

Policy Brief

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An adolescent girl collecting fodder, Oromia, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

GAGE longitudinal evidence on young people's bodily integrity and freedom from age- and gender-based violence in Ethiopia

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Introduction

The Ethiopian government has made a range of policy and action plan commitments to support its large and growing population of children and young people so that they can access the services, rights and work that they need to secure their own futures – and transform the country into an economic and social 'Beacon of Prosperity' for Africa (Ministry of Planning and Development, 2020). Recent events, however, have put these objectives at risk. Political and ethnic conflict have become intractable; climate change is accelerating; the government's budget is stressed by high inflation and debt load; and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is projecting that official development assistance (ODA) will decline by up to 17% in 2025, due to cuts by major donors (OECD, 2025; UNDP Ethiopia, 2025; World Bank, 2025a).

Drawing on longitudinal evidence from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme (2016-2026), this brief is designed to inform the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs and the National Alliance to End Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Child Marriage about the multiple and shifting threats facing young people in Ethiopia. As with the broader regional reports that accompanies (see Presler-Marshall et al., 2025a, 2025b, 2025c), this brief is based on mixed-methods data collected in late 2024 and early 2025. It also draws on data collected in 2019 and 2020 (Round 2) to show changes over time in key dimensions of young people's lives.

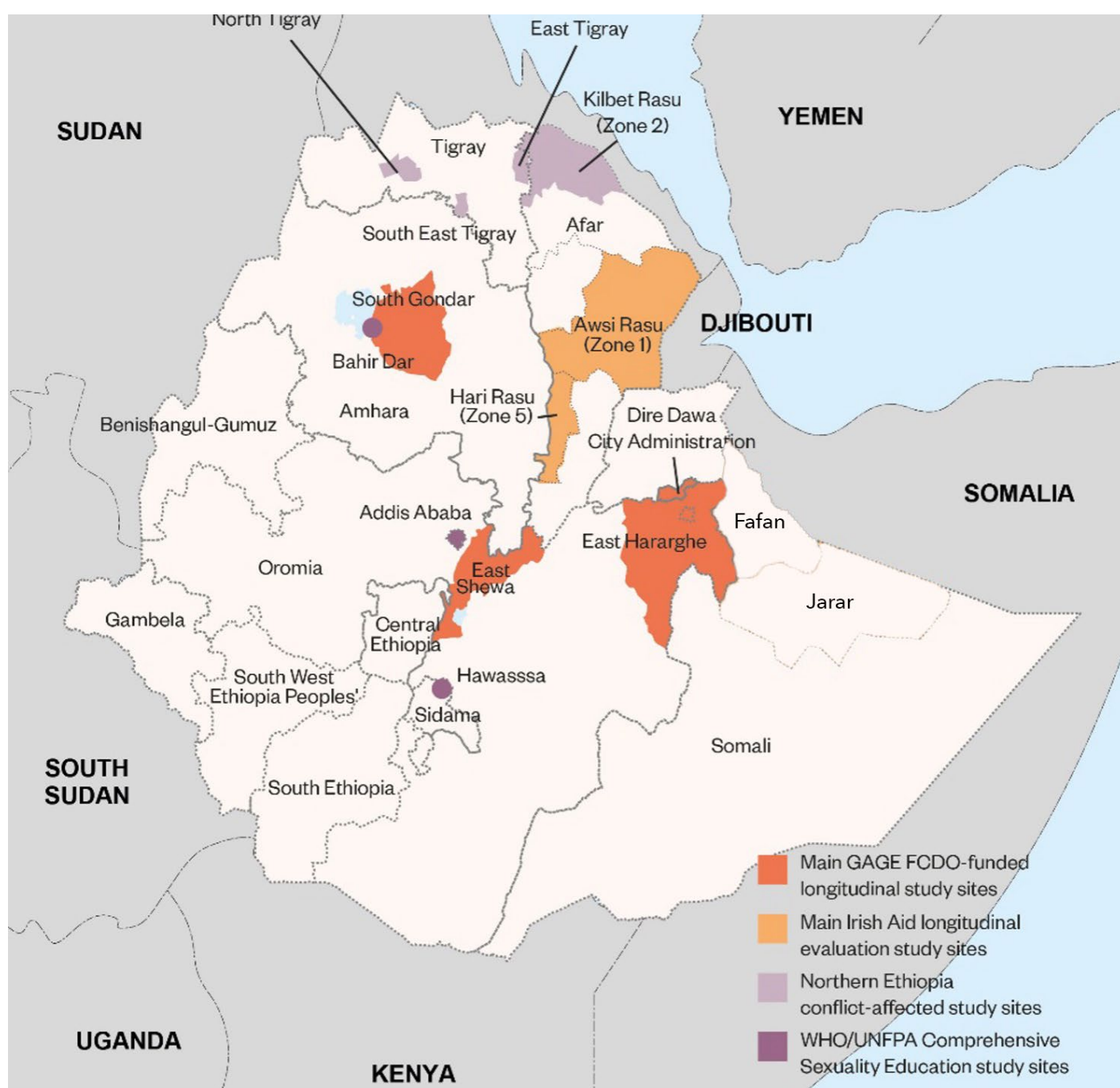
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The brief begins with a short introduction to our research sample and methods. We then summarise key cross-regional findings on young people's risks of age- and gender-based violence, FGM and child marriage, their psychosocial well-being, education and economic empowerment, and the specific challenges facing young people with disabilities. The brief concludes by making recommendations about how to better tailor programming and policies to mitigate those risks and expand opportunities for young people, now and as they make the crucial transition into young adulthood.

Methods

The GAGE research sample covers six locations in Ethiopia, three rural and three urban. They include: 20 *kebeles* (clan leaders) in 5 *woredas* (administrative zones) in rural Hari Rasu (Zone 5), Afar; 80 *kebeles* in 4 *woredas* in rural East Hararghe, Oromia; 80 *kebeles* in 5 *woredas* in rural South Gondar, Amhara; 23 sub-*kebeles*/*menders* in urban Debre Tabor (located in South Gondar, Amhara); 22 *menders* in 4 *kebeles* in urban Batu (located in East Shewa, Oromia); and 20 *menders* in 7 *kebeles* in the chartered city of Dire Dawa (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: GAGE research sites



The endline research surveyed 6,673 young people – 4,565 in a younger cohort (who were aged 10-12 years at baseline and had a mean age of 18.3 years at endline) and 2,108 in an older cohort (who were 15-17 years at baseline and had mean age of 22.5 years at endline) (see Table 1). The tracking rate at endline was very high, 88% overall, and involved interviewing young people who had moved throughout the country and also internationally. South Gondar data should be interpreted with caution. First, due to security challenges, surveys and qualitative interviews were carried out by phone only. Second, the attrition rate was considerably higher than for other locations, leaving the endline sample in South Gondar with a disproportionate number of boys, young adults, and unmarried young people.

Qualitative research included 959 interviews. Of these, 416 were individual interviews conducted with young people who were selected from the larger quantitative sample, deliberately oversampling the most disadvantaged individuals in order to capture the voices of those at risk of being 'left behind' (see Table 2). Individual interviews were also conducted with the caregivers (235) and siblings (58) of these 'core' young people, as well as with key informants (130), including kebele-level officials and service providers and woreda and regional sector officials. Group interviews were conducted with young people who were not part of the larger GAGE sample (79 groups), caregivers whose children were not part of the larger GAGE sample (22 groups) and community leaders and service providers (19 groups).

Table 1: Quantitative sample

	Adolescents	Young adults	Sub-sample married < 18	Sub-sample with disabilities (at Round 2)	Total
Female	2547	1139	1281	211	3686
Male	2018	969	159	197	2987
Total	4565	2108	1440	408	6673

Table 2: Endline qualitative research sample

Interview types	Location	Young people – IDIs		Young people – FGDs		Sibling IDI	Parent IDI	Parent FGD	Influencers FGD	KII	Total
		Females	Males	Females	Males						
Face-to-face interviews	East Hararghe	68	50	17	16	15	41	11	9	43	270
	Batu	17	12	9	8	-	15	3	3	9	76
	Dire Dawa	24	21	8	7	1	21	4	3	8	97
	Afar	35	24	6	8	17	40	4	4	16	154
Phone interviews	Debre Tabor	17	17	-	-	-	21	-	-	7	62
	Ebenat Woreda	74	57	-	-	25	97	-	-	47	300
	Total interviews	235	181	40	39	58	235	22	19	130	959

To keep the two cohorts distinct, in this brief, we refer to the younger cohort as 'adolescents' and the older cohort as 'young adults'. Female adolescents are called 'girls'; male adolescents are called 'boys'. Female young adults are called 'young women'; male young adults are called 'young men'. When the sample is referred to as a single group they are called 'young people'. When girls and young women are jointly discussed, they are called 'young females'; when boys and young men are jointly discussed, they are called 'young males'.

The GAGE research design and tools were approved by ethics committees at ODI Global and George Washington University, and the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists. Verbal consent was obtained from caregivers and married adolescents; verbal assent was obtained for all unmarried adolescents under the age of 18. There was also a robust protocol for referral to services, tailored to the different realities of the diverse research sites.



1. Age-based violence


As adolescents grow up, their risk of age-based violence falls

- Boys and young men are overall more at risk than girls and young women.

 *Mostly it is boys who are becoming disobedient to parents.*

(Kebele chair, South Gondar)

- Young males also tend to experience more extreme age-based violence than young females.

 *Below 15 years old, he will be advised by a stick. Above the age 15, if you beat him, it will be useless, it will have no result.*

(16-year-old boy, East Hararghe)

Young people experience violence at home, at school and in the community, and these experiences are shaped by gender

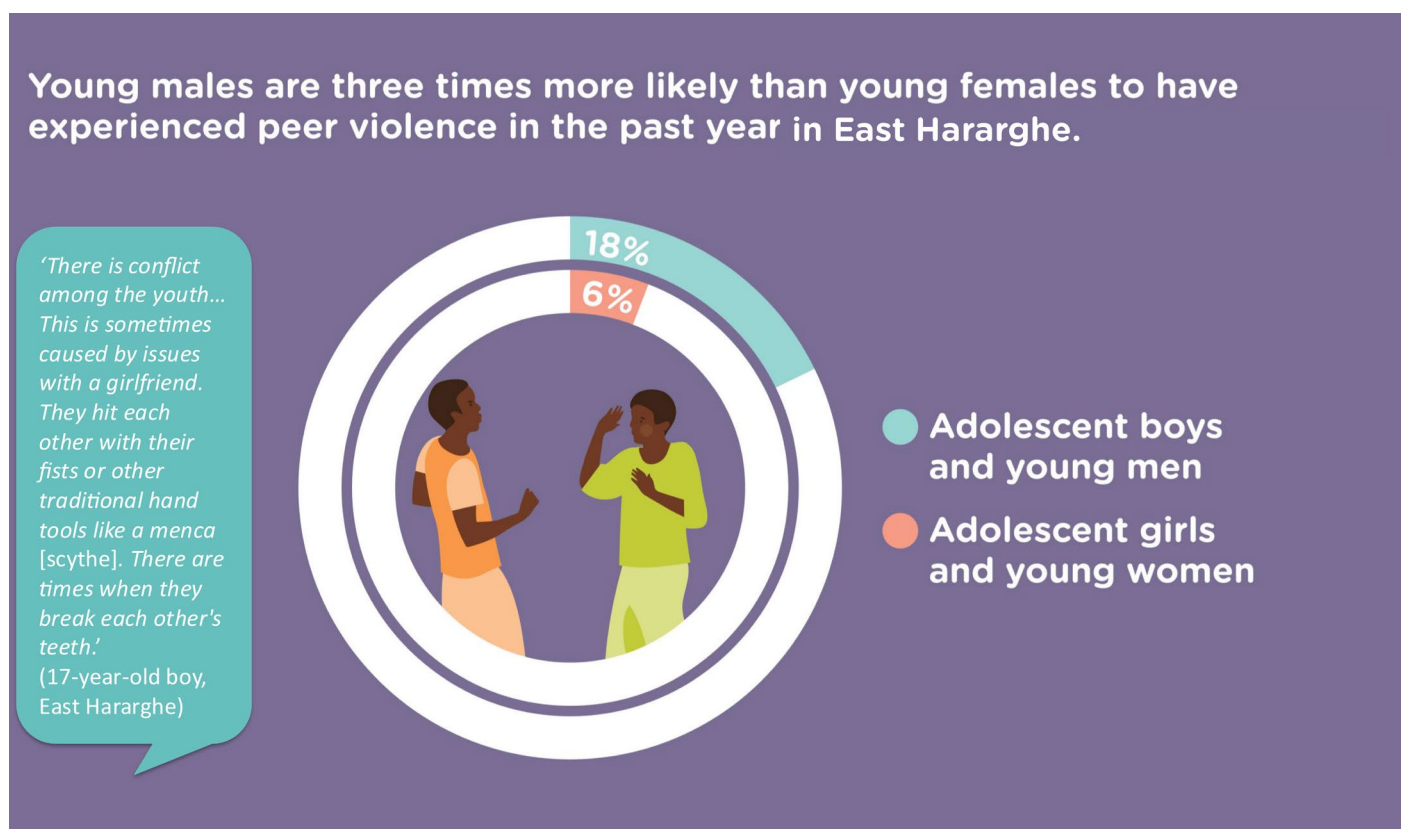
Violence at home

- 25% of young people have experienced violence at the hands of a caregiver in the past year
- Rates of caregiver violence are half what they were at Round 2 (2019–2020).
- Overall, there are no gender gaps in rates of caregiver violence, because girls are typically socialised into compliance and boys learn to run away or fight back.
- Girls and young women are also at risk of violence from brothers, who police their mobility outside the home and online to protect 'family honour'.

Teacher violence:

- 19% of students have experienced corporal punishment in the past year.
- Male students are at a greater risk than female students, by 7 percentage points.
- Girls are more often punished for events beyond their control (such as being late to class on account of domestic or care work responsibilities), whereas boys are punished for misbehaviour.
- Rates of teacher violence are half what they were at Round 2 (2019–2020).

Figure 2: Peer violence in East Hararghe



Peer violence

- 17% of young people have experienced peer violence in the past year.
- Young males are twice as likely to experience peer violence as young females.
- As young males grow up, the violence they perpetrate on one another tends to become more extreme.
- Threats to young females are often verbal – and aimed at undermining their reputation (which can put them at risk of violence from caregivers and brothers).
- Rates of peer violence are half what they were at Round 2 (2019–2020).



A group of adolescents living in the streets, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

2. Sexual and marital violence

Sexual violence is widespread but often not recognised

- areas, 15% reported having experienced sexual violence.
- Among young women in South Gondar, self-reported sexual violence was already 24% at midline (2019–2020). (We did not ask questions about sexual violence at endline, due to concerns for young females' privacy, given that interviews were phone-based).
- In Hari Rasu (2%) and East Hararghe (5%), reports of sexual violence were rare at endline.
- Sexual harassment is pervasive in all locations – but not perceived as a form of violence.

DD *In Debre Tabor, violence on girls is common... For instance, boys tease girls while they are on their way to and from school. A boy can grab the girl's hand without her interest and he can even insult her when she tells him not to grab her hand, and this kind of practice is normal in this area and no one consider it as violence.'*

(18-year-old young man, Debre Tabor)

- In East Hararghe, marriage by abduction, which is perpetrated if girls do not give into pressure from adolescent boys and young men to marry – is not perceived as a form of sexual violence.

DD *Even if the girl did not love the boy, she might be forced to show consent since her name could be defamed.*

(18-year-old young woman, East Hararghe)

- In South Gondar, the risk of sexual violence was perceived to be so high – even before the conflict – that girls reported using contraception so that they would not become pregnant before marriage if raped. Parents also endorsed this practice.

DD *The good thing is the presence of the contraceptive pill means that women are now protected from unwanted pregnancies in the case of possible rape.'*

(Mother, South Gondar)



Adolescent girls in Oromia, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/
GAGE 2026

Marital violence is widely viewed as acceptable, especially in rural areas, but there are some signs of progress

- Approximately half of rural young people (48%) believe that it is acceptable for man to beat his wife to control her behaviour – even more (63%) believe that marital violence is private and should never be disclosed.

The habit of husbands beating his wife exists here for life. This is bad tradition. It arises from a gap of sharing ideas and decisions freely... Husbands are usually stubborn that they want things done only in the way they want.'

(Key informant, East Hararghe)

I do not tell anyone when he beats me. Even if I discuss with people, they cannot bring any change.

(19-year-old young woman, Dire Dawa)

- Urban young people have less tolerance for marital violence. Only 16% believe that wife beating is acceptable, and 25% believe that marital violence is private and should not be disclosed.
- In aggregate, between Round 2 (2019–2020) and endline, the proportion of young people who believe that wife-beating is acceptable fell by 20 percentage points. There were more modest improvements in beliefs about disclosure.

In backwards communities, men are dominant over women so husbands will do everything in the household. In a backwards community, men and women do not have equal rights and equal decision-making power; hence backwardness or being uneducated is the main driver of gender-based violence.

(18-year-old adolescent boy, Debre Tabor)

There is culture where they send elders to her [wife who is beaten by husband] to prevent her from taking him to legal courts. She can't say no to the elders.

(Key informant, East Hararghe)

Figure 3: Marital violence is widely viewed as acceptable

Approximately half of young people believe that it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife to control her behaviour.

Even more (63%) believe that marital violence is private and should never be disclosed.



In all locations, males are at least twice as likely as females to have sought support for having experienced violence

- Young people's awareness of where to seek violence support services if they should experience violence rose by 19 percentage points between Round 2 and endline.

Afar:

- 67% of males but only 40% of females know where to seek support if they experience violence.
- 6% of males and only 2% of females have ever sought such support.

Amhara:

- 81% of males but only 56% of females know where to seek support if they experience violence.
- 12% of males and only 5% of females have ever sought such support.

Oromia:

- 87% of males but only 67% of females know where to seek support if they experience violence.
- 13% of males and only 4% of females have ever sought such support.

Urban:

- 90% of males but only 85% of females know where to seek support if they experience violence.
- 13% of males and only 3% of females have ever sought such support.

3. Female genital mutilation (FGM)

FGM incidence and practices vary significantly by location – as do signs of progress

Afar:

- 98% of girls have been cut, usually as infants or in early childhood.
- Most underwent Type 3/infibulation with scar tissue.
- Practices are slowly shifting, with less flesh removed and narrowing less severe, primarily due to the efforts of religious leaders.

Amhara:

- 61% of girls have been cut, usually as infants.
- Most underwent Type 1/clitorectomy.
- Incidence is falling, with today's infants rarely undergoing FGM, primarily due to the efforts of health extension workers, teachers, and other government officials.

Oromia:


- 92% of girls have been cut, usually in late childhood or early adolescence.
- Most underwent Type 2/excision.
- There is no evidence of change over time.

Urban:

- 31% of girls have been cut, and incidence varies by religion and ethnicity.
- Practices also vary by religion and ethnicity.
- Incidence is falling and practices are shifting to become less severe, primarily due to the efforts of health extension workers, teachers, and other government officials.

 *FGM is no longer practised, it is absent in our area.*

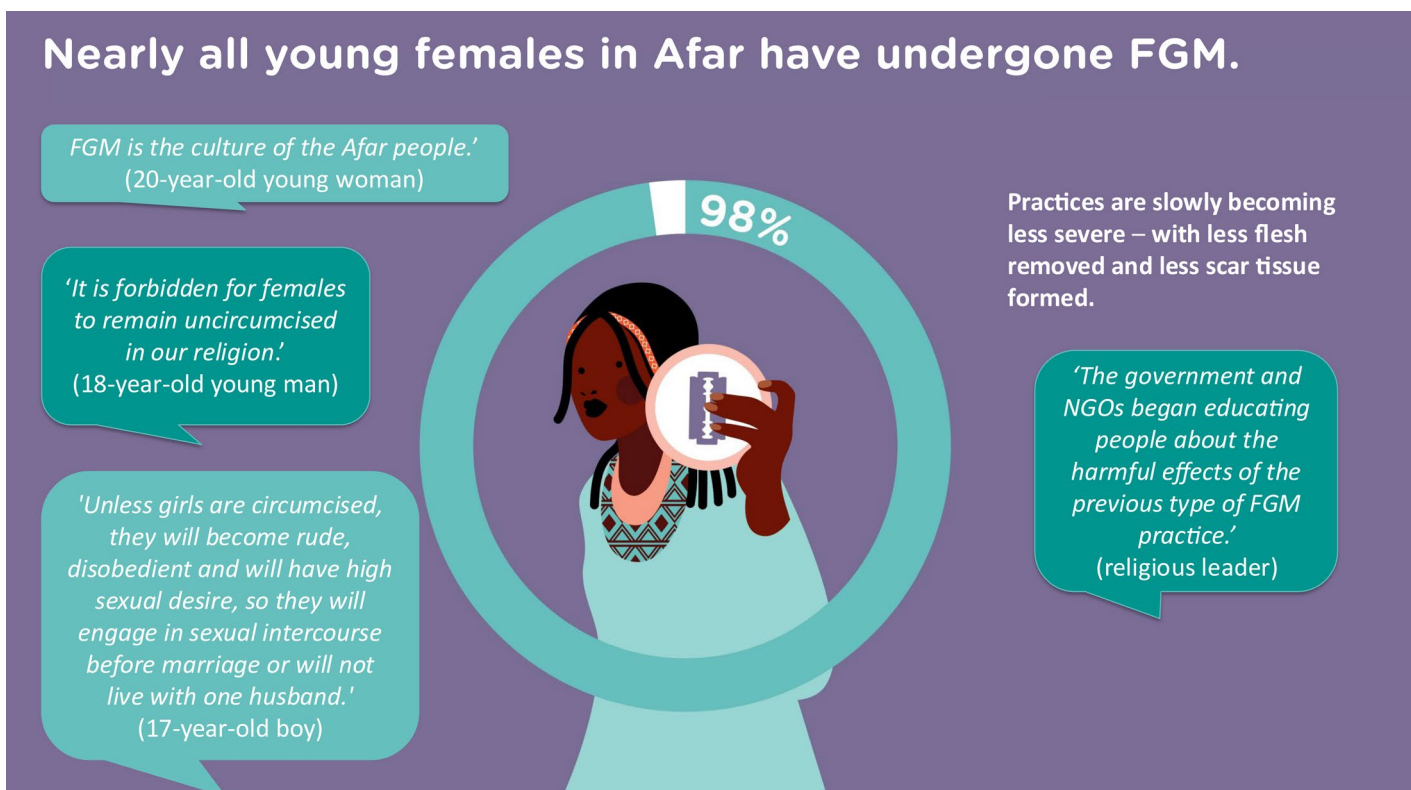
(21-year-old young woman, South Gondar)

 *FGM is culture. Every human being practices it.*

(Father, East Hararghe)

Beliefs about FGM reflect Ethiopia's diversity

Figure 4: Nearly all young females in Afar have undergone FGM



Afar:

- 57% of young people believe that FGM is required by religion.
- 46% believe that FGM has benefits.
- 58% believe that FGM has risks.
- There is no evidence that most communities are ready to eliminate the practice.

Amhara:

- 10% of young people believe that FGM is required by religion.
- 10% believe that FGM has benefits.
- 83% believe that FGM has risks.

Oromia:


- 67% of young people believe that FGM is required by religion.
- 37% believe that FGM has benefits.
- 34% believe that FGM has risks.
- There is no evidence that most communities are ready to eliminate the practice.

Urban:


- 12% of young people believe that FGM is required by religion.
- 10% believe that FGM has benefits.
- 86% believe that FGM has risks.



A 15-year-old girl newly married to her cousin, Afar, Ethiopia
© Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

 *Girls shouldn't be mutilated. That is because she may face high bleeding during delivery. It is no longer practiced, it is absent in our area.*

((21-year-old young woman, Batu)

 *It is forbidden for females to remain uncircumcised in our religion.'*

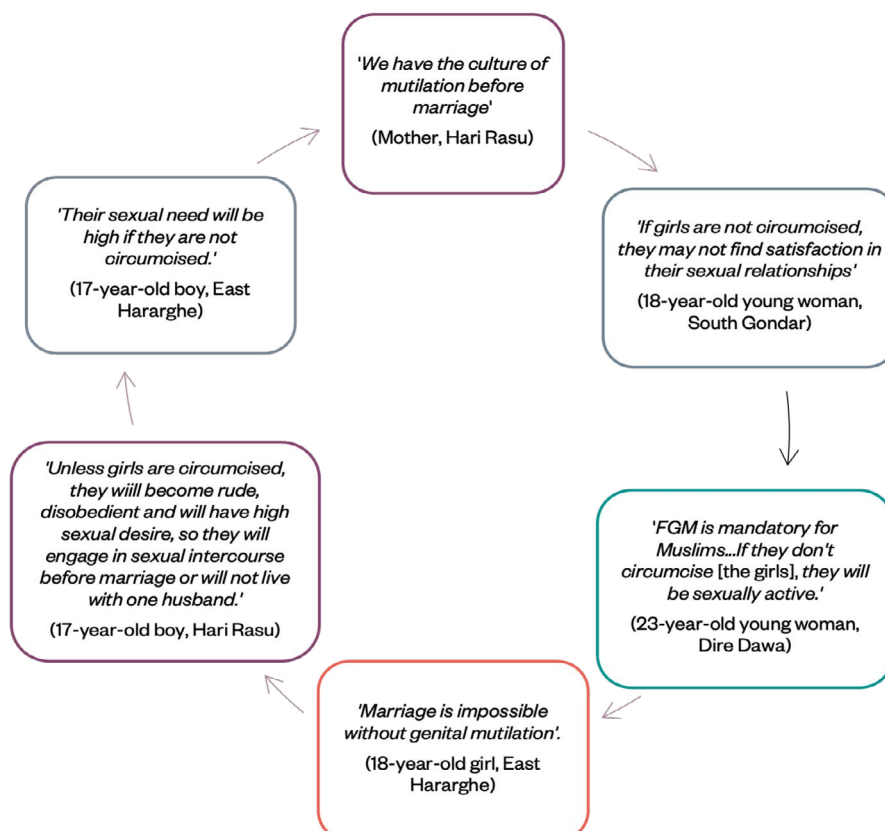
(18-year-old young man, Hari Rasu)

Commitment to FGM varies by location – and sometimes by gender

<p>Afar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 68% of young people, with no gender differences, plan to have their own daughter(s) cut. Only 29% of young males would be willing to marry a wife who had not been cut. 	<p>Amhara:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 10% plan to have their own daughter(s) cut. Young males are twice as likely as young females to plan this for their daughter(s). 86% of young males would be willing to marry a wife who had not been cut.
<p>Oromia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 51% of young people plan to have their own daughter(s) cut. Young males are 9 percentage points more likely than young females to plan this for their daughter(s). Only 30% of young males would be willing to marry a wife who had not been cut. 	<p>Urban:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 9% of young people, with no gender differences, plan to have their own daughter(s) cut. 86% of young males would be willing to marry a wife who had not been cut.

Beliefs about female sexuality are central to the continuity of FGM

Figure 5: Beliefs about female sexuality



4. Child marriage

Knowledge of the law against child marriage

Figure 5: Young people's knowledge about child marriage in Afar and South Gondar



Young people in South Gondar have the best knowledge of the marriage law

Afar:

- At endline, 23% of young people knew that marriage before 18 is illegal.
- Males were 8 percentage points more likely to know than females.
- There was a 13 percentage point improvement since Round 2.

Amhara:

- At endline, 71% of young people knew that marriage before 18 is illegal.
- Females were 12 percentage points more likely to know than males.
- There was a 38 percentage point improvement since Round 2.

Oromia:

- At endline, 42% of young people knew that marriage before 18 is illegal.
- There were no gender differences.
- There was a 25 percentage point improvement since Round 2.

Urban:

- At endline, 69% of young people knew that marriage before 18 is illegal.
- There were no gender differences.
- There was a 17 percentage point improvement since Round 2.

Rates of child marriage vary across locations

Figure 6: Child marriage is more common in Oromia and Afar than in South Gondar



An 18-year-old girl who got married at 16, buys khat with her mother for resale, Oromia, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

Girls in East Hararghe are the most likely to marry – and do so at the youngest ages

Afar:

- At endline, 8.3% of adolescent girls had married before age 15.
- 39% of adolescent girls had married before age 18.
- Of all girls and young women, 28% had married by age 18.
- Grooms were an average of 7.7 years older than brides.

Amhara:

- At endline, 6% of adolescent girls had married before age 15.
- 10% of adolescent girls had married before age 18.
- Of all girls and young women, 28% married by age 18.
- Grooms were an average of 6.5 years older than brides.

Oromia:

- At endline, 23% of adolescent girls had married before age 15.
- 54% of adolescent girls had married before age 18.
- Of all girls and young women, 58% had married by age 18.
- Grooms were an average of 4.6 years older than brides.

Urban:

- At endline, 0.6% of adolescent girls had married before age 15.
- 3% of adolescent girls had married before age 18.
- Of all girls and young women, 15% had married by age 18.
- Grooms were an average of 6 years older than brides.

- Not all adolescent girls are 18 years old yet, so rates of child marriage will continue to rise.
- Many young women were purposively selected into the sample because they married as children, so aggregate figures are likely an overestimate of incidence.

Marriage decision-making varies by location

- Girls in Hari Rasu and South Gondar have little input into marriage decision-making compared with their peers in urban areas and in East Hararghe.
- The proportion of young brides who made the decision to marry varies depending on how marriages are transacted. In Afar and Amhara, most marriages are arranged by parents (or extended families). In Afar, only 5% of young brides reported that they made the decision to marry; in Amhara, 20% reported this. In Oromia (76%) and urban areas (60%), where marriages are less often arranged by adults, most young brides reported that they made the decision to marry.

 *It was my desire [to get married], and my family did not interfere'*

(Key informant, East Hararghe)

 *In Afar culture, there is no practice of asking for girls' consent.*

(20-year-old married young woman, Hari Basu))



An 15-year-old girl forced into child marriage, Afar Ethiopia
© Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

Child marriage is driven by a complex set of factors including gender and social norms, education-related factors, economic motivations, and legal knowledge, systems and enforcement

- For each of these factors there are both cross-regional commonalities as well as regional specificities (see figures 7–10).

Figure 7: Drivers: gender and social norms around girls' marriageability + social value of marriage

Common norms	Regional specificity	
Girls are ready for marriage at onset of puberty / menarche – and on condition they have undergone FGM	Afar (HR): <i>Absuma</i> (maternal cousin marriage) tradition is central to preserving clan alliances + continuity – girls' compliance with this norm is pivotal. FGM is essential for marriage – but happens in infancy/ early childhood	Amhara (SG): Arranged marriage by parents Pre-marital pregnancy is shameful, but unmarried girls' contraceptive use is increasingly not, leading to later marriages. <i>But</i> physical/ social access challenges re contraceptives due to conflict + pressures to rebuild family
Girls are no longer attractive for marriage once they reach late adolescence – both physically + malleability for husbands + in-laws		
Pre-marital intimate relationships and esp. pre-marital pregnancy is shameful for the family	Oromia (HR): Adolescent-initiated marriage Boys/ young men place value on girls' physical attractiveness at puberty onset; pre-marital sex is taboo; community pressures on parents to accept adolescent-initiated marriages	Urban: Less prevalent norms – predominantly among rural migrants, Muslim communities (in Dire Dawa), and in case of pre-marital pregnancies
Marriage is for girls' protection – physical (<i>from sexual violence</i>), social (<i>prestige as wife + mother; avoiding becoming junior wife</i>) and economic (<i>future livelihood security</i>)		

Figure 8: Drivers: education-related challenges

Common barriers	Regional specificity	
Norms that under-value girls' education based on belief that girls will not support natal family after marriage	Afar (HR): Limited availability of functioning schools in remote rural localities, poor attendance due to livestock herding, seasonal migration and conflict, v. limited role models of secondary educated females from community	Amhara (SG): Relatively high commitment to girls' education reflected in higher grade attainment Conflict-related disruptions to education have increased risks of child marriage
Growing distrust in value of education in general due to poor learning outcomes reflected in challenges w/ passing national exam and high youth under/ unemployment		
Concerns about girls transitioning to secondary education given distance, safety, expense of boarding in woreda towns, limited role models	Oromia (HR): Limited commitment to girls' secular education (vs religious education), and esp. for secondary education. In part shaped by khat cash economy in which girls can generate income as traders	Urban: Rural kebeles in urban peripheries often overlooked by service providers
High girls' dropout rates due to domestic and care work burdens, disinterest in education due to limited learning, expensive school materials		
Only 47% of adolescents in EH had completed Grade 6. Of enrolled adolescents w/ average age of 18.1 years, the average student was attending grade 8.		

Figure 9: Drivers: food and climate-related challenges

Common barriers	Regional specificity	
Poverty and food insecurity propel parents to view marriage as a possible route to reducing household costs (for basic needs, education-related direct and opportunity costs)	Afar (HR): Poverty / climate-shocks shape age at which prospective grooms can secure enough livestock to support independent married life; it may shape girls' risks of marriage to much older husband as parents may be unable to wait for younger <i>absuma</i> groom	Amhara (SG): Parents may arrange marriages due to poverty, but also esp. in context of chronic land shortage to secure land for their offspring. Conflict has exacerbated poverty and hence risks of child marriage
Marriage seen as a mechanism to increase family economic wellbeing – through land inheritance, bride wealth, connections to wealthy relatives		Urban: Poorer and less educated girls either from rural kebeles or distress migrants from rural areas may be at greater risk of child marriage
Climate shocks, related death of livestock, distress migration and food insecurity increase risk of child marriage	Oromia (HR): In context of adolescent-initiated marriages, girls from poor backgrounds may agree to marry to secure more resources for herself	
Disruption of livelihoods, markets, social protection support during conflict leading to poverty and insecurity – and indirectly child marriage		

Figure 10: Drivers: limited knowledge of laws

Common barriers	Regional specificity	
Limited knowledge among adolescents + parents of legal age of marriage, reporting channels, penalties for violations	Afar (HR): Clan leaders committed to <i>absuma</i> tradition; growing divergence w/ religious leaders who are starting to champion 'free choice' marriage, lack of ratification of Family Law and Shariah courts providing 'nikah' marriage contract from 15	Amhara (SG): Pre-conflict relatively good awareness of legal age of marriage and surveillance by educators and HEWs of at risk girls and violations. Conflict has disrupted these surveillance mechanisms
Limited capacity of local authorities to enforce the law due to limited surveillance, inter-sectoral coordination, political will		Urban: Good awareness of the law and better surveillance mechanisms but inter-sectoral collaboration often challenging
Lack of harmonized legal traditions + systems – secular, Shariah law that permits marriage from 15, traditional/cultural courts that prioritise family harmony over individual rights	Oromia (HR): Marriages are either adolescent-initiated or by abduction; once girl has been taken to groom's home, her parents cannot intervene and Shariah court provides Nikah at 15	
Law better able to tackle family arranged marriages than adolescent-initiated marriages		

Adolescent pregnancy patterns reflect both child marriage patterns and broader beliefs about the social acceptability of contraceptive uptake

- Young people were 29 percentage points more likely to be able to name a method of contraception at endline than they were at Round 2 (2019–2020). Rates of current uptake, however, were unchanged over time.

Afar:

- 67% of young people can correctly name a modern method of contraception.
- 13% of sexually active young people are currently using a modern method.
- 49% of young females have ever been pregnant.
- Average age at first pregnancy was 17.2 years.

Amhara:

- 87% of young people can correctly name a modern method of contraception
- 57% of sexually active young people are currently using a modern method
- 23% of young females have ever been pregnant
- Average age at first pregnancy was 18.6 years.

Oromia:

- 70% of young people can correctly name a modern method of contraception
- 6% of sexually active young people are currently using a modern method
- 48% of young females have ever been pregnant
- Average age at first pregnancy was 16.1 years.

Urban:

- 90% of young people can correctly name a modern method of contraception
- 44% of sexually active young people are currently using a modern method
- 16% of young females have ever been pregnant
- Average age at first pregnancy was 19 years.

5. Young people's psychosocial well-being

Many young people are struggling, and have limited emotional support.

Distress and depression

- At endline, 14% of young people reported symptoms of emotional distress.
- 15% reported symptoms of depression.
- Young females are at greater risk of both than young males.
- Location differences primarily reflect awareness (Afar is low, urban is high).
- Rates of depression have nearly doubled since Round 2.


Emotional support

- At endline, 25% of young people did not have a trusted friend.
- 35% did not have a trusted adult.
- In rural areas, young females are very disadvantaged compared with young males.
- Location differences are minimal.
- Young people are 9 percentage points more likely to have a friend at endline than they were at Round 2 – gains have been especially large in Afar.
- Access to a trusted adult is unchanged.


No young people, even those who have witnessed and experienced violence, reported having access to formal or semi-formal psychosocial support services.

Common stressors across contexts


- Regardless of where they live, how old they are or whether they are female or male, most young people are worried about poverty and food security.

 *I worry about the living conditions of my family.*
(23-year-old young woman, Dire Dawa)


- Nearly all young people outside of Afar are also worried about the lack of work.

 *Job scarcity is a big issue.*
(18-year-old young woman, Batu))


- Girls and young women are worried about sexual and gender-based violence.

 *My intended daughter-in-law killed herself... She was not interested to marry him.*
(Mother, Afar)


- Boys and young men in South Gondar and East Hararghe are worried about forced recruitment.

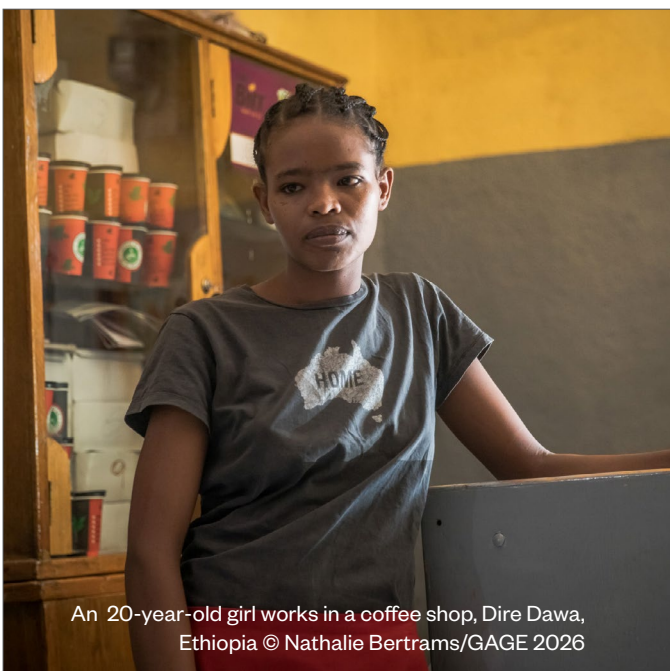
 *The military is a source of stress for boys.'*
(18-year-old young man, East Hararghe)

- Young people in South Gondar are worried about ongoing conflict.

 *During the conflict, I felt scared and worried.*
(16-year-old boy, South Gondar)

- Students are worried about exams and academic failure (and how these will impact their ability to find work).

 *I am stressed due to only my education.*
(18-year-old young woman, Debre Tabor)



An 20-year-old girl works in a coffee shop, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

Recommendations

To reduce and redress young people's risk of age- and gender-based violence:

- Raise young people's awareness (at school and in the community) about their right to be free from violence – including at home, from parents, siblings or spouses – and how to access supportive services, including at one-stop centres. Strengthen coordination and collaboration with other sectors to ensure that young people are able to fulfil their rights to health and sexual and reproductive health and well-being.
 - » Prioritise reaching girls, who are both less aware of services and less likely to use them (including the most vulnerable, such as girls who are out of school, girls with disabilities, young brides and those affected by conflict).
- Provide parenting education courses that address adolescent development and gender norms and how these impact girls' and boys' risks of experiencing various forms of violence over the life course.
 - » Parenting courses should also offer non-violent discipline strategies and emphasise that parents' obligations to their daughters do not end at marriage.
- Provide young people with school- and community-based programming designed to reduce peer, youth, and sexual and gender-based violence (including marital violence); expose young males to positive masculinities; and empower young females to recognise and protect themselves from myriad forms of violence.
 - » Venues for such programming could include gender clubs and community conversations (both using manuals with structured curricula), and youth centres in urban areas. Messaging could be reinforced through religious and traditional leaders, and media (including social media).
- Develop community awareness and media campaigns designed to ensure that sexual violence is recognised and that survivors are not blamed.
- Work with the Ministry of Education to develop school-based programming designed to teach young people (and their caregivers) on how to be safe online.
- Strengthen the capacity of *kebele*-level social workers to enhance surveillance and reporting on age- and gender-based violence and to coordinate case management for survivors.

- Work with the Ministry of Justice to improve legal awareness of adolescents' rights to live free from all forms of violence, through gender clubs, media, community meetings, and traditional institutions such as *iddir* [traditional community-based mutual aid association], *mehaber* [religious-based community association], *afocha* [traditional self-help community-based organisation].
- Work with the Ministry to improve young survivors' access to justice (in person and online). This should aim to ensure that perpetrators, even when they are family members, are prosecuted and that the rights of survivors are prioritised over community and clan cohesion.
- Work with the Ministry of Education to ensure that the ban on corporal punishment at school is enforced and that all students know how to anonymously report violations (e.g. secret boxes and hotlines).
- Work with traditional and clan leaders to explore ways to make traditional practices and structures (e.g. *shegoyeh* cultural dances in East Hararghe and *fimas* in Afar), contribute to positive, non-violent behaviours.
- Work with religious and traditional leaders to develop and disseminate messages that promote non-violence at all levels – in the family, community, and nation.

To reduce girls' risks of FGM and child marriage:

- Strengthen efforts supporting the design and implementation of the second generation Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM by harnessing lessons learnt from the first phase of the Roadmap. These include: the importance of basing policies and programming on robust research evidence; strengthening national data systems (including reporting, dashboards, and verification tools) and investing in research, monitoring and evaluation capacities at regional level.
 - » Strengthen collaboration and coordination with the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM to further enhance the capacity of regional and other local implementers to fulfil the commitments of the Roadmap.
- Ensure that girls know that they have a right to not undergo FGM and not to marry before the legal age, and that they know where to seek help should that right be threatened (e.g. police, child protection officers, health extension workers, school teachers, women's development union, *kebele* leaders, and youth structures).

- Work to raise girls' aspirations beyond only marriage and motherhood, by exposing them to female role models through schools, talks by health extension workers, and radio programme messaging.
- Include attention to gender norms and how these underpin FGM and child marriage in parenting education courses and community dialogues, facilitated by teachers, NGO mentors and social workers.
- Develop messages and programming, collaborating with religious leaders (especially in Muslim communities) and traditional leaders, aimed at reducing support for FGM. Efforts should directly address the perceived benefits of FGM (not merely reiterate risks) and should include mothers (who arrange cutting), fathers (who could refuse to allow it), girls (to reduce peer pressure and related demand), and young males (to address their beliefs about female sexuality and preferences for wives who are cut). In pastoralist communities, efforts should prioritise ending infibulation.
- Develop messages and programming – again collaborating with religious (especially in Muslim communities) and traditional leaders – aimed at reducing support for child marriage (especially of the youngest girls and between partners with large age gaps), and increasing support for adult marriage. Efforts should be carefully tailored to local marriage practices – especially whether they are parent-arranged or adolescent-initiated.
- Expand the mandate of the one-stop-centres to include child marriage prevention and cancellation, and expand the number of centres to ensure greater access for all girls.
- Work with the Ministry of Health to ensure that health extension workers are endeavouring to reduce the risks of FGM, are able to provide treatment for its health and psychosocial consequences, and are aware that it is illegal for them to perpetrate FGM – even when their goal is harm reduction.
- Work with the Ministry of Education to ensure that classroom and gender club curricula adequately address the risks of FGM and child marriage (and the advantages of adult marriage and parenthood) and that all schools provide students with a way to report girls who are risk of child marriage and FGM. This should also include raising awareness in gender clubs about adolescents' potential to share messaging with parents about the importance of preventing FGM and child marriage for their younger siblings and also to eschew these harmful practices for their future daughters.
- Strengthen the capacity of *kebele*-level social workers to enhance surveillance and reporting on FGM and child marriage and to coordinate case management for survivors.
- Work with the Ministry of Justice to strictly enforce laws against FGM and child marriage, including fining parents (even in locations where child marriages are adolescent-driven, to give parents a justification for refusing), adult grooms, religious leaders who officiate child marriages, and cutters.
 - » In regions that have not ratified the Family Law, work to make this happen.
 - » In conflict-affected localities where conflict has disrupted enforcement of the law, redouble efforts to prevent further backsliding – including via remote monitoring and documenting of child marriage and FGM violations.



Grade 8 students in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia
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To improve young people's psychosocial well-being:

- Develop parenting education courses that help parents learn how to communicate and support their children emotionally; courses should also address gender norms and how these shape parenting, as well as the risks (e.g. violence) and opportunities (e.g. for socialisation) open to girls and boys and women and men.
- Provide young people, especially young females (including those who are married), with opportunities to spend time with peers and trusted adults, and expose them to role models and programming designed to foster self-confidence and voice. Venues could include rotating savings groups, traditional associations (e.g. *iddir*, *mehaber*, *afocha*), youth centres, and youth parliaments.
- Work with the Ministry of Culture and Sport to create sports grounds and facilities and entertainment opportunities (e.g. festivals, community theatre) so that young people can spend time with peers and release their stress.
- Develop courses for young couples, helping them learn to better communicate with one another better, and learn about the rights and responsibilities of marriage. These could potentially be organised in partnership with Shariah councils in line with promising practice from Jordan, and/or through social workers.
- Work with the Ministry of Health to scale up access to semi-formal and formal psychosocial support services, expanding the number of social workers at *kebele* level as well as providing online and phone-based support. Prioritise conflict-affected localities to help survivors of recent conflict process the trauma they have experienced.

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