

## Multidimensional Poverty across Ethnic Groups: Disaggregating the Global MPI

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It is vital to document inequalities across ethnic groups to inform policies that can enable inclusive poverty reduction measures and prioritise the poorest.<sup>1</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demand greater disaggregation of indicators in order to make visible the inequalities that exist across social groups. This briefing presents disaggregations of the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)<sup>2</sup> by ethnicity for the 24 countries and 650 million people whose current surveys present figures by ethnic group.

Past studies disaggregating multidimensional poverty data by ethnicity include UNDESA's World Social Report 2020, which highlighted inequalities among ethnic groups within and across countries (UNDESA 2020) using illustrative examples from the global MPI analysed below.<sup>3</sup> Other studies address monetary poverty. The 30th anniversary of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169), celebrated in 2019 also drew attention to the rights and aspirations of indigenous groups



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## HOW IS ETHNICITY DEFINED IN GLOBAL MPI ANALYSIS?

The definitions of ethnicity used in surveys matter, as do the number and precision of ethnic 'categories' that are recognised. This briefing disaggregates the MPI using the definitions and ethnicity categories presented in the survey report, recognizing these to be contested and imperfect. They are broadly defined as follows.

For countries using MICS data, the ethnicity of the household is defined as the ethnicity of the household head.

For countries using DHS data, the ethnicity of the household is defined as the ethnicity of the household head, if their information is available, or else of the oldest member of the household for whom information was collected.

All ethnic groups reported for a country here follow the categories reported in the survey reports.

across the world. Based on a study of 23 countries, the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that indigenous persons – whom they estimate constitute 6.2% of the population – were three times more likely to be in \$1.90/day monetary poverty than non-indigenous persons (ILO 2019).<sup>4</sup>

This briefing is also inspired by the leadership of many national governments that have already disaggregated their official national multidimensional poverty statistics by ethnic groups. For example, since 2009, Mexico's multidimensional poverty measure has compared the poverty levels of indigenous and non-indigenous groups. Panama's national MPI profiled the conditions in the indigenous comarcas, and Viet Nam's Voluntary National Review in 2018 observed that multidimensional poverty is '3.5 times higher than the national multidimensional poverty rate' among ethnic minorities (UNDP and OPHI 2019; Viet Nam 2018, p. 28).<sup>5</sup>

The global MPI is an international measure of acute poverty across developing regions that includes deprivations in education, health, and living standards. As it measures deprivations directly, it can be extensively disaggregated – something that is difficult for global monetary poverty measures.

We disaggregated by ethnic categories all countries whose current Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) or Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) disaggregated some indicators by ethnic groups in their survey reports.

By this rule, we are able to disaggregate 24 countries included in the global MPI 2019, which corresponds to 192 ethnic groupings. The countries covered are in sub-Saharan Africa (13), Latin America (5), Europe and Central Asia (3), and East Asia and the Pacific (3). The countries are Belize, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guyana, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lao PDR, Malawi, Moldova, Mongolia, Nigeria, Paraguay, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Suriname, North Macedonia, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, and Viet Nam.<sup>6</sup>

Overall, these 24 countries are home to over 650 million people, nearly 300 million of whom (46%) are living in multidimensional poverty.<sup>7</sup> Poverty across these countries ranges from affecting 85.7% of the people in Chad with an MPI of 0.533, to 0.5% in Kazakhstan with an MPI of 0.002. Hence the included countries cover a wide range of poverty conditions globally.



Across ethnic groups, poverty ranges from 100% poor people in the Mesmedjé/Massalat/Kadjaksé groups in Chad, to zero poor in the ‘Other’<sup>8</sup> categories of Guyana, Moldova, and Trinidad and Tobago. Thus, the range of deprivations across ethnic groups could not be greater. Of those covered by the data, 11 million MPI-poor people belong to ethnic groups where 90% or more of the members of that ethnic group are poor, and 178 million belong to groups where 70% or more of their people are MPI poor.

The global MPI is already disaggregated by urban-rural areas, age groups, and over 1,100 subnational regions (Alkire, Kanagaratnam, and Suppa 2019).<sup>9</sup> Other studies have disaggregated the global MPI by disability status (Pinilla-Roncancio and Alkire 2020).

Since the launch of the global MPI, OPHI has regularly provided illustrative ethnic disaggregations. For example in 2010, OPHI’s first MPI report profiled the differences in the composition of poverty between the Kikuyu and Embu ethnic groups, finding that the composition of their poverty varied substantially (Alkire and Santos 2010). In 2013, OPHI’s global MPI report profiled the slower progress among the poorest caste and religious groups in India (Alkire and Seth 2013). In 2014, the

global MPI report profiled trends by ethnic groups in Kenya, Ghana, and Benin, finding a very pro-poor trend in Kenya, whereas in Benin the poorest group was being left behind (Alkire, Chatterjee, Conconi, Seth, and Vaz 2014; Alkire and Vaz 2014).

This briefing provides the first comprehensive disaggregation of the MPI in all the 2019 global MPI surveys that permit disaggregation by ethnic groups. Seeing the very different configurations of multidimensional poverty across groups contributes to a better understanding of their experiences and enables more targeted policies that leave no one behind.

Overall, the results suggest that disparities across the included ethnicity categories vary significantly across countries. What is clear is that, in most countries, ethnicity is a relevant categorisation for understanding differences in multidimensional poverty.

**PARITIES AND DISPARITIES ACROSS GROUPS**

Some countries show relatively little variation in poverty by ethnic group, while in others there are very large differences. This is highlighted in Figure 1, in which the box heights show the highest and the lowest levels of poverty across each ethnic group, and the circle depicts the national MPI headcount ratio. The countries are ordered from those with the lowest disparity on the left (Kazakhstan, Trinidad and Tobago) and the highest on the right (Togo, Gabon).

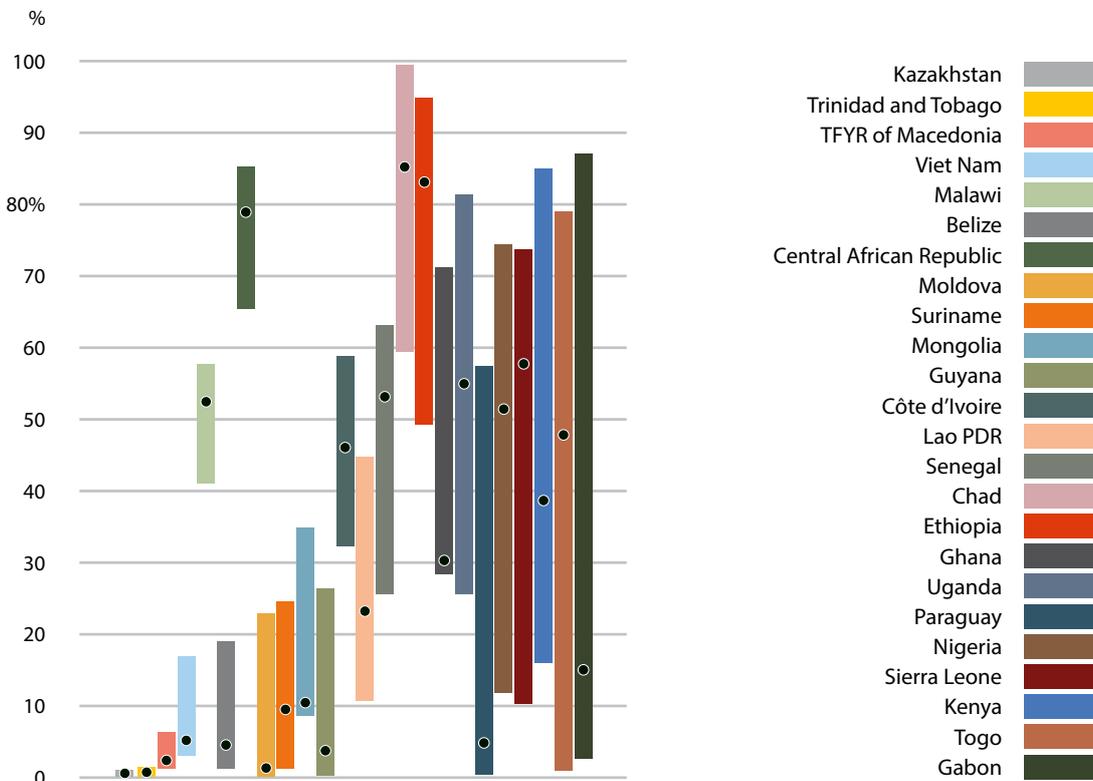
Interestingly, this dispersion is not necessarily linked to overall levels of poverty. Malawi and Sierra Leone have fairly similar MPIs (0.243 in Malawi and 0.297 in Sierra Leone), but very different patterns of distribution across ethnic groups.

Malawi has remarkably similar levels of poverty across all of its ethnic groups, with headcount ratios ranging from 41% among the Nkhonde to 58% among the Sena. There are no real outliers to the national results, which show 53% of those in Malawi as multidimensionally

poor. Looking at results by indicator, the composition of poverty across Malawi’s ethnic groups is also fairly similar.

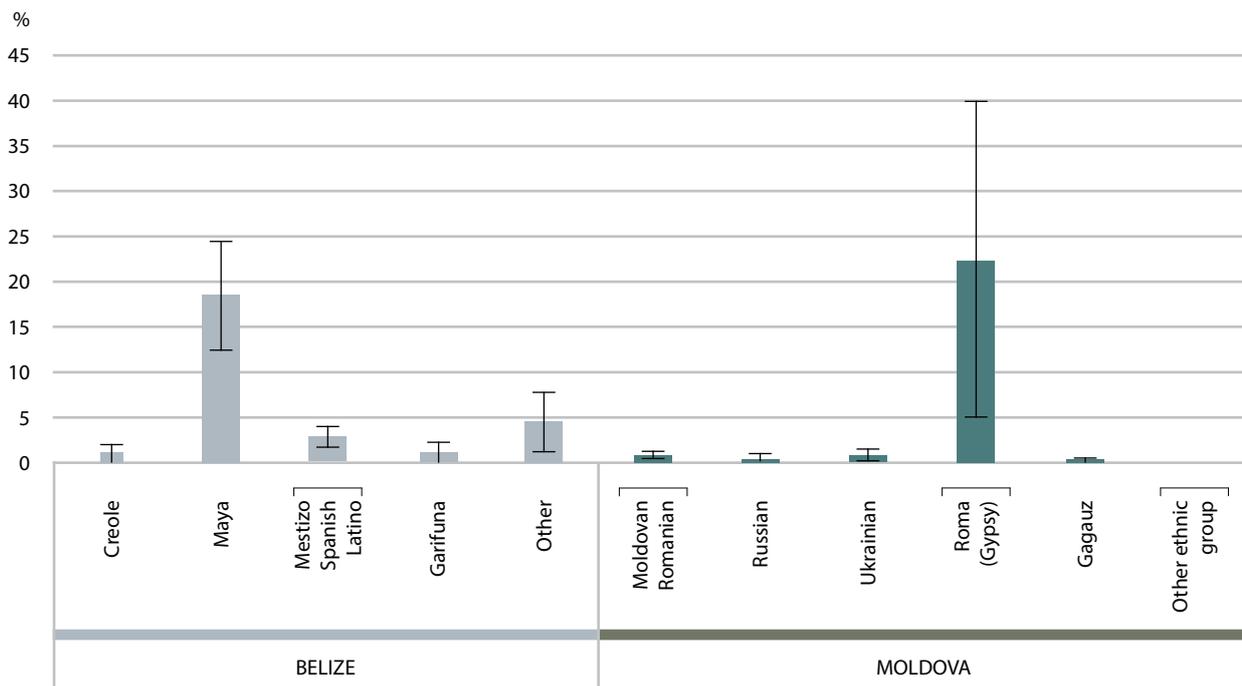
This situation is in sharp contrast to that in Sierra Leone, which has much greater disparities among its ethnic groups. In Sierra Leone, 74% of the Yalunka live in multidimensional poverty, while only 10% of the Krio do. These both represent significant outliers from the national estimates of 58% of people who are poor. There are similarly large differences when looking at individual indicators. Fewer than 1.4% of the Krio are poor and deprived in years of schooling, while more than 47% of the Koranko are. There is some clustering between the two largest groups – the Mende and the Temne – which each represent about one-third of the population, but the remaining third of the population live very differently.

**Figure 1. Disparities across Ethnic Groups Ranked from Lowest to Highest Disparity**



Source: Authors’ computations based on specifications articulated in Alkire, Kanagaratnam, and Suppa (2019).

Figure 2. Headcount Ratios by Ethnic Group in Belize and Moldova



Source: Authors' computations based on specifications articulated in Alkire, Kanagaratnam, and Suppa (2019).

## POCKETS OF POVERTY

In some countries, there is a clustering of ethnic groups around a lower national poverty level with one exception representing a pocket of poverty or a minority ethnic group that is being 'left behind'. Figure 2 demonstrates this phenomenon in Belize and Moldova.

In Belize, nearly 19% of Mayans are multidimensionally poor, while no other ethnic group has a multidimensional poverty headcount ratio of more than 5%. This means that approximately half of the MPI poor in Belize are Mayan, even though Mayans only account for 12% of the population. Put another way, Mayans are contributing 56% of overall poverty in Belize, while no other ethnic group contributes more than one-third. Moreover, the nature of their poverty differs from that of other ethnic groups. Deprivations in living standards are responsible for 47% of the MPI for Mayans, but not more than one-third of the MPI for any other ethnic group. Deprivations in cooking fuel and housing are particularly high among Mayans compared to other ethnic groups in Belize.

The ethnic group with the greatest difference relative to national poverty is the Roma in Moldova. More than 22% of Roma are multidimensionally poor, which is in stark contrast to non-Roma Moldovans, of whom fewer than 1% are poor. This is by far the highest poverty rate of any group in Europe and Central Asia for which we have information, and, even considering its high standard errors, would be consistently higher than any other ethnic group in the region. While Roma make up a small proportion of the population of Moldova (1%), they appear to represent more than one-fifth of all multidimensionally poor people.

## POVERTY OF ETHNIC GROUPS ACROSS BORDERS

It can be instructive to explore how separation by national borders – or the migration across borders – can affect multidimensional poverty levels. There are a few datasets in which we can identify similar ethnic groups across national borders. However, these results should be interpreted with some caution, as ethnic categorisation differs across surveys, so similar names may not necessarily mean the same ethnic identification in each country.



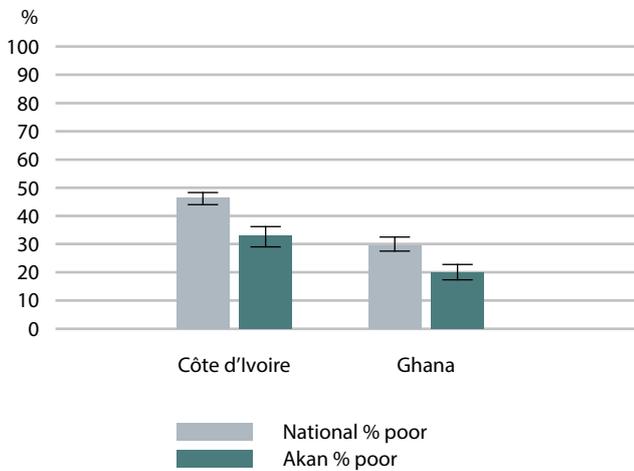
The Akan ethnic group is found in both Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, allowing an analysis of how their experiences differ depending on which side of the border they live. The Akan population of Côte d'Ivoire is poorer than that in Ghana, reflecting that overall poverty levels in Côte d'Ivoire are higher than in its neighbour. This is illustrated in Figure 3. However, because Ghana has a larger number of Akan people, there are more poor Akan living in Ghana than in Côte d'Ivoire. But what is striking is how the composition of that poverty differs across country borders. In Ghana, health deprivations account for more than 30% of overall poverty among the Akan, while in Côte d'Ivoire, it is less than 20%. Differences in contribution are particularly high in the indicators of nutrition (26% in Ghana versus 15% in Côte d'Ivoire) and years of schooling (8% in Ghana versus 21% in Côte d'Ivoire).

The Hausa people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, found in many countries in West and Central Africa. In our data, we have information on the Hausa/Haoussa communities in both Nigeria and the Central African Republic. Here, the pattern is a convergence in

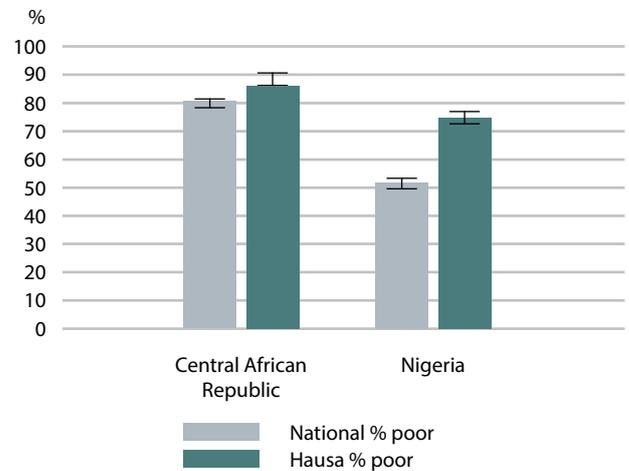
poverty levels among the Hausa ethnic group, despite national borders. Overall poverty levels are much lower in Nigeria than in the Central African Republic (with an MPI of 0.291 in Nigeria, compared to 0.465 in the Central African Republic), but Nigeria has much higher inequality among its ethnic groups. In the Central African Republic there is much more parity among ethnic groups. In Nigeria, 75% of the Hausa people are multidimensionally poor, compared to 30% of non-Hausa in the country. In the Central African Republic, 85% of the Hausa people are multidimensionally poor, compared to 80% of non-Hausa in the country (Figure 4). The composition of poverty among the Hausa people in these two countries is also remarkably similar, with significant differences mainly in the health variables, in which nutrition is a bigger issue for poor Nigerian Hausa, while child mortality is more of a concern among poor Hausa in the Central African Republic.

The Sara people are found in both Chad and the Central African Republic. They are the largest ethnic group in Chad and the fifth-largest ethnic group in the Central

**Figure 3. Headcount Ratios for the Akan Ethnic Group in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana**



**Figure 4. Headcount Ratios for the Hausa Ethnic Group in Central African Republic and Nigeria**



Source: Authors' computations based on specifications articulated in Alkire, Kanagaratnam, and Suppa (2019).

African Republic. The poverty of the Sara in these two countries is similar, with 85% of the Sara in the Central African Republic being multidimensionally poor, compared to 76% of the Sara in Chad. Due to differences in population, 93% of the Sara across these two countries reside in Chad. Overall national poverty is somewhat greater in Chad than in the Central African Republic, and the Sara represent one of the less poor ethnic groups in Chad and one of the poorer ethnic groups in the Central African Republic, though the differences compared to other ethnic groups in each country are not too large. They also have similar patterns of deprivations among the poor.

Sometimes, ethnic groups can be separated by the drawing of boundaries, as in the case of the Akan in West Africa; at other times, diasporas are created by migration, as in the case of Kazakhs in Central Asia. The Kazakhs are the largest ethnic minority in Mongolia, although they only comprise 4% of the total population. They mostly live in the mountainous far western provinces in Mongolia and are traditionally semi-nomadic and largely pastoralists. Many Kazakhs migrated to Mongolia in the

nineteenth century, with some families returning to Kazakhstan following the fall of the Soviet Union.

The Kazakhs living in Mongolia are significantly poorer than those in Kazakhstan, with more than 24% of Mongolian Kazakhs identified as multidimensionally poor, compared to 0.6% of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan. The lived experiences of these communities also vary significantly between the two countries, as poor Kazakhs in Kazakhstan experience very low deprivations in education and living standards, while about a quarter of Kazakhs in Mongolia are poor and deprived in cooking fuel, sanitation, and housing. Figure 5 shows the percentage of Kazakhs who are poor and deprived in each indicator based on country of residence.

Figure 5. Censored Headcount Ratios for Kazakhs in Kazakhstan and Mongolia



Source: Authors' computations based on specifications articulated in Alkire, Kanagaratnam, and Suppa (2019).

### POVERTY AND PROSPERITY IN THE MAJORITY ETHNIC GROUP

In the countries for which data on ethnicity were available, there does not seem to be a clear pattern between an ethnic group's population share and their poverty levels. Figure 6 shows how the majority ethnic groups in Nigeria and Laos have different shares of the number of poor people in each country.

Nigeria (Figures 6a and b) is a notable example in which the poorest ethnic group is not a minority. The Hausa account for 49% of the population of Nigeria but 71% of Nigeria's MPI poor. By contrast, the Igbo and Yoruba, who represent 10% and 12% of the population, respectively, each account for only 3% of the country's MPI poor.

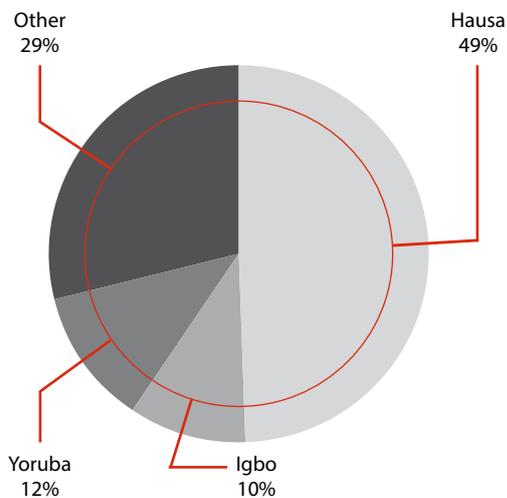
The situation is quite different in Laos (Figures 6c and d), where the Lao-Tai are the largest ethnic group in the country, representing 62% of the population. They also have significantly lower levels of poverty than any other ethnic group in the country, with only 11% of Lao-Tai living in multidimensional poverty, compared to 43% of all other ethnicities. This means that fewer than 30% of the multidimensionally poor in Laos are Lao-Tai, while 47% are from the second-largest ethnic group, the Mon-Khmer.

### DIFFERENCES IN COMPOSITION OF POVERTY ACROSS ETHNIC GROUPS

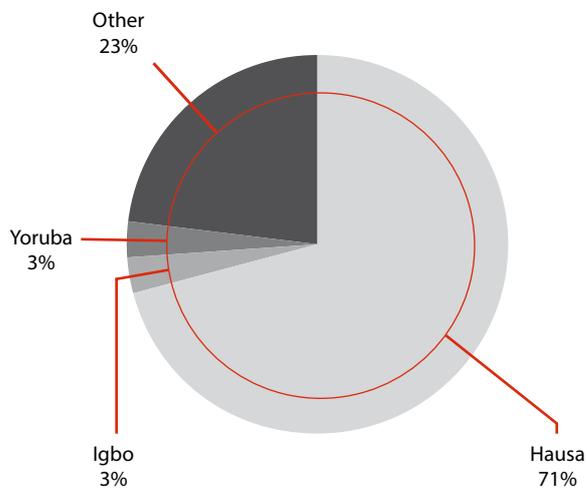
In Gabon, despite most ethnic groups having relatively similar levels of multidimensional poverty, the composition of that poverty – the indicators that contribute to it – varies. For instance, among the Fang, child mortality contributes 18.6% to poverty and school attendance only 8.4%, while among the Nzabi-Duma, this is nearly reversed, with child mortality contributing 7.6% and school attendance contributing 18.3%. The outlier in Gabon is the Pygmée ethnic group, who, though they represent a very small percentage of the population (0.4%), have significantly higher poverty, with an MPI of 0.582 compared to the national MPI of 0.066. Figure 7 shows the percentage contribution of each indicator to the ethnic group's MPI.

Figure 6. Comparing Population Share and Distribution of Poor among Ethnic Groups in Nigeria and Lao PDR

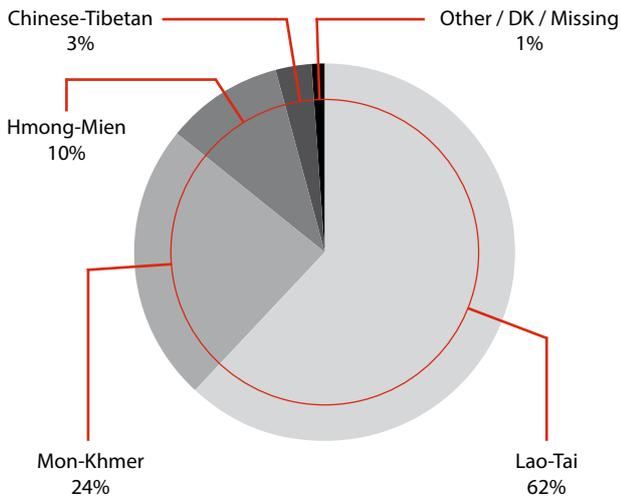
A. Population share in Nigeria



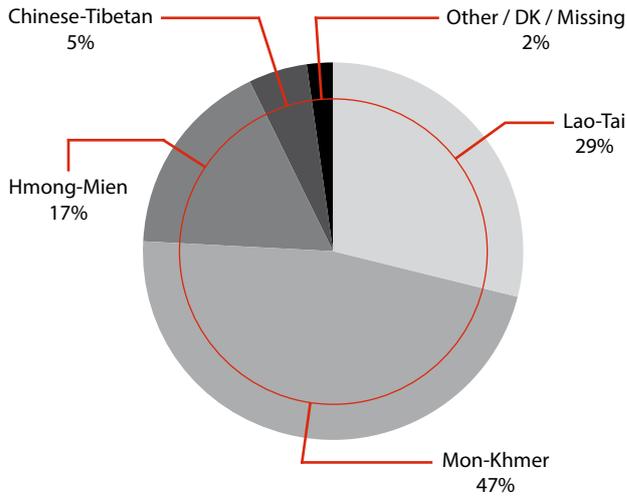
B. Distribution of poor in Nigeria



C. Population share in Lao PDR

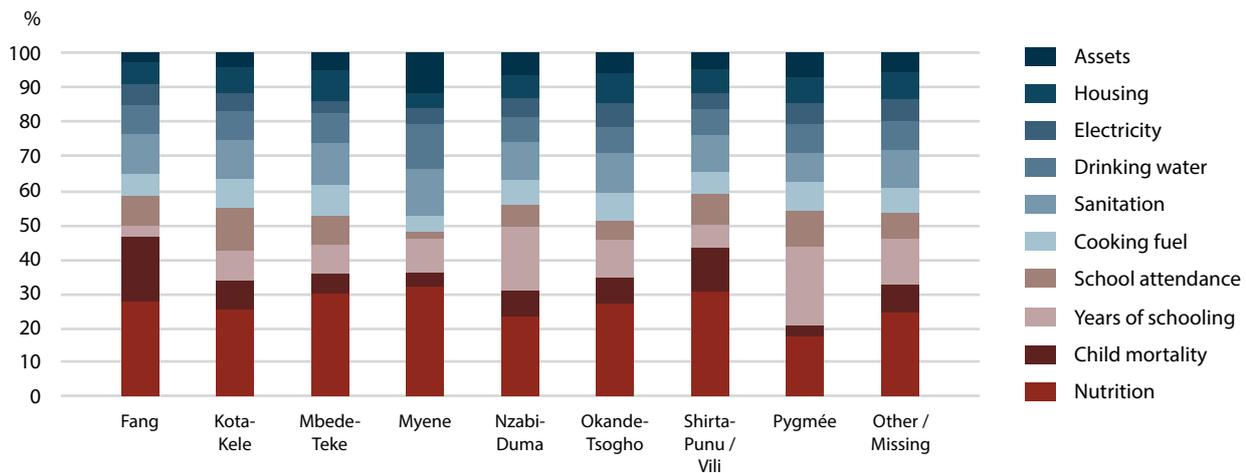


D. Distribution of poor in Lao PDR



Source: Authors' computations based on specifications articulated in Alkire, Kanagaratnam, and Suppa (2019).

Figure 7. Percentage Contribution of Indicators to Poverty among Ethnic Groups in Gabon



Source: Authors' computations based on specifications articulated in Alkire, Kanagaratnam, and Suppa (2019).

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Disaggregations of the global MPI by ethnic group make apparent the great divergences in terms of inequalities across ethnic groups within different countries. Differences across groups are negligible in Kazakhstan or Trinidad and Tobago, but span 60 percentage points in Paraguay, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Togo, and Gabon. Yet patterns differ considerably.

In some countries, there are 'pockets of poverty' where certain ethnic groups are outliers, having much higher poverty than the rest. In neighbouring countries similar ethnic groups may fare differently across national borders. In some countries, the majority ethnic group is the poorest; in others, it is the minority groups who are the poorest. Moreover, even if groups have relatively similar levels of multidimensional poverty, the composition of poverty by indicator can vary considerably, hence policy responses, too, must differ. In short, ethnic compositions put on the map the poverty profiles that accompany ethnic diversity across countries. And they do showcase some very worrying horizontal inequalities across groups.

It is therefore natural to emphasise the benefit of having information on ethnicity in household surveys so that disaggregation by the relevant ethnic groups is possible. At present such information is not available for over three-quarters of the global MPI datasets. This first study will, we hope, open a constructive conversation that can help to identify actionable inequalities so that the poorest ethnic groups make the fastest progress.

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## ENDNOTES

1. We are grateful for research support for this briefing from the ESRC-DFID grant ES/N01457X/1.
2. These figures are based on the 2019 release of the global MPI (see Alkire, Kanagaratnam, and Suppa 2019). The ethnicity data table can be accessed *here*.
3. Some preliminary analyses from the dataset profiled in this briefing also feature in that study (pp. 37–38).
4. Note that, in a different study of 23 countries also included in the 2020 report, they found it was twice as high not three times. For previous studies please see Hall and Patrinos 2014; World Bank 2015.
5. See UNDP and OPHI (2019) pp. 49, 69, 76, 92, 103, 108, 119, 128, 135, 148, and 152.
6. India was not included as caste categories may be viewed as different from ethnicity. For analyses of India's MPI data by caste, please see Alkire, Kanagaratnam, and Oldiges (2018).
7. Quote taken from page 28 of Viet Nam 2018. All population aggregates use UNDESA population estimates for 2017.
8. The category 'Other' is a function of the way DHS/MICS questionnaires are administered, with respondents choosing from a list of options or 'Other'. As such, the category 'Other' varies by country.
9. Online data tables for all disaggregations are available at [www.ophi.org.uk](http://www.ophi.org.uk) > *Global MPI* > *Data tables and do-files* > *2019 global MPI resources*.

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