

Primary Education in Malawi - 2024 Sector Performance & Strategic Recommendations

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INTRO: Overview of Primary Education

Primary Education Structure:

- From *Standards 1 to 8*, covering eight years
- It forms part of a broader basic education system that also includes *Early Childhood Education, Education for Out of School Youth, and Complementary Basic Education*.

Legal and Policy Framework:

- *Education Act of 2013*: Legal foundation for ensuring education access and quality.
- *National Education Policy of 2016*: Framework to enhance inclusivity and educational standards.
- Malawi 2063 & NESIP 2020-2030

National Education Sector Implementation Plan (NESIP):

- Primary education progress is being monitored under the *National Education Sector Implementation Plan (NESIP)*, initiated in 2020.
- The current assessment aims to measure achievements, evaluate *ongoing strategies*, and identify *challenges* as we approach the *2025 targets*.

Enrollment and Gender Parity

Overall Enrolment fluctuated between 2020 and 2024

- 2020: 5.42 million, 2021: Decrease to 4.96 million, 2023: Increase to 5.30 million.
- 2024: Back to 5.42 million.
- This trend highlights the need for stability and resilience in the education system.

Gender Parity Index (GPI):

- GPI has consistently exceeded the *National Education Sector Implementation Plan (NESIP)* target of 1.02 since 2020.
- By 2024, GPI reached 1.04, indicating a slight advantage for girls in primary school enrolment.
- Maintaining a healthy GPI requires *support for girls' education* alongside *targeted interventions for boys* to ensure balance.

Reflection:

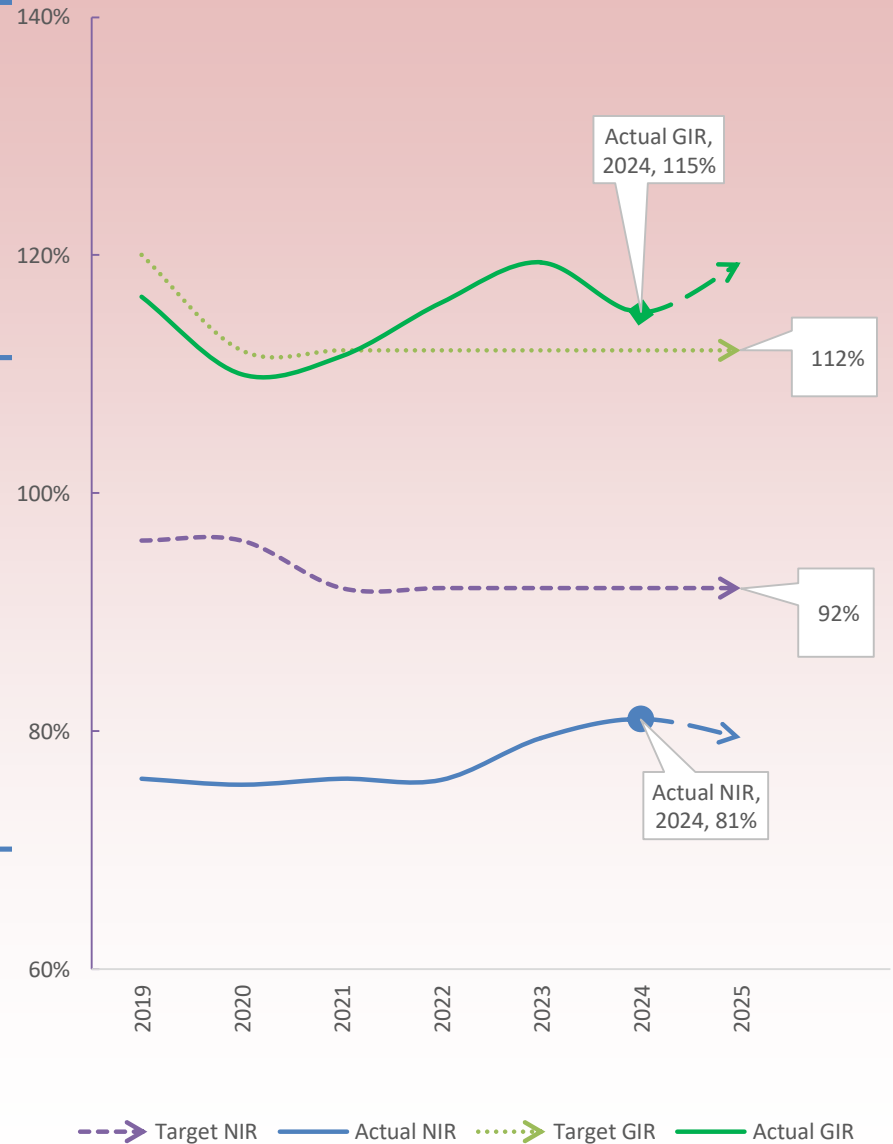
- We need a balanced approach that supports *both genders* is essential to maintain an equitable educational landscape.

Net and Gross Intake Rates

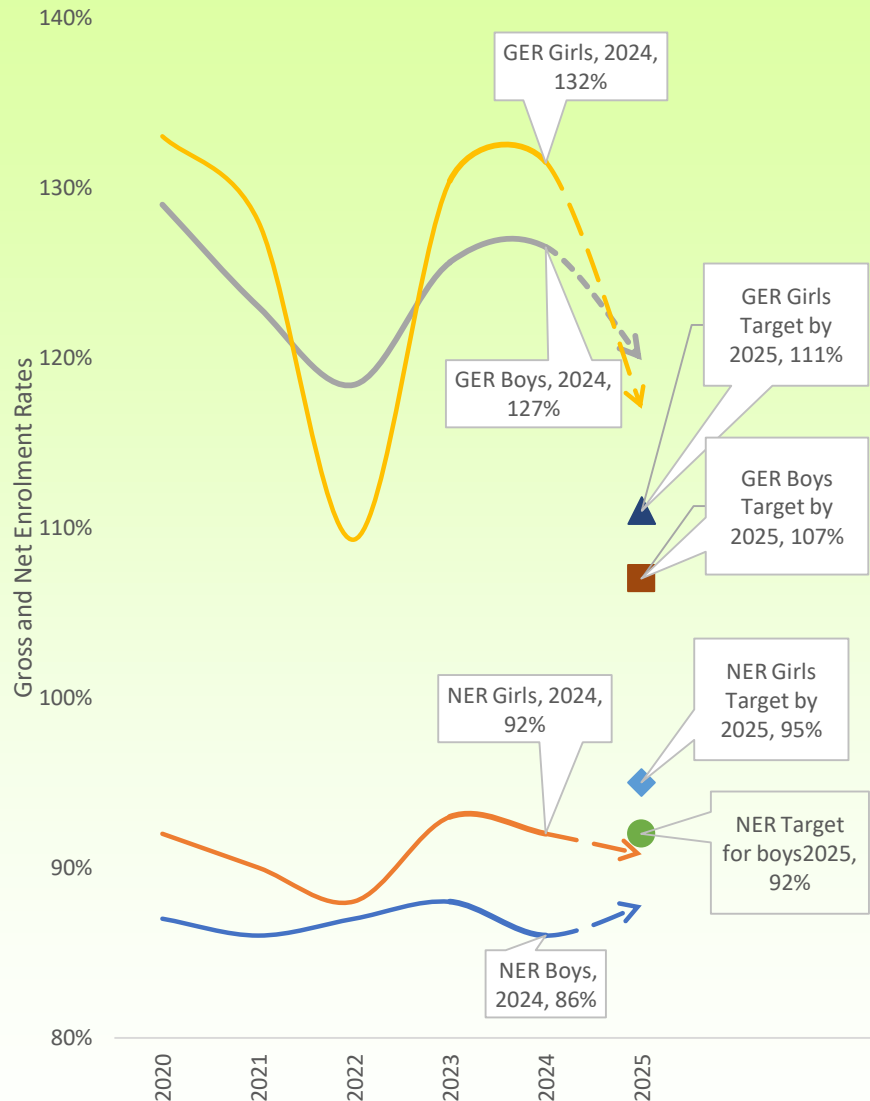
Net Intake Rate (NIR) Measures the proportion of *children aged 6 years* who enrol in Standard 1. In 2024, NIR increased to 81%, On track towards the *NESIP target of 92% by 2025*.

Gross Intake Ratio (GIR): Represents the number of new entrants to Standard 1, regardless of age. GIR decreased from 119.4% in 2023 to 115.2% in 2024. This indicates reduction in the proportion of *overage and underage students*, aligning better with age-appropriate education.

Strategic Initiatives to enhance performance: Improving *birth registration* data accuracy & Strengthening *early childhood education* programs to prepare children for timely school entry.



Net and Gross Enrolment Rates in Primary Education



Gross Enrolment Rate (GER): Total enrolled students as a % of the age-appropriate population.

•**Girls:** GER rose from 130% (2023) to 132%.

•**Boys:** GER rose from 126% to 127%.

High GER reflects overage/underage enrolment issues.

Net Enrolment Rate (NER): % of primary-age children enrolled.

•**Girls:** NER fell from 93% (2023) to 92%.

•**Boys:** NER fell from 88% to 86%.

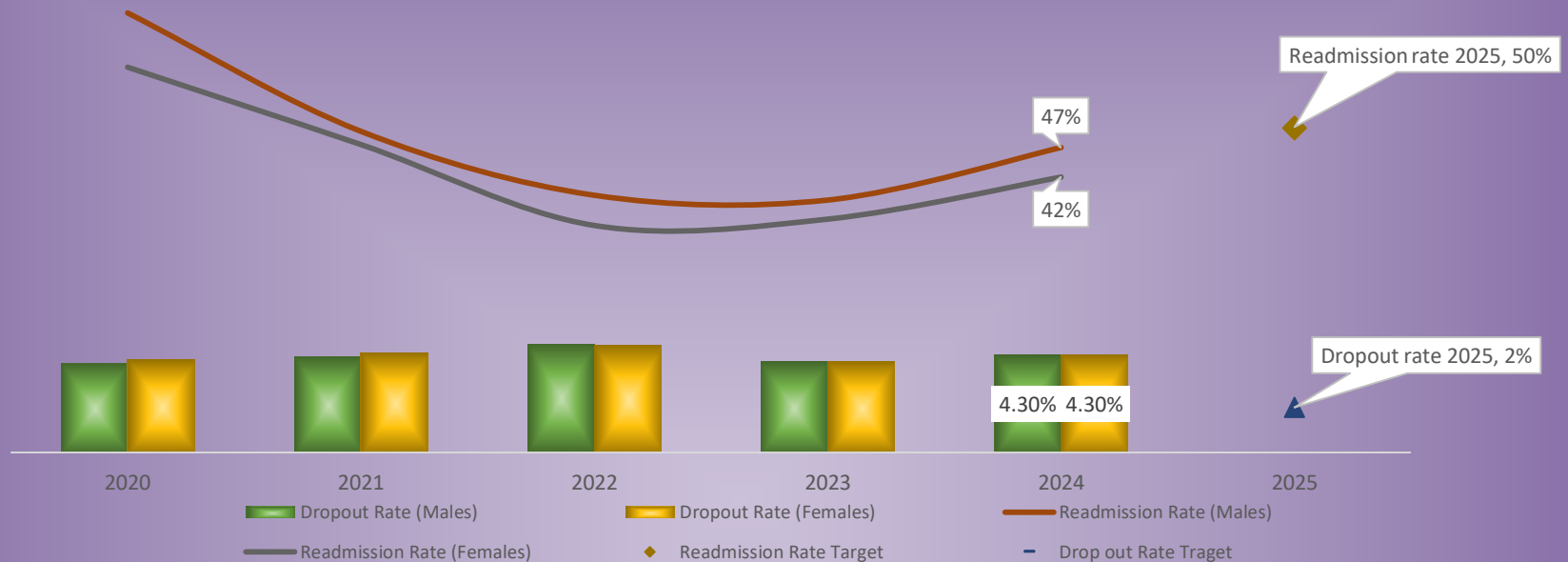
Decline suggests socio-economic challenges impacting age-appropriate attendance.

Next Steps:

•Prioritize age-appropriate advancement.

•Boost community engagement for timely enrolment; strengthen retention programs for boys and girls.

Dropout and Re-admission Rates



Dropout Rate

- Increased from 4% to 4.3% in 2024.
- **Males:** 112,311 dropouts.
- **Females:** 114,791 dropouts.
- *Primary reasons: Poverty, truancy, family obligations.*

Re-admission Rates

- **Females:** Increased from 36% in 2023 to 42% in 2024.
- **Males:** Improved from 38.9% in 2023 to 47% in 2024.
- *Higher re-admission rates show success in re-engagement initiatives.*

Strategic Interventions

- **Expand School Feeding Programs** to reduce hunger-related dropouts.
- Enhance conditional cash transfers to support economically burdened families.
- **Psycho-social Support:** Implement counselling and after-school programs to prevent truancy and disengagement.

Repetition Rates

Repetition Rate Overview (2020-2024):

- **Overall Repetition Rate:** Increased to 23.75% from a 22.7% NESIP baseline.
- *Target: Reduce to 14% by 2025 (NESIP midterm goal).*

Key Statistics by Standard:

- **Standard 1:** High repetition at 36% in 2023 and 2024.
- **Standard 5:** Peaked at 27% in 2023, slight drop to 26% in 2024.
- **Standard 8:** Rose from 15% (2021) to 18% in 2024.

Challenges:

- **School Readiness:** Limited early childhood preparation affecting Standard 1.
- **Transitional Grades:** High repetition in Standard 5 due to academic challenges.
- **Insufficient Learning Support:** Lack of individual support for struggling students.

Recommendations:

- **Enhance Early Childhood Education:** Focus on school readiness programs.
- **Targeted Learning Support:** Provide tutoring and mentoring, especially in Standard 5.
- **Resource Allocation:** Direct resources to standards with high repetition.
- **Psycho-social Interventions:** Offer counselling to address social barriers.

Completion Rates

Completion Rate Trends (2019-2024):

- **2019:** 52% males, 51% females.
- **2024:** Decrease to 43% males, 46% females.
- *Widening gender gap with boys at a disadvantage, highlighting the need for targeted support.*

Barriers to Completion:

- **Reasons for Dropout:** Poverty, family responsibilities, and lack of male role models impact boys.
- **Learning Environment:** Inconsistent support and limited resources hinder completion

Strategic Recommendations:

- **Gender-Specific Initiatives:**
 - *For Boys:* Mentorship programs and positive learning environments.
 - *For Girls:* Strengthen retention efforts and address socio-cultural barriers.
- **Community Engagement:** Promote the importance of education through awareness campaigns.



Progress in Community-Led Classroom Construction

Community-led classrooms are crucial for *enhancing access to education*, especially in *remote and underserved areas*.

- This initiative fosters *community ownership*, as local communities are directly involved in planning, constructing, and managing school infrastructure.
- Since the beginning of *NESIP in 2020*, significant progress has been made towards classroom construction: By the end of *2023*, a total of *2,680 classrooms* had been constructed.
 - ***In 2024, an additional 668 classrooms have been built.***
- The government aims to construct *10,900 community-led classrooms* across Malawi by *December 2025*.

Major Next steps:

- **Government and Community Collaboration:**
 - Continued strengthening of partnerships between the *government and local communities* to enhance efficiency and coordination in the construction of community led classrooms.

Quality of Teaching and Learning in Primary Education

Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) and Pupil-Qualified Teacher Ratio (PQTR):

- **PTR Trends (2020-2024):** PTR started at *65 in 2020*, dropped to *59 in 2021 and 2022*, but increased back to *65 by 2024*.
- **PQTR Trends:** PQTR started at *68 in 2020*, dropped to *62 in 2021*, and rose to *65 in 2024*, indicating challenges in *maintaining quality teaching*.
- The current PTR and PQTR highlight inconsistencies in teacher allocation across the education system.
- **Disparities in Resource Allocation:**
- **Urban vs. Rural:**
 - Urban areas have a PTR of *40.66*, while *most-remote areas* have a high PTR of *73.56*.
- Rural areas are particularly underserved, with a need for *better teacher allocation* to reduce disparities in access to quality education.
- **Key Strategies for Improving Teaching Quality:**
 - Prioritize *teacher allocation* in remote areas to bring PTR closer to *NESIP targets*.
 - Enhance *professional development programs*, rural areas to improve teaching quality.
 - Provide *learning materials and mentoring* to teachers, especially in regions with high PTR.

Textbook Accessibility

- **English and Chichewa Textbooks:**
 - **Lower Standards (Std 1-2):** The ratio is relatively adequate, with a ratio of *1.59 to 1.66* for English and Chichewa.
 - **Middle Standards (Std 5):** Sharp increase to *10.89 for English* and *11.75 for Chichewa* in Standard 5.
 - **Upper Standards (Std 8):** The ratio improves again, decreasing to *3.82 for English* and *4.26 for Chichewa*.
- **Mathematics Textbooks:**
 - **Standard 3:** The ratio is *5.92* and gradually improves to *4.46* by Standard 8.
- **Challenges with Textbook Availability:**
- High textbook ratios, particularly in *middle standards*, indicate *shortages and increased demand*.
- Limited access to textbooks negatively impacts learning outcomes, especially in under-resourced schools.
- **Next steps for Improving Pupil-Textbook Ratio:**
 - **Ongoing Efforts:** The government, with support from *Development Partners*, is printing and distributing textbooks to achieve the *targeted 1:1 ratio in various subjects*.
 - Implement *textbook management systems* to ensure effective tracking and equitable distribution.
 - We need to Prioritize *textbook distribution* to schools with higher ratios to ensure equitable access across the system.

Classroom Infrastructure and Pupil-Classroom Ratio (PpCR)

•**2020:** 120 pupils per classroom (above target).



2022: Improved to 100 pupils per classroom.



2024: Increased again to 105, indicating persistent overcrowding.

Impact of Overcrowded Classrooms:

- Reduced student engagement and limited individualized instruction.
- Overcrowding due to rising enrolment without sufficient classroom expansion.

Next Steps to Reduce PpCR:

- **Classroom Construction:** Accelerate building in high-demand areas.
- **Resource Allocation:** Prioritize areas with the highest PpCR.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- Collaborate with government, NGOs, and donors for funding.
- Focus on renovating classrooms to meet climate-smart standards for durability.



School Improvement and Governance

School Improvement Plans (SIPs):

- Essential for continuous improvement and decentralizing education management.
- **2023/24 Progress:** 82% of schools developed and implemented SIPs & 64% participated in PSIP refresher courses.

School Improvement Grants (SIG):

- **Funding Support:** All primary schools received SIG funds in 2023/24, enabling SIP implementation.
- **Impact:** Grants support infrastructure upgrades and essential learning materials.

Decentralized Governance & Community Engagement:

- **Mother Groups:** Active in 76.6% of schools (up from 2023), focusing on reducing absenteeism, menstrual health management, and ending child marriages.
- **Capacity Building:** Ongoing training for school leaders and community stakeholders to strengthen school improvement practices.

PSLCE Results and Literacy/Numeracy Proficiency

Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE) Results:

- **Pass Rates (2020-2024):**
 - **2020:** 83.8% pass rate, with 270,557 candidates examined.
 - **2023:** Pass rate improved to 87.7%, the highest in the five-year period (2020-2024).
 - **2024:** Pass rate slightly decreased to 86.2%, with 252,668 candidates examined.
- **Gender Disparity:**
 - In 2024, **males** pass rate of 89.54%, while **females** had a pass rate of 82.92%

Literacy and Numeracy Proficiency:

- **Common Zonal Test (CZT) Results:**
 - **Standard 4 English:** Proficiency increased from 30% (2023) to 43% (2024), progressing towards the 50% NESIP target.
 - **Standard 4 Chichewa:** Reached the 50% target in 2024, showing significant progress.
 - **Mathematics in Standard 4:** Declined from 26% (2023) to 23% (2024), needing targeted interventions.
- **Participation in CZT:**
 - All primary schools in 2023/24 participated in CZT.

Next steps:

- **Support for Female Students:** Implement *targeted interventions* to support female students in improving their exam performance.
- **Strengthen Mathematics Support:** Provide additional *teacher training* and *student tutoring* in Mathematics to reverse declining trends in proficiency.
- Continue to **expand participation in the Common Zonal Test (CZT)** to assess and improve literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Next steps

- **Expand Pre-primary education** to enhance *school readiness*
- **Continued Construction and Maintenance of school Infrastructure**
- **Prioritize *teacher allocation*** in underserved areas to ensure a balanced Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR).
- Implement **continuous teacher training programs** to *enhance teaching quality*.
- **Gender-Specific Interventions:** Focus on reducing dropouts through *male mentorship programs and*; for girls address socio-cultural barriers, improve *retention efforts*, and provide support through *Mother Groups* and school engagement.
- Expand *conditional cash transfers* and school feeding programs to reduce the economic pressures that lead to dropout.
- Strengthen partnerships with *local communities, NGOs, and development partners* to enhance *school governance* and secure funding.
- Support schools in developing and implementing *School Improvement Plans (SIPs)*, and ensure School Improvement Grants (SIGs) reach all eligible schools.
- Build the capacity of *Mother Groups* to support student attendance, provide psycho-social support, and track learner absenteeism effectively.
- **Implement *digital data collection systems*** to monitor progress, enforce teacher time-on-task, and ensure timely interventions.



Conclusion and Path Forward

Achievements:

- Despite the challenges, progress has been made in *expanding community-led classrooms*, improving *gender parity*, and increasing participation in *School Improvement Plans (SIPs)*.

Persistent Challenges:

- Key challenges remain in *reducing dropout rates*, addressing *overcrowded classrooms*, improving *teacher allocation*, and ensuring *textbook availability*.

Call for Coordinated Action:

- All stakeholders, including *government*, *local communities*, *development partners*, and *NGOs*, to work together to achieve *NESIP 2025 targets*.

Focus on Sustainability and Equity:

- We need to ensure that all interventions are focused on *sustainable impact*, particularly in rural areas.
- Emphasize the commitment to *equity*, ensuring no child is left behind—regardless of gender or socio-economic status.

The End.