

Suriname has made important progress in expanding access to education, achieving near-universal primary enrollment, with more than 90% of children attending primary school (Arias Ortiz et al., 2024). Yet the system continues to face deep structural challenges related to efficiency, student trajectories, and learning quality. Education investment remains below the regional average; it has decreased in recent years and may further constrain improvement in education outcomes. Secondary and tertiary completion rates are low and highly unequal while learning outcomes remain weak—particularly in mathematics and language. Multilingualism partly explain these low learning results, given that Dutch is the language of instruction and many are raised in a different language at home.

These challenges are interconnected and carry important implications for Suriname's future productivity, equity, and competitiveness. Addressing them will require a sustained focus on three priorities: ensuring adequate and efficient investment, keeping students in school through completion, and improving learning outcomes at all levels of the system.



Three Strategic Pillars



EFFICIENCY

Optimize the use of public resources by strengthening planning, accountability, and equity in the allocation of education spending.



TRAJECTORIES

Ensure that all children and young people, especially those from rural, Indigenous, or vulnerable communities, can access and remain in the education system.



QUALITY

Improve learning outcomes through better teaching practices, appropriate materials, functional infrastructure, and a safe and inclusive school environment.



Suriname in Data



The education system in numbers

Investment and efficiency¹

Education spending:

- **2.9%** of GDP (vs. 4.1% Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC))
- **7.5%** of Education as share of public expenditure (vs. 14.8% LAC)

Basic and digital infrastructure²

- **65%** schools do not have internet connection
- **20%** schools do not have access to water, electricity, or both

Completion rates (2022)³

- **87.3%** primary (vs 98% Caribbean and 97,5% LAC)
- **65.5%** in lower secondary vs. 84.1% LAC
- **41.7%** in upper secondary vs. 69.6% LAC
- **9.6%** in tertiary vs. 19% LAC

Poverty level (2025)

- **20.9%** live below the poverty line (US\$8.30/day)⁴
- **46%** faces food insecurity. A double burden of malnutrition, with high obesity rates alongside persistent anemia⁵

Learning (2022)

- **75%** of students of 8 years old lack basic skills in math
- **64%** lack basic skills in language⁶
- **49%** of students of 15 years old lack basic skills in math
- **12%** of students of 15 years old lack basic skills in language⁶
- **91.3%** of students aged 7-14 from the interior do not speak Dutch at home (vs. 37.3% on average in the country)⁷

Skills Mismatch

- **75%** of employers' express difficulties recruiting employees with the right skills⁸

Source: ¹UIS UNESCO (2023); Data from Suriname is from 2023 and LAC average is circa 2024 ²(MOESC, 2019); ³CIMA (2022) for Suriname and CIMA (2024) for LAC; ⁴World Bank (2025); ⁵Schools Meals Coalition (2024); ⁶Examination Bureau (2020); ⁷UNICEF's MICs (2019), ⁸(WB-IDB, 2024).

Note: Suriname's education system serves more than 193,354 students across all levels with 65,182 students in primary education, 37,901 in lower secondary, 18,622 in upper secondary, and 7,563 in higher education — including special education¹.

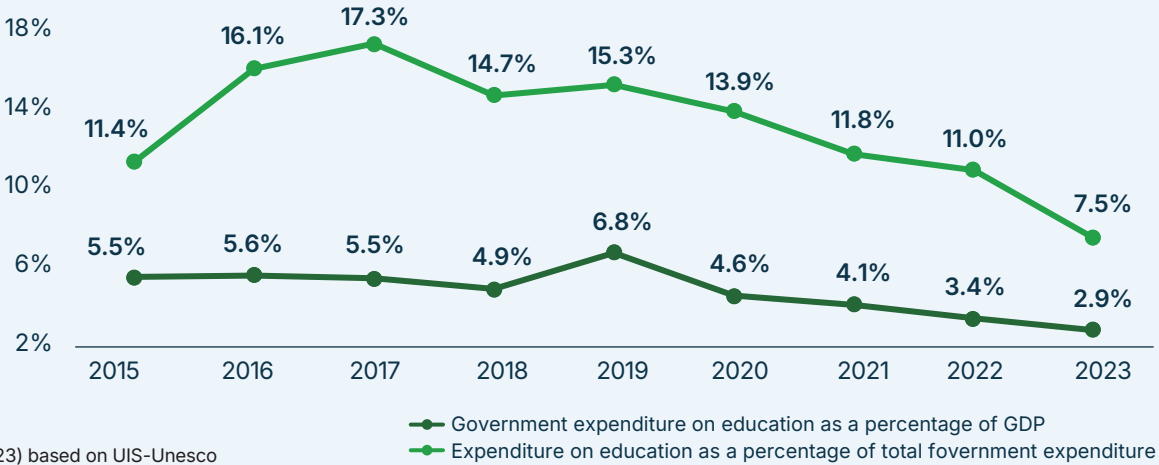
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Investment and efficiency

- Education investment (2.9%) remains below the Caribbean (3.6%), while its outcomes are comparable to much poorer nations: for example, tertiary enrollment mirrors countries like Zimbabwe (WB-IDB, 2024).
- In parallel, education investment has declined in recent years, which may further constrain progress in education outcomes. This decline coincided with a severe fiscal crisis that led to the approval of an International Monetary Fund Extended Fund Facility program in December 2021, aimed at restoring sustainability through fiscal consolidation, including measures to contain the public wage bill while protecting vulnerable households through expanded social assistance (IMF, 2021; 2024).

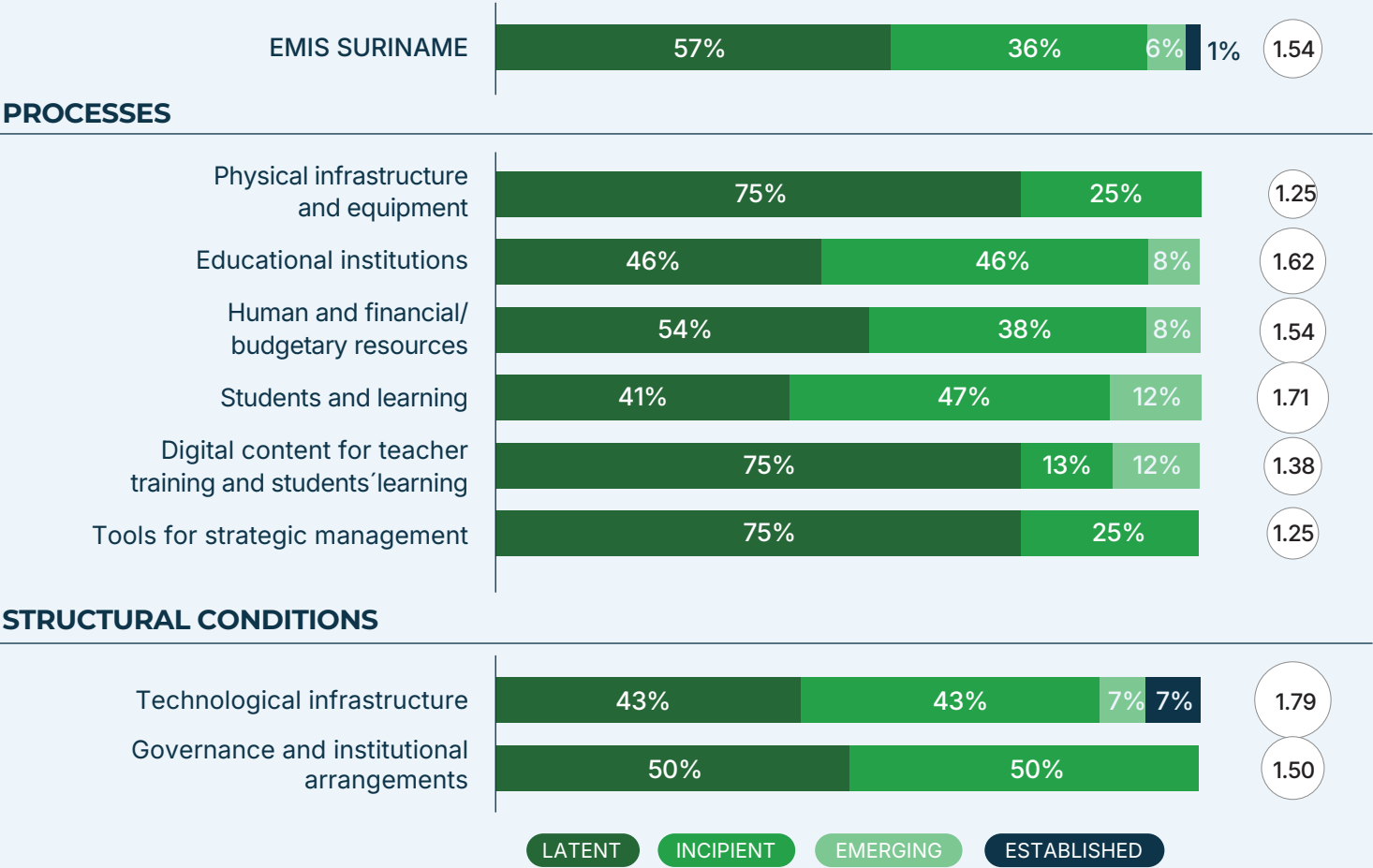
HISTORICAL EDUCATION SPENDING (2015-2023)



Source: CIMA (2023) based on UIS-Unesco

- Several structural factors undermine spending effectiveness and mobilization, including weak education management and information system (EMIS), and difficulty deploying qualified teachers to remote areas (WB-IDB, 2024).
- The education system currently lacks the instruments needed for adequate planning, informed decision-making, and systematic monitoring of results. Suriname's EMIS is fragmented across student, teacher, infrastructure, finance, and human resource systems, with limited staffing capacity and no platforms for content development or distribution (Dewees, 2020). Without these foundations, it is difficult to allocate resources where they are most needed, track whether interventions are working or build the evidence base for sustained policy improvement.
- Teacher salaries are also low relative to other public sector professions. As of 2025, monthly pay ranges from approximately USD 300 to USD 575, and the highest-paid teachers earn only 69% of what comparable civil servants receive (Government of Suriname, 2024, Annexes 2C and 3C) — a gap that undermines the recruitment, retention and effectiveness of educators.

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION SYSTEM'S LEVEL OF MATURITY

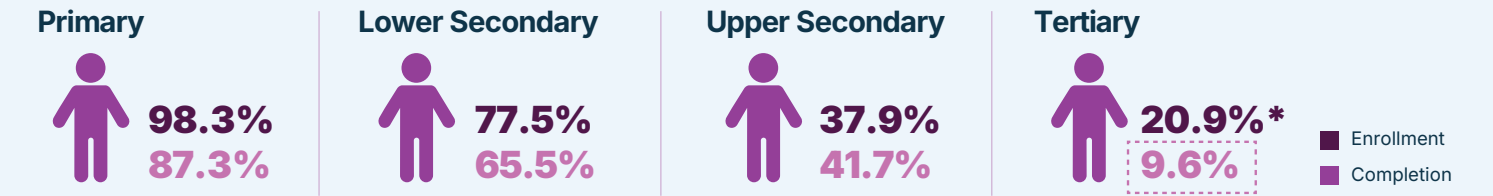


Source: Dewees (2020) References: Percentages represent the share of EMIS subprocesses at each maturity level: Latent (1), Incipient (2), Emerging (3), and Established (4). The values shown in the circles correspond to the average maturity scores, measured on a scale from 1 to 4. Suriname's overall score of 1.54 indicates a maturity level between Latent and Incipient.

Trajectories

- Suriname's education system faces a structural attrition challenge: while primary enrollment remains relatively high, participation drops sharply at successive levels, and completion rates follow the same downward trajectory.

HISTORICAL EDUCATION SPENDING (2015-2023)

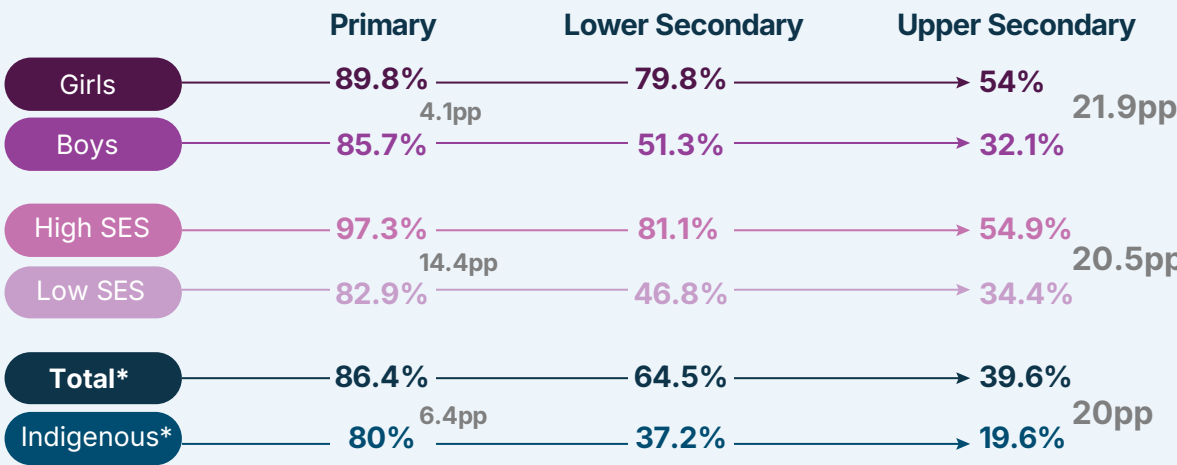


Source: Source: CIMA (2022)
*While the indicator is representative of the country, the construction of a cross-country comparable indicator, following the CIMA harmonization framework, does not meet the sample size required to ensure statistically robust inferences across the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Inequalities persist across gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geography

- Girls' completion is significantly higher rates than boys, with completion gaps reaching approximately 21.9 percentage points (p.p.), as observed in the Caribbean (Thailinger et.al., 2024).
- Important inequalities also persist across socioeconomic groups, with differences in completion rates between the highest and lowest income quintiles reaching 20.5 p.p.
- Educational disparities are pronounced among Indigenous populations, whose education completion rates are approximately 20 p.p. lower than those of the rest of the population.

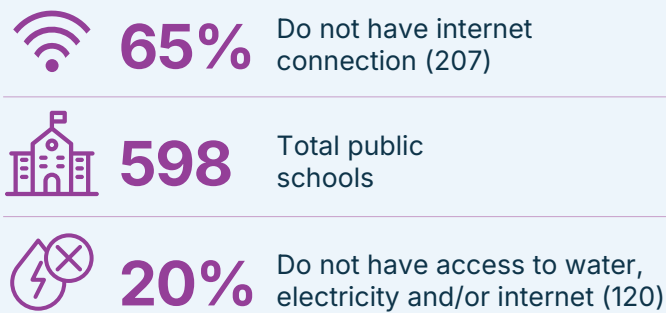
COMPLETION RATES BY GENDER, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND INDIGENOUS ORIGIN (2022)



Source: CIMA (2022). *While the indicator is representative of the country, the construction of a cross-country comparable indicator, following the CIMA harmonization framework, does not meet the sample size required to ensure statistically robust inferences across the Latin American and Caribbean region.

School Dropout: Patterns, Causes, and Gender Gaps

- Among youth aged 18–24 who have not completed upper secondary education, economic constraints are the main driver of dropout (32%), followed by lack of interest (22%) and care responsibilities (4%) (CIMA, 2022).
- Gender differences point to distinct vulnerabilities. Male students are more likely to cite lack of interest (26% vs. 14% among females), while female students are more than twice as likely to report care responsibilities (7% vs. 3%), reflecting unequal caregiving burdens.
- These factors account for 58% of reported cases (CIMA, 2022). The remaining 42% is not disaggregated, but LAC evidence highlights other structural factors, including poor academic performance, grade repetition, school quality and access barriers, teenage pregnancy, and early labor market entry, which disproportionately affect disadvantaged youth (ECLAC, 2023; IDB, 2022).
- Internet access also varies sharply by location: interior schools are more than four times as likely to lack internet access as urban schools (61% vs. 14%), highlighting a clear connectivity divide.

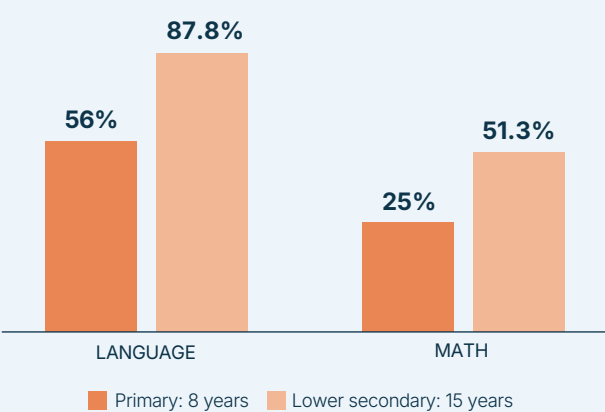




Low quality and relevance

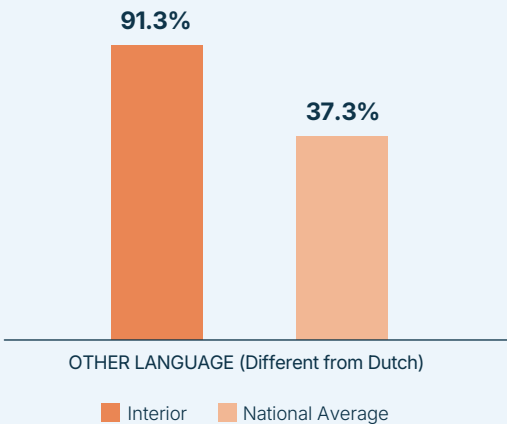
- Learning outcomes remain concerning across the education cycle, particularly in mathematics. While outcomes improve among students who remain in the system and complete lower secondary education, only around half of students achieve proficiency in mathematics by age 15. These results likely overestimate system performance, as they exclude students who dropped out before reaching this level. In addition, these figures are not internationally comparable, as Suriname has not participated in PISA.
- Children in rural districts have lower performance in math and language than those in rural areas.
- Challenges in language learning are shaped by Suriname’s multilingual context: in the interior, most students aged 7-14 do not speak Dutch at home.

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH SATISFACTORY SCORES IN LANGUAGE AND MATH



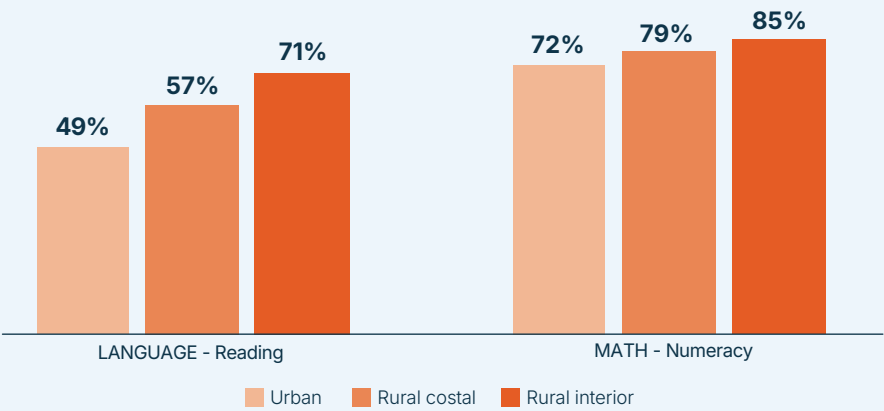
Source: Examination Bureau (2022)

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AGED 7-14 WHO DO NOT SPEAK DUTCH AT HOME



Source: UNICEF’s MICS (2019)

SHARE OF CHILDREN (AGE 7-14) WHO DO NOT HAVE FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS



Source: Graph from UNICEF’s MICS (2019)



Firms demand higher quality and levels of education

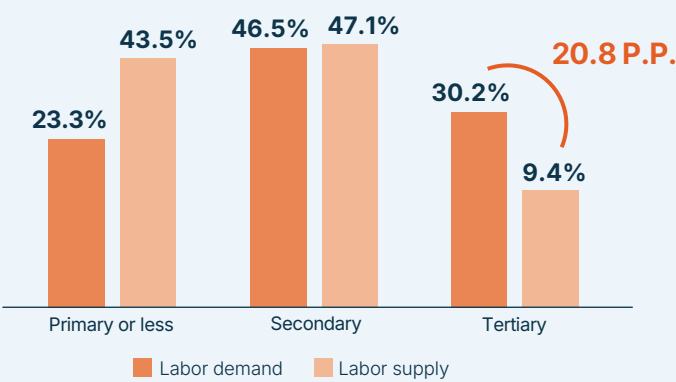
- According to firms, the main cause of skill shortages is the quality of education and training provided.
- In this context, there is a mismatch of 20.8 percentage points between the qualifications held by workers and the level of education demanded by firms (Suriname Poverty and Equity Assessment, 2024).

COMPANIES’ PERSPECTIVES ON SKILLS SHORTAGES



Source: Suriname Poverty and Equity Assessment (2024)

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION ACHIEVED



Source: Suriname Poverty and Equity Assessment (2024)



EFFICIENCY

- Increase investment in educational infrastructure, connectivity, teacher salaries, and education management systems to strengthen system capacity and resilience.
- Strengthen education information systems to improve data availability, sector diagnosis, and evidence-based policymaking.

TRAJECTORIES

- Prioritize retention strategies, particularly for vulnerable students in secondary and tertiary education.
- Expand scholarship programs to address economic barriers to school completion, the leading driver of dropout.
- Align secondary and tertiary pathways with labor market demand to ensure curriculum relevance and create re-engagement pathways, particularly to prevent male dropout.
- Expand school feeding programs to reduce malnutrition and promote cognitive development.

QUALITY

- Prioritize foundational learning in mathematics and Dutch language acquisition to strengthen future learning.
- Improve teacher working conditions, attraction, allocation, and equitable distribution to ensure qualified teachers reach the students who need them most.
- Invest in continuous, classroom-focused teacher professional development to improve instructional quality and learning outcomes.

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