



The Program on Governance  
and Local Development

# The Tunisian Local Governance Performance Index: Selected Findings on Education

Report  
November 2015

SERIES 2015:1

**Yale**

The Program on Governance  
and Local Development



UNIVERSITY OF  
GOTHENBURG

# 1. Introduction: The Challenge of Education in Tunisia\*

Tunisia has long recognized the importance of education for its development. The Education Act of 2002 deems education a “national priority” and makes schooling compulsory for children ages 6 to 16. Education is not only a “national right” for all citizens but “incumbent upon the citizens and the community.”<sup>1</sup> Despite good intentions, however, progress has been sluggish in the past decade. In international TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) tests, Tunisians scored considerably lower than the global average.<sup>2</sup> Tunisia must continue to invest efforts in enhancing education if it is to meet its goals.

This report aims to assist citizens, policymakers, and educators in improving education by providing a snapshot of citizens’ experience with schools, drawn from the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI), described below. The LGPI reveals encouraging and worrisome characteristics of Tunisia’s education. As depicted in Figure 1, the Tunisian education infrastructure is generally good: nearly two-thirds of students attend a school that their parents consider to be well built, and very few students are placed in overcrowded classrooms. However, only one in three parents believe that his or her child attends a school with clean toilets. One in five students (20%) has a teacher who is frequently absent, and the parent questionnaire reveals that 70% of students rely on private tutors. Simply put, there is evidence that the physical infrastructure is generally good, but the Tunisian education system is still facing important challenges related to teaching quality and maintaining a clean school environment.<sup>3</sup>

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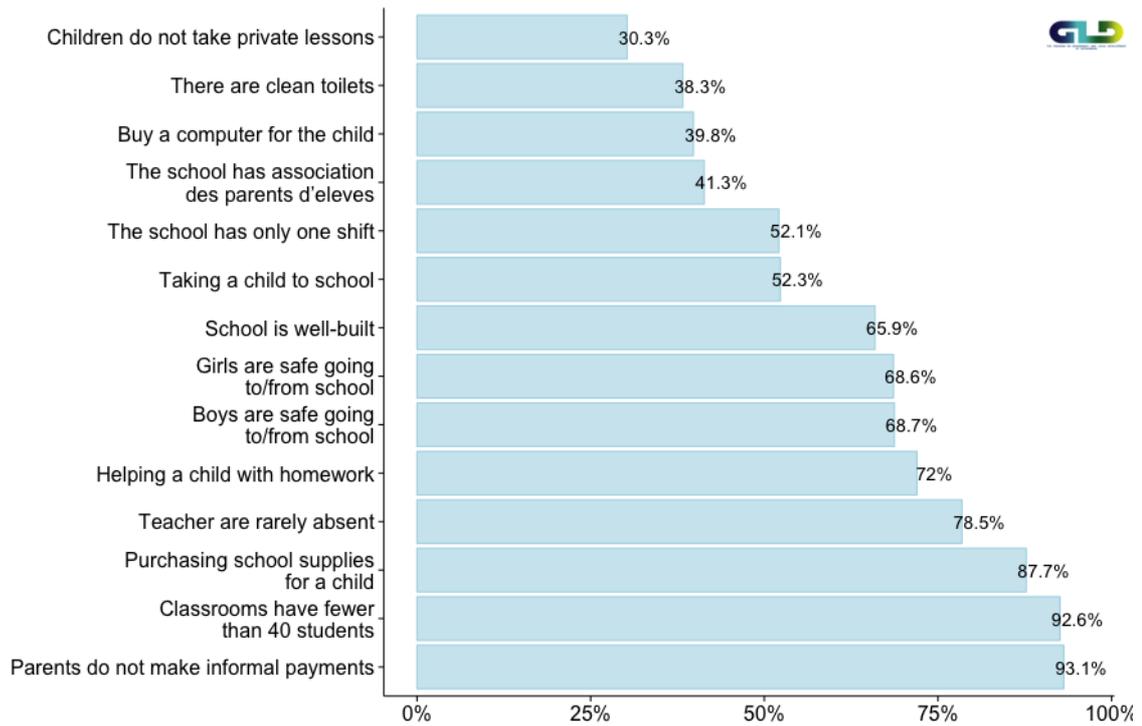
\* We are grateful for the financial support of the Moulay Hicham Foundation, Yale University, the World Bank, the Carnegie Foundation Centennial Scholars Grant and the Swedish National Research Council. We also thank the team of interviewers and researchers from MAZAM for the survey implementation and without whom no data would ever have been collected. All errors are those of the authors of this report: Lindsay Benstead, Kristen Kao, Adam Harris, Pierre Landry, Ellen Lust, and Natalia Stepanova.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education and Training, Republic of Tunisia. “The Development of Education National Report: 2004-2008.” [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National\\_Reports/ICE\\_2008/tunisia\\_NR08\\_efa.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2008/tunisia_NR08_efa.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/11/01/will-the-arab-spring-lead-to-a-revolution-in-education/>

<sup>3</sup> One explanation may be that the mechanisms for voice, trust, and incentives for teachers, policymakers, and students/parents to invest fully in education are lacking. For further discussion, see Brix, H., Lust, E., and Woolcock, M (2015). *Trust, Voice, and Incentives: Learning from Local Success Stories in Service Delivery in the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

In the remainder of the report, we delve in more detail into these and other issues that citizens, policymakers and educators in Tunisia face. We begin with a short description of the LGPI, from which these findings are drawn. We then address access to education, the quality of education, citizens’ challenges, and their strategies for overcoming obstacles. We conclude by considering the implications of these findings for Tunisians as they address these challenges in the future.



**Figure 1: Overview of Education Findings<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>4</sup> For this figure, a number of indicators were reversed, so that in the table, a higher percentage indicates better performance. The survey asks if a student’s teacher is frequently absent and if teachers favor students who attend after-school study sessions. However, in this figure we indicate the percent of teachers who are “generally present” and teachers who do not favor those who attend after-school sessions. And finally, we ask each parent if their child’s classroom has 40 or more students, but here we report the percent of children whose classroom has fewer than 40 students.

## 2. The Local Governance Performance Index

The analysis presented in this report draws from the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) implemented in Tunisia in February–March 2015. The LGPI provides a new approach to the measurement, analysis, and improvement of local governance. The tool aims to help countries collect, assess, and benchmark detailed information concerning issues of local and public-sector performance and service delivery to citizens and businesses. The methodology uses heavily clustered surveys to uncover important local-level variation in governance and service provision. The goal is to provide information that helps to pinpoint, diagnose, and foster discussion regarding areas of need; formulate policy recommendations; provide a benchmark for assessing policy implementation; and allow us to examine the factors driving good governance and quality service provision.

The Program on Governance and Local Development (GLD) at Yale University designed and implemented the LGPI with generous funding from the Moulay Hicham Foundation and Yale University.<sup>5</sup> The survey was fielded in six of Tunisia's 24 governorates, focusing on three municipalities in each governorate (See Table 1).<sup>6</sup> Households within each governorate were randomly sampled using probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling, and respondents within households were chosen randomly from among those over 18 years old using the Kish selection grid. There were 3,659 complete interviews, approximately 200 in each municipality. The survey was implemented under the oversight of Professor Dhafer Malouche, at the University of Carthage, by interviewers who were trained by the GLD team in conjunction with MAZAM.

The Program on Governance and Local Development at Yale University designed the pilot LGPI citizen household survey and implemented it in Tunisia in February 2015. The pilot study illustrates how the tool can help provide a comprehensive picture of service delivery and governance at the municipal level, identifying key areas of need,

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<sup>5</sup> Subsequent analyses and dissemination efforts have been funded by the World Bank and the Program on Governance and Local Development at Gothenburg (GLD-G), which is funded by the Swedish Research Council.

<sup>6</sup> Households within each governorate were randomly sampled, using PPS by points of light data (due to the fact that the last census was conducted in 2004 and there appear to be considerable changes in population distribution in the last decade).

highlighting significant inequalities, and shedding light on the relationship between governance and service delivery.

Governorate	Municipality		
Bizerte	Bizerte Nord	Bizerte Sud	Menzel Jemil
Mahdia	Mahdia	Ksour Essaf	Souassi
Monastir	Monastir	Tebolba	Moknine
Sfax	Sfax Sud	Sfax Ville	Sekiet Eddayer
Siliana	Siliana Ville	Bouarada	Gaafour
Tunis	La Marsa	Cite Khadhra	Jebel Jloud

**Table 1. Municipalities included in the LGPI survey, Tunisia 2015.**

The education module asks respondents to describe the experiences of each child in their home. The survey gathered data on each child’s school fees, the type of school (private or public), whether the child has had any problems at school, whether the child misses school, and whether the child is still attending school (to measure dropout rates). We also measure the quality of education each child receives. Further, we ask about experiences at the child’s school, such as teacher absenteeism. This individual-level investigation of each child’s experiences allows us to estimate the aggregate provision of education in each municipality.

### 3. Accessing Education

Successful education requires first that students remain enrolled in school. In Tunisia today, the LGPI found surprisingly high dropout rates. Given the average dropout rate of 10.4% across the six governorates recorded in the sample, we estimate that approximately 178,341 school-age (up to age 17) children in Tunisia have left school. This is somewhat higher than the figures from the Tunisian Ministry of Education, which estimates that 107,000 children aged 6 to 16 were not attending school in 2012–2013. The discrepancy may be due to the use of a slightly higher cutoff (17 years) in the LGPI.

Dropout rates vary considerably by gender, age, and class. Figure 2 shows that at all ages, except 6, 8, and 9, boys are more likely to drop out of school than girls. The general trend in dropout rates is that children are more likely to drop out the older they get, but a surprisingly large portion of both boys and girls are still not enrolled at the age of 6. Boys are more likely to drop out than girls regardless of class. Interestingly, both the lower- and upper-middle classes have the highest dropout rates (see Figure 3).

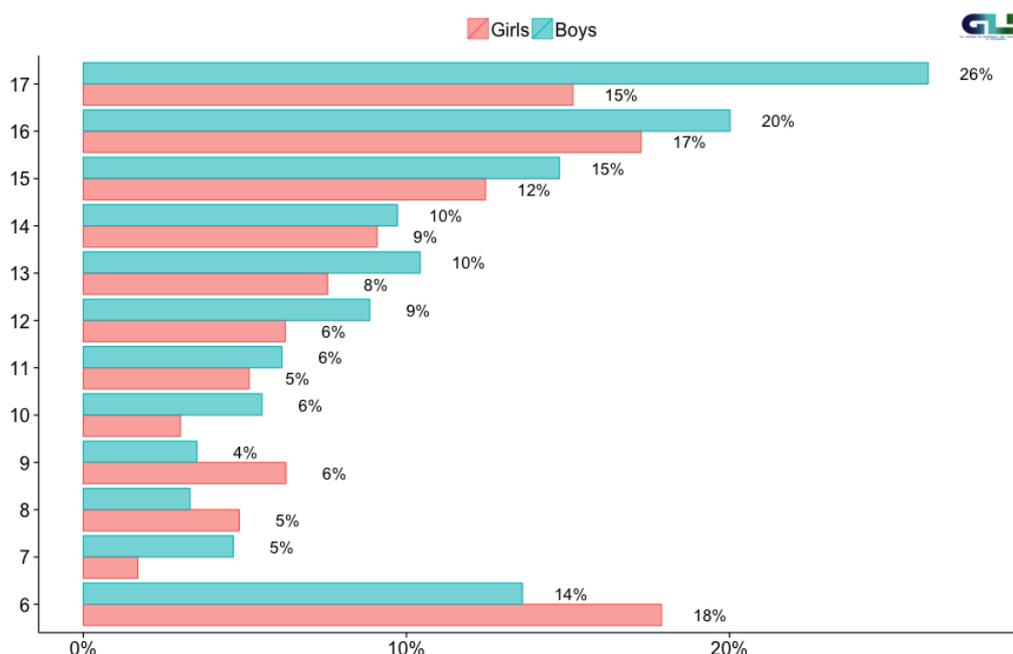
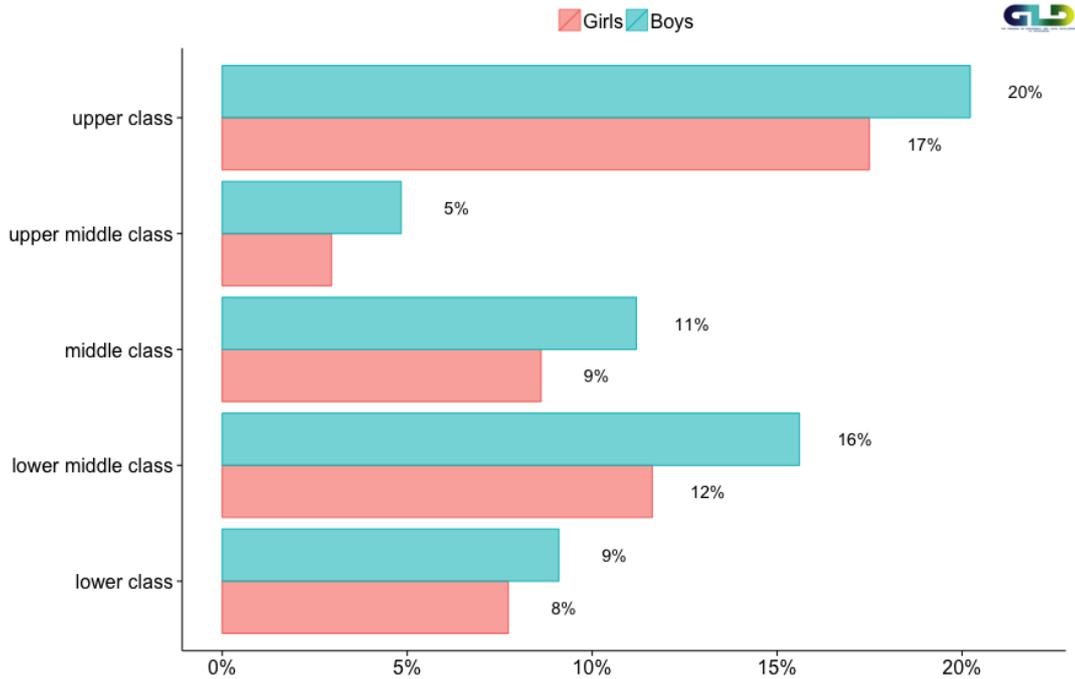
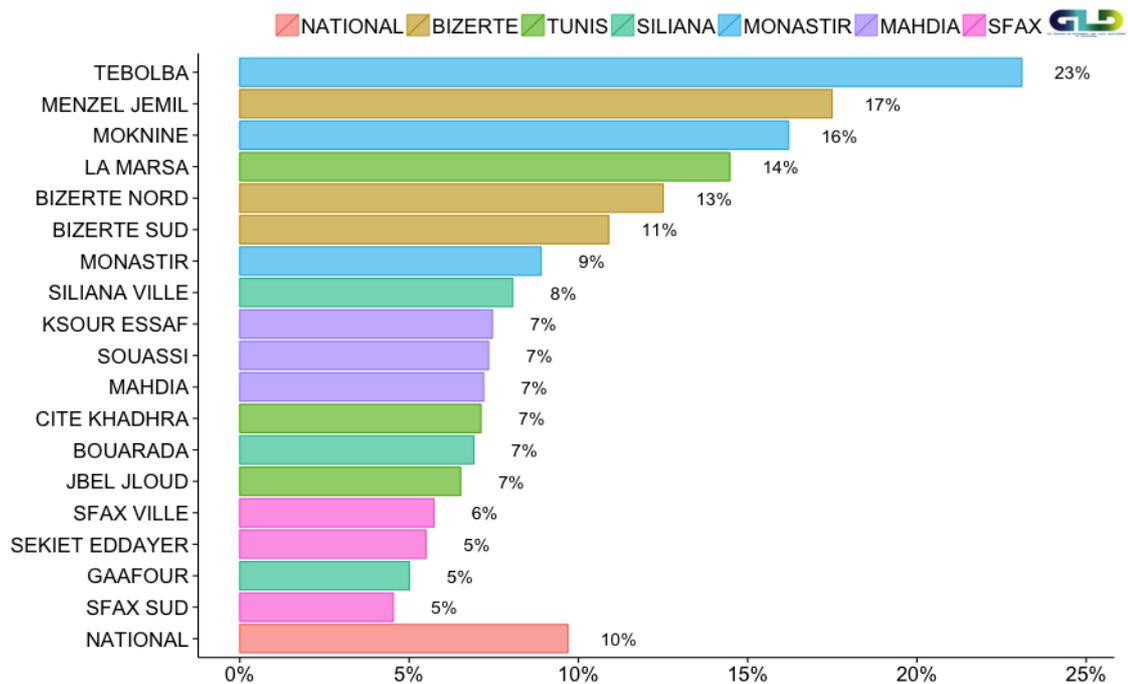


Figure 2. Dropout Rates by Age and Gender



**Figure 3. Dropout Rates, by Gender and Social Class**

There is important municipal variation in dropout rates. Overall, Tebolba, Menzel Jemil, Moknine and El Marsa have well-above-average dropout rates, while Sfax Sud has the lowest overall dropout rate, as shown in Figure 4. There is also considerable variation within governorates (as depicted in Figure 4). In Tunisia, for instance, El Marsa has an overall dropout rate of 14%, which is twice that of Cité El Khadra. In the governorate of Monastir, the rate in Tebolba and Moknine reaches 23% and 16% respectively, compared to just 9% in the governorate’s seat. On the other hand, there is much less variation in Sfax or Siliana, where dropout rates are both lower and more uniform across the governorate.

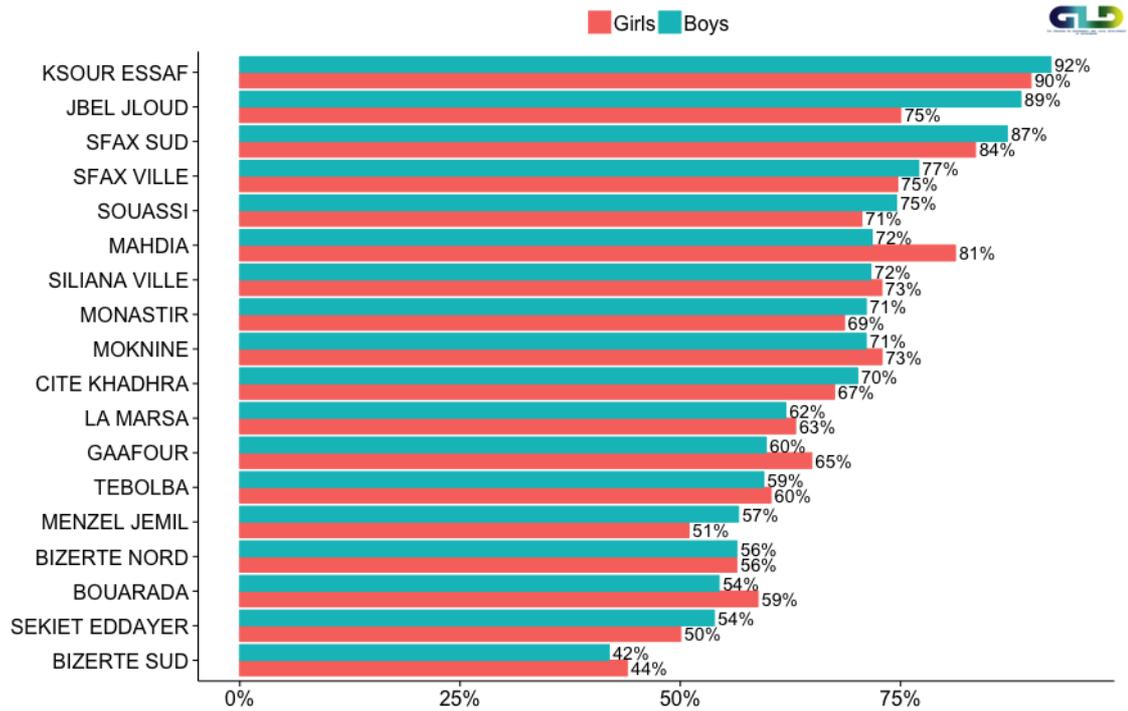


**Figure 4. Dropout Rates by Municipality (Delegation)**

When we look at the individual level, we find somewhat surprisingly that upper-class students are the most likely to leave school. Nineteen %, almost one in five leave school before age 18, compared to 11% for the middle class, 14% for the lower-middle class, and 7% for the lower class. More research is required to determine the paths that upper-class students take after leaving school, but the evidence suggests that economic need is not the sole reason that students drop out. The most likely point at which students leave school, not surprisingly, is between the ages of 15 and 18. The dropout rate is 15% for 15- to 18-year-olds, and only 7% for 11- to 15-year-olds.

In many countries, safety is an important issue affecting school attendance. If parents do not feel that their children can go to school safely, then children may miss out on a formal education. Nationally, 31% of parents of both boys and girls feel their children are *not* safe going to school. Lower-class families feel the most insecure; over 50% of parents of lower-class boys and girls feel their children are unsafe going to school. Parents of younger children are also more worried about safety. It is important to note that these are simply parental perceptions and not reports of actual security problems, though the perception of problems can prompt parents to keep their children from attending school freely.

Once again, there are important variations across governorates, and among municipalities within them, with regard to children’s safety. Bizerte Sud is seen as the least safe municipality for both boys and girls, and insecurity is widespread in all municipalities in Bizerte governorate. In contrast, in Siliana governorate, the parents in Siliana Ville and Gaafour feel that their children are safe going to school, while the same does not hold in Bou Arada (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Parents’ Perceptions of Children’s Safety Going to School**

## 4. Quality of Education

While Tunisian students' experience varies by municipality, the dimensions of school quality are correlated. Teachers are most likely to be absent in Moknine, Tebolba, and Madhia and least likely to be absent in Bou Arada (see Figure 6). Moknine also ranks high in terms of crowded classrooms, having schools with more than one shift, teacher absenteeism, and teacher favoritism. We see similar trends in Mahdia and Tebolba. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Cite Khadhra, Bizerte Sud, and Bizerte Nord have the least crowded classrooms, low multi-shifts reported, relatively infrequent teacher absenteeism, and low teacher favoritism. These general trends can also be seen in Figure 7, which combines these indicators into an education-quality index and plots the education-quality index for each municipality.

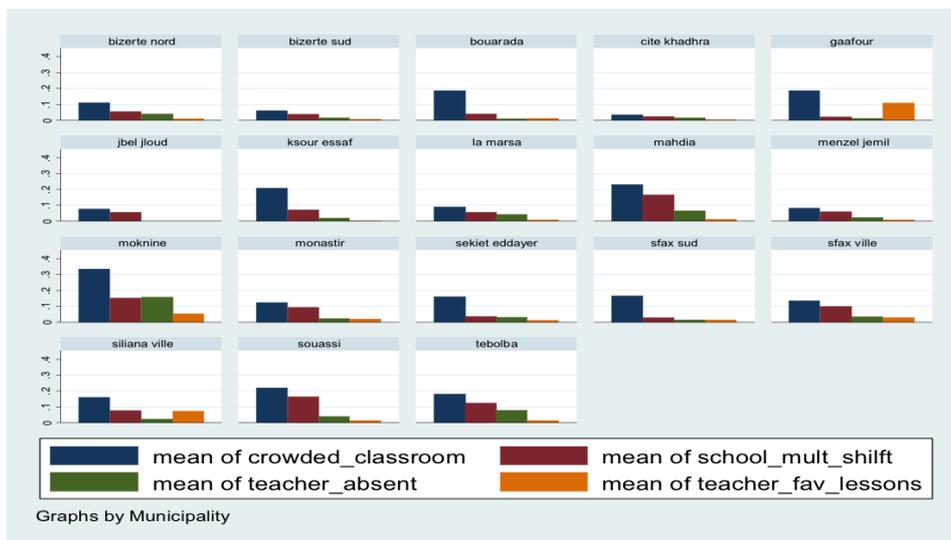
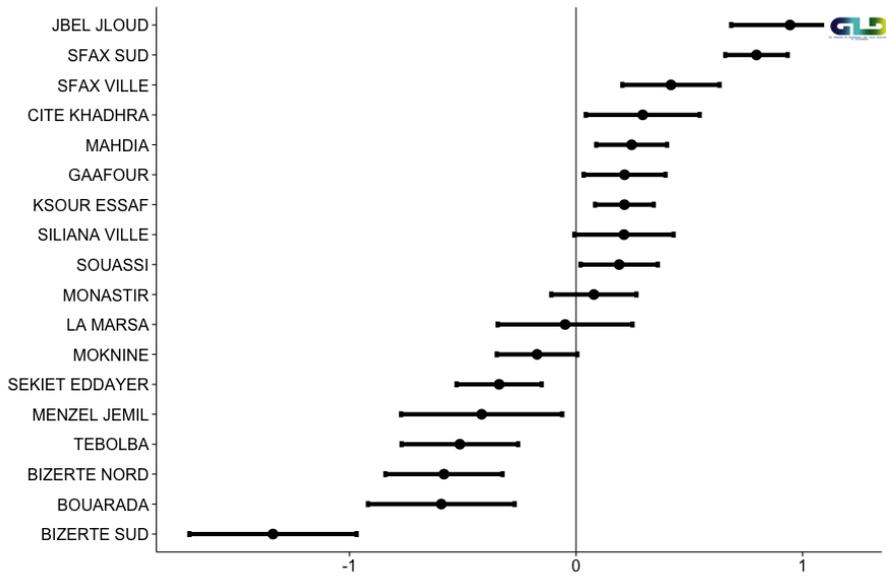
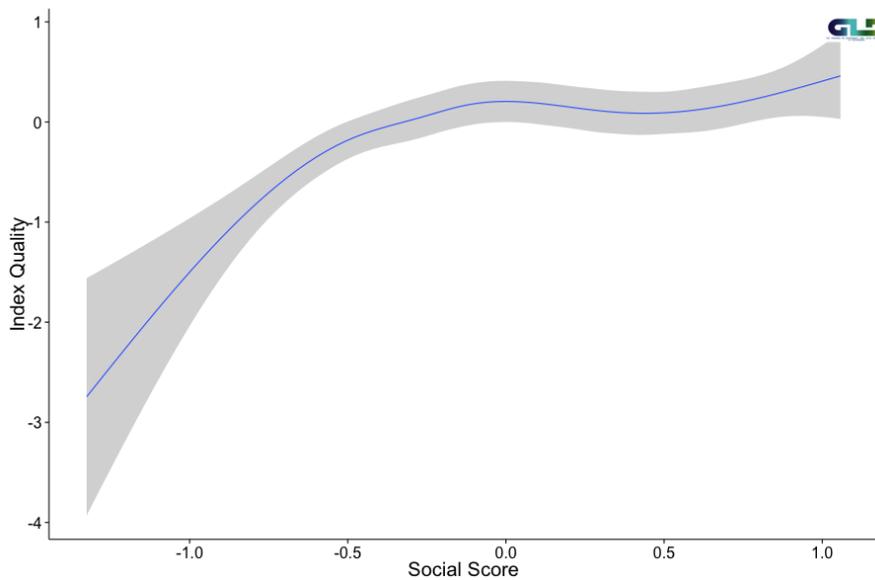


Figure 6. Various Indicators of Classroom Quality, by Municipality



**Figure 7. Education Quality Index by Municipality**

In addition, socioeconomic conditions appear to affect education quality. When the education quality index is graphed according to a socioeconomic score, developed based on the reported personal property (e.g., ownership of a car, refrigerator, computer), we find that those who are better off financially also report better school quality. As in much of the world, the quality of education one receives is highly and positively correlated with socioeconomic background: the wealthy have access to better-quality education.

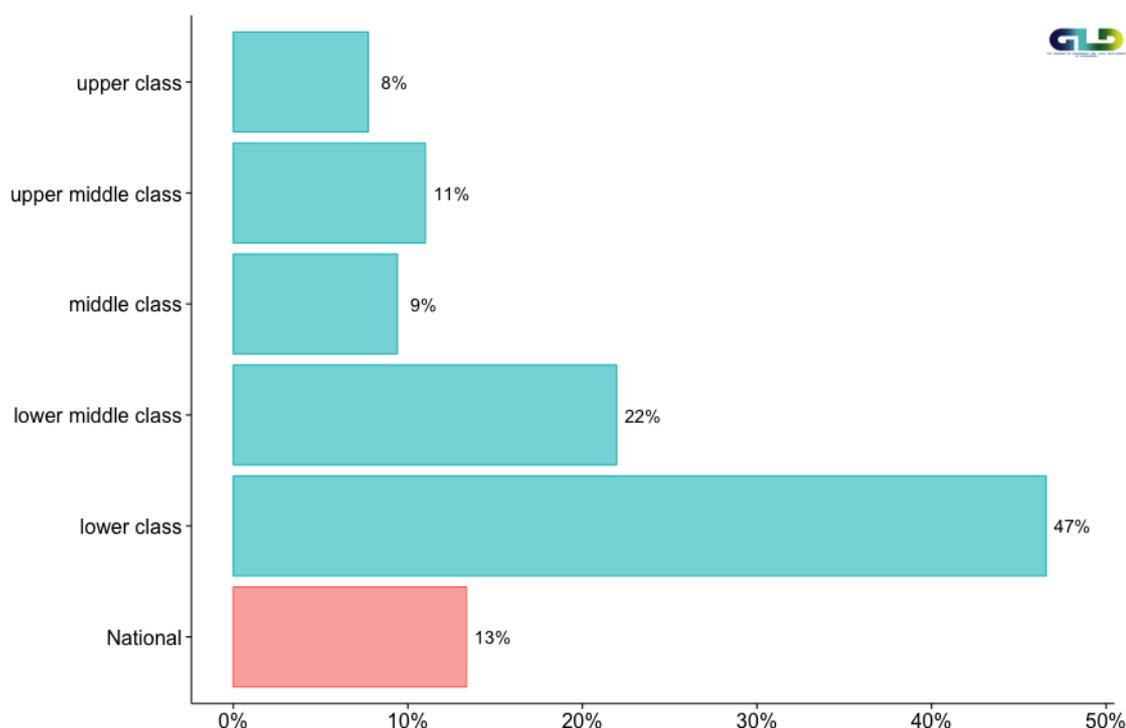


**Figure 8. Education Quality Index by Socioeconomic Status Score**

## 5. Addressing Problems in Children’s Education

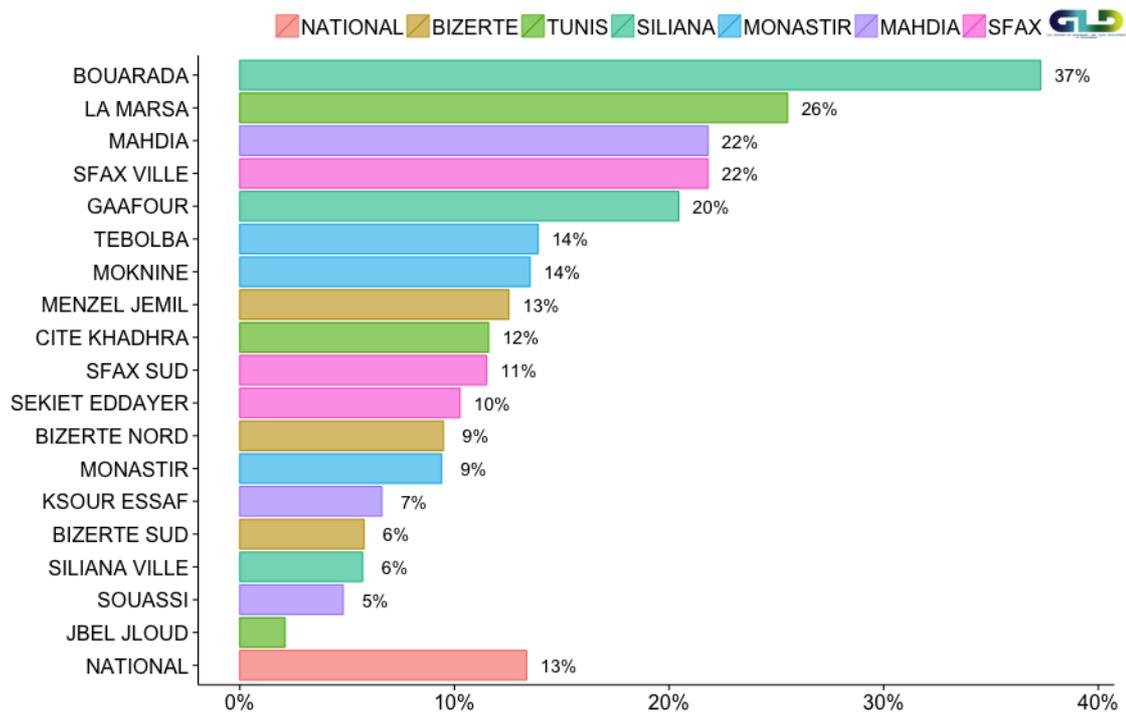
Tunisian families face gaps in quality of education, in addition to the challenges that individual students may face in schooling. How do parents attempt to solve these problems? When do they seek assistance, and from whom?

In the LGPI, we asked each respondent to indicate whether each child in their home faced problems in their education. Parents report that 19% of the children face problems with their education (Figure 10). There is virtually no difference by gender: 15% of boys and 13% of girls face problems, with only small changes in the prevalence of problems faced by children of different ages; parents were marginally more likely to state that children ages 6 to 11 face problems than do older children. The most important differences, as shown in Figure 9, relate to class: only 8% of the upper class face problems, compared to nearly half (47%) of lower-class students. The lower-middle and lower classes are the only class categories that are above the national average.



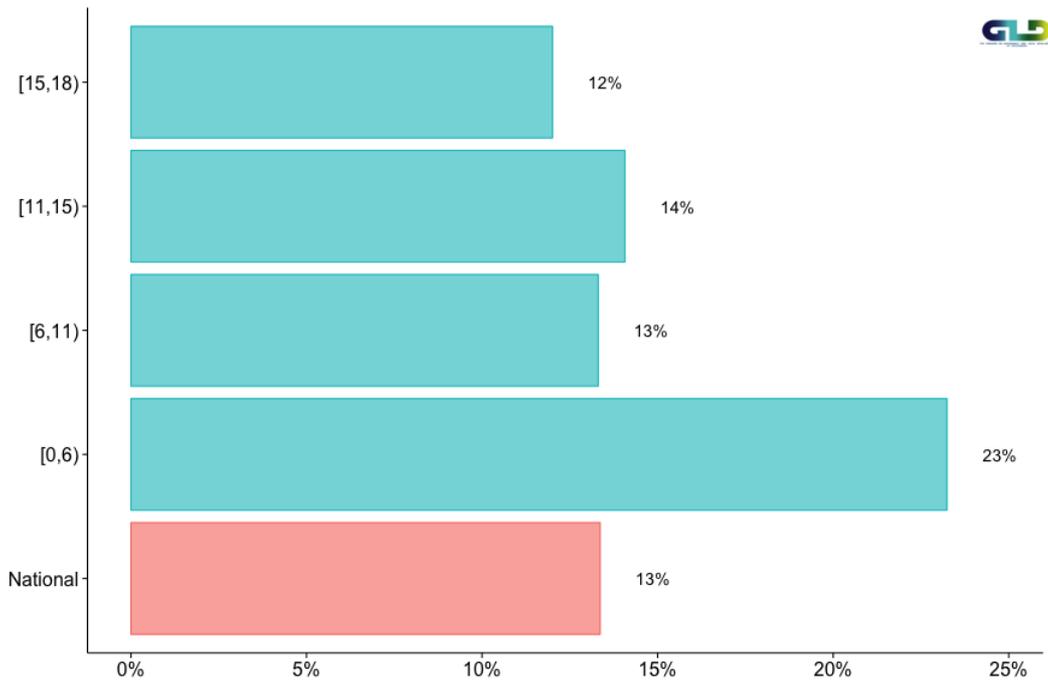
**Figure 9: Children Reportedly Facing Education Problems, by Class**

We also find striking variation across municipalities and governorates in the extent to which parents report that their children are having difficulties in school. As shown in Figure 10, Bou Arada stands out, with just over one-third of students facing problems. There are also high percentages of reported problems in El Marsa, Mahdia, and Sfax Ville, where parents of roughly one in four children report that their children face problems in school. Seven of the sampled municipalities are above the national average in terms of problems in education.

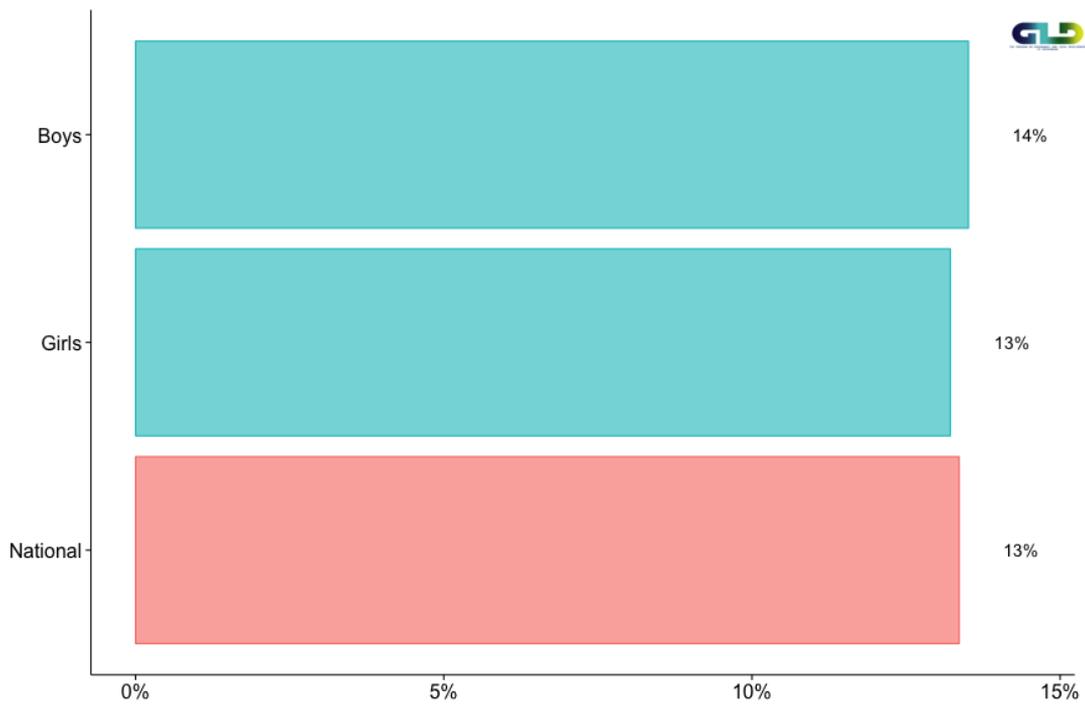


**Figure 10. Percentage of Children Whose Parents Report Problems in School**

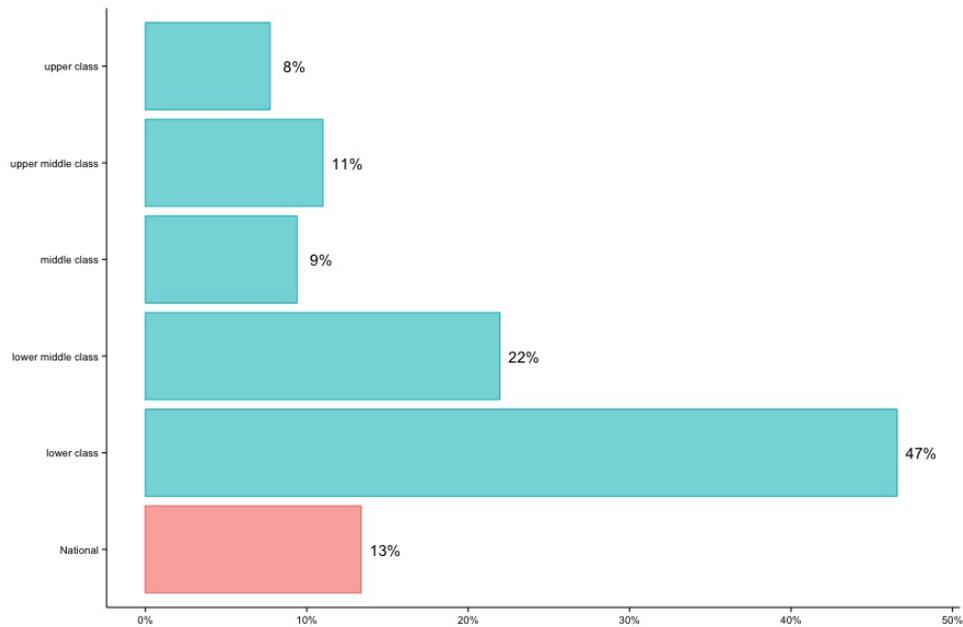
The LGPI data also allow us to investigate which types of students are facing the most problems in their education in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic status (See figures 11–13). Children who are younger than 6 and are lower class are much more likely to face problems in their education. However, there is little difference in terms of gender.



**Figure 11. Percentage of Children with Difficulties, by Age**

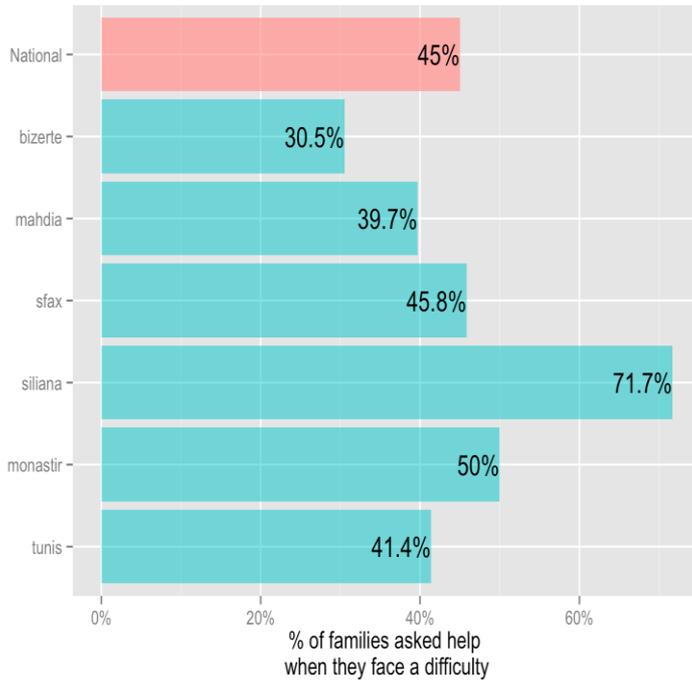


**Figure 12. Percentage of Children with Difficulties, by Gender**

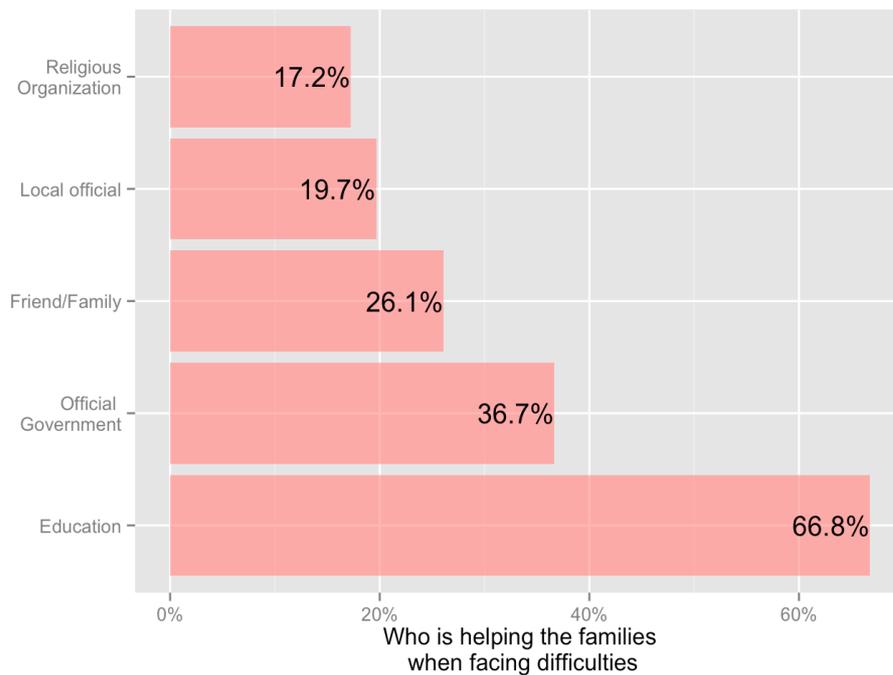


**Figure 13. Percentage of Children with Difficulties, by Socioeconomic Status**

When parents face problems, do they look for help from friends, family, or other sources? Importantly, in Tunisia as a whole, the majority of parents facing difficulties do not seek help. At the governorate level, we see significant variation. Parents in Siliana governorate ask for help the most, with over 70% seeking help. In contrast, in Bizerte governorate, only about 30% of the children have parents who seek assistance (see Figure 14). When parents do seek assistance, about two-thirds of the time they turn to the teacher, school principal, or other individuals within the education system for help. They also rely on nonstate actors, such as religious organizations or friends and family, and on local and national officials, for assistance (see Figure 15).



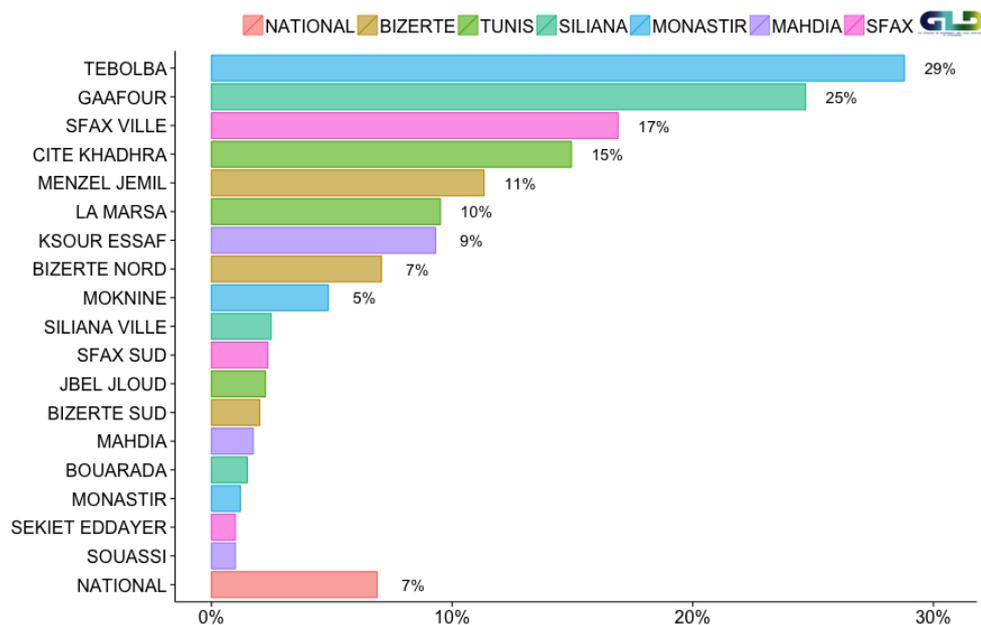
**Figure 14. Percentage of Children with Difficulties Whose Parents Seek Assistance**



**Figure 15. Whom Families Turn to for Help**

Most parents also do not report turning to informal payments to improve their children’s education. Only 7% of the sample report making informal payments to their child’s

school. A higher percentage of parents report making payments to help girls than boys (9% vs. 5%), and there are slight differences according to age. Most notably, the lower- and lower-middle-class parents are more likely say that they made additional payments to their child’s school than are upper- and upper-middle-class parents. Specifically, 10% of lower-class parents and 14% of lower-middle-class parents report making informal payments, compared to 6% of upper-middle-class parents and 4% of upper-class parents. Finally, as shown in Figure 13, there is enormous variation in some of the governorates. For instance, in Sfax, we find that payments are reportedly quite common in Sfax Ville, where 17% of children’s parents report giving additional payments. This contrasts sharply with Sfax Sud and Sekiet Eddayer. The parents of a lower-middle-class female student between the ages of 6 and 11 from Tebolba are the most likely to make such informal payments. (Nearly one in three such families in Tebolba do so.) Such payments are also relatively common in Gaafour, Sfax Ville, and Cite Khadhra municipalities.



Figure

## 16. Informal Payments to Aid in Education

Across municipalities and regardless of class, we find that parents of most students seek private tutoring to supplement schooling. At the national level, nearly 70% of students in the sampled municipalities take additional private lessons. Surprisingly, this does not vary greatly by gender, age, or socioeconomic stratum. However, we do find that three in four students between the ages of 15 and 18 pay for additional lessons, but not quite two out of three students between the ages of 6 and 11 do so. As we might expect, the lower

classes are also less likely to pay for additional lessons, but even then, the practice is still quite high. Finally, we see interesting variation in the prevalence of private lessons across municipalities. In Gaafour, almost 90% of students are taking additional lessons. This compares to just over 50% of the students in Siliana Ville (see Figure 17).

Two points should be noted here. First, it does not appear that the suboptimal performance in education outlined at the outset of this report is due to an unwillingness of parents and students to invest in education. On the contrary, many parents and students put enormous resources toward improving their outcomes. Second, however, this also appears to be an inefficient, and often unsuccessful, strategy for improving education outcomes. It is also not equitable. Students spend time in both formal school and after-school lessons, and parents expend resources in difficult economic circumstances. They do so at a cost that, collectively, is far greater than the national public expenditure on education. Among the 70% of children age 6 to 17 who pay for private lessons, assuming that they take only one lesson per week for five months of the year, at a cost of 15 dinars per lesson, we estimate that the cost of private tutoring exceeds 415 million dinars annually. That is more than three times the annual budget of 131 million dinars that the Ministry of Education allocates each year toward maintaining schools in Tunisia.

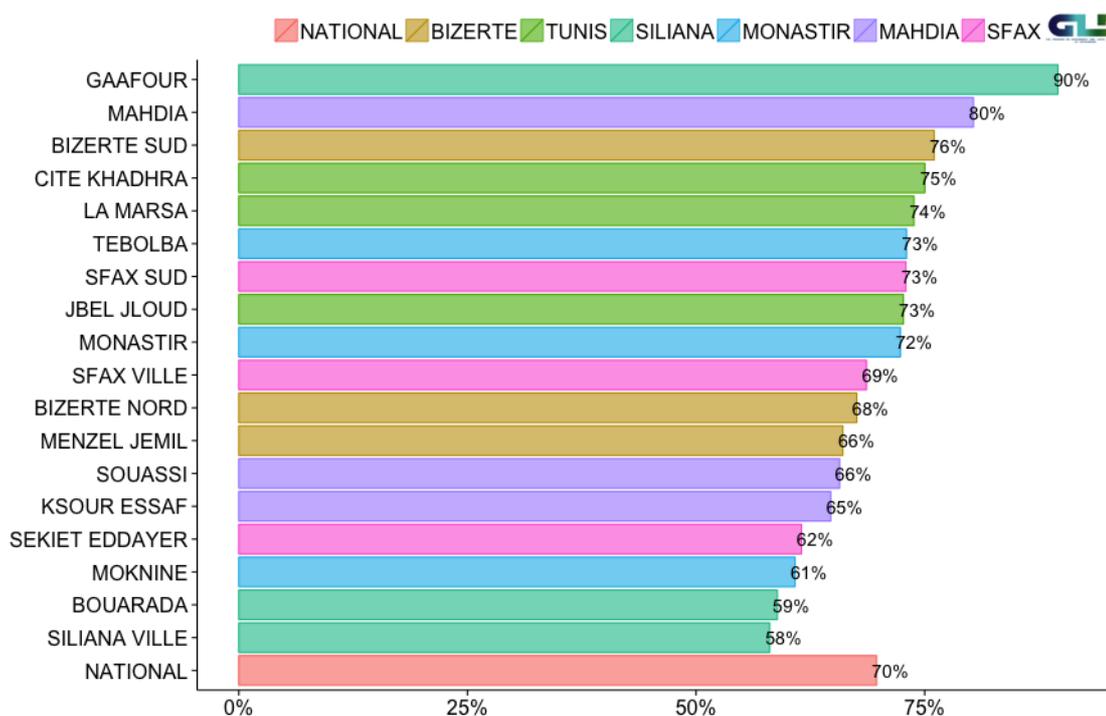
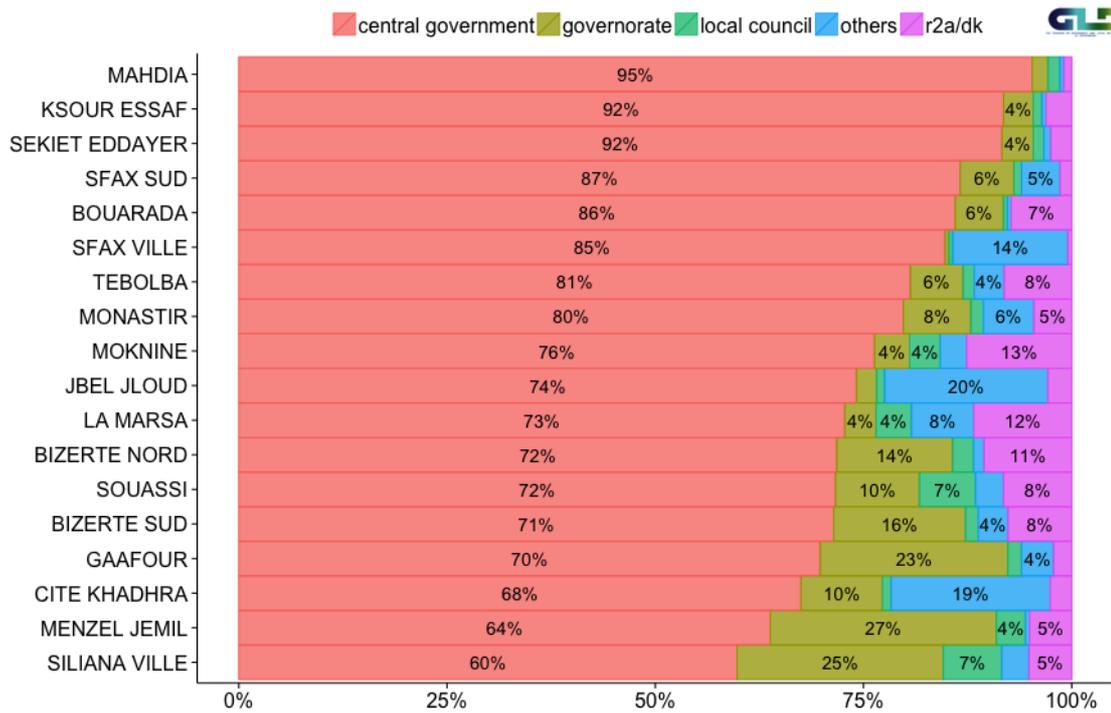


Figure 17. Percentage of Students Whose Parents Report Paying for Tutoring

Tunisians rely on the central government to address the problems facing education. This study reveals that citizens widely support a centralized system: more than 75% of respondents see the central government as responsible for education, and the same percentage believe that responsibility for education should be with the central government (see Figure 18). There does not seem to be widespread public support for decentralization of education, but rather demand for improvement of the current system.



**Figure 18. Percentage of Respondents Who Want the Central Government to Have the Responsibility for Education, by Municipality**

## 6. Conclusion

The LGPI reveals important variation in the quality of education in Tunisia. This is somewhat perplexing, given Tunisia's commitment to provide quality education through a centralized system. Despite decades of efforts toward improving education, and the middle-income status that Tunisia enjoys, the country falls short of meeting its goals.

Moreover, two factors stand out as persistently affecting the quality of education in Tunisia: the household's socioeconomic status and its geographic location. Students from lower-class families face more problems with their education, enroll in lower-quality schools, and have parents who are more likely to report making more informal payments to teachers. Thus, lower-class students are at an educational disadvantage. So too, the municipality in which a student lives and attends school heavily influences the quality of education s/he is likely to receive.

Further research needs to be done to investigate the interplay between poverty and municipal outcomes, and efforts taken to address the inequalities. These are critical for improving Tunisia's education and guaranteeing citizens' equal right to quality education.