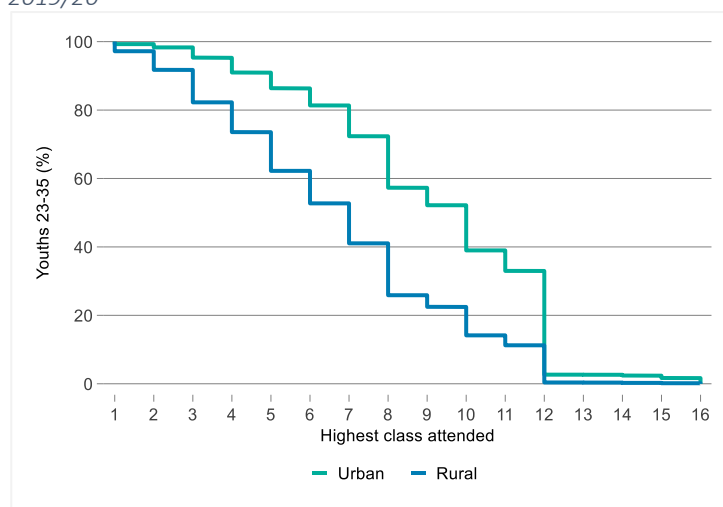


Figure 5 shows the distribution of the highest class attended for individuals aged 25 to 34 years in rural and urban areas; this is the age by which most people are expected to have completed their education in Malawi. The gap between the lines portrays the wide differences in education attainment for young adults in rural and urban areas, favoring urban dwellers.

The highest proportion of urban adults aged 23-35 (30.3 percent) attained an MSCE (class 12) whilst the highest proportion of rural residents aged 23-35 (15.2 percent) attained a PSLCE (class 8). However, in both urban and rural areas, there is a sharp decline in education attainment after standard 8 and form 4, the highest class of primary school and secondary school, respectively. The sharp drop-off in the curves reflects that only a small proportion of adults aged 23-35 were able to proceed to secondary and tertiary education, respectively.

Literacy Rate

Literacy is defined as the ability to read or write a simple sentence in any language. Table 2 shows the literacy rate for different demographic groups. At national level, the literacy rate among people aged 15 and over increased from 66.7 percent in 2010/11 to 74.5 percent in 2016/17 and to 76.2 percent in 2019/20—an increase of 9.5 percentage points in 9 years. Although declining, there are persistent gender gaps in literacy levels in Malawi. Whereas 75.1 percent, 81.6 percent, and 83.2 percent of males aged 15 years and above were literate in 2010/11, 2016/17, and 2019/20, respectively, only 58.9 percent, 68.1 percent, and 69.9 percent of females were literate in those years.

Similar to highest education qualifications, we also observe wide differences in literacy levels between urban and rural areas. The gap between literacy rates in urban and rural areas has persistently been more than 18 percentage points. At regional level, the northern region has consistently had the highest percentage of literate people, followed by the central region. The southern region has had the lowest percentage of literate people aged 15 years and above. The literacy rate among those aged 15-24 years is more than two times higher than the literacy rate among those aged over 64, which will result in long-run improvements in literacy rates in the country.

Table 2: Literacy Rate (percent of household members aged 15 years and above)

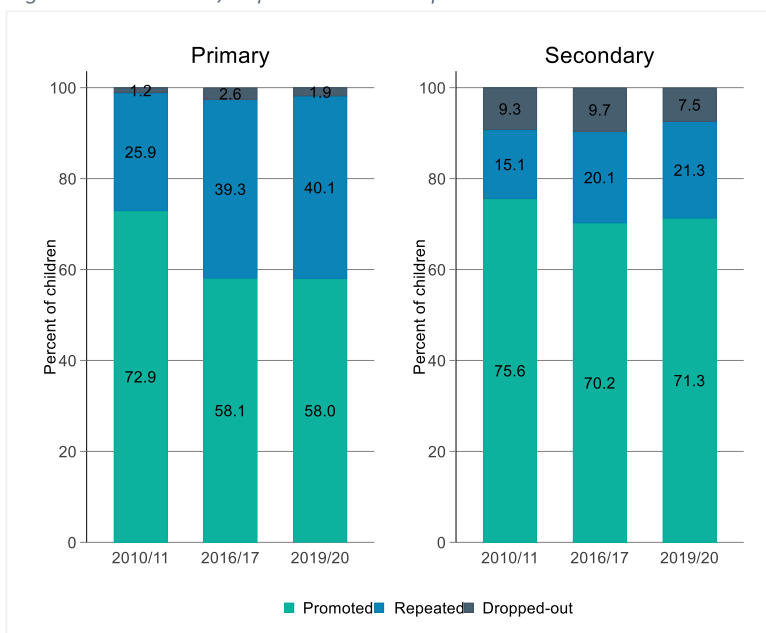
	2010/11	2016/17	2019/20
Gender			
Female	58.9	68.1	69.9
Male	75.1	81.6	83.2
Residence			
Urban	89.4	90.1	91.6
Rural	62.1	70.3	73.1
Region			
North	78.2	86.6	85.0
Central	66.4	73.8	75.8
Southern	63.4	72.2	73.6
Age			
15-24 years	78.1	86.6	87.7
25-34 years	70.0	77.4	78.8
35-64 years	57.8	65.5	67.8
> 64 years	30.9	39.9	42.4
National	66.7	74.5	76.2

Promotion, Repetition and Drop-Out Rates

Pupils entering any year (grade) in the primary or secondary school system can be divided into three categories: (i) those who are promoted to the next year; (ii) those who need to repeat that grade; and (iii) students who drop out of school altogether. Figure 6 shows the percentage of pupils who were promoted, repeated, or dropped out irrespective of age. Over the survey years, promotion rates have decreased in both primary (from 72.9 percent in 2010/11 to 58.0 percent in 2019/20) and secondary schools (75.6 percent in 2010/11 to 71.3 percent in 2019/20), consequently increasing the repetition rate by 14.2 percentage points in primary schools and 6.2 percentage points in secondary schools in the same period.

Dropout rates were highest in 2016/17 in both primary (2.6 percent) and secondary (9.7 percent) schools. In 2019/20 the percentage of dropout had gone down to 1.9 percent in primary and 7.5 percent in secondary schools.

Figure 6: Promotion, Repetition and Dropout Rates



Reasons for Dropping Out From School

Table 3 presents the main reasons why primary school and secondary school pupils born after 1988, who in 1994 (the year that universal free primary education was introduced in Malawi), were eligible to enroll in primary school, dropped out of school. The leading reason for dropping out of primary school has been lack of interest in attending school. In 2010/11, 45.5 percent of those who dropped out did so because they were simply not interested in school. Nonetheless, the percentage of those dropping out because they were not interested decreased to 36.7 percent in 2016/17, then to 36.2 percent in 2019/20. Even though parents were not required to pay primary school fees after 1994, insufficient money for paying for school uniforms, books or other contributions remain the second most significant reason for dropping out of primary school.

Table 3: Reasons for Dropping Out of School

Reason for dropping out	Primary			Secondary		
	2010/11	2016/17	2019/20	2010/11	2016/17	2019/20
No money for fees/uniform	27.8	31.8	31.8	34.7	53.4	51.2
Married/became pregnant	8.1	10.6	10.2	18.6	16.1	14.8
Acquired all education wanted	0.0	1.4	0.1	6.7	12.8	9.6
Not interested	45.4	36.7	36.2	3.3	4.8	8.3
Had to work or help at home	4.1	0.2	1.8	1.1	4.1	2.6
Illness/disability	4.7	7.0	5.3	1.1	0.0	1.4
Too old to continue	0.0	1.4	3.8	0.0	1.5	0.0
Other	9.0	11.1	10.6	34.5	7.2	12.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

The most reported reason for dropping out of secondary school is the lack of money for fees and/or uniform. More than half of those who dropped out of secondary school in 2016/17 and 2019/20 dropped out because of lack of money for fees and/or uniform. Despite declining, getting married or becoming pregnant contributed was the second most reported reason for dropping out of secondary school in in 2016/17 and 2019/20.

How large are out-of-pocket education expenditures?

Household out-of-pocket expenditures on school comprise a number of different items. On average, a household with at least one child attending primary school, spent MWK 4,094, MWK 6,990, and MWK 9,371 annually on education per primary school going household member in 2010/11, 2016/17 and 2019/20, respectively and deflated to 2019/20 MWK values for comparability. The average household out-of-pocket expenditure on a household member attending secondary school tends to be more than 10 times the amount spent on primary school household members. The total annual household expenditure on secondary education for households with at least one secondary school going household member was MWK 52,632 in 2010/11, increasing to MWK 79,974 per secondary school going household member in 2010/11 and to MWK 95,742 in 2019/20.

Figure 7: Out of Pocket Education Expenditures Per Pupil

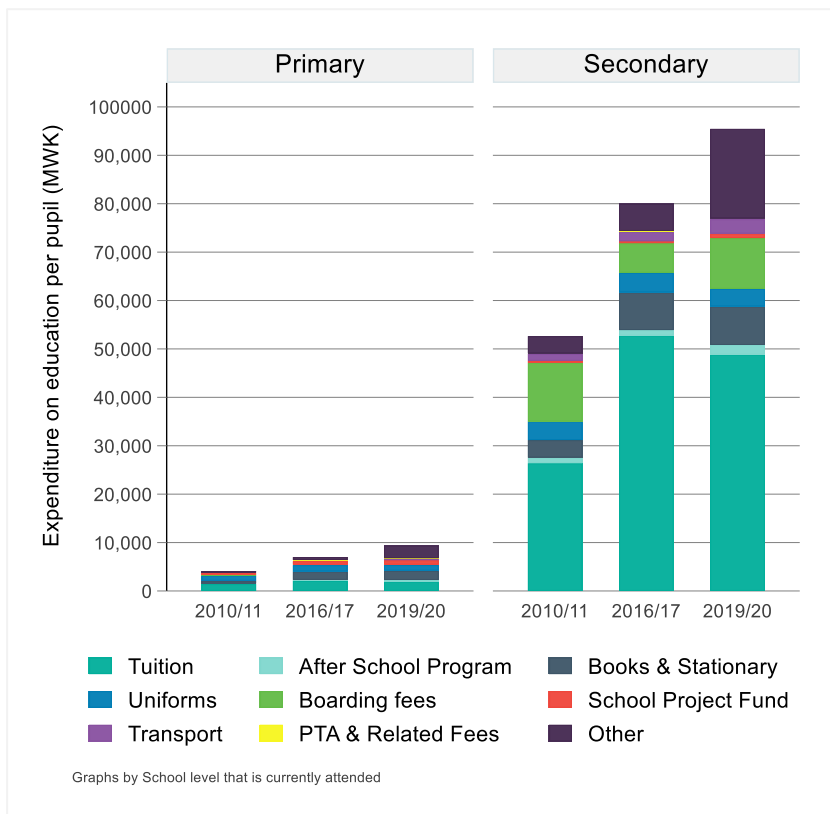


Figure 7 shows the breakdown of the annual household out-of-pocket expenditures on education. The biggest share of this expenditure on both primary and secondary school pupils is on tuition. Over 50 percent of household expenditure on secondary education is taken up by tuition fees. Households spent an average of MWK 26,377, MWK 52,743, and MWK 48,833 on secondary school tuition fees in 2010/11, 2016/17 and 2019/20, respectively, per secondary school-going household member. Lack of money to pay for school is the most commonly reported reason for children dropping out of secondary school (Table 3).

Households spent an average of MWK 1,425, MWK 2,068, and MWK 1,923 on tuition fees in 2010/11, 2016/17 and 2019/20, respectively, per primary school pupil. In all survey years and school levels, fees relating to Parent Teacher Association (PTA) took up the smallest share of total education expenditure. For example, in 2019/20, households only spent an average of MWK 55 for primary school and MWK 178 for secondary school on PTA and related fees annually.

As shown in Table 4, the share of primary education expenditure and secondary education expenditure in total household expenditure has been increasing with time. Generally, households living below the poverty line, those residing in rural areas and in the southern region have the lowest shares, but differences are not very large.

Table 4: Share of Education Expenditure to Total Household Expenditure

	Primary			Secondary		
	2010/11	2016/17	2019/20	2010/11	2016/17	2019/20
Poverty Status						
Poor	1.54	1.91	2.21	6.92	7.07	7.62
Non-Poor	1.71	2.40	2.84	5.92	7.32	7.89
Residence						
Rural	1.51	1.90	2.25	6.46	7.06	7.62
Urban	2.27	3.21	4.01	5.60	7.58	8.31
Region						
North	2.03	2.82	3.14	7.60	7.40	8.91
Central	1.69	2.13	2.45	6.85	7.45	8.11
South	1.43	2.02	2.41	4.96	6.99	7.17
National	1.62	2.14	2.51	6.20	7.24	7.81