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*Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality*

# **Enrolment in Mali: types of household and how to keep children at school**

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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
1. – The situation now .....	3
2. – Entry of children into the school system.....	4
3. – Enrolment and types of household.....	6
1. 3.1 – <i>Status of child in household</i> .....	6
2. 3.2 – <i>Educational level of head of household</i> .....	7
3. 3.3 – <i>Size of household</i> .....	8
4. 3.4 – <i>Presence of single women aged between 15 and 29</i> .....	8
5. 3.5 – <i>Kind of household education-wise</i> .....	8
4. – How to keep children at school .....	9
CONCLUSION .....	10
Bibliography.....	11

## INTRODUCTION

UNESCO launched the goal of “Education For All” at the end of the last century to try to boost access to education in developing countries. But despite national and international efforts to increase educational availability, universal enrolment of children, especially in Africa, is still a long way off. Lack of facilities and family poverty do not entirely explain this. Enrolment is a complicated process and depends on many economic, political, demographic, social, cultural and religious factors.

Educational data in Mali shows enrolment for basic schooling sharply increased over the past decade. Political change, with the advent of democracy, opened up the educational system and gradually made more school places available through growth of educational infrastructure at state, private and community level.

Most education surveys in Mali have focused on its availability, rarely on demand for it. Educational data (and as currently gathered) is not very useful for studying demand, which can often only be measured by specialised surveys. Some census data is also a good source.

The trend is towards paying more attention to demand. Enrolment in country areas and among women is known to be below average, but little is known about educational attitudes at family level.

Unanswered questions include:

- Which children a family chooses to send to school and why.
- The family factors at play (such as status of the child in the family, who the head of household is, makeup of households, housing conditions, domestic and productive labour needs).

We highlight here key factors in enrolment and keeping children at school in Mali, using data from the nationwide survey of migration and urbanisation (EMMU93) done between December 1992 and March 1993 as part of the Network of Surveys on Migration and Urbanisation in West Africa (NESMUWA) and from the survey of family patterns and children’s education in Mali (EDFEEM-2000) done between November 1999 and May 2000 among a sample of about 3,000 children.

EMMU93 deals with children aged between 7 and 14 and EDFEEM-2000 covers those between 12 and 16. Both look at the educational history of children who have already been to school and their contribution to household activities since the age of six.

Not all factors are taken into account. Some are enough to back up the points made here. Three key elements will be considered:

- The entry of children into the educational system
- Enrolment and the type of household
- Factors that help or discourage keeping children at school

We start with current data about primary education.

### 1. – The situation now

Gross enrolment has steadily grown, reaching 64.34% at primary level in the 2001/02 school year (Table 1).

**Table 1: Gross enrolment, primary education, 2001/02**

Region	Boys %	Girls %	Total %
Mopti	46.43	34.09	40.14
Bamako	138	135	137
Mali	75.33	55.66	64.34
<b>Net enrolment, primary education, 1998/99</b>			
Region	Boys %	Girls %	Total %
Mali	50	36.2	43.5

Most recent data confirms the rural-urban and boy-girl disparity. The gap between the gross and net enrolment rates also shows children enter the educational system quite late. A child in Bamako almost always goes to school but more than half the girls in the Mopti region still do not have the chance to. Who exactly are the children who go to school and those who have never been?

## 2. – Entry of children into the school system

The 1993 migration and urbanisation survey shows a high 69% of all children have never been to school, especially girls (74% – boys were at 64%). In addition, the enrolment gap between rural and urban children is very large.

**Table 2: Enrolment status by gender and place of residence**

			Boys %	Girls %	Total %
<b>Residence</b>					
<b>Urban</b>	<b>Enrolled</b>		60.90	48.50	54.70
	<b>Dropped out</b>		4.80	4.90	4.90
	<b>Never enrolled</b>		34.30	46.60	40.40
<b>Rural</b>	<b>Enrolled</b>		22.50	13.80	18.50
	<b>Dropped out</b>		3.70	1.90	2.90
	<b>Never enrolled</b>		73.80	84.30	78.60
<b>National</b>	<b>Enrolled</b>		32.00	23.50	28.00
	<b>Dropped out</b>		4.00	2.70	3.40
	<b>Never enrolled</b>		64.00	73.80	68.60

In both cases, children aged nine have the highest enrolment (32%) and the average is 23%. Dropouts are 3.4% for all ages and boys and girls combined, with the highest rate (7%) for 13 and 14 year-olds. These figures are from the early 1990s but were confirmed by the

EDFEEM-2000 survey.

Table 3, compiled from the results of EDFEEM-2000, shows that 5% of boys in Bamako, 30% in other towns and 56% in the countryside have never been to school and that if a boy has not entered the educational system by the time he is 10, he will never be able to. The figures for girls clearly show gender disparity. More than 20% in Bamako, 45% in other towns and over 70% in the countryside have never been to school.

The average age at first enrolment varies widely depending on where the child lives. There is also a gap of nearly a year between urban and rural children, whether boys or girls.

The two surveys show big disparities overall between town and country and between girls and boys. A girl in the countryside has serious obstacles getting into school compared with an urban boy, who can almost always find a place.

**Table 3: Entry into the school system by gender and place of residence. Percentage of children still not in school at a given age.**

EDFEEM 2000

	BOYS			GIRLS		
	Bamako %	Other towns %	Rural %	Bamako %	Other towns %	Rural %
<b>Children still not enrolled by the age of:</b>						
7	62	85	94	66	85	97
8	30	66	83	42	67	91
9	12	47	73	31	57	85
10	7	37	63	26	49	79
Who have never been to school by the age of 12	5	31	56	22	45	72
<b>Average age of first enrolment*</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>8.5</b>

\* This is calculated only for pupils who have completed a whole school year.

EDFEEM-2000 shows that postponing school entry reduces the likelihood of academic failure or dropping out. This evidence challenges the wisdom of the often discriminatory refusal in some countries to admit children older than 8 or 9. The survey suggests it would be worth delaying entry as a way of reducing repeat years and dropping out. More research needs to be done on this. It also raises the question of whether the desirable goal is higher enrolment or better educational results – whether pupil numbers should be boosted or whether repeat and dropout rates should be reduced.

Table 4 is based on the EMMU93 survey.

**Table 4: School attendance, by link between pupil and head of household (HH) in rural and urban settings**

	Status in household	Not enrolled %	Enrolled %	
Urban	Child of HH	42.8	57.2	
	Child from other family	47.1	56.5	
	Child without parents present	67.5	32.5	
Rural	Child of HH	81.5	18.5	
	Child from other family	85.1	14.9	
	Child without parents present	77.7	22.3	

In the towns, enrolment is highest (57.2%) among the children of the head of household, but not far behind are children in the household who have other parents. In the countryside however, children with no biological parents in the household have the highest enrolment (22.3%), which may be due to children migrating for lack of educational opportunity in some rural areas.

### **3. Enrolment and types of household**

Here we describe the enrolled children and the kind of households they come from.

#### *3.1 – Status of child in household*

The EMMU93 survey shows that the status in the household of children between 7 and 14 is the key to whether they have a chance to go to school. In both town and countryside, children of the head of household are usually favoured over others in the family (children entrusted to the family and those living in it with parents other than the heads of household).

The trends noted here are the same whether the household is headed by a man or a woman. When place of residence is taken into account, the percentage of children without parents present is much higher in towns than in the countryside.

**Table 5: Status of child in household, by gender, place of residence and gender of head of household (HH)**

Gender of HH	Place of residence	Status in household			Total
			Boy %	Girl %	
<b>Man</b>	<i>Urban</i>	Child of HH	74.9	72.6	73.7
		Child from other family	9.9	8.4	9.2
		Child w/o parents present	15.3	19.0	17.1
	<i>Rural</i>	Child of HH	72.5	72.2	72.4
		Child from other family	15.1	16.3	15.6
		Child w/o parents present	12.4	11.5	12.0
<b>Woman</b>	<i>Urban</i>	Child of HH	59.3	52.1	55.6
		Child from other family	12.2	13.8	13.1
		Child w/o parents present	28.4	34.1	31.4
	<i>Rural</i>	Child of HH	53.6	66.0	60.8
		Child from other family	12.1	3.9	7.3
		Child w/o parents present	34.4	30.1	31.9

When the head of household is a woman however, in towns the percentage of girls without parents present (34%) is higher than for boys (28%), while in the countryside the situation is reversed, with 34% boys and 30% girls. The use of child labour may explain this.

These trends were confirmed by the EDFEEM-2002 survey, which said about household environment that:

“Belonging to a Christian or Muslim household seems to make no difference, any more than does having one parent belonging to one of the country’s castes. Divorce, which is becoming more popular in Mali, makes no difference either in the two phenomena studied – enrolment and keeping the child in school. But not having either parent present does seem to seriously affect a child’s educational opportunities. The family system that enables these children to be taken in does not lead to them performing as well in school or staying there. As expected, the educational resources of the child’s family are very important to ensure its success and staying at school, but only when both parents have completed primary education themselves.”

### ***3.2 – Educational level of head of household***

An educated head of household, whatever the level and formal or informal, encourages the enrolment of children between 7 and 14.

The EMMU93 survey shows heads of household without any education are least likely to send children to school (36.5% of boys and 25% of girls). The higher the educational level the more children they sent to school. But despite this, the most educated heads of household still send more boys (95.6%) to school than girls (72.8%).

### 3.3 – Size of household

The size of household significantly influences enrolment. As long as it is not too big, a fairly high proportion of its children are sent to school. Table 5 shows enrolment rising until the household reaches between 11 and 15 people, with 55% of boys sent to school and 43.7% of girls. After that, the percentages steadily fall.

**Table 6: Enrolment according to size of household and gender of child**

	Household size	Enrolled (%)	
		No	Yes
<b>Boy</b>	1-5	52.5	47.5
	6-10	46.5	53.5
	11-15	44.9	55.1
	16-20	48	52
	over 21	53.1	46.9
<b>Girl</b>	1-5	66.9	33.1
	6-10	59.6	40.4
	11-15	56.3	43.7
	16-20	60.1	39.9
	over 21	66.6	33.4

### 3.4 – Presence of single women aged between 15 and 29

The presence of single women aged between 15 and 29 in a household is an important boost to enrolment. Living in towns is a similar encouragement but in the countryside, enrolment of boys varies greatly in this context. For girls, enrolment goes up (to 24.2%) when there are two single women between 15 and 29 present and then drops to 19.7% when three are present.

The influence of the number of very young children and of school-age children (an indicator of the family’s educational burden) and overall the size of the household is not clear. It seems that young girls who are obliged to help with domestic chores from a certain age get relief from this hindrance to their studies when the household contains other females who can do these tasks.

So a large number of adults in a household, both men and women, greatly increases a child’s chances of going to school since their absence will not mean housework is not done.

### 3.5 – Kind of household education-wise

The EMMU93 survey found three kinds of household education-wise:

- total: those that send all their children to school
- partial: those sending some
- zero: those sending none

**Table 7: Kinds of household education-wise, by gender of head of household (HH) and place of residence**

	HH gender	Zero (%)	Partial (%)	Total (%)	
<b>Urban</b>	Man	37.1	23.9	39	
	Woman	44.1	19.7	36.2	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>38.6</b>	
<b>Rural</b>	Man	75	13.6	11.5	
	Woman	78.3	8.7	13	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>75.3</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>11.6</b>	

The educationally weakest households were in rural areas, with 75% of those headed by men and 78.3% of those run by women being “zero” households. In the towns, more totally-enrolled households were headed by men (39%) than by women (36.2%) but the difference was small.

Place of residence was a big factor. While 39% of urban households had all their children in school, only 12% did in the countryside. The gap remains large and needs attention by all education planners in Mali.

#### **4. Keeping children at school**

Towns and cities offer many more opportunities to keep children at school because they have more educational facilities and a wider range of them. But does this entirely explain why children stay at school?

The EDFEEM-2000 survey shows the combined effect of three factors increases the chances of keeping a child at school:

- Presence of a lamp or table at home.
- Help with homework.
- Not being forced to do domestic chores after school.

Special facilities help children with their studies, as does help from their parents, especially the mother, is crucial to keeping up with the curriculum and avoiding repeating years.

The survey also shows that children who have housework to do are usually at much greater risk of failure or dropping out. Those who get home from school and have to do more than four domestic chores are twice as likely to drop out as those who have none.

Also, children who are used to getting rewarded or paid for doing work tend to drop out of school to continue such work.

As well as the three above factors keeping children at school, others tend to work against this, such as:

- Lack of educational infrastructure, including the distance between school and home.
- Early marriage.
- How well off parents are.
- The language classes are taught in.
- 

The EDFEEM-2002 survey shows that dropping out is sometimes linked to decisions in the household, according to what the parents’ goals are.

A survey done in the Kayes and Yélimane regions about children being entrusted to households confirms this and shows that the order children are born in a family is a factor in whether they are kept at school. The first male child is destined to become head of the family, so is often taken out of school to do productive work before his education is complete.

## **CONCLUSION**

Educational opportunity has steadily grown in Mali over the past decade, increasing enrolment at all levels. But much remains to be done to reduce the “never enrolled” category highlighted by the two surveys used here.

Demand for education is steady, though it varies according to place of residence and gender. Existence of an educational infrastructure is by itself not enough to persuade parents to send their children to school and keep them there.

The consequences of failure at school have not been directly discussed here, but have been partly dealt with through mention of factors that discourage parents from keeping children at school. We have shown that a child’s social surroundings are key to whether they are sent to school and stay there.

The attention they get from their parents and the facilities they have to do their homework are also factors keeping them at school.

It is also hard for a child to combine studies with after-school household chores or productive activity. Paid work done by children outside school or during holidays is a temptation that sometimes undermines studies.

Parent awareness of the importance of education is therefore necessary to boost demand for it where it is available. Schooling still needs to have a better reputation, especially in the countryside.

We have only dealt with enrolment according to the kind of household and the issue of keeping children at school. We have not said educational facilities are currently adequate and efforts to expand and improve them must continue, notably through the PRODEC 10-year national educational reform plan. Growth of private and community schools must be encouraged and monitored to make up for the lack of facilities overall.

Setting up development education centres (CEDs) is another way to boost enrolment and literacy, by reincorporating children who have dropped out or never been to school, so as to move closer to the universally-agreed goal of “Education For All.”

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