GENDER & ADOLESCENCE: GLOBAL EVIDENCE

ENDLINE REPORT SERIES

Young people's well-being and development in South Gondar, Amhara region, Ethiopia

GAGE endline evidence

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Table of Contents

Figures

Boxes

Tables

Introduction

As laid out in the Ten Years Development Plan (2021-2030)(Ministry of Planning and Development, 2020), as well as sectoral policies and commitments to international objectives (including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2024 Pact for the Future[1]), the Ethiopian government is intent on ensuring that its large and growing population of children and youth have access to 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 (ibid.). 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 have declined by up to 17% in 2025, due to cuts by major donors (OECD, 2025; UNDP Ethiopia, 2025; World Bank, 2025a). The World Bank (2025b) has stated that decades of development progress in Ethiopia are at risk, with the poverty rate expected to climb from 33% in 2016 to 43% in 2025.

Recent events in Ethiopia's Amhara region have jeopardised young people's present and their future. Although the region had a strong track record of investing in education, had made good progress in reducing female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, and had one of the country's highest rates of contraceptive uptake (Ministry of Education, 2020; CSA and ICF, 2017), it has been beset by recurrent conflict since mid-2021, when the unrest that broke out in Tigray spilled into Amhara. After a brief respite (after a cessation of hostilities was declared in November 2022), conflict changed shape and intensified, as the local militias (Fano[2]) who had fought alongside federal forces resisted pressures to de-arm and began to fight against them instead (Center for Preventive Action, 2025; Tesfaye and Debebe, 2025). Loss of life and destruction of property has been severe, and services in many communities have not only been disrupted but destroyed altogether (Vera, 2024; Gedfew et al., 2025).

This report is designed to inform the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Amhara Regional government, and the South Gondar Zone Administration, and their development partners, about the multiple and shifting threats facing young people living in South Gondar, Amhara. It also makes 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 to young adulthood. The report is based on mixed-methods data collected in late 2024 and the first half of 2025 by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme. Due to the security situation, surveys were undertaken by phone with 2, 610 young people living in 69 *kebele*s in 5 *woredas* (districts) of rural South Gondar as well as in 35 *ketenas* of the zone city Debre Tabor[3]. In addition, qualitative interviews were conducted by phone with 165 young people, 118 caregivers, 25 siblings and 54 key informants. The report also draws on previous rounds of data (starting with baseline in 2017-8) to show changes over time in key dimensions of young people's lives.

The report begins with an overview of existing evidence on how young people in Amhara are faring, including in the context of conflict. We then describe the GAGE conceptual framework and methodology. We present our findings on young people's capability outcomes across six domains: education and learning; physical health; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. We focus on differences by gender, age, and marital and disability status. We conclude by discussing the policy and programming actions that our findings indicate are needed to accelerate progress and ensure that all young people living in South Gondar have access to the services and supports they need to thrive as they move through adolescence and into young adulthood.

1 The 2024 Pact for the Future is a is a landmark agreement adopted by United Nations Member States at the 2024 Summit of the Future designed to strengthen the international system and ensure that it is more inclusive and fit for 21st-century challenges. One of five key pillars focuses on youth and ensuring their meaningful participation in global decision-making.

2 Fano is a network of armed Amhara youth militias that initially mobilised as community-based self-defence groups but have since evolved into a broader nationalist armed movement involved in regional and federal conflicts in Ethiopia.

3 A *kebele* is the lowest formal administrative unit while a ketena is a sub-division within an urban *kebele*.

Context

South Gondar, Amhara

The economy of South Gondar, like most of Amhara, is highly dependent on rainfed subsistence agriculture. Agriculture accounts for 53% of Amhara's gross domestic product (GDP), compared to 35% of GDP at national level, and employs up to 85% of the region's workforce (Endale, 2021a). Although the World Bank (2020) estimated that between 2011 and 2016, poverty reduction in Amhara was slower than the national average, with most gains accruing to urban residents – resulting in increased inequality – the Ethiopian Economics Association (2025) reported that between 2018 and 2021, there were declines in the region's poverty headcount, depth of poverty and inequality.

Adolescents in Amhara have historically had better access to education than their peers in many other regions of the country. In 2020, prior to the outbreak of sustained conflict, the Ministry of Education (2020) reported that the net enrolment rate (NER) in secondary school for the 2019–2020 school year was 36% in Amhara – above the national average of 29%. Girls' enrolment in secondary school was higher than boys (38% versus 33%). With the caveat that conflict has complicated record-keeping, the Ministry of Education (2024) reports that for the 2023–2024 school year, the secondary NER had climbed to 39% – and the gender gap had widened, to 44% for girls versus 33% for boys.

Amhara has also historically reported better outcomes compared with many other regions in terms of sexual and reproductive health indicators. The 2024–25 Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS) reports, for example, that 43% of sexually active women use a modern method of contraception (versus 34% nationally), that 90% of mothers receive antenatal care (78% nationally), that 46% of young people aged 15–24 know how to prevent contracting HIV (versus 28% nationally), and that 6.3% of adolescent girls aged 15–19 have ever been pregnant (versus 10.2% nationally) (Ethiopian Statistical Service (ESS) and ICF, 2026).

On the other hand, in terms of indicators of gender-based violence, Amhara has often lagged national averages. With the caveat that the data is now a decade old, the 2016 EDHS reports that of girls aged 10–14, 48% had undergone FGM, versus 28% nationally (CSA and ICF, 2017). The rate of child marriage was also higher in Amhara than the national average – 43% versus 40% (UNICEF, 2018). Intimate partner violence is also more common in Amhara. Lifetime incidence of any form of intimate partner violence for women aged 15–49 was 35% in Amhara, versus 30% nationally (ESS and ICF, 2026).

Conflict

The conflict in Amhara began when conflict in Tigray (which started in late 2020) spilled over regional borders. By July 2021, that conflict had spread into neighbouring Afar and Amhara, and Prime Minister Abiy had entreated citizens to take up arms and help the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) defeat rebels from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) (Center for Preventive Action, 2025). Tens of thousands of Amhara, including Fano, heeded the call, and for six months the region saw heavy fighting (ACLED, 2023). A treaty establishing a cessation of hostilities signed in November 2022 officially ended the conflict between the federal government and the TPLF (ibid.).

This first conflict had devastating impacts on Amhara (Mandefro, 2023; Birara, 2024). Regional leaders estimated that the destruction set the economy back by at least three decades (Endale, 2021b). They also reported that 40 hospitals, 443 health centres, 1,800 health stations, 466 private health institutions – and countless schools, from primary to tertiary levels – had been destroyed or damaged by the conflict (Endale, 2021a; Jones et al., 2022; Birara, 2024).

In April 2023, Amhara regional leaders disbanded the Amhara Regional Special Forces (ARSF), which had fought alongside the ENDF. After months of protests, and several skirmishes between the Fano (a coalition of Amhara militia) and the ENDF, Prime Minister Abiy declared a state of emergency in August 2023 (Mandefro, 2023; Haregu, 2024). Since then, Amhara has effectively been a war zone, with some areas (primarily urban areas and main transport links) controlled by the ENDF and other areas (including most of the countryside) controlled by the Fano (ibid.). Given that the region's infrastructure was already heavily damaged, the impacts of this subsequent conflict are almost incalculable. The regional president estimates that 60% of children cannot access education (UNDP, 2025).

Conceptual framework

Informed by the emerging evidence base on adolescent well-being and development, GAGE's conceptual framework takes a holistic approach that pays careful attention to the interconnectedness of what we call the '3 Cs' – capabilities, change strategies and contexts – in order to understand what works to support adolescents' development and empowerment, both now and in the future (see Figure 1). This framing draws on the three components of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) approach to evaluation, which highlights the importance of outcomes, causal mechanisms and contexts, though we tailor it to the specific challenges of understanding what works in improving adolescents' capabilities.

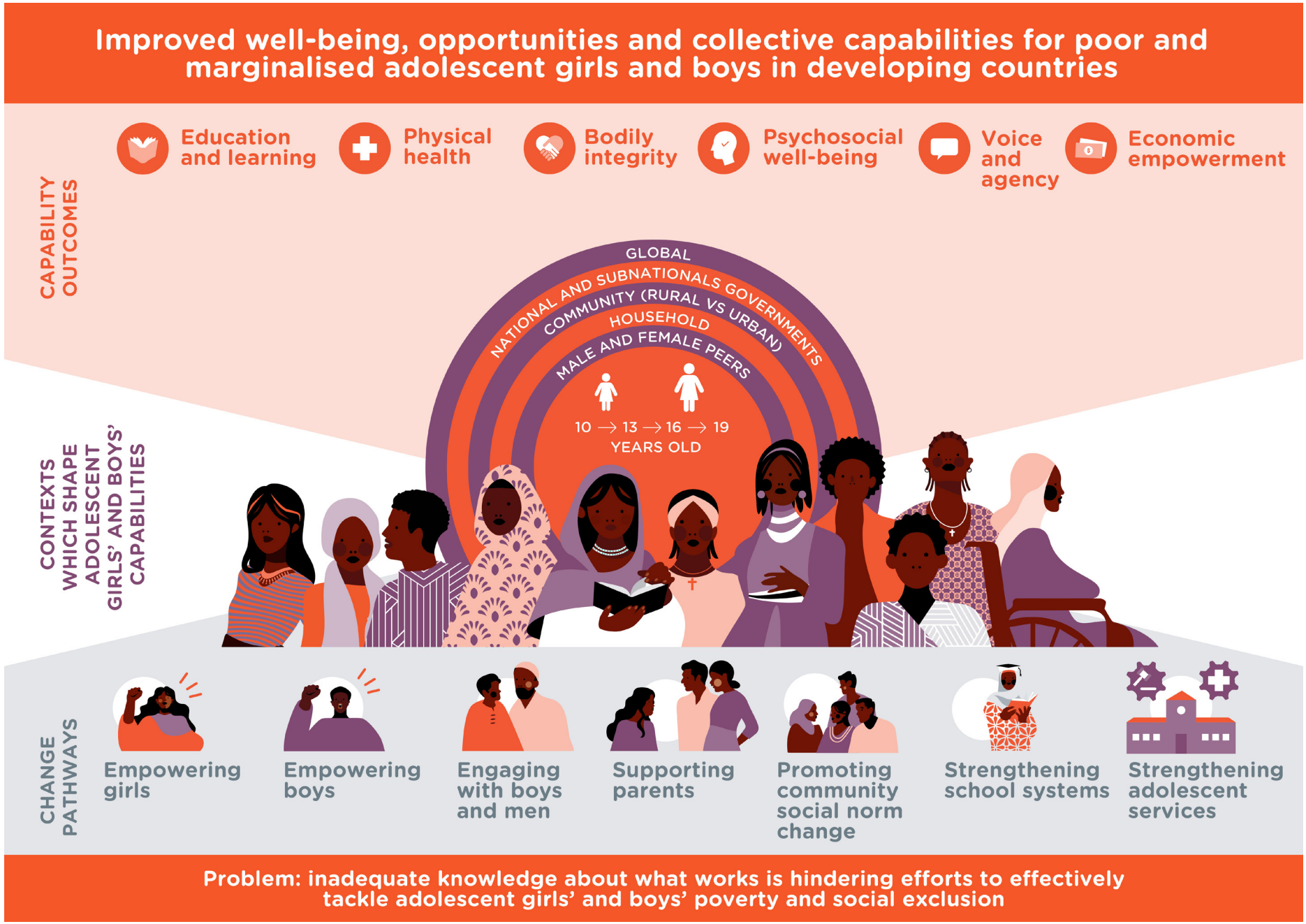
The first building block of our conceptual framework is capability outcomes. Championed originally by Amartya Sen (1985, 2004) and nuanced by Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Naila Kabeer (2003) to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels, the capabilities approach has evolved as a broad normative framework exploring the kinds of assets (economic, human, political, emotional and social) that expand the capacity of individuals to achieve valued ways of 'doing and being'. At its core is a sense of competence and purposive agency: it goes beyond a focus on a fixed bundle of external assets, instead emphasising investment in an individual's skills, knowledge and voice. Importantly, the approach can encompass relevant investments in children and young people with diverse trajectories, including the most marginalised and 'hardest to reach' such as those with disabilities or those who married as children. The GAGE framework covers six core capabilities: education and learning; physical health; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment.

The second building block of our conceptual framework is context dependency. Our '3 Cs' framework situates young people socio-ecologically. It recognises that not only do girls and boys at different stages of the life course have different needs and constraints, but also that these are highly dependent on their context at the family/household, community, state and global levels.

The third and final building block of our conceptual framework – change strategies – acknowledges that young people's contextual realities will not only shape the pathways through which they develop their capabilities but also determine the change strategies open to them to improve their outcomes. Our socio-ecological approach emphasises that to nurture transformative change in girls' and boys' capabilities and broader well-being, potential change strategies must simultaneously invest in integrated intervention approaches at different levels, weaving together policies and programming that support young people, their families and their communities while also working to effect change at the systems level.

A 19-year-old woman who had an early marriage and has one child, Soth Gondar © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

Figure 1: GAGE conceptual framework



Methods

This report draws on mixed-methods data collected in 69 *kebele*s in 5 *woredas* of rural South Gondar as well as in 35 *ketenas* of urban Debre Tabor (see Figure 2), in late 2024 and the first half of 2025 (see Figure 2). This research follows up on four earlier rounds – at baseline (2017– 2018), Round 2 (2019–2020), Round 3 (2021–2022) and Round 4 (2022–2023) (see Figure 3). At baseline, the quantitative sample included 2,896 young adolescents – 2,754 randomly selected individuals aged 10–12 years in rural sites and aged 10–12 and 15–17 in urban sites, and an additional 142 adolescents aged 10–18 who were purposefully selected in order to include a greater number of the most marginalised adolescents (particularly those with disabilities). At Round 2, 652 adolescents were purposefully added to the sample, bringing the total sample to 3,548. Most of these newly recruited adolescents were aged 17–19 and were added as an older rural cohort of adolescents to compare to those in the broader GAGE sample living in urban areas. The remaining adolescents, aged 10–21, were added to increase representation of particularly marginalised adolescents in the sample, including those with disabilities, those who were out of school, or those who had married as children. At Round 3, an additional 807 adolescents aged 14–18 were recruited in urban Debre Tabor in anticipation of an impact evaluation there. To minimise attrition in this longitudinal survey, a two-stage tracking strategy was used that limited focus to a subset of those included in previous rounds (Hamory et al., 2025), resulting in a total sample of 3,888 adolescents. At Round 4, a similar methodology was used, and the total research sample included 3,191 adolescents.

The endline research (Round 5) surveyed 2,610 of these previously recruited young people – 1,845 in the younger cohort (aged 18.9 years on average at endline) and 765 in the older cohort (aged 22.9 years on average) (see Table 1 and Box 1). To keep these cohorts distinct, in this report

Figure 2: Map of Amhara, with South Gondar highlighted and Debre Tabor marked

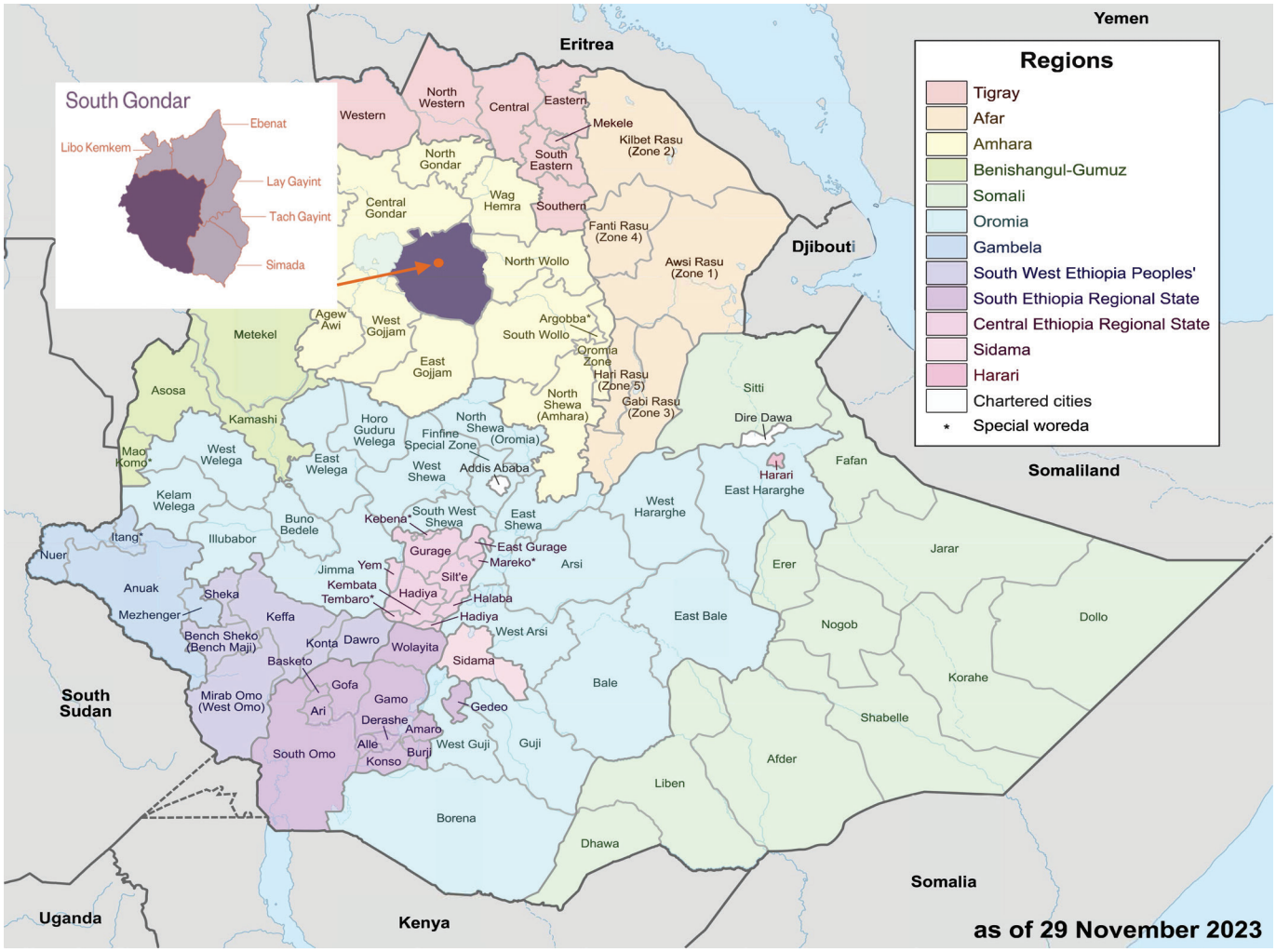


Figure 3: Timeline of GAGE quantitative research in South Gondar

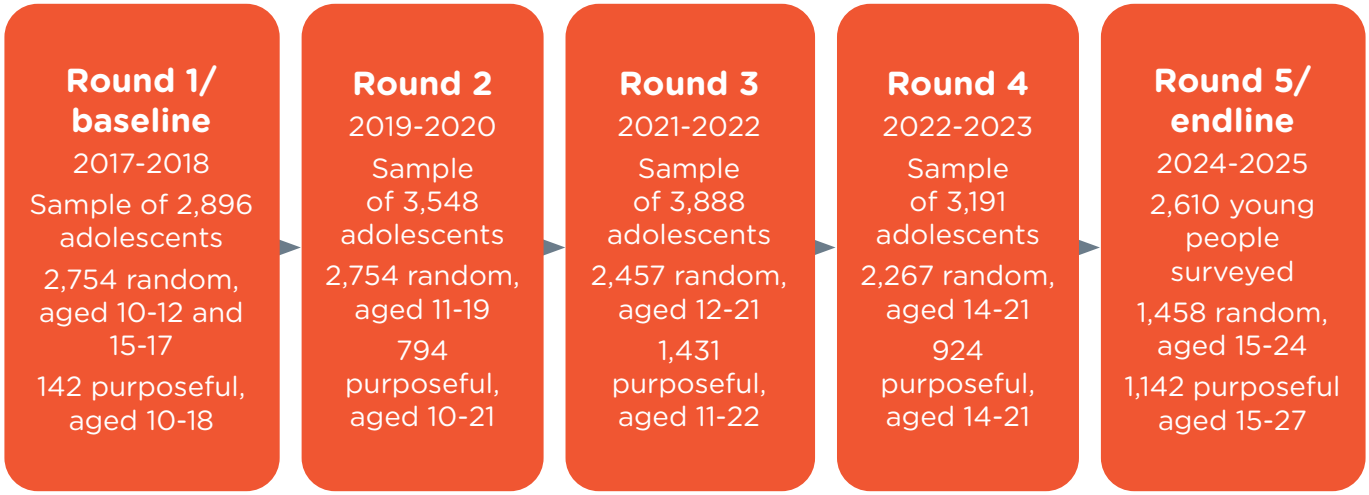


Table 1: Quantitative sample for GAGE Round 5 (endline)

		Young females	Young males	Total
Rural South Gondar	Adolescents	451	441	892
	Young adults	194	168	362
	Sub-sample married < 18	179	20	199
	Sub-sample with disability at Round 2	13	53	66
	Subsample migrants	203	161	364
	Subtotal	*645*	*609*	*1254*
Debre Tabor	Adolescents	516	437	953
	Young adults	220	183	403
	Sub-sample married < 18	58	1	59
	Sub-sample with disability at Round 2	15	24	39
	Subsample migrants	117	72	189
	Subtotal	*736*	*620*	*1356*
Total		**1381**	**1229**	**2610**

we refer to the younger cohort as 'adolescents' (despite the fact that most are legally adults) and the older cohort as 'young adults'. Female adolescents are referred to as 'girls'; male adolescents 'boys'. Female young adults are referred to as 'young women'; male young adults 'young men'. When the sample is referred to as a single group they are referred to as 'young people'. When adolescent girls and young women are jointly discussed, they are referred to as 'young females'; when adolescent boys and young men are jointly discussed, they are referred to as 'young males'.

Qualitative research took place in 8 *kebele*s in Ebinat town *woreda* (see Table 2), plus the city of Debre Tabor (see Table 3). This involved individual interviews with young people (53 of whom had migrated outside of their original community), caregivers and siblings, as well as key informant interviews (KIIs). The majority of the 165 young people who took part in individual interviews 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'. GAGE has followed these individuals since Round 2. The qualitative sample also included 118 caregivers, 25 siblings and 54 key informants (community leaders, *kebele*-level officials and service providers, *woreda* and regional sector officials).

Quantitative survey data was collected through interviews conducted over the phone (given the security challenges in the region) and via Telegram/WhatsApp (for those who migrated internationally) by enumerators who were trained to communicate with marginalised populations. With the exception of never-married adolescent boys, enumerators were typically the same sex as the respondent; all female respondents were interviewed by female enumerators, and the majority of

Box 1: Attrition over time

Minimising attrition (loss to follow-up) is a key challenge for longitudinal studies designed to understand changes over time. This challenge is acutely felt in the GAGE samples, as adolescents and young adults can be highly mobile as they pursue education, seek employment, and marry and start their own families. Compounding these challenges, the GAGE South Gondar sample was affected by widespread conflict and economic disruption in the months leading up to the endline data collection. The research team determined that continuing data collection was important for providing insights into the lives of adolescents in the study sites during this upheaval; however, the data collection protocol was altered substantially to maintain the safety of respondents and data collectors alike. Four modifications are particularly relevant:

- Endline surveys in rural and urban sites in South Gondar were conducted via phone; for young people who had migrated internationally, interviews were also conducted via Telegram/WhatsApp.
- For rural sites, where phone coverage and reliability is somewhat lower, local facilitators already residing in the study communities assisted in reaching respondents.
- The survey instrument was trimmed substantially to a length manageable for phone administration.
- Most importantly for attrition, GAGE was unable to implement the usual two-stage tracking approach, and targeted a sample size of approximately half the sample from previous rounds in rural sites, on a first-to-locate basis.

Ultimately, 47% of the rural sample and 97% of the urban sample were interviewed at endline. Although there is little evidence of differential survey attrition along key baseline characteristics for the urban sample, the resulting rural sample differs systematically from those reached in prior rounds and from samples at other GAGE Ethiopia sites. In particular, relative to the full rural GAGE South Gondar sample, girls and younger adolescents were less likely to be interviewed at endline, as were adolescents who were married or affected by a disability at the time of their recruitment. This selective attrition warrants caution when interpreting comparisons across sites in Ethiopia or to previous reports on this sample. But, panel analysis presented in this report that is restricted to this sample does correctly reflect changes over time for that population. Where relevant, subsequent sections of this report flag specific findings that may be especially sensitive to these patterns of differential attrition.

It is worth noting that the 47% surveyed in the rural sample is in line with what one would expect as a best-case scenario within a conflict affected setting (Alrababah et al. 2025).

Table 2: Qualitative sample, rural South Gondar

Interview type	Participant type	Remote communities (Abena, Aquashmoch, Embachiko, Niquara, Shumgie)	More central communities (Deber, Jeman, Ebinat town)	Total
Individual interviews with young people	Young females	51	23	74
	Females with disabilities	2	10	12
	Married females	25	3	28
	Females who had migrated	21	7	28
	Young males	38	19	57
	Males with disabilities	1	9	10
	Married males	8	1	9
	Males who had migrated	10	6	16
Subtotal		**89**	**42**	**131**
Individual interviews with family members	Siblings	17	8	25
	Caregivers	74	23	97
Subtotal		**91**	**31**	**122**
Key informants	Community leaders	6	2	8
	Kebele officials/ providers	21	13	34
	Woreda officials			5
	Regional officials			0
Subtotal		**27**	**15**	**47**
Total		**207**	**88**	**300**

Table 3: Qualitative sample, Debre Tabor

Interview type	Participant type	Total
Individual interviews with young people	Young females	17
	Females with disabilities	*2*
	Married females	*6*
	Females who had migrated	*4*
	Young males	17
	Males with disabilities	*2*
	Married males	*1*
	Males who had migrated	*5*
Subtotal		**34**
Interviews with family members	Caregivers	21
Key informants	Officials/ providers	7
Total		**62**

young men/ever-married males were interviewed by male enumerators. Surveys were broad and included modules reflecting the GAGE conceptual framework (see Hamory et al., 2025), though it should be noted that the surveys conducted in rural South Gondar were substantially shorter than those conducted in other GAGE sites (trimming sensitive questions and reducing overall length for phone administration).

Statistical analysis was conducted using Stata 18.0. Importantly, where we present endline survey findings, we include the 2,610 young people who completed the endline survey. Where we present change since Round 2, however, we restrict our sample and include only the 1,824 young people who completed both the Round 2 and endline surveys. These young people are referred to as the panel sample. Note that these findings are preliminary and figures may shift slightly in the future as data is further cleaned. Since individuals in South Gondar were surveyed on a first-to-locate basis and we were unable to implement two-stage tracking in this conflict-affected setting, we do not use survey weights in analysis of the rural data. Differences that are statistically significant with $p<0.05$ and substantial magnitudes are discussed in the text.

Qualitative tools were also employed over the phone by researchers carefully trained to communicate sensitively with marginalised populations. Although all tools were designed to be interactive, in the case of South Gondar, primary consideration was given to flexibility around young people's availability, comfort and security while being interviewed (see Jones et al., 2026). Preliminary data analysis took place during site-wide debriefings. Interviews were transcribed and translated by native speakers and then coded thematically using the qualitative software analysis package MAXQDA.

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.

Findings

The endline findings are organised in line with the six capability domains laid out in the GAGE conceptual framework (see page 4): education and learning; physical health; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. When discussing findings in each domain, we first present endline survey findings and, where there are interesting patterns of change over time, we include longitudinal data using the panel sample. We then present qualitative findings.

Education

Educational aspirations

The endline survey found that young people's educational aspirations are still high. In aggregate, 91% would like to complete secondary school (see Figure 4) and 82% would like to complete university (see Figure 5). Young people in Debre Tabor were significantly more likely than their peers in rural areas to aspire to complete both secondary school (95% versus 85%) and university (91% versus 73%). Adolescents, who are still school-aged, were significantly more likely than young adults to aspire to complete secondary school (93% versus 84%) and university (86% versus 74%). There were no gender differences in aspirations for secondary school. However, young females were slightly but significantly more likely than young males to aspire to complete university (85% versus 80%).

Including only the young people in the panel sample, aspirations for secondary school have slightly but significantly fallen since Round 2 (from 94% to 89%). Aspirations for university, on the other hand, have risen from 74% to 80%. Gains were largest among young females from rural South Gondar. At Round 2, 63% of young females in the panel sample in rural South Gondar aspired to complete university. At endline, this had risen to 78%.

Figure 4: Proportion of young people who would like to complete secondary school (by location and cohort)

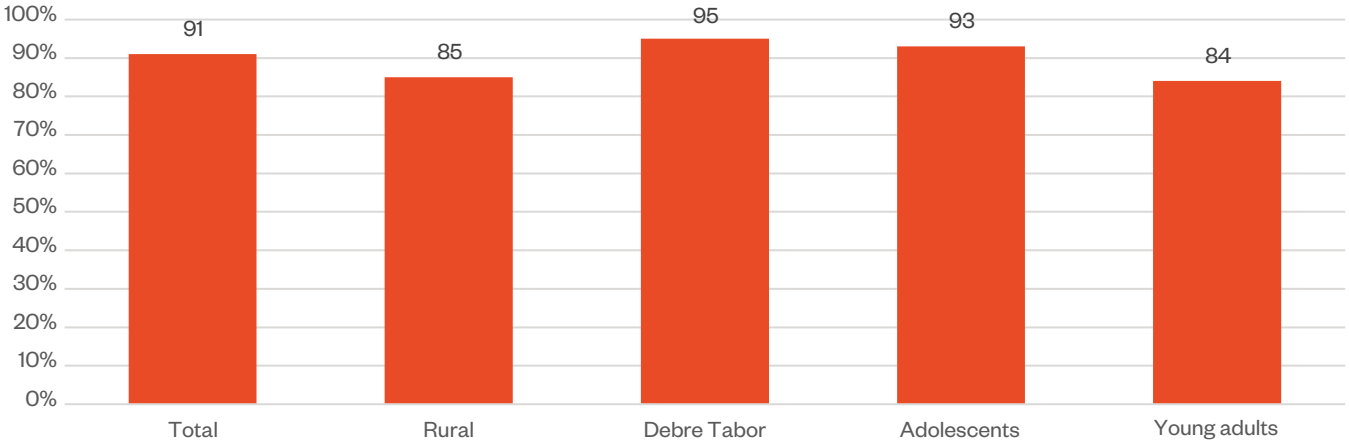
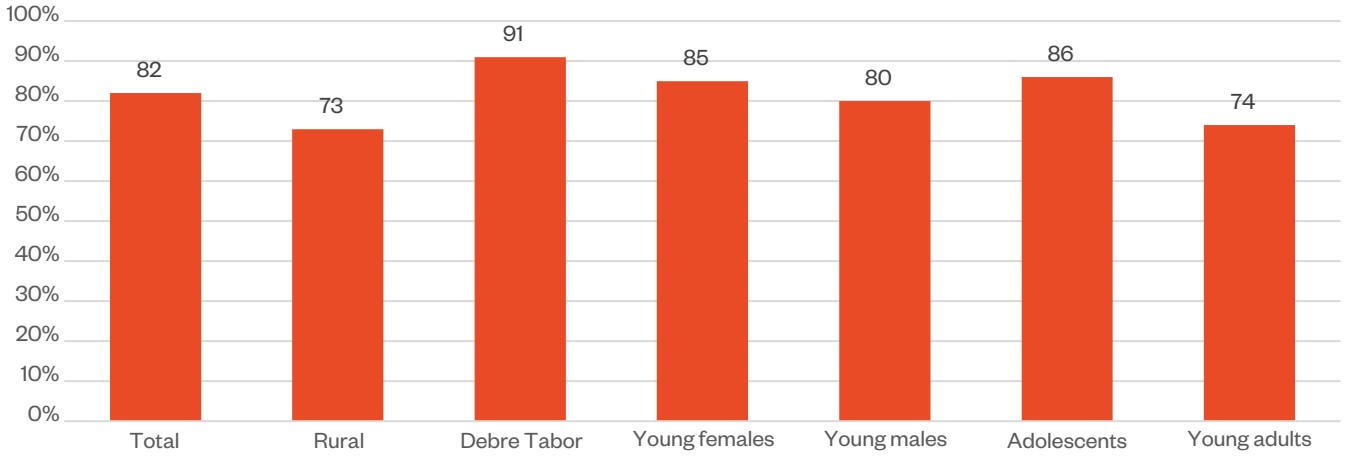


Figure 5: Proportion of young people who would like to complete university (by location, cohort and gender)



During qualitative interviews, respondents primarily spoke of declining educational aspirations – in part due to the security situation in South Gondar and in part due to high youth unemployment. A 22-year-old young man from Community F, where schools have been completely closed for three years, reported of the former:

> *Our sole focus was education, and we were doing well, but without school, we have to consider other options… Many young girls were forced to migrate to the cities for work, especially those from poor families. Many young boys also left the area. Only a few students remain here now.*

A key informant from Debre Tabor reported that, '*Nowadays, adolescents and young adults are losing their hope in learning because of unemployment of educated young adults*.'

That said, some young people did speak of their aspirations for education. An 18-year-old out-of-school young woman from Community E stated that she wishes to complete secondary school: '*I want to return to school and am interested to complete my education and want to be a health professional*.' An out-of-school young man the same age, from Debre Tabor, stated that he wishes to attend technical school:

> *The customer* [where he worked] *didn't trust me and even he asked me for a certificate in auto mechanics or a related field. That's when I realised that I need to continue learning and get certified from the relevant college.*

Students' aspirations were often quite ambitious. An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, for example, reported, '*I want to attend university. I want to study software engineering*.' A 19-year-old young woman from Community D similarly stated, '*I want to complete my university education… I was thinking to be a doctor*.'

Access to quality education

At endline, fewer than half of young people (47%) were still enrolled in education (see Figure 6). Location, cohort and gender differences (for adolescents only) were significant. Young people in Debre Tabor were more than twice as likely to be enrolled as their peers from rural areas (65% versus 27%). In both locations, adolescents – and especially adolescent girls – were the most likely to be enrolled. In rural areas, 37% of girls, 26% of boys and 14% of young adults were enrolled. In Debre Tabor, 80% of girls, 71% of boys and 40% of young adults were enrolled.

Enrolment figures tell only half the story in rural areas, where students are also years over age for grade. In rural South Gondar, while 51% of young people were enrolled in secondary school, 44% were still enrolled in primary school (see Figure 7). Young males were significantly more likely

Figure 6: Proportion of young people enrolled in formal education (by location, cohort and gender)

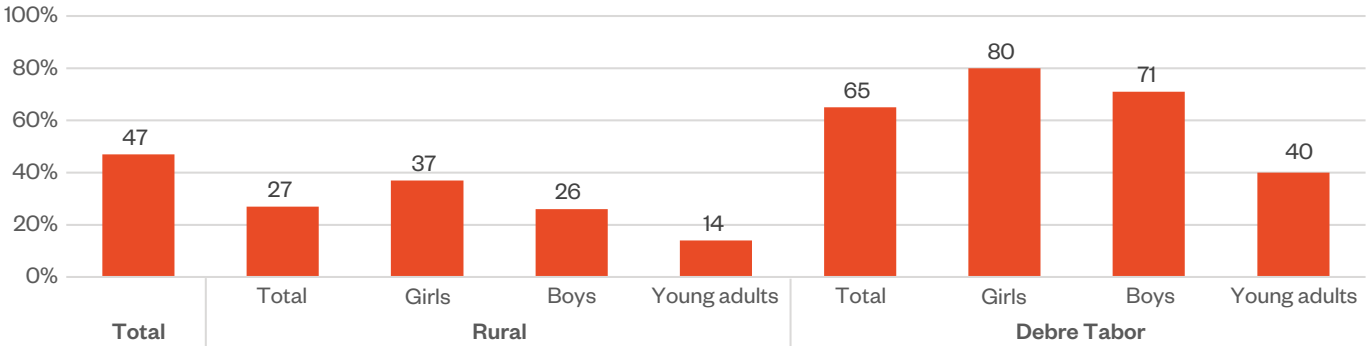
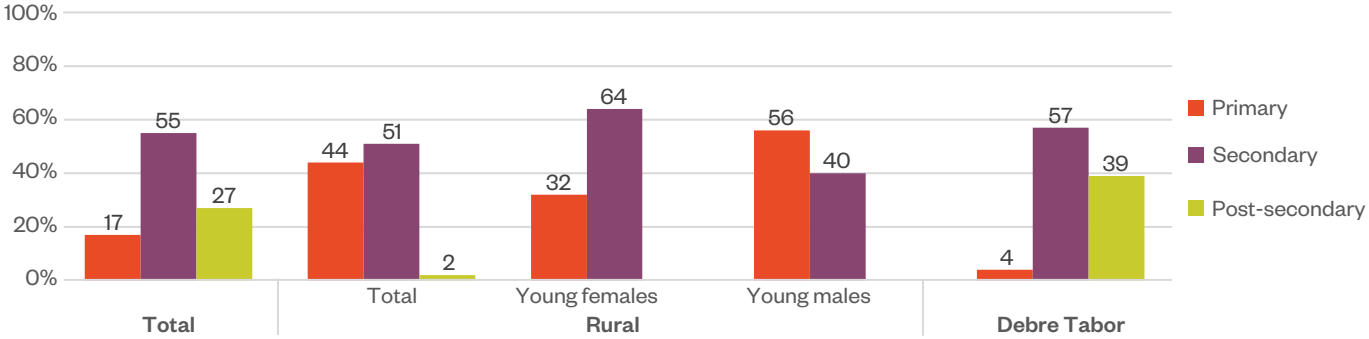


Figure 7: Level of schooling enrolled in, of enrolled young people only (by location and gender)



than young females to still be enrolled in primary school (56% versus 32%). Enrolment in post-secondary education was very rare (2%) in rural areas. In Debre Tabor, most students, with no gender differences, were enrolled in either secondary (57%) or post-secondary (39%) education. It was rare (4%) for urban students to be attending primary school.

Young people's access to education is made even more visible by tracking the proportion who ultimately attend a given grade, even years late. Of all young people aged 13 and older, 96% had attended 3rd grade (see Figure 8). Of those 16 and older, 88% had attended 6th grade. Of those 19 and older, 72% had attended 9th grade. Of those 22 and older, only 47% had attended 12th grade. Location differences were highly significant, with a gap that grows by grade level. Compared to their peers in rural areas, young people in Debre Tabor were 7 percentage points more likely to attend 3rd grade (99% versus 92%), 23 percentage points more likely to attend 6th grade (99% versus 76%), 48 percentage points more likely to attend 9th grade (92% versus 44%), and 62 percentage points more likely to attend 12th grade (72% versus 10%). Although gender differences were not significant in Debre Tabor, in rural areas, young females were more likely than young males to attend all gateway grades.

Since Round 2, and for many reasons (including their age and recurrent conflict), young people's enrolment in formal education has plummeted. In aggregate, young people were 43 percentage points less likely to be enrolled at endline than they were at Round 2 (see Figure 9). Location differences were significant, with rural young people seeing far steeper declines than those in Debre Tabor (-49 percentage points versus -29 percentage points). Of students who were still enrolled at endline, those in rural areas had attended only 3 grades of schooling in the five years between Round 2 and endline; those in Debre Tabor had attended 4.1 grades in that same time frame.

Recurrent conflict is a key reason why young people – especially those in rural areas – have lost access to education. When asked how educational services have changed since April 2023, 48% of young people in Debre Tabor and 75% of young people in rural areas reported that services have got worse (see Figure 10). In rural areas, gender differences were significant, with young males more likely than young females to report worsening services: 81% versus 68%.

Figure 8: Proportion of young people who have attended 'gateway' grades (by location and gender)

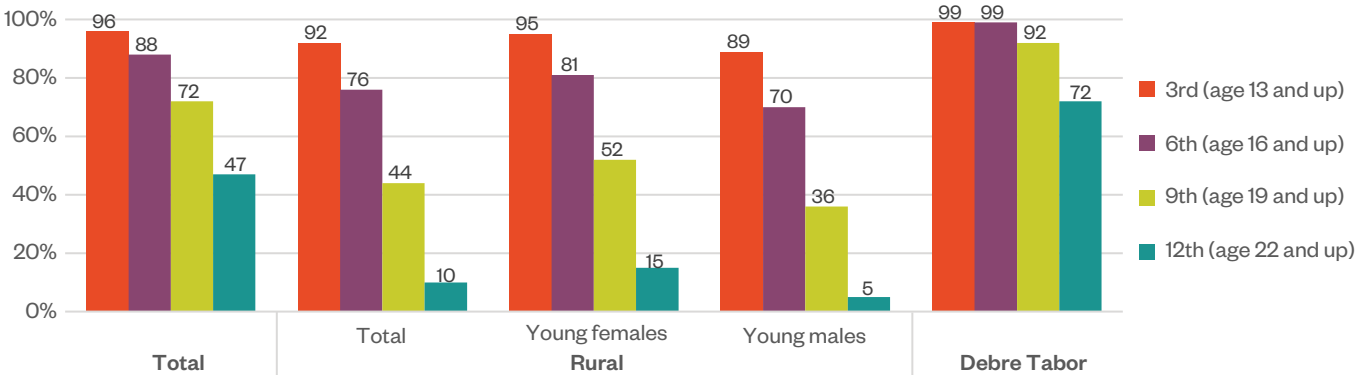


Figure 9: Declines in enrolment between Round 2 and endline (by location)

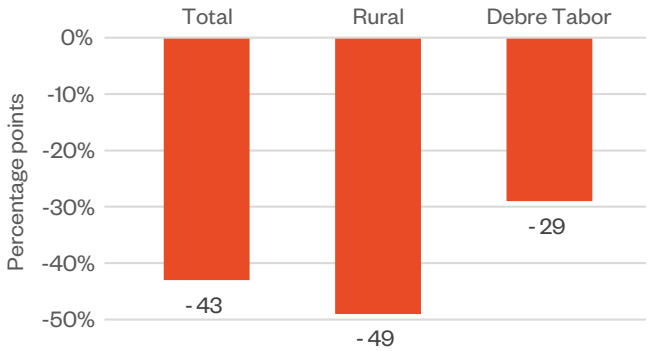
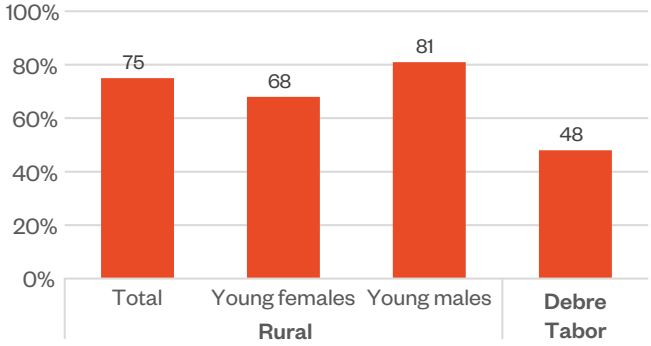


Figure 10: Proportion of young people who reported that educational services have got worse since April 2023 (by location and gender)



Qualitative research participants spoke most often of how recent conflict has limited access to education. In some communities, schools have now been completely closed for over four years. A 20-year-old young man from Community D stated:

> *Since 2021, the schools have been closed in the area… Since 2023, there has been conflict between the Fano and government forces… Before that, there was war with the Junta group in the area.*

School closures are almost universal in areas controlled by Fano militias. A teacher from Community F reported that teachers and parents have received death threats:

> *Fano militias ordered that they should never be opened and threatened to punish teachers if anyone attempted to open them. The punishments include beating, killing and abduction for anyone who teaches against the order. Schools closed because of that. They even threatened parents with punishment if they sent their children to school.*

A teacher from Community D added that even when the Fano pull out (and that often this is temporary), many schools cannot reopen, because of the destruction that militias have left behind:

> *The school was destroyed after the conflict. There are no school materials left. They destroyed the boards, desks, and other necessary educational materials. Most of the educational materials were stolen by robbers. The toilets and the school compound are also destroyed. Currently, the community uses the school compound as grazing land for their cattle.*

A mother from Community B noted that children from poorer households have been disproportionately impacted by school closures:

> *A rich child dresses, eats well, wears what he sees, drinks, so his upbringing is different. Even now, you don't see it in education, now, in the chaos, the rich children have not stopped. The rich parents are sending their children to other places like Ebenat and Bahir Dar to study. But the poor children have stopped.*

Even prior to the conflict, young people from rural communities – and especially those from poorer households – had limited access to secondary school. This is because some *kebele*s only provide education through the end of 8th grade, meaning that students must then undertake long commutes or pay to board in town. A 19-year-old young man from Community B, who dropped out after 8th grade, explained: '*There was no secondary school in our area and my family didn't have any money to go to a secondary school and study there. So the reason for not studying is poverty.*' A mother from that same community reported of her daughter, who is attending secondary school, '*The distance between our kebele and China town is three hours walking distance… Since the room is expensive… we begged our relative to support her.*'

Access to post-secondary education for rural students is rare. Not only are such programmes exclusively provided in urban areas, which makes them financially out of reach for most, but few students from rural areas are able to pass the exam on which entrance depends. A 19-year-old young woman from Community D explained, '*The national exam is very tough even for students who are clever in lower grades.*' An 18-year-old young woman from Community E reported that 'tough' is an understatement: '*In Community E, there are only 2 students who passed the matriculation exam and joined university, and one of them is my brother.*'

In stark contrast to the survey findings, most participants in qualitative research reported that rural adolescent girls' access to education is broadly worse than that of their male peers. This is because although girls are more likely to enrol on time, by adolescence their attendance and study time are compromised by parental

A 19-year-old woman selling vegetables in the street © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

demands on their time. A 13-year-old boy from Community C explained:

> *Although both boys and girls miss school for different reasons, it is the girls who miss school most. This is because parents want their girls to assist them at home performing house chores.*

A 19-year-old young woman from Community G, who dropped out at age 12, elaborated, '*I support them with harvesting the crop in the harvest season. I do animal herding, fetch water, and do household chores. I did not understand education well. That was why I quit school.*'

Girls' access to education is further truncated by the fact that many parents will not allow their daughters to commute or board for secondary school, due to concerns for their safety. A teacher from Ebinat town explained, '*There are problems on the road, especially for female students. Boys harass them, and there are risks when they go home at night.*' A 16-year-old boy from Community C, enrolled in the 9th grade in Ebinat town, reported, '*There are 36 students in my class… Girls are only nine or ten in number… In our class there is no girl who goes from Community C to Ebinat town to attend her education.*' Although becoming less common, child marriage also truncates some girls' access to education. A teacher from Ebinat town explained, '*Many girls are forced into early marriage, which leads them to drop out of school.*'

That said, a few respondents reported that since the onset of conflict, boys' access to education has deteriorated more than that of girls. An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor explained:

> *Due to recurrent conflicts it is the boys who have become disadvantaged in terms of accessing education. Currently, girls are coming to school and learning properly. Too many boys left school because of the recurrent conflicts and some of these boys joined armed groups and the ENDF, while others migrated to other places looking for work to support themselves and their families.*

A teacher from Community G agreed, '*The problem is now on the side of the boys. That is because they are joining the Fano.*'

In Debre Tabor, most respondents reported that access to education is good. Schools have not closed due to conflict, formal education through to the end of secondary school is widely valued and expected for both girls and boys, and young people have multiple options (including technical and vocational education and training (TVET), private colleges, and Debre Tabor University) for post-secondary education. Indeed, what stands out in Debre Tabor is the tenacity and creativity that young people (and their families) employ to ensure their continued access to education. A 23-year-old young woman in her 4th year at university reported that she studies all week and works on the weekend: '*I have been working since I joined university. I was trading every Saturday.*' A 20-year-old young woman stated that her sister, a second-year university student, maintains the opposite schedule: '*My sister works from Monday to Friday and studies on Sunday and Saturday.*' A 23-year-old young man explained that he is pursuing two credentials at once, to increase his prospects for employment: '*I am studying auto mechanics… I am also attending university.*' A 22-year-old young woman reported that she is enrolled in online graduate school: '*I have started my master's degree now. I am paying from a distance.*'

Young people in Debre Tabor explained that they are forced to rely on creative solutions because post-secondary education is only affordable for a few. It is rare for students sitting the university entrance exam to achieve a passing score. This means that most young people who want to attend post-secondary education must enrol in a private college, where fees can be very high. A 23-year-old young man in his third year of pharmacy school explained, '*We pay for 12 months per year, so it's 12,000 birr* [77USD] *per year.*' Even students who do pass the exam are usually assigned to universities in other locations, which means that families are forced to pay for transport and boarding that they cannot afford. A 24-year-old young man who attended a private college in Debre Tabor explained, '*I couldn't afford to go to the university where I was assigned.*'

In rural areas and in Debre Tabor, respondents reported that the 2023 shift in curriculum has led to challenges – in part because textbooks are still in short supply and in part because teachers have not received enough training. A 21-year-old young woman from Ebinat town reported, '*The curriculum has changed. There are new books that are hard to understand. Even the teachers find them difficult. Some subjects don't have textbooks at all.*' A teacher from Debre Tabor elaborated:

> *There was no training for the teachers, especially skilling-up training. There was introductory training for the teachers when the new curriculum was introduced. The purpose of that training was to inform them about the new curriculum, but there was no real skilling-up training.*

Physical health

Nutrition

Just under one-fifth (18%) of young people reported on the endline survey that they have been hungry in the past month because there is no food available in their household (see Figure 11). Rates of hunger were significantly higher in rural areas (25%) compared to Debre Tabor (17%).

Young people reported that they ate a mean of 2.6 meals on the day prior to the endline survey. Of those meals, 75% contained some form of animal or plant protein (see Figure 12). Gender differences were significant: more young males reported eating meals containing protein on the day prior to the survey than did young females (81% versus 70%).

Between Round 2 and endline, and with the caveat that the rural panel sample for this question is small, rural young people's food security had significantly worsened. At Round 2, 12% of rural young people reported being hungry – compared with 25% at endline (see Figure 13).

Food security has been heavily impacted, both directly and indirectly, by the recent conflict. Of rural young people, 11% reported that their household's crops had been stolen or destroyed.

In rural areas, many participants in the qualitative research reported that hunger is a large and growing problem. An 18-year-old young man from Ebinat town stated, '*Food shortage and spending time without food has become common for me, particularly since two years ago.*' In some cases, hunger is due to families not having enough land to grow the food they need, or not being able to access sufficient fertiliser (which the government reportedly uses as an incentive to force families to pay for health insurance). A 21-year-old young man from Community G stated, '*We have shortage of land. Its productivity is also low.*' A mother from Community F reported, *'In the past three years, production has decreased significantly even though we are working hard.*' In other cases, hunger is driven by conflict, as crops have been destroyed or confiscated. A 16-year-old girl from Community C recalled, '*When there was war they asked us to give them food and grains, and we gave them our food and grains… We reduced our weight.*'

Other respondents spoke not of hunger, but of diets devoid of diversity, as prices have spiked and proteins and fruits and vegetables have become unaffordable. An 18-year-old young woman from Community G stated, '*We eat similar food most of the time, we diversify food rarely.*' A 28-year-old young man from Debre Tabor similarly reported, '*We always eat food with poor quality. This is because of lack of money to purchase and access the kind of food that we want to eat.*'

Broader health and access to services

Fourth-fifths (82%) of young people reported on the endline survey that they are in good physical health (see Figure 14). Location differences were significant: young people in Debre Tabor were more likely to report being in good health than their rural peers (85% versus 79%). Gender differences were also significant: young males were more likely to report good health than young females (87% versus 79%).

Approximately 1 in 7 young people (15%) reported that they had had a serious illness in the year prior to the endline survey (Figure 15). Location differences were significant: rural young people were more likely to have been seriously ill than their peers in Debre Tabor (19% versus 11%).

Figure 11: Proportion of young people who reported being hungry in the past month (by location)

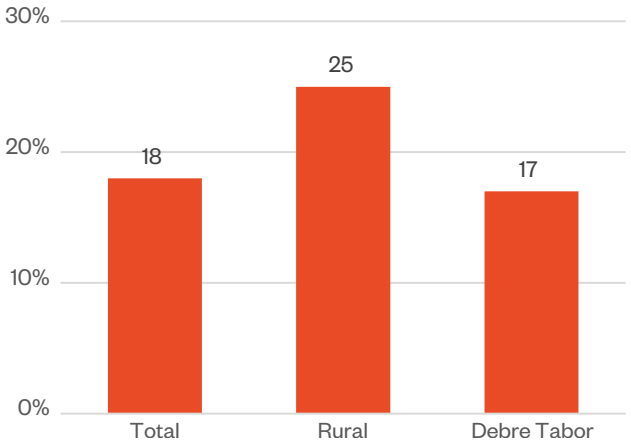


Figure 12: Proportion of meals eaten the day prior to the survey that contained protein (by gender)

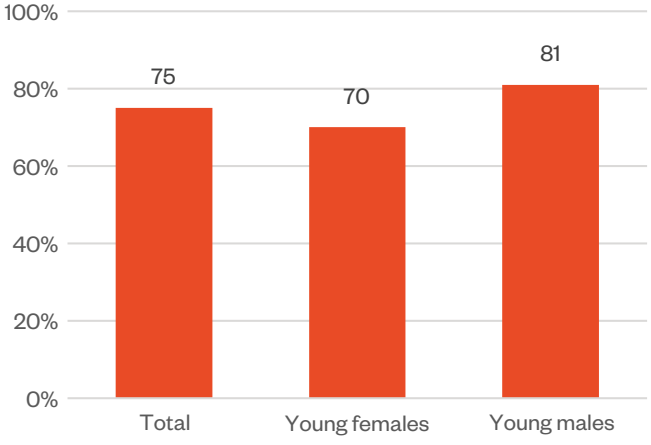
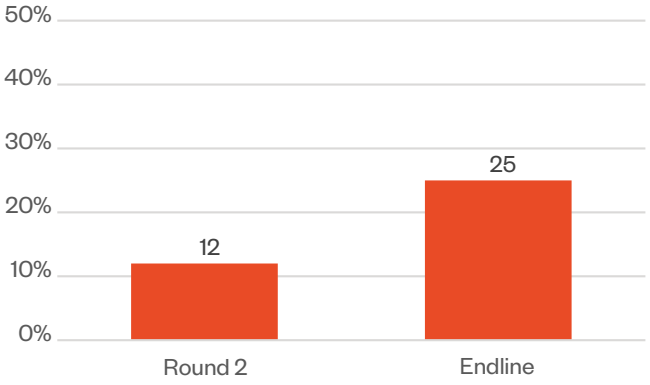


Figure 13: Proportion of rural young people in the panel sample who reported being hungry in the past month (by round of data collection)



It was rare for young people to report that they had had a serious accident or injury in the past year – only 3% did so (see Figure 16). Gender differences were significant: young males were five times more likely than young females to report a serious accident or injury (5% versus 1%).

Although 100% of young people who reported a serious illness or injury reported that they sought health care, young people also reported barriers to accessing needed health services. In aggregate, 48% reported that cost is a barrier to care and 20% reported that distance is a barrier (see Figure 17). Location differences were significant: rural young people were more likely than their peers in Debre Tabor to report that cost (54% versus 43%) and distance (33% versus 9%) are a barrier to accessing care.

Between Round 2 and endline, the proportion of young people in rural areas who reported being in good health declined from 85% to 79%. The decline was larger for young females (8 percentage points) than for young males (3 percentage points). There was no significant change in Debre Tabor. In the same time frame, the proportion of young people who reported that cost is a barrier to accessing health care spiked from 32% to 49%, with all groups similarly impacted.

When asked how health services have changed since April 2023, 32% of young people in Debre Tabor and 46% of young people in rural areas reported that they have got worse (see Figure 18).

Figure 14: Proportion of young people reporting that they are in good health (by location and gender)

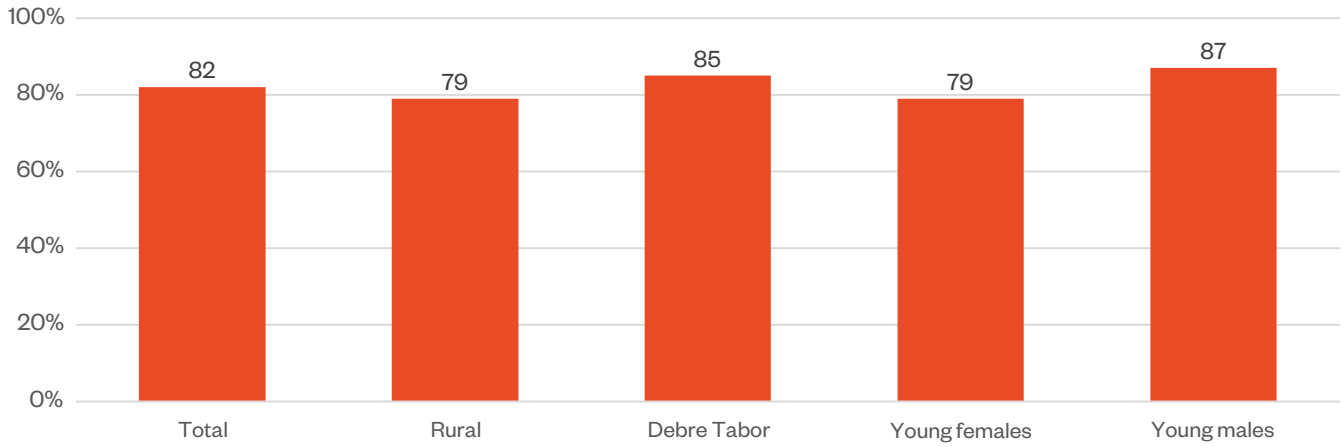


Figure 15: Proportion of young people who have had a serious illness in the past year (by location)

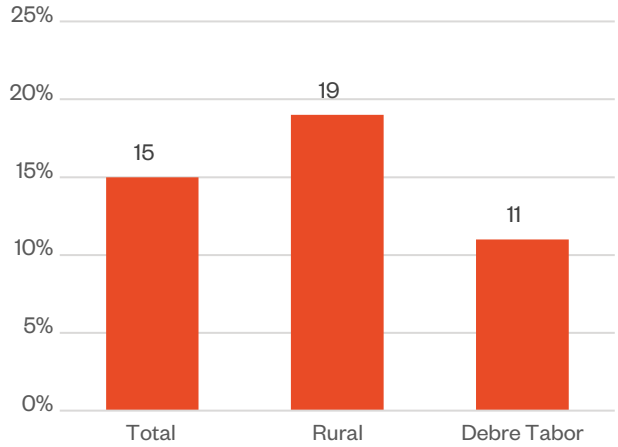


Figure 16: Proportion of young people who have had a serious accident or injury in the past year (by gender)

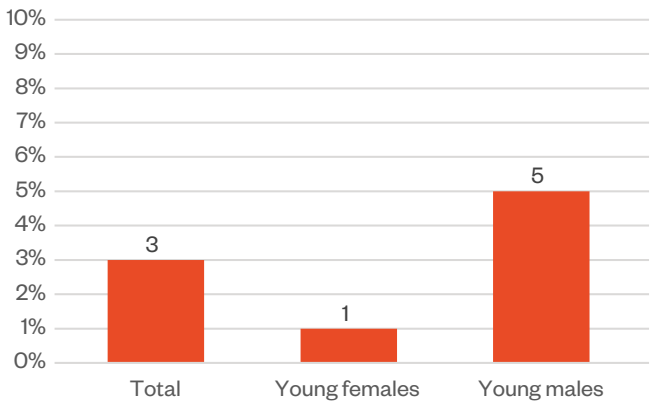


Figure 17: Proportion of young people reporting barriers to accessing health care (by location)

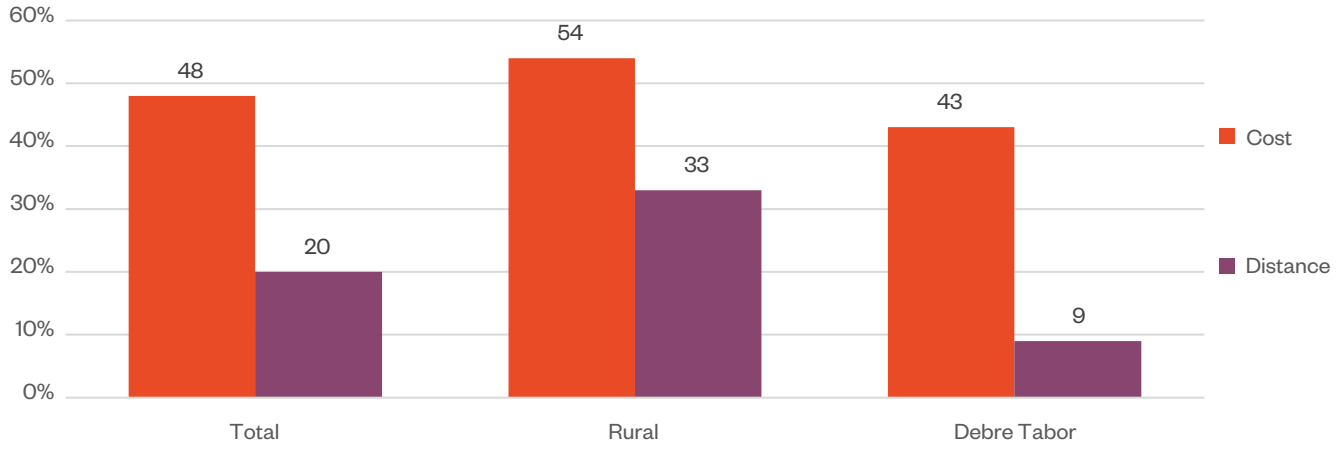
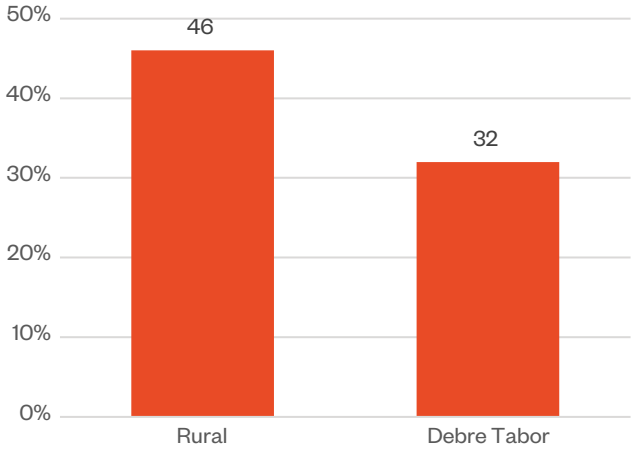


Figure 18: Proportion of young people reporting that health services have got worse since April 2023 (by location)



During qualitative interviews, young people reported normal maladies (e.g. headaches and colds), poverty-related illnesses (e.g. waterborne diseases, malaria, yellow fever, tuberculosis and trachoma), and injuries from accidents and conflict. An 18-year-old young man from Community B recalled, '*I got injured while fighting against government soldiers*.' Several rural respondents noted that conflict has also led to increases in waterborne disease, as water taps have been destroyed. A 13-year-old girl from Community C stated, '*There is lack of a water tap so now we fetch water from the river*.'

Young people's access to health services was extremely varied. Those living in the most remote communities reported that they had no access because services were not – and had never been –available. A 19-year-old young woman from Community D stated, '*There is no health service in our area. It is located far from us*.' Those living in communities where fighting is most intense reported that they had no access due to conflict. A father from Community F explained:

> *Only fighters on both sides are receiving services at the health centre. Farmers aren't getting services. There are many issues in the area that I can't discuss over the phone. They have spies everywhere, and I will be in danger if anyone hears me, so please keep this interview brief.*

Other respondents reported that care is easily accessible. A 15-year-old girl from Community C reported, '*My family takes me to a health facility when I am sick. The health worker diagnoses me with bacterial infection or respiratory problems*.' Critically, even where health services are available, families often turn first to holy water as a remedy rather than modern medicine. Most of the young participants with vision impairments reported that this is how an easily treated bacterial infection had resulted in permanent blindness. A 22-year-old young man who went blind at age 12 after contracting trachoma recalled, *'I didn't get medical treatment. My mother tried a holy water.'*

In line with survey findings, cost emerged as a major barrier to health care for numerous reasons – because the price of health insurance has spiked in recent years, because in rural areas there are no local authorities to collect insurance fees, because public clinics often cannot provide needed medications, and because private services (and public services for those without health insurance) are very expensive. A 17-year-old girl from Community D stated, '*The health insurance was for reasonable prices, but now it increased very much*' (her mother clarified that the family pays 2,000 birr a year). A health extension worker from Community E noted that although the poorest families are provided with free insurance, most households are forced to pay, even if they cannot afford it: '*If a person can't pay the annual fee for the health insurance, he will*

not be eligible to get fertiliser.' A 19-year-old young woman from Community G added that even those who have insurance often have to pay out of pocket for medication, or do without: '*When there is no medication in a public health facility we buy it from the private pharmacy in Ebinat town. Those who have no money cannot buy.*' The result, especially in rural areas where access to care and medications has been severely disrupted, is that health insurance is broadly felt to be a burden rather than a benefit. An 18-year-old young man from Community F stated, '*There are no health insurance services in the rural area… Since the war broke out, health insurance stopped functioning.*'

Substance use

One-fifth (20%) of young people reported on the endline survey that they drink alcohol weekly (see Figure 19). Location differences were significant: rural young people were almost twice as likely to drink weekly as their peers in Debre Tabor (26% versus 14%). Gender differences were also significant, with young males more than twice as likely as young females to drink weekly (27% versus 13%). It was very rare for young people to report that they drink alcohol daily (2%) or chew khat (1%). With the caveat that panel data is available only for young adults (because adolescents were too young to have been asked about substance use at Round 2), young people were four times more likely to drink weekly at endline than they were at Round 2 (27% versus 7%). The magnitude of change was similar in both rural areas and Debre Tabor.

Just over half (56%) of young people reported that they have ever had education on how drugs impact the body and mind (see Figure 20). Location differences were significant: young people in Debre Tabor were more likely to have had drugs education than their rural peers (59% versus 41%). Gender differences were also significant: young males were more likely to have had drugs education than young females (65% versus 48%).

In aggregate, 44% of young people reported that they know where someone addicted to substances might seek

Figure 19: Proportion of young people who report drinking alcohol weekly (by location and gender)

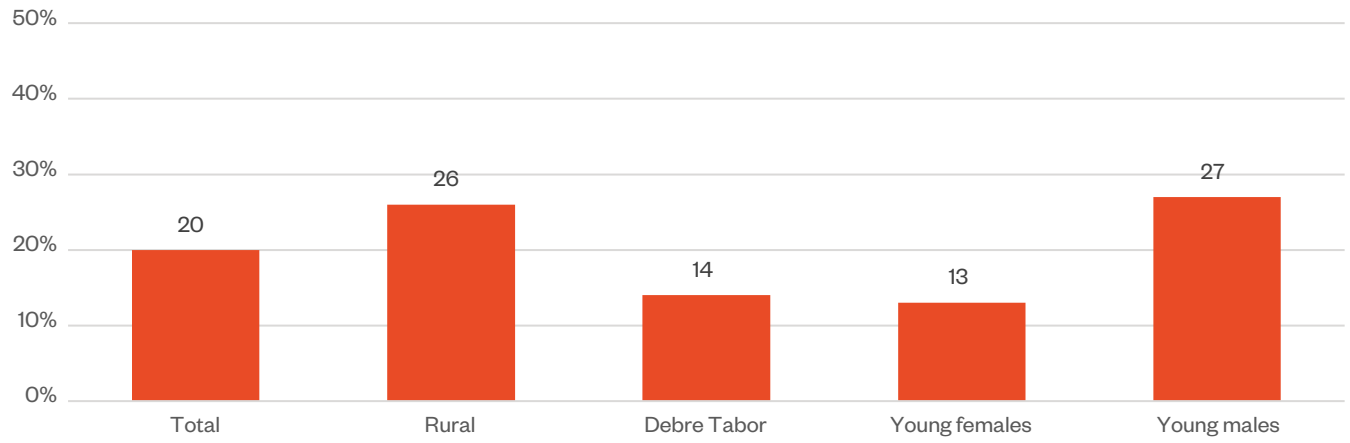
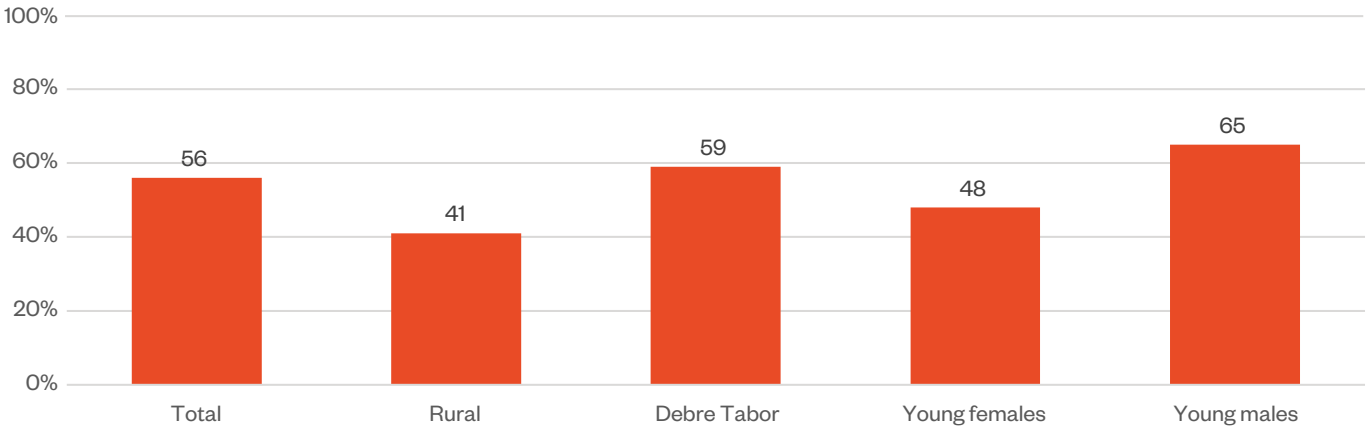


Figure 20: Proportion of young people who have ever had education on how drugs impact the body and mind (by location and gender)



treatment (see Figure 21). Location differences were highly significant: young people in Debre Tabor were more than three times more likely than their rural peers to know where services are available (67% versus 19%). In rural areas, gender differences were also significant, with young males nearly three times as likely as young females to be aware of services (29% versus 11%).

Adults who took part in qualitative research were broadly concerned about young people's (usually young males') use of substances, which they primarily blamed on unemployment and loss of hope. A father from Community D stated:

> *Most of the youth are spending their time drinking alcohol. For instance, I raised my son properly, but since I am living separately from them and can't travel to visit due to the conflict, I have heard that my son spends his time drinking alcohol. I bought him a mobile phone, but he sold it for gambling... They have lost hope.*

A teacher from Ebinat town similarly reported, '*Nowadays young people are rushing to addiction like chewing khat, smoking and other substance use. These things are because of frustration due to being unemployed, and hopelessness.*' Parents often reported that they have tried hard to moderate their sons' alcohol consumption, with only mixed success. A father from Community B lamented,

> *I always advise him not to drink too much alcohol, to save some money for his future, and to take care of himself. But he's not willing to accept or follow my advice. Instead, he prefers to drink with his peers.*

Young people less often reported concerns about substance use. A 20-year-old young man from Community D stated that he has only school friends, because students are less likely to drink than dropouts: '*I have no friends in our village since they drink alcohol.*' A 23-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, who admitted that being a student had not kept him from drinking, agreed that the best solution to preventing substance misuse is a carefully curated peer group:

> *I drank alcohol when I was in high school... Peer pressure forces you to do many things you don't like. If you are a member of a group of friends, you must do anything they do because if you don't, you can't be a member any longer.*

Puberty education

Nearly all young people (96%) reported that they had a source of information about puberty. The source of that information, however, varied. The plurality of young people (39%) reported that they learnt about puberty from their teachers (see Figure 22); another 21% learnt from peers. It was unusual for young people to learn about puberty from their mother (12%) and rare for them to learn from their father (4%). With the caveat that not all rural young people were asked questions about puberty, location and gender differences were significant. Young people in Debre Tabor were more likely than their rural peers to learn from teachers (41% versus 30%). Rural young people were more likely than their urban peers to learn from their friends (30% versus 19%). Young females were more likely to learn from teachers than young males (46% versus 30%). Young males were more likely to learn from peers than young females (31% versus 14%). Young females were more likely than young males to learn about puberty from their mother (17% versus 6%). Young males were more likely than young females to learn from their father but the rate was very low (7% versus 2%). A large majority of young people (88%) were aware that menarche means that a girl can become pregnant.

Figure 21: Proportion of young people who know where addiction services are provided (by location and gender)

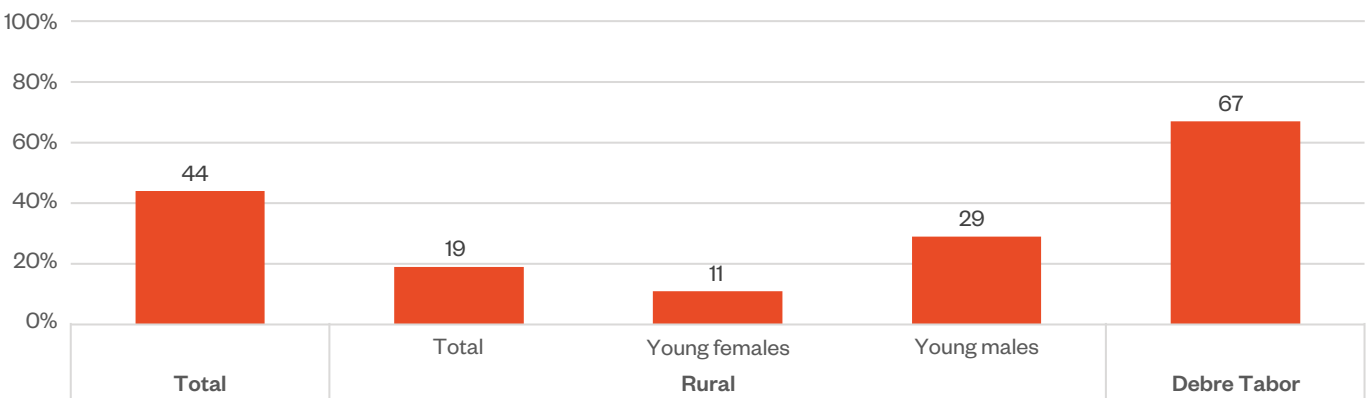
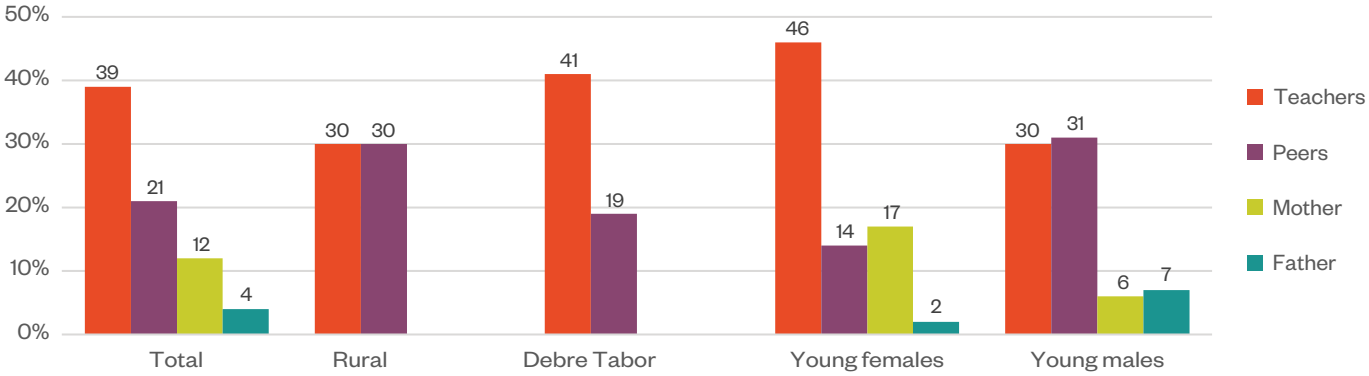


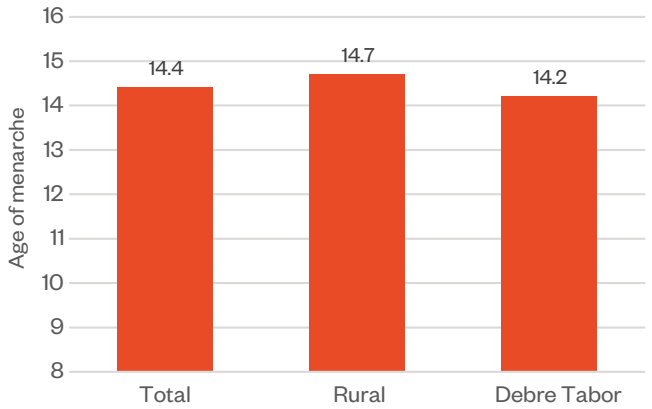
Figure 22: Source of young people's information about puberty (by location and gender)



Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that puberty education is delivered at school, not in the home. A 15-year-old boy from Community C stated, '*When I was in 7th grade, our biology teacher taught us about puberty and body changes that can occur during puberty.*' A 23-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor similarly recalled, '*My family didn't teach me such things. I learnt them in school.*' Although a few parents, all in Debre Tabor, reported that they had told their children that '*it is natural to have physical changes during the teenage years*' (mother, Debre Tabor), most respondents agreed that such conversations are completely taboo. A 24-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor explained, '*Parents rarely talk to their children about these kinds of things, as it is considered immoral and socially unacceptable.*' Indeed, most parents, when asked whether they had ever discussed puberty with their children, replied in ways that underscored how deeply uncomfortable they were with sexual topics. A mother from Community C stated of her son:

> *I have not advised him about the changes on him yet. I will advise him in the future. He is now 16 years old. When he will be 18 years old, he will be youth and changes will come. If he needs to marry at this age, I will let him marry.*

Figure 23: Mean age of menarche (by location)



Menstrual health

Nearly all young females (98%) had experienced menarche, at a mean age of 14.4 years (see Figure 23). Location differences were significant, with young females in Debre Tabor getting their periods nearly a half a year earlier than their rural peers (14.2 years versus 14.7 years).

A large majority of young females use purpose-made disposable or reusable period products (80%) and dispose of those products appropriately (84%)(see Figure 24). Location differences were significant: young females in urban areas were more likely than their rural peers to use purpose-made products (91% versus 64%) and to practise appropriate disposal (92% versus 74%).

Just over a third (35%) of young females reported that they are embarrassed or afraid to ask for family support with managing their periods (see Figure 25). Location differences were significant: rural young females were more than twice as likely as their peers in Debre Tabor to report being embarrassed or afraid: 54% versus 21%.

Fewer than half (45%) of enrolled females reported that their school has facilities or supplies to help them manage their periods (see Figure 26). Location differences were significant, with young females in rural areas, where some schools have special rooms for girls who are on their period to rest, more likely to report school environments supportive of menstrual management than their peers in Debre Tabor (56% versus 41%).

Again, just over a third (34%) of young females, with no location differences, reported that their normal activities are impacted by menstruation. Of those young females who reported impacts, most (53%) reported that they cannot work while they have their period. Another 22% reported that they must sleep in a different place at home while menstruating.

Menstruation in South Gondar remains heavily stigmatised. A mother from Community B reported, '*We*

Figure 24: Proportion of young females who use purpose-made period products and practise appropriate disposal (by location)

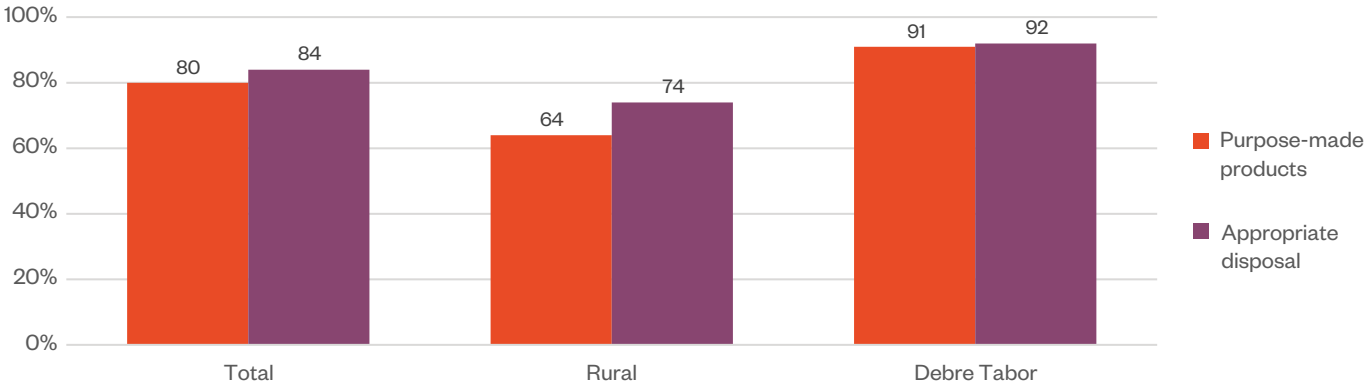


Figure 25: Proportion of young females who are embarrassed or afraid to ask for family support in managing their periods (by location)

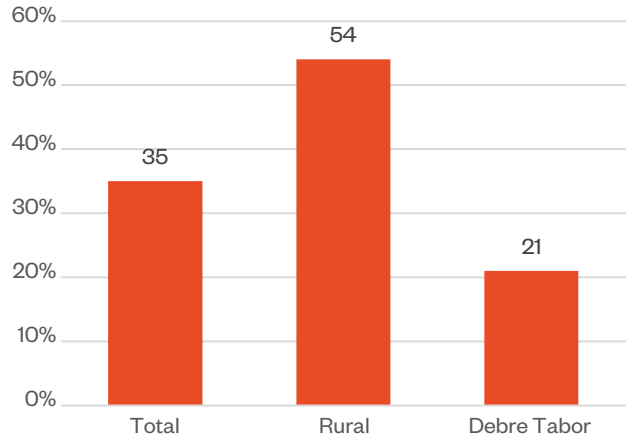
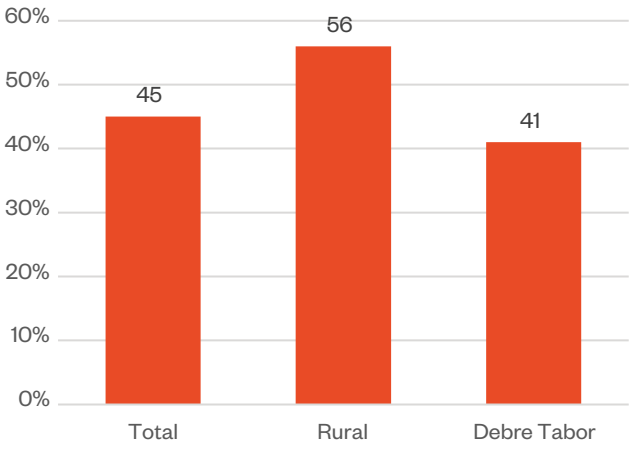


Figure 26: Proportion of enrolled females who report that their school has facilities or supplies to help them manage their periods (by location)



feel shame to talk about this.' As a result, girls primarily learn about how to manage their periods from teachers (especially those who lead girls' clubs), older sisters and older peers. An 18-year-old young woman from Community E recalled:

> *It was our female teachers who oriented about hygiene management… She told us not to get humiliated when we experienced menstruation. She prepared a separate room to use it as a changing room.*

A young woman the same age, but from Community G, reported of her sister, '*She advised me to use a pad or otherwise to use a neat cloth and put it inside my shorts to manage menstruation.*'

There are, however, signs of progress in reducing the stigma that surrounds menstruation. Some mothers, especially in Debre Tabor, stated that they had prepared their daughters for menarche. A mother from Debre Tabor recalled of her daughter, '*We had the talk when she was 13 years old, I told her how to use sanitary pads, how to clean after herself and such things. And she told me when she first had her period, and I bought whatever was necessary for her.*' Some young people have been exposed to programming by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – primarily Act With Her, implemented by Pathfinder – that has helped increase knowledge and reduce stigma (see Box 2). A 16-year-old boy from Community C stated that he had learnt that menstruation is normal:

> *We learnt, if for example a girl is attending her education and if she faces menstruation, it is a natural gift. We have to encourage her and take her to the toilet for sanitation and make her change her clothes and attend her education. We make it so that she is not absent from school.*

For many young females, managing their periods remains very challenging. Purpose-made pads (which are, in any case, expensive) are not always available, especially when conflict results in road closures. As a result, it is not uncommon for young females to rely on cloth instead. A

Box 2: The Act With Her programme has changed young lives

Act With Her (AWH) was delivered in four regions of Ethiopia, including South Gondar, beginning in 2018. It aimed to support adolescent girls to develop the knowledge and skills they need to thrive during the transition to adulthood. Initially developed as a five-arm randomised control trial (RCT) aimed at very young adolescents (see Baird et al., 2022; Boudreau et al., 2023), the programme evolved over time to also include girls and boys in middle adolescence. Act With Her worked with adolescent girls, adolescent boys, and girls' caregivers. It also worked with schools, to develop and strengthen girls' clubs; and with communities, to shift the social norms that limit girls' lives.

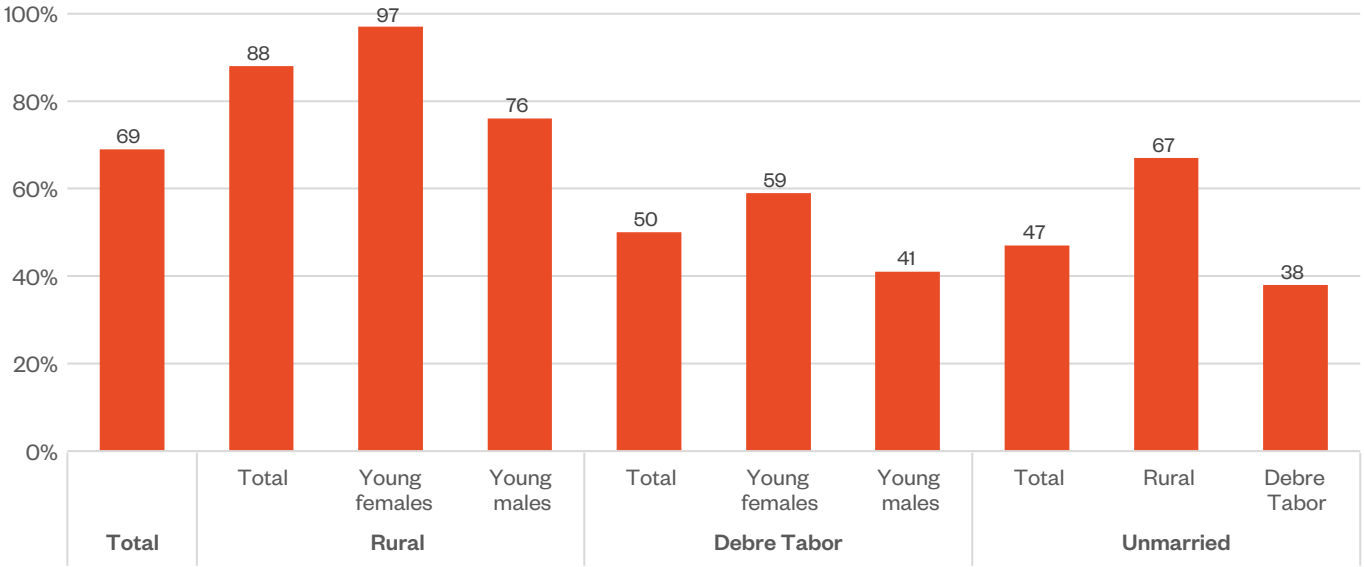
During qualitative interviews, many young people spoke of Act With Her and the enduring lessons they had learnt. An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor said: '*The AWH programme was the best of the activities I have ever participated in in my school life.*' Some young people recalled learning about the importance of education. A 17-year-old girl from Community G reported that she learnt how to balance study time and domestic work: '*They teach us to set goals and to schedule for work and education. To schedule our study time, it may be on Monday or Tuesday, and also to set time to work.*' Other young people reported learning about their right to bodily integrity and how to report violations. A 13-year-old girl from Community C recalled learning what to do if threatened with sexual violence: '*If a man waits for a woman on the road, she should avoid insulting him… Rather, she has to explain to him that she is not interested… If he does not agree, then she has to shout for help.*' Young people also reported that AWH had helped them understand the importance of saving money for the future. A 17-year-old boy from Community G recalled, '*We have learnt, as we have to save money for future life.*' Critically, young people reported that AWH provided them with the first education they had ever had about gender norms and the importance of equality. A 14-year-old girl from Community C recalled, '*Before attending AWH we considered it shameful for a male to do work meant for females, and for a female to do work meant for males.*' For some girls, these lessons changed the way they understood themselves and their options for the future. A 15-year-old girl stated of AWH: '*The training helped me understand who I am.*'

17-year-old girl from Debre Tabor explained, '*I use torn clothes for my period because I can't afford sanitary pads.*' Endline research also found that some young females are being discouraged from using purpose-made pads by health extension workers who ought to know better. A 20-year-old young woman from Community C reported, '*They also told us not to use sanitary pads during our period as it could expose us to cervical cancer.*'

Sexual activity and knowledge about contraception and disease prevention

With the caveat that the endline sample is unusual due to attrition (see Box 1 on page 7), and the further caveat that not all young people were asked questions about their sexual health, most young people (69%) who answered the endline survey question about sexual debut reported that they were sexually active (see Figure 27). Location

Figure 27: Proportion of young people who are sexually active (by location and gender and marital status)



differences were significant: young people in rural areas, who were far more likely to be married than their urban peers, were accordingly more likely to be sexually active (88% versus 50%). In rural areas and in Debre Tabor, young females, who were more likely to be married than young males, were also more likely to be sexually active. Just under half (47%) of unmarried young people, with no gender differences, reported that they were sexually active. Premarital sex was more common in rural areas than in Debre Tabor (67% versus 38%).

A large majority (90%) of young people were able to correctly name a modern method of contraception (see Figure 28). Location and cohort differences were small, but significant. Young people in Debre Tabor had better knowledge than their rural peers (92% versus 87%), and young adults had better knowledge than adolescents (94% versus 88%). Gender differences were not significant. In the years between Round 2 and endline, the ability of rural young people in the panel sample to correctly name a modern method climbed from 70% to 87%. Rates in Debre Tabor were unchanged, largely because they were already so high at Round 2.

During qualitative interviews, and unsurprisingly given that interviews were conducted over the phone rather than in person in a private location, it was primarily adults who spoke of the growing trend of premarital sex. An official from Community A stated, '*When youths become 19 or 20 years old, they start sexual intercourse secretly. When they start sexual intercourse secretly, we let them marry.*' An official from Community B agreed:

> *Young people nowadays start having sex even before marriage. This practice has become common in our community. When I was young or an adolescent, it was shameful for young people to start having sex before marriage, but nowadays this practice has become common and most young people, particularity those who turned 17 and 18, will start having sex before they get married.*

Only a few unmarried young men – all of whom stated that they themselves were not sexually active – said that premarital sex was common among young people. A 22-year-old young man from Community B reported:

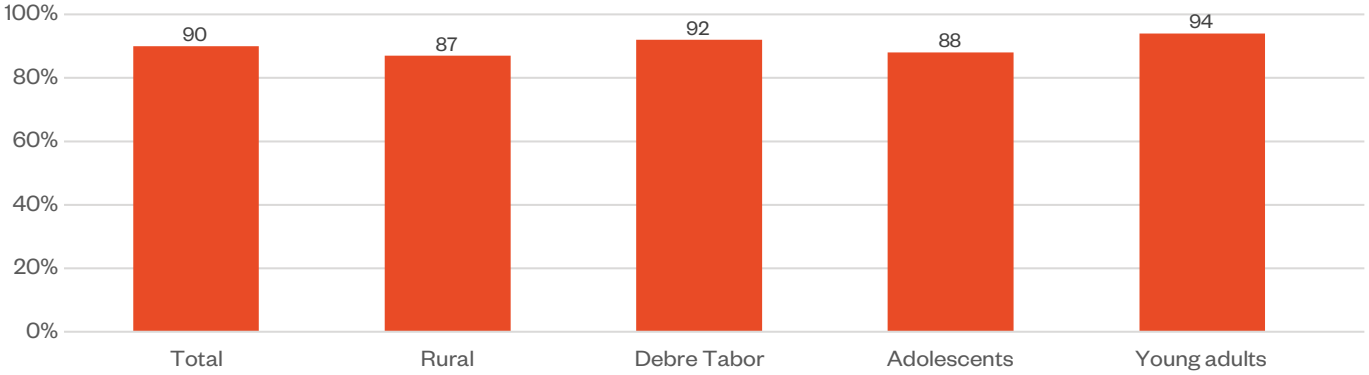
> *Nowadays boys and girls in our community start romantic relationships and having sex at a young age, mostly after they turn 17 and 18... even though I am 22 and started a romantic relationship, I still didn't start having sex.*

In line with survey findings, nearly all young people reported being well aware of their contraceptive options. With the caveat that schools have been closed for years in many communities, many young people reported learning about contraception at school, in class and in girls' clubs. A 17-year-old girl from Debre Tabor reported, '*We do learn about unwanted pregnancy and what to do to control it... We learnt it in primary school, but in secondary school, we learnt it in full.*' Others reported being taught by health extension workers or NGOs. A 27-year-old young man from Community B recalled:

> *As soon as I got married, when I and my wife went to the health post, the health extension worker advised us a lot about contraceptives, family planning and related issues. The health extension worker even taught my wife about many things related to childbirth, forms of contraceptives, the importance of delaying childbirth and the like.*

A 16-year-old girl from Community A reported, '*I learnt how to use contraceptive pills from Pathfinder and others.*'

Figure 28: Proportion of young people able to correctly name a modern method of contraception (by location and gender)



Young people were also broadly aware of how HIV spreads and how to prevent sexual transmission. A 20-year-old young man from Community F stated, '*We can prevent STIs* [sexually transmitted illnesses] *by using condoms.*' A 16-year-old boy from Community F similarly reported, '*Both of them* [sexual partners] *should take a medical test and should be free from any communicable illness before they have sexual intercourse.*'

Desired fertility and contraceptive uptake

The endline survey found that young people would like to have an average of 3.9 children. Young people living in rural areas wanted slightly larger families than their peers in Debre Tabor (4.1 children versus 3.8 children).

The endline survey found that 75% of sexually active young people had ever used contraception (see Figure 29). Cohort differences were significant: sexually active young adults were more likely to have ever used contraception than sexually active adolescents (82% versus 66%). Location differences were also significant: young people in rural areas, who were more likely to be married than their peers in Debre Tabor, were also more likely to have ever used contraception (80% versus 69%). In rural areas, young females, who were more likely to be married than young males, were more likely than their male peers to have ever used a method (83% versus 73%). The reverse was true in Debre Tabor, where young males were more likely than young females to have ever used a method (75% versus 66%). With the caveat that panel data is available only for young adults (because adolescents were too young to be asked about contraceptive use at Round 2), ever use of contraception is unchanged over time in both rural areas and Debre Tabor.

Just over half of sexually active young people (55%) reported that they are currently using contraception (Figure 30). Gender differences were small, but significant, with young males more likely than young females to report current use (58% versus 53%). With the caveat that panel data is available only for young adults (because adolescents were too young to be asked about contraceptive use at Round 2), current use of contraception is unchanged over time in both rural areas and Debre Tabor.

Of current contraceptive users, most young females in rural areas (82%) and Debre Tabor (61%) reported that they use the contraceptive injection. In Debre Tabor, the contraceptive pill was also a common choice (24%). Long-acting methods such as the intrauterine device (IUD) and implants were far less commonly used by young females (11%). Among young males who reported using

Figure 30: Proportion of sexually active young people currently using contraception (by gender)

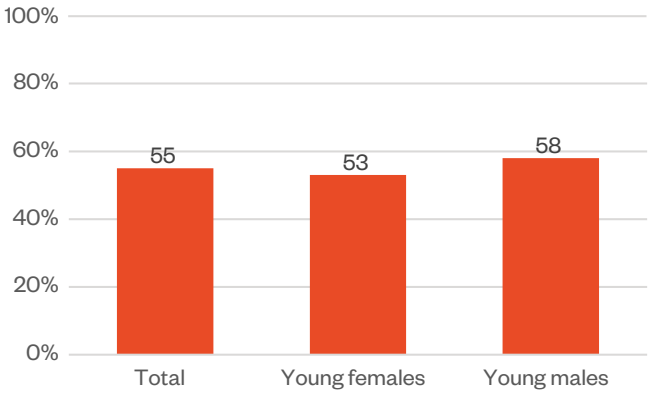
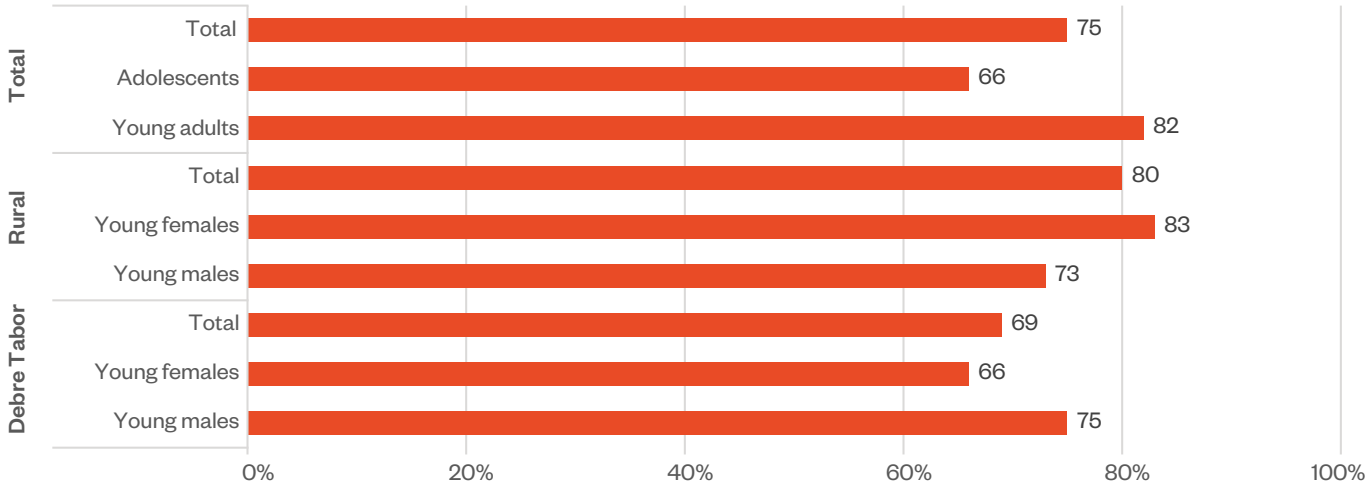


Figure 29: Proportion of sexually active young people who have ever used contraception (by cohort, location, and gender)



contraception, 33% of those in Debre Tabor but only 4% of those in rural areas reported using the male condom.

In line with survey findings, the dominant story about contraceptive uptake in South Gondar – in rural areas as well as Debre Tabor – is positive, especially compared with East Hararghe (Oromia region) and Hari Rasu (Afar region). Married young people are broadly committed to delaying their first child until they are financially secure and then spacing their children to optimise child health. A 22-year-old young man from Community B stated of young couples in his community, '*Until they accumulate some amount of capital, they use contraception*.' A mother from Community G reported that she has been unable to pressure her daughter, who has a 2-year-old, into having another: '*I advised her to have more children while I am alive. She wants to space childbirth till her child grows*.'

Respondents reported that unmarried young females use contraception for other reasons. Most often, they reported that unmarried girls and young women use contraception to ensure they will not become pregnant should they be exposed to sexual violence. A mother from Community F explained:

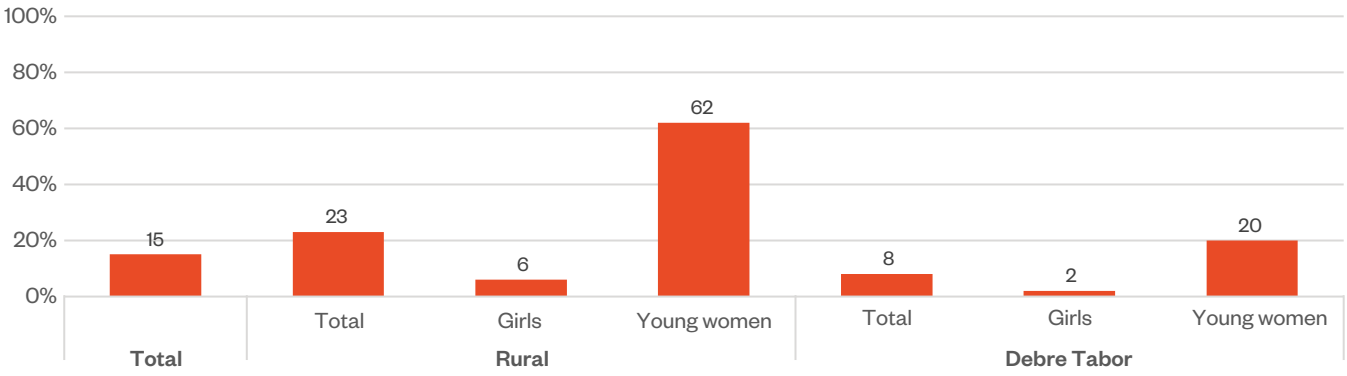
> *It is for fear of being exposed to sexual violence and getting pregnant. The good thing is, with the presence of the contraceptive pill, women are now protecting against unwanted pregnancy for possible rape.*

An 18-year-old young woman from Community G reported that she uses contraception to prevent painful menstrual symptoms: '*I use injectable contraceptives when my period is heavy and painful… The injection helps you by stopping the menstruation*.' Unmarried young people did not report using contraception in the context of romantic relationships – which is not surprising, given that interviews were conducted over the phone. A mother from Community B, however, reported that she is in favour of this, because of the stigma that surrounds premarital pregnancy. She recalled telling her unmarried daughter, who already has one child, '*Please use injectable contraceptives. You need to focus on work. You shamed me, so please don't become pregnant again*.'

That said, not all respondents painted a positive picture about contraceptive uptake. In some cases, young people stated that contraception contravenes their religious beliefs. A 17-year-old girl from Community D stated, '*It is a sin to use contraceptives… I learnt it in church, we learnt as well as read it from spiritual material as it is not accepted and has problems*.' In other cases, young people admitted that they were leaving conception up to fate. A 28-year-old young man from Debre Tabor reported, *'So far, I and my girlfriend didn't use any precaution to prevent STIs and unwanted pregnancy. He is God who still protects us from such kinds of things happening*.' In rural areas, local officials and health extension workers in some communities also reported that access to contraception has declined since the onset of conflict. One key informant from Community B explained, '*Because of the recent instability, and disruption of health services, adolescents and young adults do not have access to any contraception*.'

Although the dominant story about contraception is positive, this is not the case for preventing HIV and other STIs. In line with survey findings, it was very rare for rural young males to report using condoms. Boys and young men from rural areas reported that this is in part because condoms are difficult to access and are expensive. A 20-year-old young man from Community F stated, '*I don't think the youths in this area are using condoms. They are not readily available either*.' A young man the same age but from Community D, who agreed that condoms are not locally available, explained that he has found a solution: '*I ask my friends to buy it from Ebinat town*.'

Figure 31: Proportion of young females who have been pregnant (by location and cohort)



Maternity care

Pregnancy rates, which were low in aggregate (15%), varied significantly by location and cohort (see Figure 31). Young females in rural areas were approximately three times more likely to have been pregnant than their peers in Debre Tabor. In rural areas, 6% of adolescent girls and 62% of young women had ever been pregnant; rates in Debre Tabor were 2% and 20% respectively. Young females in rural areas were not only more likely than their urban peers to fall pregnant, they also did so at a younger age – a mean of 18.6 years, compared with 19.6 years in Debre Tabor. A large majority of young mothers received maternity care for their first pregnancy. In aggregate, 88% received antenatal care (with a mean of 4.8 visits) and 88% delivered in a facility.

In line with the survey findings, most young mothers – in both Debre Tabor and in rural areas – reported good uptake of modern maternity care. A 17-year-old mother of one from Community D, who had six antenatal visits over the course of her pregnancy, stated, '*I gave birth in a health facility*.' A 19-year-old mother of one from Community G, who had five antenatal visits, explained why mothers prefer facility delivery: '*They do not birth at home. They birth in a health facility. There are examinations and medication after birth. With birth at a health facility you do not bleed much*.' Because health officials are aware that it is difficult for labouring mothers to travel, birthing facilities allow pregnant women to board for a number of days and even weeks in advance of their due date. A 20-year-old young man from Community A reported, '*They can go for a month, a week or two days before their delivery to the maternal waiting rooms*.'

That said, respondents reported that access to maternity care, like access to health care in general, has been severely impacted by the recent conflict. Most underscored that the biggest loss has been the collapse of ambulance services for labouring mothers. A health extension worker from Community E stated, '*Maternal women are now giving birth at home because of the absence of ambulance service*.' A 20-year-old young man from Community D elaborated:

> *Currently, the security situation is not good in the area. There is no one to follow the ambulance, and since it is government property, it has also been targeted by the Fano militants in the area. So, it is difficult now.*

Respondents reported that although abortion services are theoretically available, '*if the foetus is not very advanced or is less than three months old*' (24-year-old young man, Community G), they are difficult to access. A health extension worker from Community D explained that this is because services are not available in rural communities, and travel is dangerous due to conflict: '*Safe abortion services are unavailable locally, and referrals to distant health centres are complicated by insecurity and distance*.' Other respondents, however, underscored that the biggest problem in accessing abortion services is the stigma that surrounds them. A 28-year-old married woman from Ebinat town reported that she was denied an abortion by providers in that town, because her pregnancy was not the result of rape:

> *When I was two months' pregnant, I attempted to terminate my second pregnancy, but the health professionals refused. They stated that they would not perform the procedure if the pregnancy was conceived from my husband.*

A health extension worker from Community F admitted that she actively discourages pregnant women from having an abortion: '*Recently, a prostitute asked me to terminate her pregnancy because she was pregnant, so I advised her to have a baby because she was too old*.' Regardless of why services are difficult to access, a 24-year-old young man from Community G explained that the end result is that many women who wish to end a pregnancy end up doing so in dangerous ways: '*They also take traditional medicine and they will come back from the brink of death because of the medicine they take*.'

An 18-year-old woman lives alone, South Gondar © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

Violence at home

Just under one-third (30%) of young people who were living with their caregivers at the time they were surveyed reported that they had experienced violence at the hands of a caregiver (or other adult in the home) in the past year (see Figure 32). Location differences were small but significant: young people in Debre Tabor were more likely than their rural peers to report such violence (32% versus 27%), likely because violence in rural areas is so normalised. However, cohort and gender differences were not significant. Between Round 2 and endline, there were large declines in young people's risk of violence at the hands of caregivers. Of those in the panel sample, rates dropped from 44% to 27%. Declines were large for all groups of young people.

Perhaps because they were interviewed over the phone, few young people spoke of violence in the home. Those that did – all of them male – primarily spoke of it in the past tense. A 22-year-old young man from Community G recalled, '*Until I was seven years old, there was beating from my parent.*' A 19-year-old young man from Community E, who reported that he was beaten at the age of 10 for refusing to go to school, clarified that corporal punishment is not only expected, but seen as a sign of parental care: '*It was for my own sake that he beat me.*'

Caregivers, on the other hand, were forthright about their use of violence. A father from Community G stated, '*To tell you the truth, in our community, most parents punish children by beating them with a stick or in other ways.*' A mother from Community B clarified, '*I hit them when they bother me with [asking for] shoes, clothes, or anything else.*' Parents, like young people, reported that corporal punishment is believed necessary to the proper upbringing of children. A mother from Community C explained, '*Unless beaten and reprimanded, it is difficult to correct children, they do not get corrected otherwise.*'

Teacher violence

It was unusual (14%) for students to report having been hit by a teacher in the past year (see Figure 33). Gender differences were significant: enrolled young males were more than twice as likely as their female peers to report violence from a teacher in the past year (21% versus 9%). Of students who had experienced or witnessed teacher violence in the past year, only 34% reported that they had ever discussed that violence with someone else. Between Round 2 and endline, there were large declines in students' risk of violence at the hands of teachers, in part because young people were much less likely to be enrolled at endline and in part because students were much older. Of those in the panel sample, rates dropped from 37% to 15%. Declines were large for all groups of students.

Respondents reported that violence at school is common – and so normalised that it is often not even recognised as violence. A 21-year-old young man from Ebinat town, when asked if violence at school is common, replied: '*Violence at school is common, especially in the primary school. Because young students violate school rules and regulations and teachers then punish those who violated school rules.*' An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, on the other hand, when asked that same question, replied:

> *I don't remember any violence I experienced at the school. However, sometimes, when I disturbed the classroom while teachers were teaching, teachers might whip me.*

Figure 32: Proportion of young people who experienced violence at the hands of a caregiver (or other adult in the home) in the past year, of those living with a caregiver (by location)

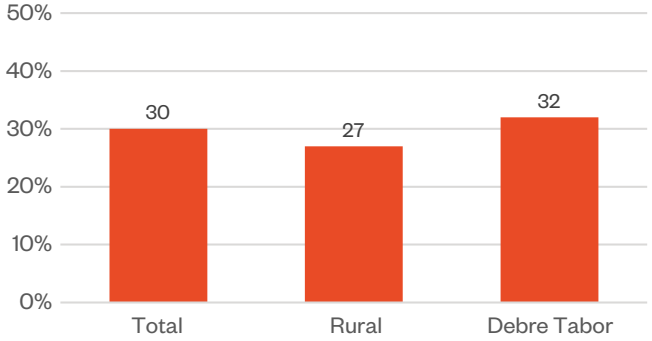
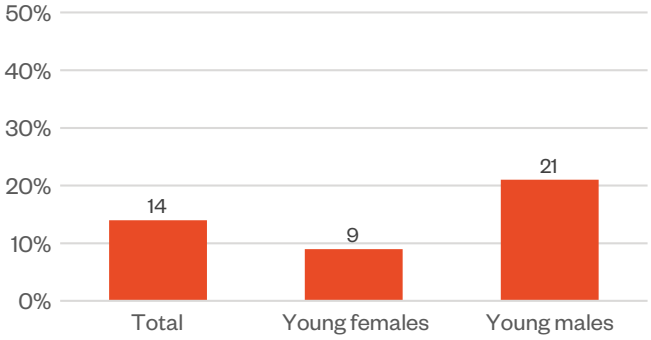


Figure 33: Proportion of enrolled young people who experienced corporal punishment at the hands of a teacher in the past year (by gender)



Teachers did not gainsay young people's narratives about violence. A teacher from Ebinat town admitted, '*We do hit students when they misbehave at school. We might pinch their ears or hit their hands with a stick.*'

Most respondents agreed that boys are more at risk of teacher violence than girls, because they are more likely to misbehave. A 15-year-old boy from Community C stated, '*They are boys who mostly violate school rules and are violated by teachers. Girls mostly do not disturb in the classroom.*' That said, girls noted that they are not immune to corporal punishment and that when they are beaten, it is often because parental demands on their time have left them unable to do homework or arriving late to school. A 12-year-old girl from Community C explained:

> *Teachers beat you or give you lower marks. They told us that late-coming leads to losing results. They also beat students who came to school late.*

Peer violence and youth violence

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of young people reported having experienced peer violence in the past year (see Figure 34). Location and gender differences were significant: young people in Debre Tabor were more likely to report peer violence than their rural peers (26% versus 21%), and young males were more likely to report peer violence than young females (28% versus 19%). Between Round 2 and endline, there were large declines in young people's risk of peer violence. Of those in the panel sample, rates dropped from 32% to 21%. Declines were large for all groups of young people.

During qualitative interviews, it was very rare for respondents to report experiencing bullying. Of the young males who did so, all related incidents that had taken place some years previously.

In sharp contrast to Round 3, when parts of rural South Gondar were effectively overrun by bands of young men perpetrating physical and sexual violence, reports of youth violence were rare at endline. A 15-year-old boy from Community C tied this directly to the conflict, which has not only provided some young males with a purpose (they have joined a militia or the army), but also reduced youth violence: '*The youth have been disciplined, I think, by the military.*'

Sexual violence

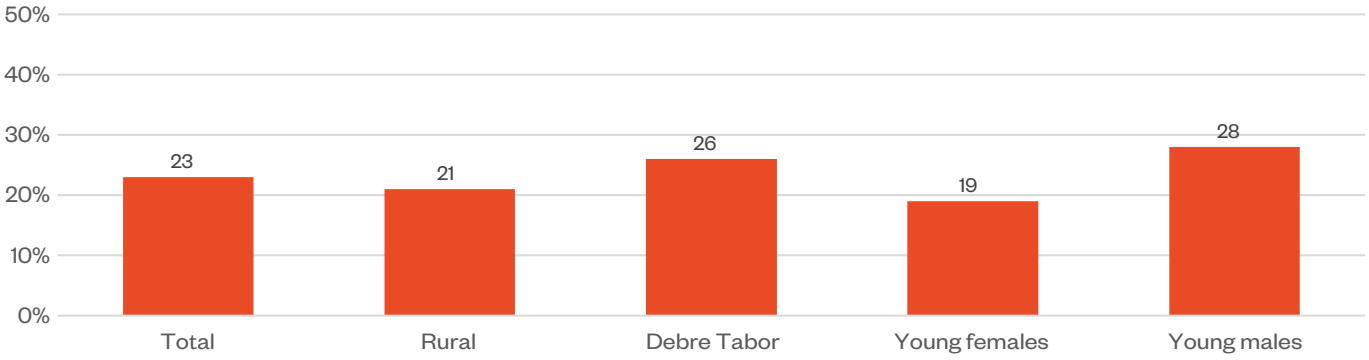
Due to concerns about young females' privacy, given that interviews were conducted over the phone, the endline survey did not ask about experiences with sexual violence. At Round 3, however, 10% of adolescent girls and 19% of young women in rural South Gondar reported that they had ever experienced sexual violence.

During qualitative interviews, nearly all respondents agreed that sexual harassment is endemic. A 20-year-old young woman from Community G stated that travelling to and from school is an especially dangerous time: '*Boys harass girls when on their way to school.*' A teacher from Ebinat town echoed this view:

> *Many boys are harassing girls on the road. I have seen them take their exercise books and grab their hands within the school compound as well. The boys are trying to start relationships, but they act irrationally when the girls refuse.*

An 18-year-old young woman from Community B noted that working in the market is also dangerous: '*There are intoxicated people who dare to harass you verbally and physically while trading.*' An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor observed that although sexual harassment is endemic, most people do not even recognise it as a form of violence: 'This kind of practice is normal in this area and no one considers it as violence.' Indeed, a 19-year-old young woman from Community G, who married at age 15,

Figure 34: Proportion of young people who experienced peer violence in the past year (by location and gender)



reported that sexual harassment is so normalised that it did not seem unusual to marry the perpetrator:

> *I decided to marry since young men were harassing me while I was going to school. I chose one and got married… I was interested in education, but I was influenced and decided to marry because of the harassment, it was too much.*

Narratives about rape diverged. Some respondents, all male, reported that rape (which was reported to be extremely common at Round 3) has become less common in recent years. A religious leader from Community C stated, '*This* [rape] *does not exist now*.' A teacher from Community F agreed and explained that this is due to the Fano:

> *There was more violence before the conflict. We heard many reports of violence, including rape, before the conflict, but there is no violence now. The punishment for rape by the Fano militias is death, which has deterred violence entirely due to fear of punishment.*

Other respondents, however, noted that what has changed is not the incidence of rape but the fact that survivors have become even less likely to report. A militia member from Ebinat town explained:

> *Although victims didn't report their violence cases, I have heard many rape cases in this town. Victims are afraid of further attack from perpetrators, so they never report violence they experienced.*

Sexual violence in South Gondar is very normalised. Young males widely believe that they have a right to any young female's attention and body – through force if necessary. A teacher from Community B stated that the line between flirting and rape is very thin:

> *I mean, a girl can't refuse men asking her for a relationship. They can force her for a relationship. This is a time where women are raped.*

Indeed, most respondents appear to view sexual violence as such a normal situation that they are unable to imagine a world in which it does not exist. A 22-year-year-old young woman from Community G, when asked what the government might do to reduce girls' risk of sexual violence, replied:

> *They are using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy after the violence… Nothing else needs to be done. If she uses contraceptive pills or injectable, she could not get pregnant though raped.*

Even more concerningly, young females themselves generally believe that victims of sexual assault are at fault. Girls were repeatedly described as having '*hot natures*', being in their 'fire age', and refusing to limit themselves to a single partner. A 19-year-old young woman from Community G, when asked why girls are at greater risk of violence than boys, replied:

> *Girls are not like boys in thinking, their brain is narrow and what they think is limited. That is why girls are at risk of violence.*

A 17-year-old girl from Community D, discussing girls' risk of rape en route to school, described such experiences as girls' '*sin*' and '*a day's mistake*'.

Female genital mutilation

At endline, 31% of surveyed females reported that they had undergone FGM (see Figure 35). Location differences were highly significant: young females in rural areas were more than three times more likely than their urban peers to have undergone FGM (61% versus 18%). Young females were cut at a mean age of 1.2 years. Interestingly, for rural females in the panel sample, rates of FGM appear to have climbed over time (from 50% to 60%). This is likely because more young females are now old enough to understand what was done to their bodies.

With the same caveats as above (that the endline sample is unusual due to attrition, and the further caveat that not all rural young people were asked questions about FGM), nearly all (92%) young people reported on the endline survey that they know that FGM entails risks (see Figure 36). It was also rare for young people to report that they believe FGM has benefits (3%) or is required by religion (3%). Location differences were significant for all

Figure 35: Proportion of young females who have undergone FGM (by location)

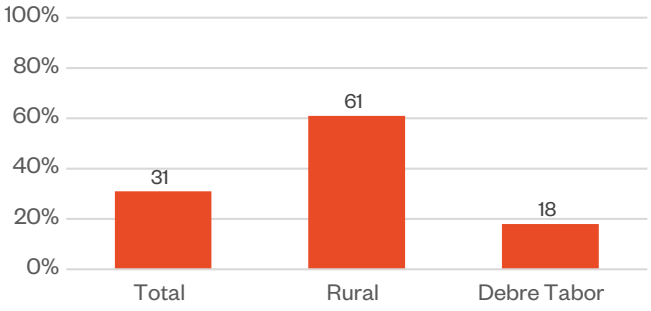
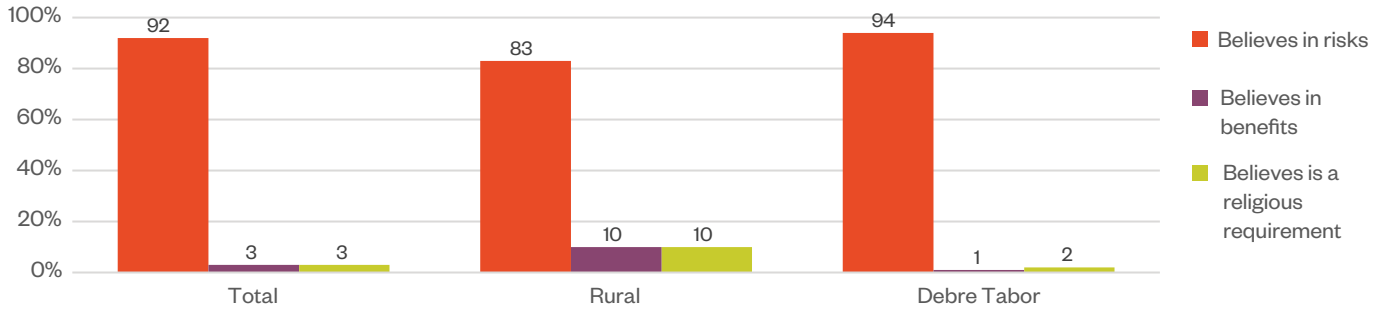


Figure 36: Young people's beliefs about FGM (by location)



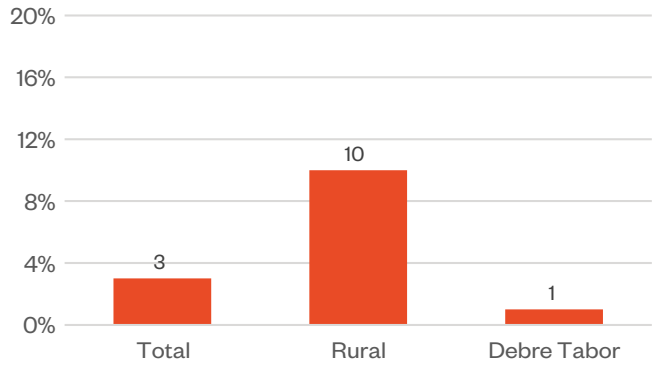
three questions. Compared to their rural peers, young people from Debre Tabor were more aware of the risks of FGM (94% versus 83%) and less likely to believe in benefits (1% versus 10%) or religious mandates (2% versus 10%). Gender differences were not significant, except in rural areas for benefits – 17% of young males and 5% of young females reported that they believe FGM has benefits. For the rural panel sample, beliefs about FGM were unchanged since Round 2.

Only 3% of young people reported that they plan for their own (future) daughters to undergo FGM (see Figure 37). Location differences were again significant, with young people in Debre Tabor less likely to plan FGM for their own (future) daughters than their rural peers. Also suggesting that young people are willing to abandon FGM, only 8% of young males reported that they would be unwilling to marry a wife who had not undergone FGM.

Although most young females in the GAGE sample have undergone FGM, the dominant narrative in qualitative interviews was that it has now been ended. A health extension worker from Community D stated, '*There is no FGM in our kebele, we are thankful for that.*' A Fano member from Community B similarly reported:

> *Nowadays people in our locality don't practice FGM. Because of the teachings of the government and others, people stopped practising FGM long ago. Currently, the practice of FGM has been forgotten in our community, because no one practises it.*

Figure 37: Proportion of young people who intend to perpetrate FGM on their own (future) daughters (by location)



With the caveat that FGM was clearly common two decades ago (because most young females have undergone FGM), it was common for young females to report that they had never even heard of it happening recently. A 20-year-old young woman from Community G stated, '*I never saw a circumcised girl, circumcision is for boys.*'

Respondents reported that progress has been the result of myriad tactics. A religious leader from Community C explained that the church has contributed to progress: '*Awareness about it is given at church… The Bible does not allow to practice it.*' A 22-year-old young woman from Community G stated that teachers have also played a key role: '*Circumcision stopped since teachers and school principals said FGM is not supported by science, it stopped because of that.*' A key informant with Women's Affairs in Community D noted that her office, as well as health extension workers, had also helped to reduce incidence of FGM:

> *We educate and provide information for the community about the problems it causes… Circumcised women may have a genital scar during childbirth. Therefore, when girls give birth, it does not stretch properly and there is a risk of fistula problems.*

Rare cases of prosecution have also helped shift practices. A 16-year-old girl from Community A reported that a case from nine years ago is still talked about in the community: '*The woman who practised the FGM was arrested.*'

Positive narratives notwithstanding, multiple respondents reported that FGM has not yet been eliminated, merely driven underground. A religious leader from Community F stated, '*What we know is they don't do it openly. They might do it in a hidden manner.*' A *kebele* official from Community A agreed: '*Girls are circumcised secretly now.*'

Child marriage

At endline, most young people were aware that child marriage is illegal, for girls and boys. Approximately three-quarters (74%) reported that girls cannot legally marry until at least age 18; 71% said the same of boys. For rural young people in the panel sample, knowledge about the marriage law had improved in the years between Round 2 and endline. The proportion who were aware that child marriage is illegal for girls climbed from 33% to 71%; the proportion aware that child marriage is illegal for boys climbed from 27% to 77%.

Rates of child marriage varied by gender, location and cohort. Young women (many of whom were selected into the sample because they had married as children) were the most likely to have married prior to age 18 – 70% of those in rural areas and 21% of those in Debre Tabor had done so (see Figure 38). With the caveat that rates will continue to rise, because some[4] adolescent girls are not yet 18 years old, adolescent girls surveyed were unlikely to have married prior to age 18 (only 10% of those in rural areas and 2% of those in Debre Tabor had done so). Child marriage was uncommon for males: no adolescent boys and only 12% of young men in rural areas had married prior to age 18. No young males in Debre Tabor had married prior to age 18.

Rates of marriage before age 15 also varied by location and cohort (see Figure 39). In rural areas, 18% of young women (many of whom were selected into the sample because they had married as children) and 6% of adolescent girls had married before age 15. Rates in Debre Tabor were 3% and 1% respectively.

Of ever-married young people, only 26% reported that they themselves had made the decision to marry (see Figure 40). This was significantly more common in Debre Tabor than in rural areas (33% versus 23%). A large majority of young people (73%) reported that their parents or other relatives had made marriage decisions for them. This was significantly more common in rural areas than in Debre Tabor (79% versus 55%). Gender differences were not significant.

Young brides were an average of 6.3 years older than their husband at the time of marriage. As a result, although both young females and young males primarily enter into arranged marriages, young grooms were far more likely to report that they had been ready to marry than were young brides (69% versus 40%) (see Figure 41). For young females, location differences were significant: young brides in rural areas, 74% of whom were married as children, were much less likely to report that they had been ready to marry than their peers in Debre Tabor: 36% versus 51%.

Child marriage in South Gondar is best understood by first explaining traditional practices. Namely, girls (and sometimes boys) were married by parental arrangement when they were very young – sometimes even toddlers. The thought was that girls would grow up dividing their time between their natal and marital homes, and that

Figure 39: Proportion of young females married prior to age 15 (by location and cohort)

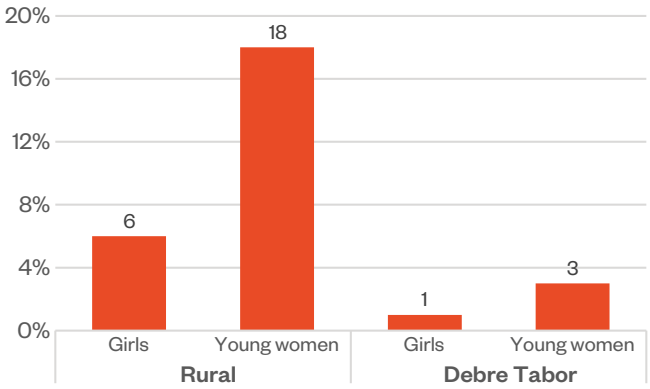
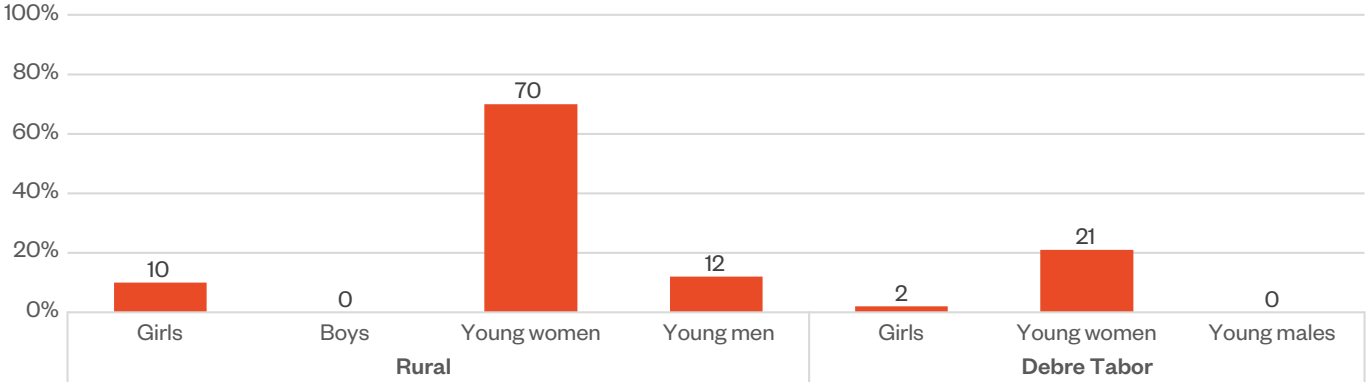


Figure 38: Proportion of young people married prior to age 18 (by gender, location and cohort)



4 In rural South Gondar, 23% of adolescent girls were under age 18; in Debre Tabor the corresponding figure was 18%.

Figure 40: Proportion of marriage decisions made by self or family (by location)

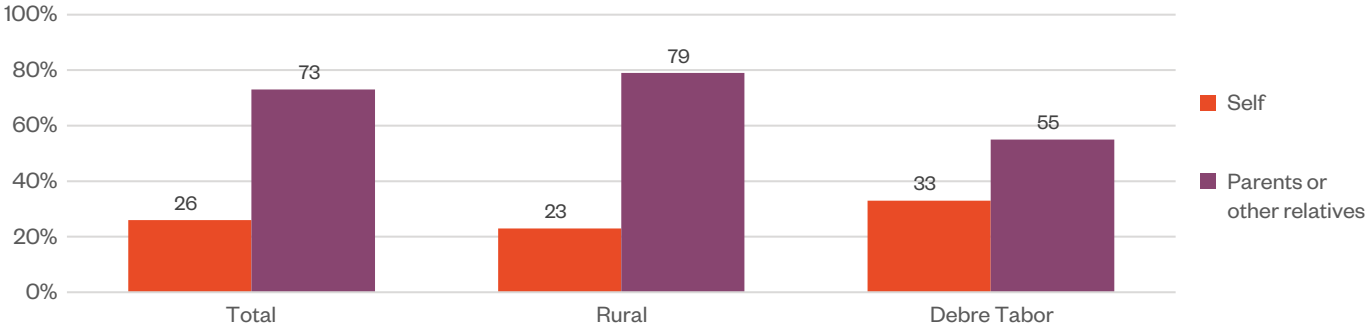
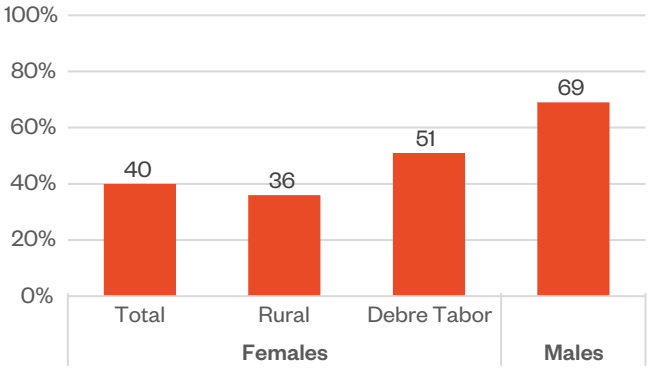


Figure 41: Proportion of married young people who were ready to marry at the time (by location and gender)



sexual relations were forbidden until girls experienced menarche. A mother from Community D explained, '*They arrange your marriage saying "she can grow together with her husband".*' This tradition explains why marriage in middle adolescence is rarely understood as child marriage. A mother from Community G stated:

> *A girl that is older than 15 is a grown one. It is bad to arrange their marriage under 15. Above 15 is a good age for marriage, she is grown at that age.*

Respondents agreed that it is now rare for girls to marry prior to age 15 – and increasingly uncommon for them to marry prior to age 18. This is in part, noted a mother from Community E, because '*The children themselves are refusing to get married.*' With both classroom content and girls' clubs teaching young people that child marriage is illegal, and schools serving as a venue for reporting that allows planned child marriages to be cancelled, girls (and some boys) often save themselves from child marriage. An 18-year-old young woman from Community E reported that she talked her parents out of marrying her: '*They arranged a marriage, but they never forced me to get married. They listened to me when I told them I didn't want to get married.*'

A 20-year-old young woman from Community C explained that a teacher had helped her remain single:

> *When I joined grade 9, I understood about the law for early marriage, and I decided to refuse the marriage and to continue my education. When they intended to arrange my marriage, I told my teacher, who then advised my father against it.*

Decreased incidence of child marriage is also partly because parents – many of whom married very young themselves – now see value in letting their children complete their schooling and grow up before they take on adult roles. A father from Community E, who married at age 14 to a girl who was only 12, reported, '*My wife and I married at an early age and we were still kids… I was married by force… I do not allow my children to do that at all. I want them to continue and complete their educatio*n.' A mother from Community E agreed and added that whereas celebrating a child's marriage used to be a source of community status, now parents take pride in educating their children:

> *Now no one considers marriage the way our parents did… The family wants to support the children's education… Because when they are educated they support us financially and change our life. Even if they cannot support us financially, it is a pride to have an educated child that achieves a position in life.*

That said, many girls are still married before the legal age of 18. These marriages are almost always arranged by parents – and many are forced. An 18-year-old young woman from Community E stated that parents arrange girls' marriage to prevent them from being raped: '*It is for fear of being exposed to unwanted pregnancy and being exposed to rape that parents arrange early marriage.*' A 19-year-old young woman from Community D reported that parents' interest in girls' marriage spikes when girls are no longer

able to continue their education: '*Parents force girls of 14 or 15 years old to get married… when they have no money to support girls' education*.' An 18-year-old young woman from Community B, who married at age 15 when she left school, observed that force is hardly required for most girls, because they are socialised into compliance:

> *They [the girl's parents] ordered me to do that and I did it unknowingly. I didn't know what was good and bad for me that time since I was too young.*

Respondents in many rural communities reported that the conflict has led to a resurgence of child marriage, because girls have lost the protective status of 'student' and because reporting and monitoring mechanisms have broken down. A father from Community F explained:

> *The number of adolescents getting married at a young age has increased after the conflict because there is no other option for them. They wanted to continue their education, but the schools are closed right now, so they were forced to discontinue their education. The only option left for them was marriage.*

A 19-year-old young woman from Community G agreed and elaborated:

> *When there was justice there was supervision, now no law, no one is working. No one is supervising the community. Now, parents decide to marry off girls, it depends only on their interests. Before, they were encouraging girls to attend school and working to avoid child marriage. Now, there is no justice to stop child marriage.*

Marital violence

Most young people (65%) reported that they believe, at least in part, that a wife owes her husband obedience in all things (see Figure 42). A minority, however, reported that marital violence is private and should not be discussed outside the home (15%), or that it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife to control her behaviour (16%). Location differences were significant for all beliefs. Young people in Debre Tabor were less tolerant of marital violence than their rural peers. In aggregate, 17% of young wives reported that they had ever been physically assaulted by their husband.

For young people in the panel sample, who for these questions were disproportionately from Debre Tabor, there were signs of progress in the years between Round 2 and endline. Although beliefs about wives' obedience showed no change, at endline young people were less likely to report that marital violence is private (18%, down from 27%) and that beating is an acceptable way for a man to control his wife (20%, down from 26%).

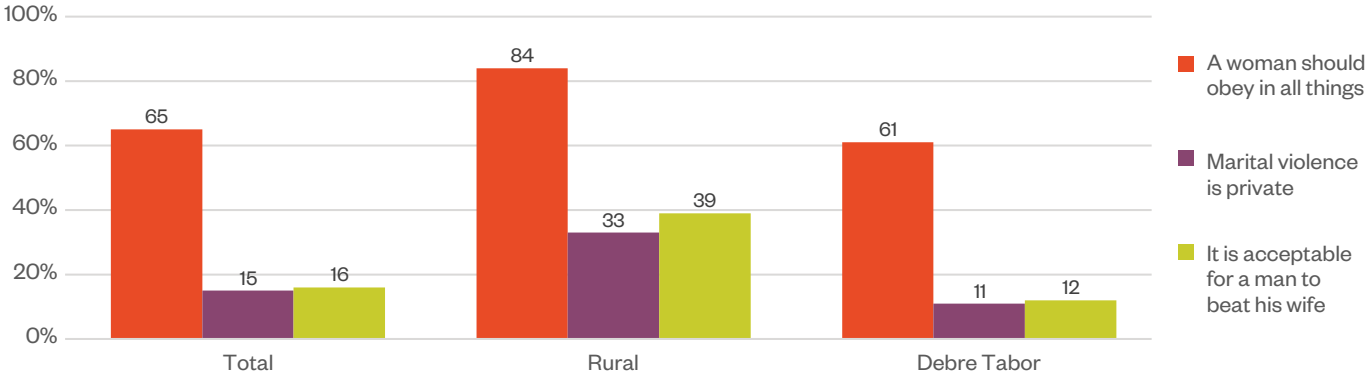
Most likely because interviews were conducted over the phone, meaning that respondents did not have full privacy, only two young women (both now divorced) spoke of experiencing marital violence. Interestingly, one – a 23-year-old from Community F – framed her choice to divorce as less about the beatings she received when her husband was drunk, and more about his inability to imagine and work towards a better future. She stated:

> *I hoped to build a better life, but he never had that mindset. His focus was always on alcohol, and he was never committed to changing his life. Because of that, I decided to leave him.*

Despite young wives' reticence to discuss marital violence, a justice official from Ebinat town stated that it is common:

> *Insulting, and undermining are common in this community. However, these practices are not considered as violence by most of the community. However, wife-beating or flogging is also a common form of intimate partner violence.*

Figure 42: Young people's beliefs about marital violence (by location)



Support-seeking and access to justice

At endline, most young people (79%) reported that they knew where a victim of violence might seek support (see Figure 43). Awareness was significantly better among respondents in Debre Tabor than in rural areas (89% versus 68%). Young males had significantly greater awareness than young females (87% versus 72%). For young people in the panel sample, awareness of where to seek help for violence had improved by 17 percentage points since Round 2 (from 58% to 75%).Gains were larger in rural areas (19 percentage points) than in Debre Tabor (12 percentage points), in large part because awareness was already high at Round 2 in Debre Tabor.

Of those who knew where to seek support for violence, only 7% had ever done so (see Figure 44). Gender differences were significant: young males were more than twice as likely as young females to have sought support for violence (10% versus 4%).

When asked how legal services in their community have fared since April 2023, 45% of young people in Debre Tabor and 63% of young people in rural areas replied that they have got worse.

Without exception, qualitative research participants agreed that access to formal justice has been devastated by the conflict, leaving most survivors (whether of physical assault, sexual harassment, rape, child marriage or marital violence) with nowhere to report violence, let alone seek support and redress. A 22-year-old young man from Community A explained:

> *Before the conflict, there was a police force and a functioning government structure. If something happened, people could report it to the police, who would take immediate action... However, after the war, there is no police presence in the area, and the kebele administration is no longer functional. No one is there to listen or intervene if something happens. Everywhere there are people who have weapons.*

A religious leader from Community G echoed this view, and said that security officers are at the same risk as teachers: '*Security officers are not operating in our locality. If security officers come to our locality, Fano will either imprison or kill them.*'

Several respondents reported that the Fano are now serving as de facto justice officials. An official at Women's Affairs in Community A explained:

> *Thanks to the Fano, issues related to security have been resolved. They do not tolerate anything that can cause a security issue such as robbery, rape, abduction, beating. Such things have stopped since the Fano came. They have their own system. They have a jail set up and so they take them there.*

That said, the same respondent also noted that rather than supporting survivors, Fano justice actively discourages reporting, due to fear of retribution. A mother from Community F stated:

Figure 44: Proportion of young people who have ever sought support for violence (of those that know a place) (by gender)

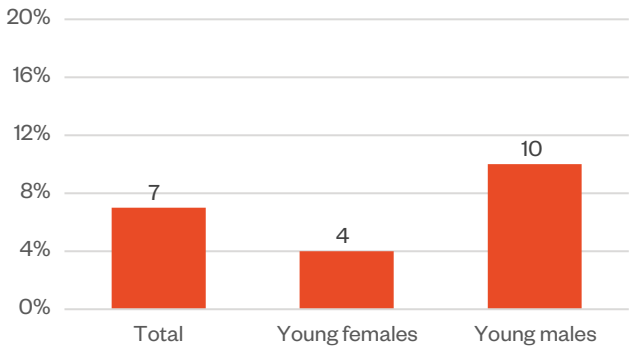
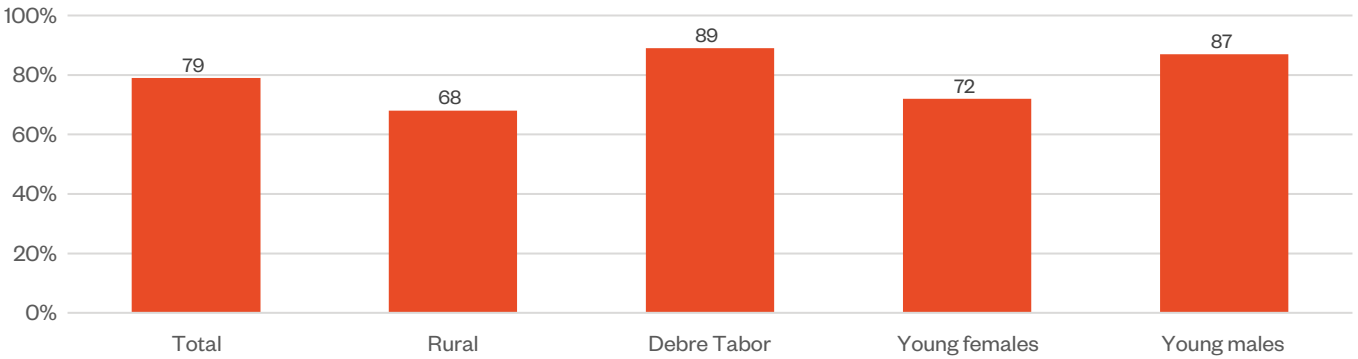


Figure 43: Proportion of young people who know where a victim of violence could seek support (by location and gender)



If you report it to Fano, they want to beat the person. The measures that they take are very bad. If a girl reports rape, they kill the person that commits the crime. In a rural area, people [take] *revenge when someone is the cause of death for others.*

A 27-year-old young woman from Community F agreed: '*You have to keep your case and hold it. You may be harmed, you keep that.*'

Conflict-related violence

When asked whether their community had experienced conflict in the past four years, 88% of young people in Debre Tabor and 78% of young people in rural areas replied in the affirmative (not shown). Indeed, 42% of young people in Debre Tabor and 35% of young people in rural areas reported that they had personally witnessed violence with weapons (see Figure 45). It was less common for young people to report that they had experienced conflict-related violence (7% in rural areas and 5% in Debre Tabor) or been asked to perpetrate violence (9% in rural areas and 4% in Debre Tabor). Gender differences were broadly significant, with young males more likely than young females (in both locations to) have experienced and been asked to commit violence. In Debre Tabor, young males were also significantly more likely than young females to have witnessed violence with weapons.

Respondents reported that conflict-related violence is meted out by both sides – government forces and Fano militia – and that it is almost unavoidable in the areas afflicted by active conflict. A father from Community G stated, '*The people are suffering from abuse both by the Fano and the government soldiers.*' An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor reported, '*These days, it has become normal for us to see the Fano fighters or government security forces everywhere in this town.*'

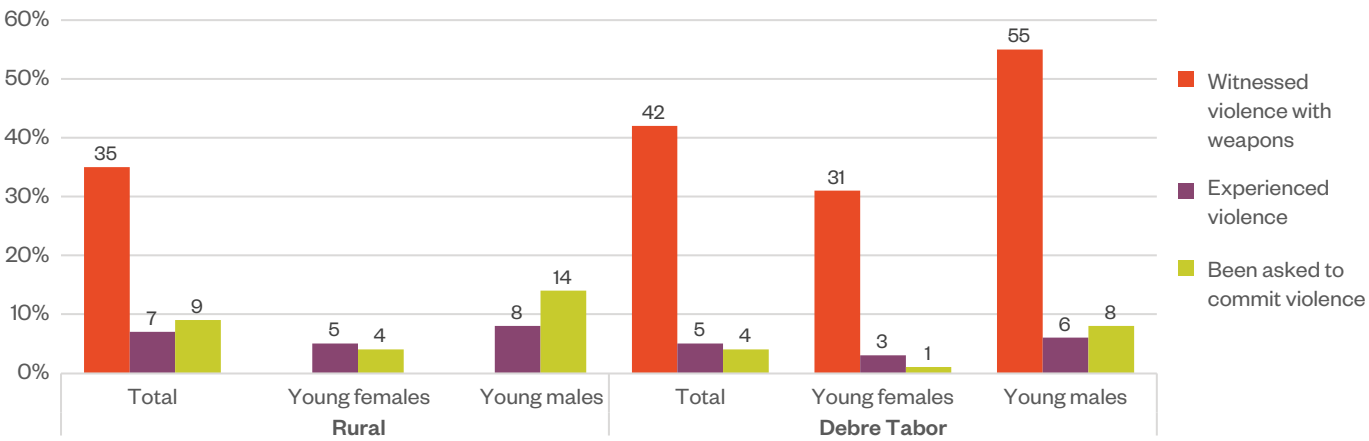
According to respondents, government forces regularly mete out physical violence. A mother from Community G, whose 14-year-old son was severely beaten by soldiers looking for guns to confiscate, stated, '*The defence forces beat us when they came to the area, they slapped us, and they kicked us. They beat us seriously… They beat those who have guns and those who have no guns.*' A 20-year-old young man from Community D reported that federal forces often beat villagers simply because of where they live: '*Since there are Fano militants in the area, the government military forces beat people… They suspect that we have family in the Fano forces.*' An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, whose mother was accidently shot by government forces and died in front of him, reported that not all deaths caused by government forces are accidents:

The worst part is that if someone informs the government forces that you are a Fano member or supporter, the government security forces don't investigate or verify the information they received, rather, they will simply arrest you, take you to an unknown place, and you might be killed – without ever knowing why you are caught, imprisoned and even killed.

The violence perpetrated by the Fano is in some ways similar to the violence perpetrated by federal forces. Fano members also confiscate weapons and beat villagers they believe may have weapons that they are not turning over. Fano members are also, however, widely implicated in kidnapping and rape. A 22-year-old young man from Community G explained of the first:

They request money after holding them as hostage. They call family members or any relative of the person

Figure 45: Young people's conflict-related exposure to violence (by location and gender)



A 21-year-old paid labourer, weighing cereal © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

to pay ransom. Then parents will beg to collect the money or borrow from others and pay it.

A justice official from Debre Tabor added that seven adolescents had recently been ransomed for 50,000 birr each. A father from Community D explained that girls and young women are at risk of rape from the Fano as well: '*Most Fano there are young men. When they find an attractive young woman they do not let her have her choice, they want to take her and go away.*' A militia member in Community A stated that the female relatives of government forces are particularly at risk:

If a girl's father, brother or male relative is a member of the government's security forces, she is likely to be targeted by Fano fighters. Girls/women have been raped by Fano fighters… In some cases, their bodies are even cut with knives or blades.

With the caveat that young males rarely acknowledge young females' risk of sexual violence, young males reported that they have been disproportionately impacted by conflict-related violence. This is, they explained, because they are often expected to participate in violence, and are often tricked or forced into participating in violence. A 20-year-old young man from Community E stated:

Nowadays because of recurrent conflict in our area, boys and men are expected to join conflicts and will be affected by the conflict. Currently, many boys joined the conflict supporting either of the conflicting groups. Therefore, boys who joined Fano or the government security forces might be injured or killed while fighting. Many boys also joined the conflict because of being misled by adults or those who have a hidden agenda, and some of these boys are affected by the direct conflict.

A 23-year-old young man from Community B echoed this belief:

Currently, being a boy has become risky, because there are boys who involve in conflicts and other activities either with interest or being forced/influenced by others. Currently, many boys joined the conflict on either side.

Psychosocial well-being

Mental health and resilience

In Debre Tabor (but not in rural areas), the endline survey included the General Health Questionnaire-12 (GHQ-12), which captures symptoms of emotional distress. In aggregate, 13% of young people in Debre Tabor had scores indicative of distress (see Figure 46). [5] Adolescent boys (8%) were significantly less likely to have symptoms of distress than young females (15%) or young men (17%). Of urban young people in the panel sample, the proportion with symptoms of emotional distress fell significantly in the years between Round 2 and endline. Declines were driven by young males, who saw their rate drop from 21% to 10%.

In both locations, the endline survey included the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), which captures symptoms of depression. In aggregate, 16% of young people had symptoms of mild depression and 5% had symptoms of moderate-to-severe depression (see Figure 47).[6] Gender differences were significant: young females were more likely than young males to report mild (18% versus 15%) and moderate-to-severe (6% versus 3%) depression. Panel data is available only for the rural sample. For those young people, rates of both mild (3% to 17%) and moderate-to-severe (1% to 5%) depression were five times higher at endline than they were at Round 2.

The endline survey also included the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM),[7] which captures young people's ability to respond to life challenges and the emotional support they have to help them do so. Dividing the sample into four quartiles – those with low resilience (25th percentile and below), those with average resilience (26th–74th percentile), and those with high resilience (75th percentile and above) – highlights that urban young people are advantaged compared with their rural peers, and that adolescents are advantaged compared with young adults (see Figure 48). Urban young people are significantly more likely than their rural counterparts to have high resilience (42% versus 29%); they are also significantly less likely to have low resilience (8% versus 12%). Adolescents are significantly more likely than young adults to have high resilience (39% versus 27%); they are also significantly less likely to have low resilience (8% versus 14%). Location and cohort differences may reflect the fact that urban young people (62%) and adolescents (83%) are more likely to still be living with their caregivers than rural young people (40%) and adolescents (84%).

Qualitative interviews suggest that survey results may understate the number of young people who are struggling with mental health concerns, particularly in rural areas. Although many of these concerns are rooted in young people's anxiety about being able to find work and build adult lives (anxiety that predates the conflict and is widespread across Ethiopia), respondents agreed that years of conflict have amplified concerns, both in terms of the number of young people affected and the depth of their despair. A 22-year-old young man from Community

Figure 46: Proportion of young people in Debre Tabor with symptoms of depression (by gender and cohort)

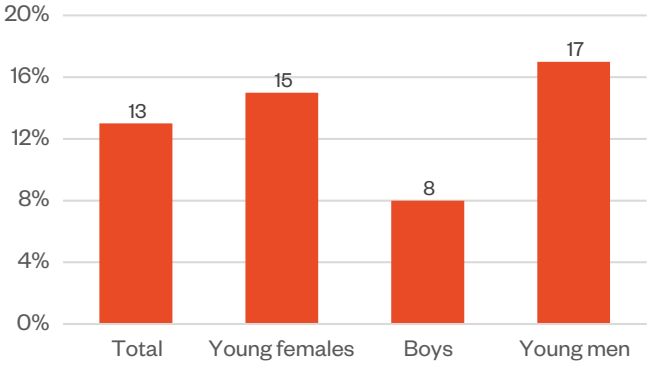
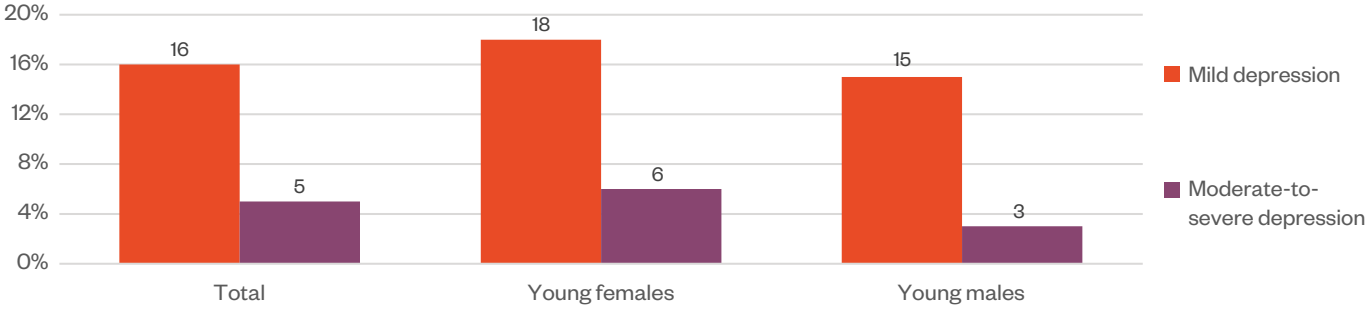
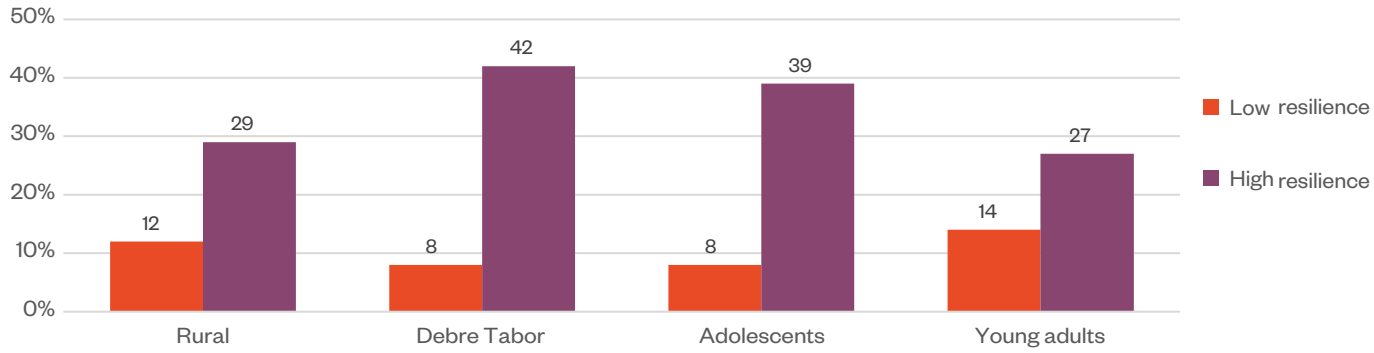


Figure 47: Proportion of young people with symptoms of depression (by gender)



5 Distressed was defined as a score =>3/12 (see Goldberg, 1972; Goldberg and Williams, 1988)
6 Depressed was defined as a score =>5/27 (see Kroenke et al., 2001)
7 See Liebenberg et al. (2013).

Figure 48: Proportion of young people with high and low resilience (by location and cohort)



G, when asked what makes him happy, replied, '*There is no happiness. Always it is miserable.*'

Some young people spoke of the emotional impacts of experiencing and witnessing violence. A 21-year-old young man from Ebinat town reported:

> *It was because of the recent instability that I was injured and suffered from a broken leg and also the death of one of my friends who was killed by militia gunshot… The psychological trauma of that event was huge on me.*

An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor similarly stated:

> *What I observed in this town during the conflict between the Fano and the government security force was unforgettable… I saw too many human corpses thrown on the street like trash.*

A 20-year-old young woman from Community G explained that she too has been scarred by conflict:

> *I was normal before… Now, I am sensitive and I am worried very much about simple and small matters… There was a continuous firing of guns, guns were fired 24 hours non-stop.*

Many young people – even those who have not personally experienced or witnessed violence –emphasised that the fear of violence can be just as traumatising as violence itself, because it never lets up. A 27-year-old young woman from Community G explained:

> *We are very concerned about the security situation. It concerned us yesterday and we are concerned about it today. Something bad or good may happen to your family, we do not expect only happiness.*

A 22-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor similarly stated: *We live in constant anxiety… If you don't die, you survive, but it's very terrifying.*' A 27-year-old young woman from Community G was even more blunt, saying: '*I think it is better to die than to suffer like this.*'

The trauma that conflict is inflicting on young people in South Gondar is also driven by the ways in which it is destroying livelihoods and amplifying poverty. With crops confiscated and roads and markets often closed, some respondents reported that they are terrified of food insecurity. A 23-year-old young man from Community B stated, '*It's better for a person to die in war than to die of hunger. The most terrible of all deaths is to die of hunger. That's how society is now. That's when I'm worried.*' Other respondents reported that although their food security is not yet at risk, they cannot find the work that affords both income and self-esteem. A 22-year-old young man from Community A reported, '*I feel like I have no bright future. Due to the security problems in the area, we are unable to work and earn a living. We sit idly, feeling helpless, as if we are sick.*' A young woman the same age, from Community B, echoed this view: '*I felt ashamed. My friends were supporting their families independently, so I wanted to do the same instead of being a burden to my mother.*'

Conflict-related impacts on education are also driving increases in anxiety and depression, because young people can feel their futures slipping away from them. An 18-year-old young woman from Community G, where schools have been closed for years, stated, '*The school here is closed, some students moved to Ebinat town and continued with their education. We who are not capable of continuing education feel miserable and stressed. We are sad.*' A mother from Community F reported the same of young people in her community: '*The absence of school has a strong impact that affects our children's future career. It causes mental disturbance in our children.*' Even in Debre Tabor, where schools are open, many young people reported that their schooling – and their mental health – has been impacted by incessant violence. A 23-year-old young man studying at Debre Tabor University,

who reported that he has severe anxiety and panic attacks, stated: '*I sometimes get desperate with my education… It is the security problem that makes me desperate.*'

When asked how they calm themselves, and try to cheer themselves up, young people reported multiple techniques. Some turn to religion. A 22-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor explained that when she is stressed, '*I seek solace in my faith by visiting the church. Sometimes, I cry there, and that brings me a sense of relief.*' Others turn to music or television. A 15-year-old girl from Community C reported that to cheer herself up, '*I listen to music… I like dancing, I practise it.*' A few, all young men, reported that they self-medicate with substances. A 19-year-old young man from Community G stated, '*I drink my local beer "Tela". It is better to enjoy than worrying about tomorrow… Since I do not know when I will die, I have to enjoy.*'

Emotional support

At endline, three-quarters of young people (76%) reported that they had a trusted friend (see Figure 49). Location and gender differences were significant: young people in Debre Tabor were more likely than their rural peers to have a trusted friend (80% versus 73%), and young males were more likely than young females to have a trusted friend (82% versus 71%). In the years between Round 2 and endline, the proportion of young people in the panel sample with a trusted friend climbed from 67% to 76%. Gains were similar in rural areas and Debre Tabor and were particularly large for young males (70% to 84%).

At endline, 72% of young people reported that they had a trusted adult in their life. There were no differences between groups and no change since Round 2.

A large majority of young people (79%) reported that they are able to talk to their mother (or female caregiver) about their dreams and aspirations for the future (see Figure 50). Location differences were not significant, but within location, cohort and gender differences were. In rural areas, adolescents (who were more likely than young adults to live with their parents) were more likely to be able to discuss their aspirations with their mother (79% versus 74%). In Debre Tabor, young females were more likely than young males to be able to discuss their aspirations with their mother (84% versus 78%).

Far fewer young people (64%) reported that they can talk to their father (or male caregiver) about their dreams and aspirations for the future (see Figure 51). Location differences were not significant, but in rural areas, gender differences were, with young males more able than young females to talk to their father (74% versus 64%).

At endline, most young people reported that they have good relationships with their caregivers and can turn to them (especially their mother) for emotional support. A 22-year-old young man from Community G reported that when he is anxious, his mother helps: An 18-year-old young woman from Community A similarly stated, '*I share my stress with my mother and father… I prefer to tell to my mother.*' A 15-year-old boy from Community C explained why mothers are preferred over fathers:

> *I mostly approach my mother rather than my father, because my mother is very close to me… This is because my father spends much of his time outside of home working on the farmland.*

Figure 49: Proportion of young people with a trusted friend (by location and gender)

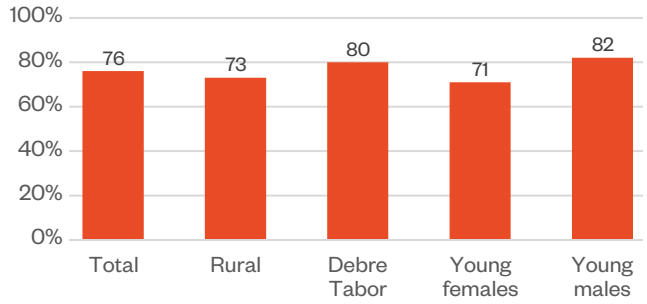


Figure 50: Proportion of young people who can talk to their mother about their dreams and aspirations for the future (by location, cohort and gender)

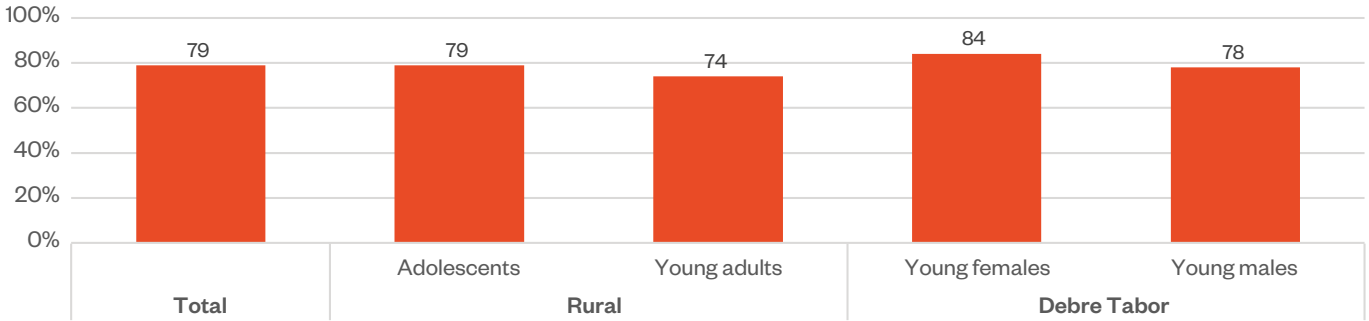
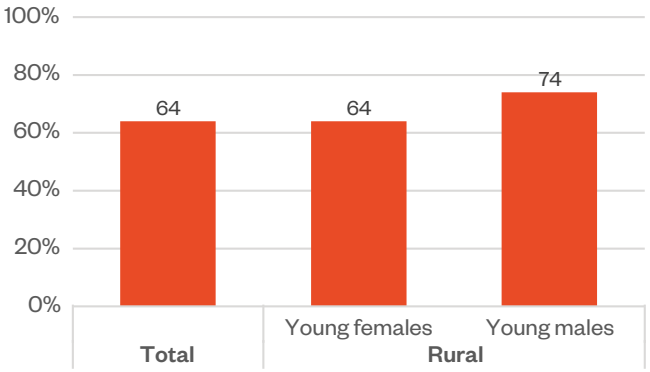


Figure 51: Proportion of young people who can talk to their father about their dreams and aspirations for the future



Besides young people with disabilities (see Box 3), two groups of young people stood out as having less emotional support from their parents. The first was those who no longer live with their parents. A 22-year-old young man from Community B, when asked what challenges he regularly faces regarding emotional health, replied: '*The only challenge I have faced is being grown up and living without parents. Being lonely is a big problem.*' A 19-year-old young woman from Community D stated that since she got married, she only briefly interacts with her parents, and there is '*only greetings... no discussion*'.

The second group of young people who reported less emotional support from caregivers was young adults in Debre Tabor, some of whom were happy to share positive news with their families, but kept their worries to themselves. A 22-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor stated, '*I don't share my stress and anxiety with my family because I don't want to burden them.*' A 28-year-old man from that same location elaborated:

> *I don't tell my mother about my stress, worries and other bad feelings or when I face something bad... If I tell her my feeling of stress and anxiety, my mother will feel stressed and anxious because she doesn't want me to face anything bad.*

Siblings also emerged as important sources of emotional support and encouragement. Some older siblings assume parental roles. A mother from Community E reported of her adolescent son:

> *His older brother calls regularly to follow up on his education. He tells him, "If I hear something bad about you, I will call your teacher directly." He also asks for his teacher's phone number to check on his performance, class attendance, and behaviour in the classroom.*

A 17-year-old girl from that same community recalled that when her mother abandoned the family:

> *My sister reassured me that she would support me and that nothing bad would happen to me. Even now, she takes care of me and does everything, so nothing bad happens to me.*

Similarly aged siblings are often best friends. A 17-year-old girl from Community G stated, '*I am close with my older [18-year-old] sister. I tell her everything.*' A 25-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor echoed this sentiment: '*My sister is my best friend. I phone her three times each day.*'

Qualitative findings suggest that only a minority of young people – disproportionately those from Debre Tabor and males – have close friends on whom they can rely for emotional support. A 23-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor, when asked with whom she can share personal information, replied: '*With my friend. I share my secrets with her because we are close and spend time together. We know each other well. We are open to talk about everything.*' A 22-year-old young man from Community B reported that only his friend can make him feel better: '*My friend knows everything about my life, so he always advises me that this mess will be over and everything will be better in the future.*' A 15-year-old boy from Community C explained that living through conflict has strengthened his friendships: '*I have trust that my best friends are by my side during such kinds of crises times and I am also on their side. This is what a true friendship is.*'

Most young people, especially those in rural areas and females, explained that although they have friends, they have only limited interactions with those friends. They overwhelmingly blamed this on the conflict. A 15-year-old girl from Community E reported that she lost access to friends when schools closed, '*I had friends when I was in school, now I have no friends.*' A boy the same age but from Community C reported that he is no longer allowed outside to play with his friends, because his mother is too worried about his safety:

> *Before the conflict, we played different games like football... It was in the playing field and communal grazing land that we were playing, but after the conflict started we don't go to these places and play with our friends.*

Young people also reported that migration, which has spiked in recent years, has disrupted friendships. An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor stated:

Box 3: Young people with disabilities face myriad disadvantages

Young people with disabilities, most of whom were living in urban areas so that they could access education, reported that the single greatest obstacle between themselves and their aspirations for the future is the stigma that surrounds disability. An 18-year-old young man with a vision impairment explained that many people with disabilities are hidden at home: '*In my view, the main thing that may hinder me achieving my aspirations is people's attitude toward their children with a disability. People in rural areas don't want their children with a disability to go out of home, because they consider it a curse, so that too many children with disabilities live hidden at home.*' A 20-year-old young woman, also with a vision impairment, recalled that although she was never cloistered at home, her early childhood was shaped by her mother's low expectations for her: '*Although my father had positive and constructive ideas about my life and future career, my mother was negative and reluctant about it.*'

Young people with disabilities have far more limited access to quality education than their peers without a disability. This is in large part because special needs education, which is especially targeted to the needs of those with vision and hearing impairments, is only available in urban areas. A 21-year-old young man with a vision impairment stated, '*There are many adolescents with a disability who are not in school and even who didn't start learning at all.*' Disability-specific barriers to education do not end with enrolment. Although young people universally reported positive experiences with special education teachers, who provide education through the end of 3rd or 4th grade, nearly all reported that the transition into regular classes is challenging. This is because teachers do not speak sign language or know braille, because there are not enough specialised textbooks, and because some teachers refuse to make accommodations for disability (for example, giving a blind student a zero on an assignment that is graphically based). An 18-year-old young man reported, '*I am the only blind student in my school. Teachers don't have the knowledge on how to deliver lessons to special needs students.*' A teacher from Debre Tabor believed that more training is needed: '*Teachers don't neglect these students out of hatred or unwillingness, but because they don't know sign language. Most teachers teaching in grade 4 and above have not received training in sign language or taken adequate special needs education courses. As a result, they are unable to effectively support students with hearing disabilities.*' Several young people with disabilities studying at the post-secondary level added that support for those with disabilities is particularly limited in those contexts. A 22-year-old young woman who is studying history at university despite having a vision impairment reported that her siblings are no longer available to read for her, that braille transcriptions of lectures are not provided by the university, and that, '*It's also difficult to hire human readers or braille transcribers because they charge for their services, and I can't afford to pay them.*'

Respondents reported that disability also shapes young people's health outcomes. Because disability is most common in the poorest households (who have the least access to modern medicine), young people with disabilities are disproportionally more likely than their peers without disabilities to live in households that are food insecure. A special needs teacher from Debre Tabor explained, '*Most students with disabilities come from poor families. I remember a 4th grade student with a visual impairment who collapsed in class. He couldn't walk or speak. When I asked him what was wrong, he told me he hadn't eaten for two days because there was no food at home.*' Young people living independently of their parents and attending school in town reported that because the government stipend they receive is too small to afford both rent and food, and because conflict has prevented their parents from sending extra supplies, concerns about hunger have been never-ending. A 21-year-old young woman with a vision impairment, attending 11th grade in Ebinat town, stated, '*I can't describe the challenges I faced due to food shortages. For example, I skipped breakfast, had lunch, and ate only a small amount for dinner. Sometimes I didn't eat dinner at all. I didn't cook different meals, I just ate one or two basic food items.*'

Young people with disabilities also reported limited access to health care – partly because of cost and partly because they are often devalued in the family. A 26-year-old young man with a vision impairment, currently attending university, reported that he had not been able to access health insurance: '*People with a disability should access community-based health insurance. I am not sure how many of the kebeles and are making this service accessible to people with disabilities. In my case, when I was in high school, I was not allowed to use health insurance.*' A 28-year-old young man with a vision impairment stated that he blamed his parents, because '*they were just waiting for my death and not concerned about my health*'.

Although in previous rounds of research young people with disabilities spoke at length about violence at the hands of caregivers, teachers and peers, this was not the case at endline. At endline, those with disabilities – like their peers without disabilities – primarily focused on conflict-related violence. A 21-year-old young man who has a vision impairment, reported that he was injured and his friend was killed because they could not move away from federal

forces fast enough: '*I was injured by a gunshot fired by the government militia in July 2023… I went to Bahir Dar to work… One day, chaos broke out and people ran to escape from the government security forces. However, while I and my friend were walking quickly as much as we could, the government militias came to us, and started firing at us. When they started firing at us, I and my friend shouted and told them, we are boys with visual impairment, but they couldn't listen to our shouting and fired at me and my friend. Unfortunately, my friend was beaten at his head and instantly died and I was injured at my left leg, above my ankle and below my knee.*' A special needs teacher from Debre Tabor added that young people with hearing impairments have also been at elevated risk of conflict-related violence: '*During the current conflict while students were in class, those with hearing impairments couldn't hear the gunshots so that while everyone else ran in the opposite direction of the danger, these students with hearing impairment ran toward it.*'

Young males with disabilities reported that young females with disabilities are doubly disadvantaged. Most focused on the constant risk of sexual harassment and rape, which are elevated for young females with disabilities because they may not be able to sense approaching danger and because they often rely on strangers to help them cross the street. A 21-year-old young man with a vision impairment stated, '*Being a boy with disability is a bit preferable than being a girl with disability because, being a girl by itself will cause girls to be vulnerable for harassment.*' An 18-year-old young man with a vision impairment echoed that view: '*Girls with disabilities are not able to prevent themselves from being violated.*' However, a 23-year-old young man with a vision impairment noted that the gender disadvantage goes beyond the risk of sexual violence, because females are simply not valued as highly as males: '*The community values the idea of a male person with a disability more than that of a female with a disability.*'

> *Two years ago, I had many close friends, but because of the current conflict, many of my close friends joined the Fano and some others left this town and migrated to other places to look for a job to support themselves and their family.*

A young woman the same age from Community G reported: '*I have a close girlfriend… We spent time together and we went to school together. Now she moved to Addis… I felt lonely when she left, and I was crying.*'

With many rural schools closed, the conflict has also cost young people access to the teachers they view as role models and sources of support. Despite the violence they experience at school, many young people spoke of their teachers with great fondness. A 13-year-old boy stated, '*I liked the environmental science class best because of the teacher who taught it… She also loved us and treated us like a mother would.*' A 22-year-old young man from Community B similarly recalled of his teachers, '*When I was in school… they had been giving me love and sympathy.*'

Multiple respondents spoke at length about the urgency of providing young people with psychosocial support services. A 26-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor, whose 18-year-old brother is taking part in GAGE and has not recovered from seeing their mother shot dead in front of his eyes, stated, '*The first thing I wish for my brother is for someone to provide him with counselling services until he returns to his normal condition.*' A key informant from Ebinat town noted that young people everywhere need help:

> *The government should also work hard on the community's health in general and on young people's mental and psychological health. Because nowadays young people everywhere in our country are in trauma of conflict and instability, distrust is developed in the mind of young people, so government and others should work on curing the young people's bad mentality.*

That said, only two young people (both in Debre Tabor) reported the availability of any services. A 23-year-old young woman studying at Debre Tabor University stated that services are available in the university clinic, and a young man the same age stated that services are available at the Debre Tabor Specialised Hospital. The young man added that while services are available, they are little used:

> *The community doesn't want to send the youth to psychiatric institutions. The first reason is that they think it is embarrassing, and they don't want people talking about admissions to psychiatric hospitals. So they prefer to send their children to holy water. The other reason is that the community genuinely believes the cure for mental illness is only found in holy water. They don't think physicians can help people if it's a mental illness. They also believe holy water cures people faster.*

In rural communities, although several respondents reported using holy water to treat mental illness (including one case of what appears to be major depressive disorder), a teacher from Community E noted, '*There is no one that provides them* [young people] *with counselling.*'

Voice and agency

Physical mobility

Two-fifths (43%) of young people reported on the endline survey that they had left the *kebele* at least once in the past three months (see Figure 52). Location differences were significant: urban young people were more likely to have left the *kebele* than rural young people (45% versus 40%). Gender and cohort differences were also significant, but must be interpreted together. Among adolescents, boys were 16 percentage points more likely to have left the *kebele* than girls (50% versus 34%, not shown). However, because young males' mobility improves as they enter adulthood, and young females' does not, the gender gap between young men and young women climbs to 24 percentage points (58% versus 34%). For rural young people in the panel sample, there was a 5 percentage point improvement in the proportion of those who had left the *kebele* at least once in the past three months in the years between Round 2 and endline (35% to 40%). Gains were entirely due to adolescent girls, whose mobility improved as they entered late adolescence (from 18% to 34%).

More than half of young people (56%) reported that they need permission to go to the market[8] (see Figure 53). Location, gender and cohort differences were significant, and highlighted that urban young people, young males and young adults were less likely to need permission than rural young people, young females and adolescents. For example, 74% of girls reported that they need permission to go to the market, versus only 22% of young men. For rural young people in the panel sample, the proportion needing permission dropped from 80% to 66% in the years between Round 2 and endline. Gains were entirely due to young males, who saw declines of 25 percentage points (81% to 56%).

Respondents universally agreed that young females' mobility is far more restricted than young males', due to parents' concerns about sexual violence and due to heavy demands on young females' time for domestic and care work. A 22-year-old young man attending 11th grade in Ebinat town stated:

> *I really thank God for creating me as a boy. Because it is the fact that I am a boy which helped me continue learning, moving from place to place. Because girls are*

Figure 52: Proportion of young people who have left the *kebele* at least once in the past three months (by location, gender and cohort)

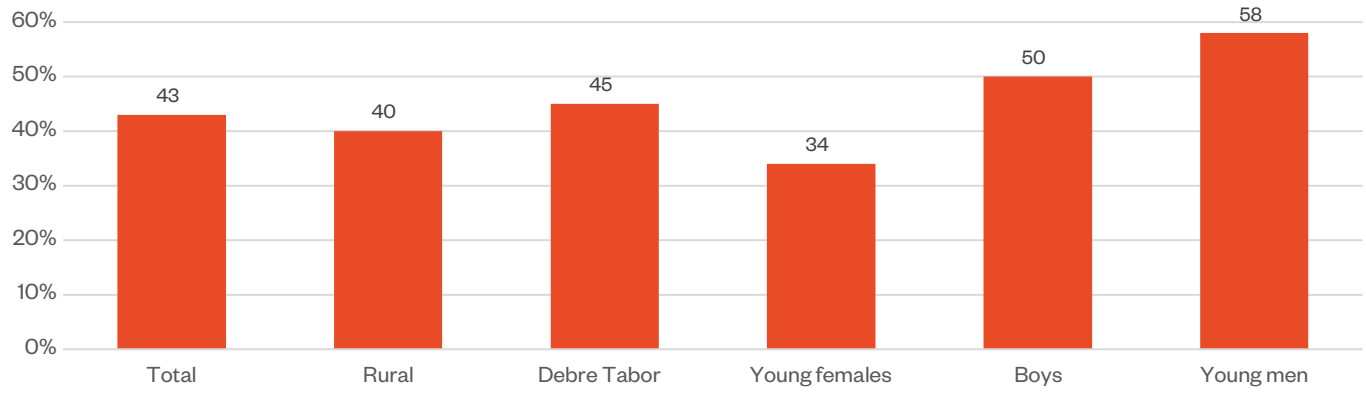
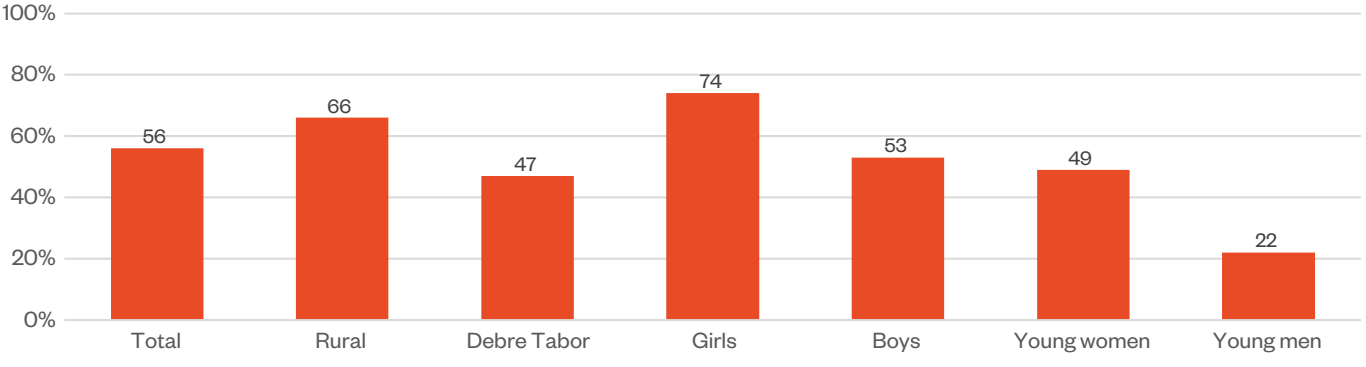


Figure 53: Proportion of young people who need permission to go to the market (by location, gender and cohort)



8 Figures and patterning were similar for permission to go to a public place and permission to visit the home of a friend or relative.

not able to move freely and learn where they want. Since I am a boy, even though I may face other challenges, I am free from any kinds of sexual violence.

An 18-year-old young woman expressed the same sentiment, from a female perspective: '*I hate my womanhood when I couldn't move to different places I wanted to go.*' A 15-year-old boy from Community C added that fear of violence is not the only reason why girls' mobility is restricted; he said of his sister:

She is not allowed to go out of home, spend time and play with her close friends like me. After school, since she is a girl she is busy doing house chores.

Respondents also agreed, however, that conflict has restricted everyone's mobility over recent years. A mother from Community F explained that young people largely spend their time at home: '*Parents worry sick when their children go outside because we don't know if they will return safely. The school is closed, and children are staying at home. Youths find it difficult to go anywhere.*' A mother from Debre Tabor stated that because of curfews and unrest, families try to ensure that everyone is home before nightfall:

People go to their homes around 6 p.m. The situation in the city has forced people to be indoors before dark. It isn't safe to go outside at night, and it isn't safe to go far from home or to other kebeles.

Young males reported far greater conflict-related impacts on mobility than did young females, partly because their mobility was previously better than that of their female peers and partly because they are genuinely targeted by soldiers and by Fano. An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor explained that young males are subject to identification checks:

Over the past two years, girls have been able to move freely around town, whereas boys, even young ones, are required to show identification cards when the government security forces ask them. Nowadays, because of the conflict and related insecurity, being a boy has become somewhat challenging in this town for boys to move freely.

A 24-year-old young man from Ebinat town reported that young males are subject to interrogation:

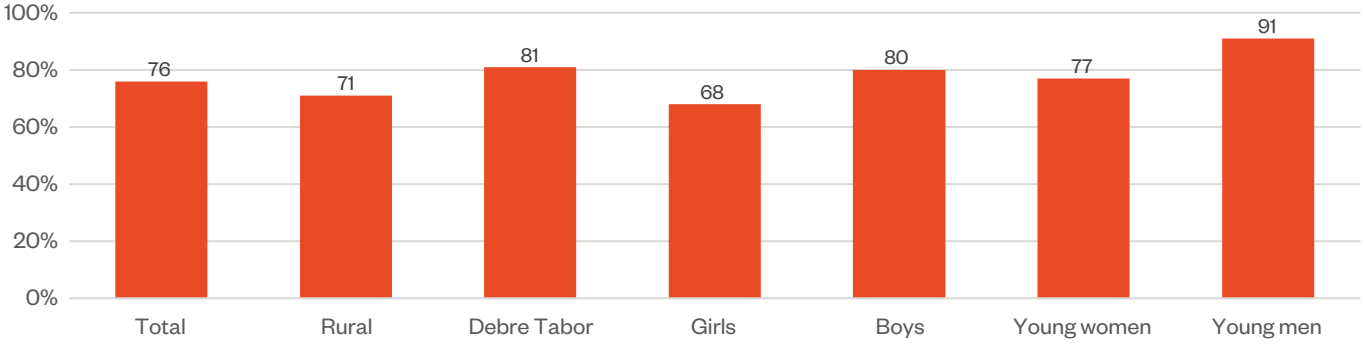
Nowadays, particularly because of the recent unrest, boys are not able to move and work freely wherever they want because, boys/men will be suspected as members of the Fano or the government security forces, which makes them vulnerable to attacks.

Digital access

Just over three-quarters (76%) of young people reported that they owned a mobile phone (see Figure 54). Location, gender and cohort differences were significant. Young people in Debre Tabor were more likely to own a phone than their rural peers (81% versus 71%). Young males were more likely to own a phone than young females (83% versus 70%, not shown), and young adults were more likely to own a phone than adolescents (83% versus 74%, not shown). Young men were the most likely to own a phone (91%); adolescent girls were least likely to (68%). For young people in the panel sample, ownership of mobile phones has exploded since Round 2, rising from 23% to 74%. Gains were larger in rural areas (56 percentage points) than in Debre Tabor (44 percentage points), because ownership in Debre Tabor was already high at Round 2.

Just under half (41%) of young people reported that they have a phone that is internet connected (see Figure 55). Location differences were highly significant. Only 14% of rural young people, but 63% of their urban peers, reported being able to access the internet. In Debre Tabor,

Figure 54: Proportion of young people who own a mobile phone (by location, gender and cohort)



gender differences were significant. Young females (59%) had less access to the internet than young males (67%). Internet connected young people in rural areas reported spending a mean of 1.9 hours each day using a screen for entertainment. In Debre Tabor, the analogous figure was 3.5 hours.

Outside of Debre Tabor, most young people reported that they have flip phones that cannot access the internet, and that they use them for talking to family and friends and listening to music. A 20-year-old young woman from Ebinat town reported, '*I use it to make and receive calls, to stay in touch with others*.' A 16-year-old boy from Community C, whose parents bought him a phone a year earlier, elaborated:

> *This mobile phone helps me a lot especially in communicating with others and sharing information with others. I mostly call to my parents, siblings, close friends and relatives to share various information. It simplifies life, so I like my phone.*

Several young people noted that although they would like to have a smartphone, there is little point in most rural communities, since the internet – which has recently been restored after being taken down during the conflict (August 2023 until July 2024) – is not available in many areas and is, in any case, expensive. A 20-year-old young man from Community D stated, '*The internet is expensive here, so I do not use it*.'

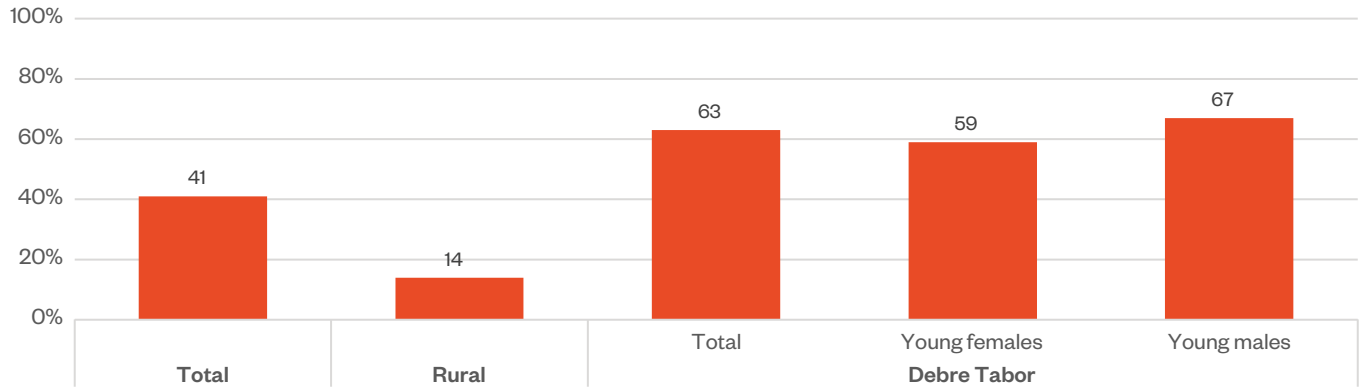
A minority of young people, disproportionately from Debre Tabor or enrolled in secondary school in Ebinat town, reported that they have a smartphone. Most explained that these are important to their schooling. A 23-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, studying at a private college, explained, '*I use the phone to read educational materials and gather information about my classes*.' A 25-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor, also at Debre Tabor University, similarly stated, '*I use it to record lectures during class and then listen to them later in the dorm*.' Non-school related smartphone use was also usually educational. A 28-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, for example, reported, '*I also download video lessons about electricity and different electronic devices so it is very helpful for me, especially to update myself and also to learn new things as well*.'

Although a teacher from Ebinat town stated that most young people use their smartphone '*for entertainment, including TikTok*', nearly all young people flatly denied this. A 22-year-old young woman, in secondary school in Ebinat town, when asked about her use of social media, replied: '*Actually, I'm not very active on social media. I use it occasionally for about 20 minutes, depending on my schedule. I'm busy with my studies*.' A 23-year-old young man, at university in Debre Tabor, when asked why he does not use social media, replied, '*I am not interested using these platforms… I consider some of these opportunities, like TikTok, a bit of a joke. I don't really trust them*.' Of the rare young people who did report using social media, nearly all reported using it with care. A 17-year-old mother from Community D, when asked what she watches on TikTok, replied, '*I only watch good things… I watch educational videos that teach about church and religious content*.'

Indeed, what stood out in South Gondar is how aware respondents are of the risks of social media in particular, and the internet in general. Several parents reported that although they will buy their son or daughter a smartphone when they go to university, they do not want their child to have a smartphone prior to that. A mother from Community E said of her 17-year-old son (who is in 11th grade):

> *He asked me to buy a smartphone so he can do homework that the teachers send through email. He also plans to open an internet centre, which would help him with that. I advised him that there is no benefit to*

Figure 55: Proportion of young people who have an internet connected phone (by location and gender)



A 19-year-old tuk-tuk driver, South Gondar © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

having a mobile phone at this stage, but I will buy one when he joins the university.

A 15-year-old girl from Community C, who borrows her older sister's phone, explained that she never wishes to have her own phone, because she does not trust herself:

I watch seasonal films on YouTube. When I am on the phone I sit in a place for a long time, I never even think of food. I did not leave it unless they took the phone and told me to go, or I leave it when the battery goes dead. Because of that, I do not want to have a phone.

Only a few respondents addressed the gender gap in access to mobile phones. All agreed that it is shaped by two factors. First, young females have less access to paid work, and are less likely to keep their own earnings when they do (see below). Second, caregivers are concerned that mobile phones facilitate the romantic relationships that may lead to premarital pregnancy and shame the family. A 12-year-old girl from Community C explained, '*They say the phone makes you a prostitute.*'

Decision-making

Just under half of young people (46%) reported on the endline survey that they have a great deal of say in how they spend their free time (see Figure 56). Gender and cohort differences were significant, but must be interpreted jointly. Young females' input into how to spend free time largely stays the same across cohorts. For young males, on the other hand, they have more input into how they spend free time as they age through adolescence and become young adults. Young men were 19 percentage points more likely than boys to report that they have a great deal of say in how they spend their free time (59% versus 40%).

Fewer than one-third (29%) of young people reported that they have a great deal of say in whom to befriend (see Figure 57). Location differences were significant, with young people in Debre Tabor reporting more input into friendships than their rural peers (32% versus 24%). Gender and cohort differences were significant, but again must be interpreted jointly. Although young adults had more input into whom to befriend than adolescents (36% versus 26%, not shown), young men had more input than

Figure 56: Proportion of young people reporting a great deal of say in how they spend their free time (by cohort and gender)

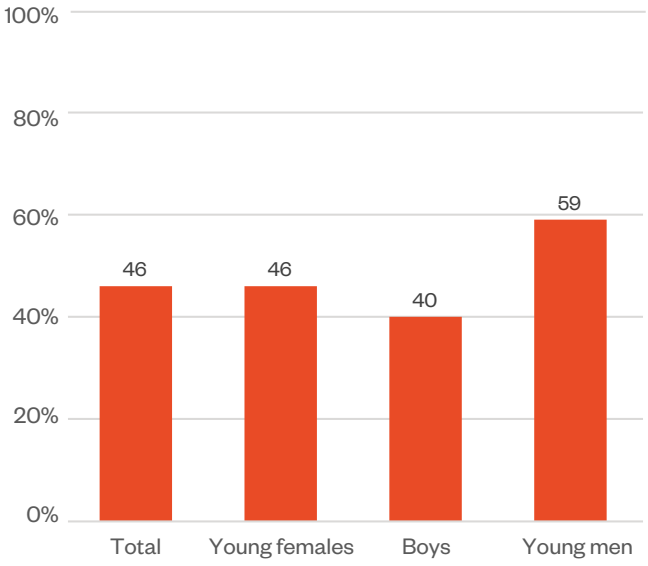
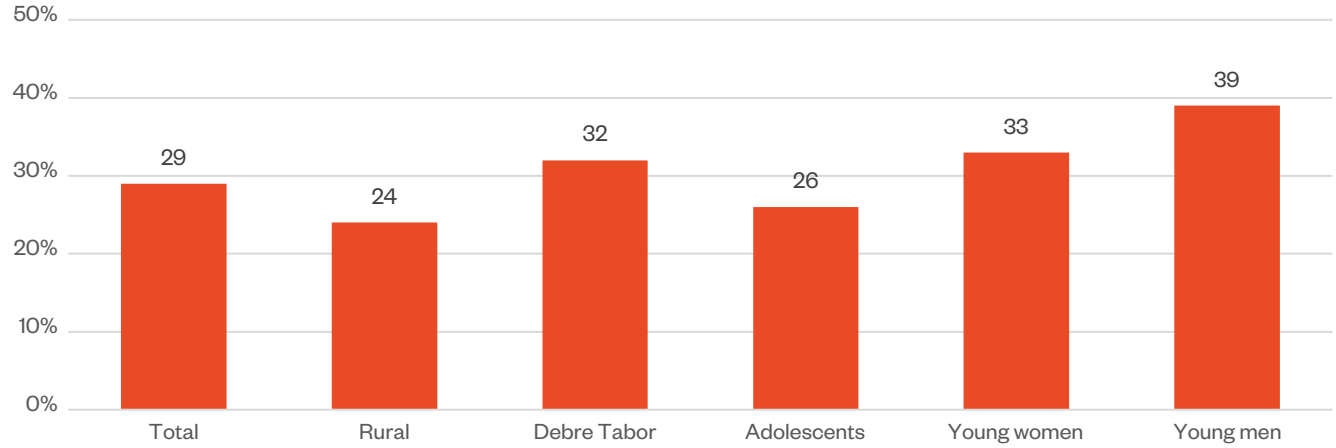


Figure 57: Proportion of young people reporting a great deal of say in whom to befriend (by location, cohort and gender)



young women (39% versus 33%). That is, while young females saw some improvement in their agency with age, young males saw more of an improvement.

More than half of young people (60%) reported that they have a great deal of say in how much education to get (see Figure 58). Location and, for adolescents, gender differences were significant. Young people in Debre Tabor were more likely to report a great deal of say than their rural peers (67% versus 52%). Adolescent girls were more likely to report a great deal of say than adolescent boys (68% versus 57%).

Just under half of young people (49%) reported that they have a great deal of say into income-generation (see Figure 59). Gender and cohort differences were significant, but must be interpreted jointly. Young adults were more likely to have a great deal of say than adolescents (60% versus 45%, not shown). However, as was the case with input into whom to befriend, young males' agency grew more with age than did that of young females. The end result is that young men were significantly more likely to report a great deal of say into income-generation than young females (66% versus 55%).

A minority of never married young people reported that they have a great deal of say into when (19%) and whom (16%) to marry (see Figure 60). Although gender differences were not significant, location and cohort differences were. Young people in Debre Tabor reported more say than their rural peers into when (23% versus 15%) and whom (21% versus 9%) to marry. Young adults reported more say than adolescents into when (28% versus 17%) and whom (25% versus 13%) to marry.

During qualitative interviews, and with the caveat that young people's input into nearly all personal decisions has been severely limited by the recent conflict, respondents agreed that young males have far more agency over all aspects of their lives than young females. A 20-year-old young man from Debre Tabor explained that this is true not only of young females, but of females in general:

Figure 58: Proportion of young people reporting a great deal of say in how much education to get (by location and gender)

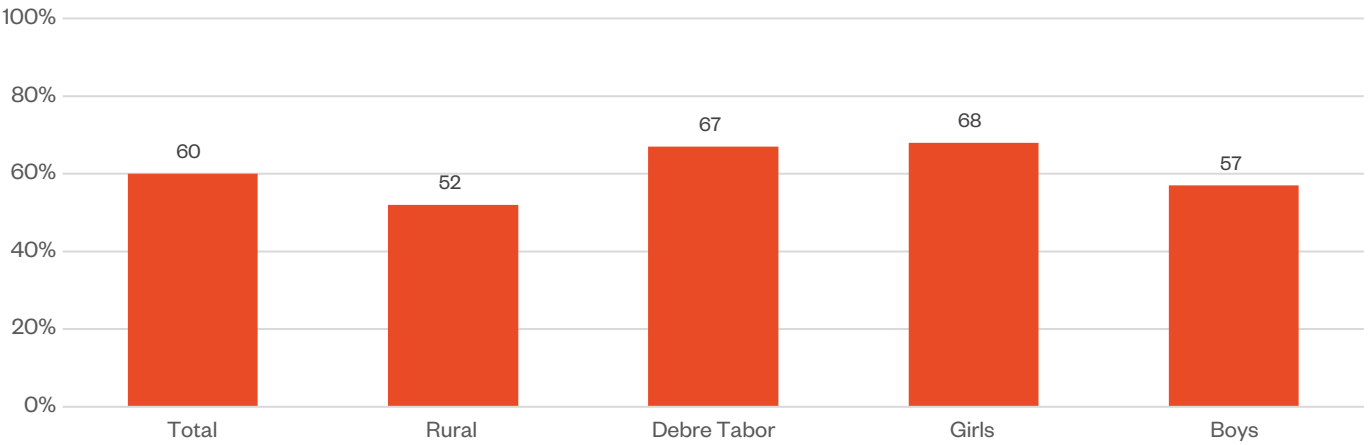
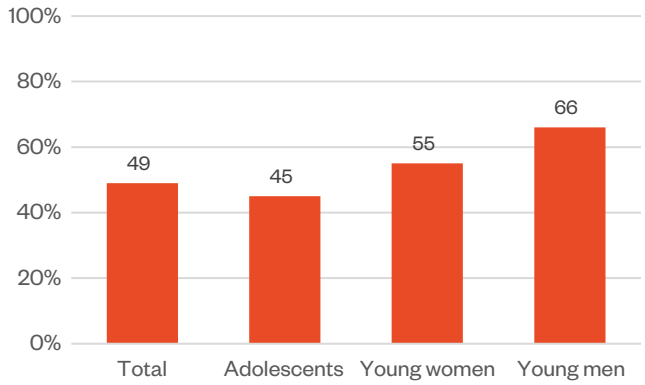


Figure 59: Proportion of young people reporting a great deal of say into income-generation (by cohort)



> *There is a saying in our community that elaborates women's incapability to decide on issues. The saying is, 'No matter how women know it, men decide on it'.*

A 20-year-old young man from Community E similarly stated, '*Girls are not able to decide.*' Several adults reported that the recent conflict has exacerbated the gender gap in decision-making, because young males – tired of being told where they may and may not go and what they may and may not do – have simply stopped listening to their parents. A government official from Community B explained:

> *The recent instability and its situation is causing boys to become disobedient and they even started deviating from parents' orders… Whereas even though girls also decide on their own lives, they mostly consult their parents and even sometimes accept parents' advice and change their mind.*

A mother from Community F echoed this sentiment: '*I can't give advice to my son and he is always deciding by himself.*'

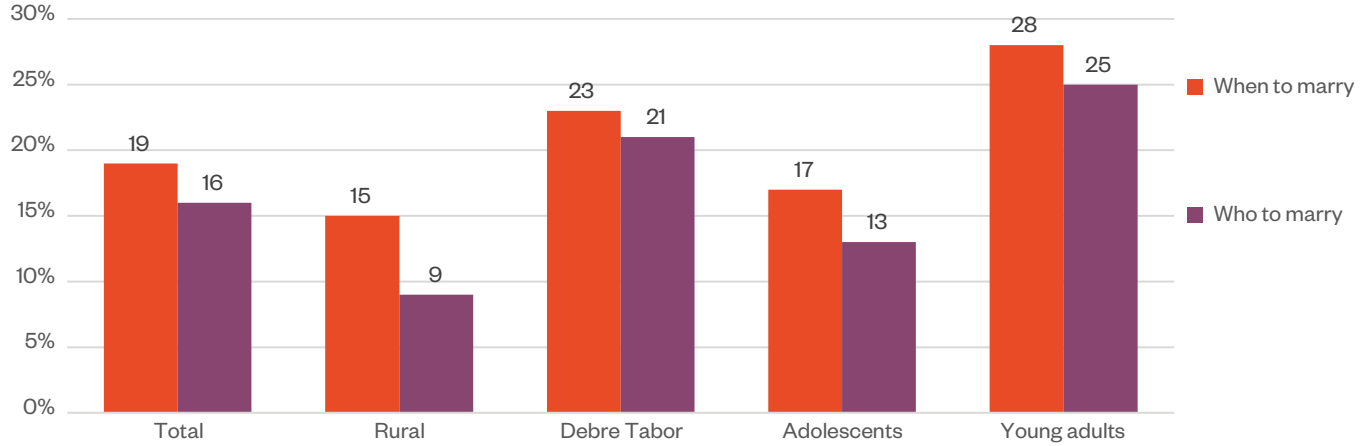
Narratives about marriage decision-making largely reflect the survey findings. That is, most marriages are arranged when and between whom parents choose. A mother from Community C stated of her 16-year-old son, '*His father will choose his wife. She will be chosen by looking at her parent and also checked whether she is good… He will not marry by his choice.*' A mother from Community E reported that arranged marriages remain particularly common in rural areas: '*In our culture, families typically arrange marriages for their children, especially in rural communities.*' Many young people were not opposed to the idea of arranged marriage. Notably, many reported that they are not opposed to allowing their parents to make marriage decisions. A 27-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor, when asked whether free choice or arranged marriages are better, replied: '*It is better for the parents to arrange it… Because they know what is best for their children.*'

That said, many young people do have some say into marriage decision-making, even when their parents are the main deciders. In some cases, young people – usually young men – approach their parents with a preferred partner. A father from Community F explained that this is what he envisions for his 17-year-old son's future:

> *It is him who identifies. But if we have kinship with her or not, I check. I make him marry the one he selected. He might not like the one I select for him. He selects and I ask her parents.*

In other cases, young people – usually young females – refuse a marriage based on timing. A mother from Community E recalled of her 17-year-old daughter:

Figure 60: Proportion of young people reporting a great deal of say into when and whom to marry, of never-married young people (by location and cohort)



We received three proposals… We chose a partner we considered to be hard-working and responsible, with his own farming land and tree plantation. However, she remained firm in her refusal because she wants to prioritise becoming financially stable and independent.

Respondents agreed that urban young people tend to have more input into marriage decision-making than their rural peers. A key informant from Community G stated, '*Nowadays, adolescents particularly in urban areas started rejecting marriage arranged by parents.*' However, they also agreed that even rural young people's input into marriage decision-making has grown over time. A religious leader from Community G reported, '*There are youths who accept parents' order and marry as per the interest of their parents. But most of the youths know each other and they become fiancé to each other and marry by their choices.*' Respondents identified several reasons for young people's growing input into marriage decision-making, including better access to education (because educated young people want more control over their lives) and reductions in child marriage (because older adolescent girls and young women now have stronger voices to refuse). A religious leader from Community F added that church education has also helped, because it has helped parents see the link between arranged marriage and divorce:

If parents arrange the marriage, it will end up in divorce. But marriage shouldn't end up in divorce. They need to get married based on their interest. The church educates on that. That is how they are getting married now. The old practice is abandoned.

Voice and participation

A large majority of young people (86%) reported that they feel comfortable expressing an opinion to a peer (see Figure 61). Location and gender differences, although small, were significant. Young people in Debre Tabor were more likely to feel comfortable than their rural peers (88% versus 83%), and young males were more likely to feel comfortable than young females (90% versus 82%). In aggregate, young people in the panel sample were 10 percentage points more likely to feel comfortable expressing an opinion to a peer at endline than they were at Round 2 (85% versus 75%). Improvement was primarily driven by young males in rural areas, who saw a 23 percentage point increase (from 64% to 87%).

Just over half of young people (55%) reported that they feel comfortable expressing an opinion to an older person (see Figure 62). Location differences were significant, and favour young people in Debre Tabor (57% versus 51%). Gender and, for young males, cohort differences were also significant. Young females (52%) and boys (54%) were less likely to feel comfortable expressing an opinion to an older person than young men (66%). Again, young males' see their agency improve as they grow up, whereas young females do not. In aggregate, young people in the panel sample were 5 percentage points more likely to feel comfortable expressing an opinion to an older person at endline than they were at Round 2 (55% versus 50%). Improvement was primarily driven by young men in rural areas, who saw a 15 percentage point increase (from 49% to 64%).

With the caveat that young people reported during qualitative interviews that they regularly discuss the conflict with family and close friends, just under two-fifths (29%) of young people reported on the endline survey that they have ever spoken with others about a serious community problem (see Figure 63). This finding may reflect sensitivities of discussing the conflict during the quantitative interviews. Gender and cohort differences were significant, but must be interpreted together. Boys were more likely than girls to have ever spoken with others about such a problem (41% versus 27%). Although

Figure 61: Proportion of young people able to express an opinion to a peer (by location and gender)

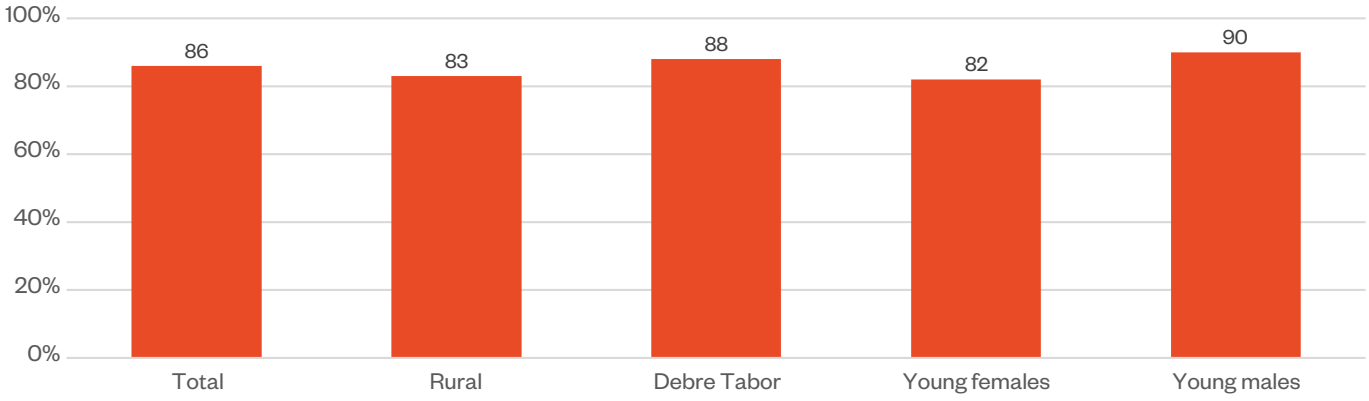


Figure 62: Proportion of young people able to express an opinion to an older person (by location, cohort and gender)

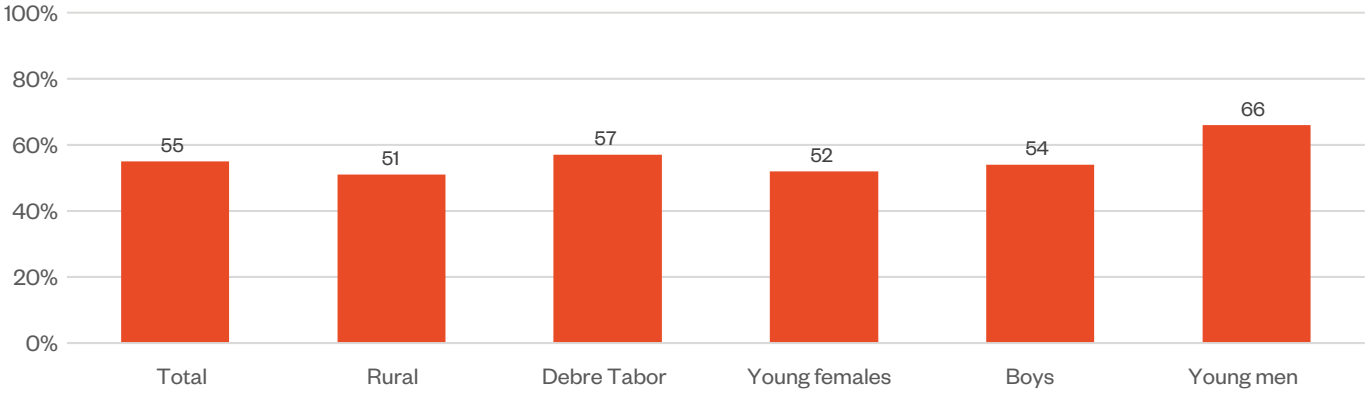
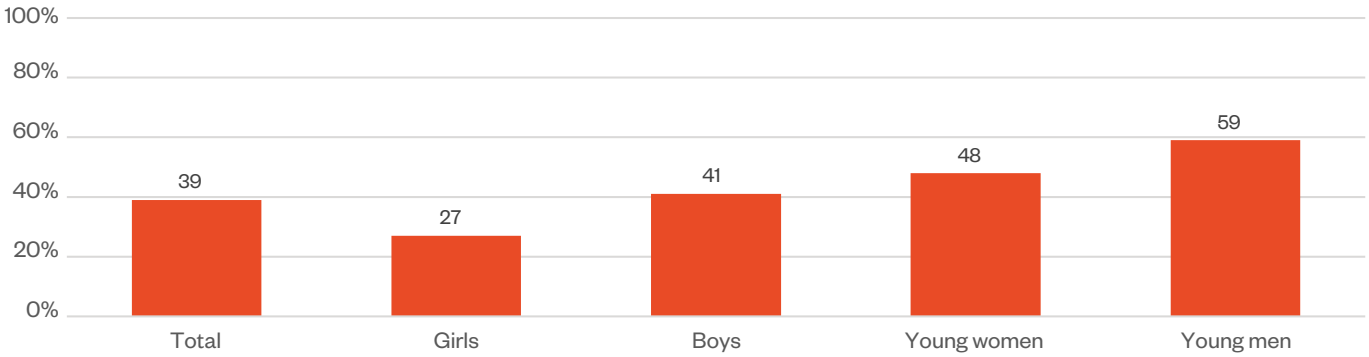


Figure 63: Proportion of young people who have ever spoken with others about a serious community problem (by gender and cohort)



both females and males see improvements with age, the gender gap remains static, leaving young men more likely than young women to have ever spoken with others about a serious community problem (59% versus 48%). Rural young people in the panel sample were more than twice as likely to have ever spoken with others about a serious community problem at endline than they were at Round 2 (56% versus 21%). There was no change in Debre Tabor.

In aggregate, only 10% of young people reported that they have ever acted with others about a serious community problem (see Figure 64). Aggregate figures, however, hide highly significant location, gender and cohort differences. Young people in rural areas were six times more likely than those in Debre Tabor to have taken action (18% versus 3%). In rural areas, young adults were more likely to have acted than adolescents (38% versus 10%, not shown) and young males were more likely to have acted than young females (23% versus 13%, not shown). The group most likely to have ever acted with others was rural young men (51%) – many of whom, according to qualitative research, had joined Fano militias. Rural young people in the panel sample were nearly six times more likely to have ever taken action with others about a serious community problem at endline than they were at Round 2 (35% versus 6%). In Debre Tabor, there was a decline from 8% to 3% in the same time frame.

In aggregate, 60% of young people reported on the endline survey that politics are irrelevant to a person like them (see Figure 65). Location differences were significant: young people in Debre Tabor were more likely to report that politics are irrelevant than their peers in rural areas (65% versus 56%).

Only 12% of young people reported believing that women who are leaders cannot also be good wives and mothers (see Figure 66). Location differences were highly significant, with rural young people more than twice as likely to espouse traditional views as urban young people (22% versus 10%). Gender differences were also significant: young males were more likely to hold traditional views on women's leadership than young females (15% versus 9%).

Quite a few young people, primarily in rural areas, reported that they had been members of various school-based clubs in the past. These included girls' and gender

Figure 64: Proportion of young people who have ever acted with others about a serious community problem (by location, cohort and gender)

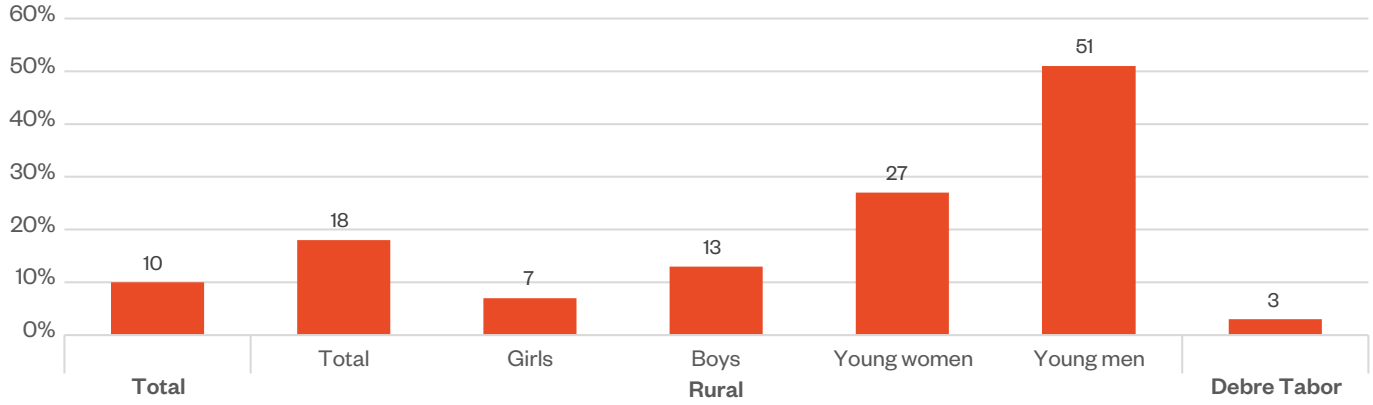
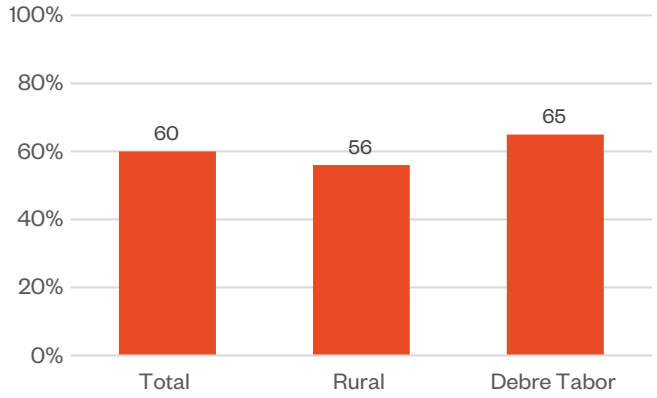


Figure 65: Proportion of young people who believe that politics are irrelevant (by location)



clubs, HIV clubs, sports clubs, and mini-media clubs. A 20-year-old young man from Community D recalled:

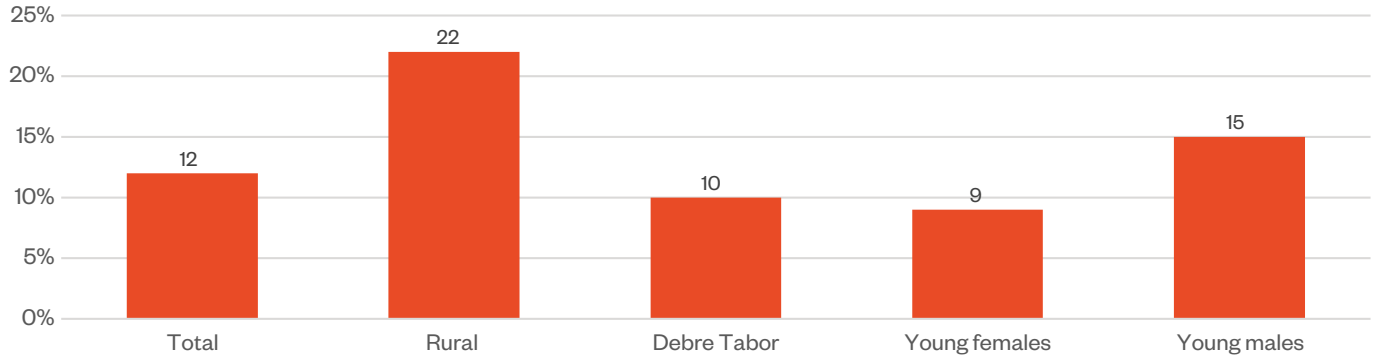
> *I was a member of the HIV/AIDS club for three years. We had 10 males and 10 female students... We received training on the meaning of HIV/AIDS, its modes of transmission, and prevention methods... We also taught other students.*

A 16-year-old girl from Community A remembered, 'I was in the girls' club... When I was in 6th grade... We learnt how to sew a cloth that we can use as a modus [sanitary pad].' Young people reported that clubs have been discontinued in recent years because of the conflict. A 16-year-old boy from Community C stated, 'It might be because of the conflict that such clubs stopped.'

Respondents reported that opportunities for young people to participate in religious activities are heavily shaped by gender. Young males can attend religious education and become deacons, whereas girls and young women are limited to attending weekly services and singing in the choir. An 18-year-old young man from Community A stated, '*Girls do not attend religious education.*' A key informant from Ebinat town elaborated:

> *Parents want their girls stay at home and help them do house chores. Besides, parents do not trust to send their girls to other places for the church education, because they are afraid that their young girls may face rape or other violence.*

Figure 66: Proportion of young people who agree – at least in part – that women who are leaders cannot also be good wives and mothers (by location and gender)



A religious leader from Community G, who reported that choir is the only way in which young females can take part in religious services, added that that option has also been closed for the past few years, because '*it is difficult for youths to come to church due to the war*'.

Opportunities for young people to participate in the community are also rare. An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor reported that young people are not included in *kebele* meetings: '*Young people do not participate in community meetings. They are adults who participate in these kinds of meetings or conferences*.' In addition, although a few young men did report volunteering to repair the homes of elderly people or buying bread for the poor, *kebele* officials were upfront about the fact that there is little effort to harness the energy of the young. A 19-year-old young man from Community E stated:

> *I have participated in volunteer activities by supporting elder people by maintaining their broken house… Many boys in our locality participate in such kinds of volunteer activities. However, there is no organised way of supporting the needy people in this community.*

A *kebele* official from Community A echoed this view, noting that opportunities started disappearing around the time conflict came to Amhara:

> *Previously there was construction of houses of displaced people and terracing via voluntarism. But in the past five or six years, there is no such type of activities. But now there is no volunteer activity within the kebele.*

Several young women did report that they are members of mahibers (community mutual associations that provide spiritual, emotional and economic support), and gather with others once a month to have a celebratory meal and donate money to those in need. An 18-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor stated:

> *We have something we celebrate together with our friends called the Association of Mary… We meet once a month on the twenty-first day of the month… Bread is baked, bread and stew are prepared, and then we celebrate.*

There was considerable diversity in young males' participation in the political process. Some, disproportionately from Debre Tabor, reported that they wished to engage, for the good of their community and country. A 23-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, when asked whether he wished to become involved in politics, replied:

> *I want to be a member of a political party. I want to struggle for justice and am interested to stand for election… I want to engage in addressing the socioeconomic problems of the community by targeting those disadvantaged social groups.*

An 18-year-old man from Debre Tabor was less enthusiastic, but still planned to vote: '*I may participate in elections in the future, because, as long as I am part of this country, I can't escape from the influence of politics*.'

However, most young males, after experiencing years of conflict, reported that they wanted nothing to do with the political process – neither to talk about it nor take part in it. A 15-year-old boy from Community C stated, '*For me it is not time to think about such kinds of thing.*' A 24-year-old young man from Debre Tabor was even more forthright: '*I am not interested in politics. I hate to be involved in politics. I don't even like to listen about politics while my friends talk.*' A father from Debre Tabor stated that he too prefers to stay out of politics and added that he, and many other parents, actively discourage their sons' interest: '*I told them* [the interviewee's sons] *to avoid any participation in politics because I experienced problems related to politics… The current conflict is very confusing, and there is no safety anywhere*.'

It should be noted that for a minority of young males, joining the Fano is felt to be a form of political participation, because it is seen as a form of protest against the federal government. An 18-year-old young man from Community B explained:

> *I have been serving Fano since two years ago… The only thing I aspire and struggle is to overthrow Abiy's regime and to establish another new government that will treat the Amhara people equally with other Ethiopians.*

With very few exceptions, almost all of them in Debre Tabor and exclusively related to plans to vote in the next election, young females expressed only ignorance of the political process. An 18-year-old young woman from Community D, when asked what she knows about participation in politics, replied: '*I am not knowledgeable in the area*.' A 19-year-old young woman from Community B echoed that view, noting that women's engagement in politics is rare in rural areas: '*Women can participate in the Ebinat town area, but the women in this area do not participate*.' Indeed, even in Debre Tabor, most young

women reported disinterest. A 26-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor, who has never voted, stated, '*I don't know about politics. So, I don't know the value of it.*' Young females' political engagement is heavily shaped by gender norms. Although a minority of respondents agreed '*that women should participate in the political sphere just like men*' (18-year-old young man, Community E), most reported that '*women do not participate in politics*' (18-year-old young man, Community A).

Economic empowerment

Household economic status and access to social protection

The endline survey asked young people in Debre Tabor whether their household owns any of 16 assets, as a way to gauge household poverty. It found that most households owned 6.3 (most often a mattress, phone, table, chair, sofa and TV). Among the young people in the panel sample, those living in Debre Tabor saw their assets significantly climb in the years between Round 2 and endline, from 5.7/16 to 6.5/16.

Young people's household economies have been seriously impacted by the recent conflict. Of those in rural areas, 11% have lost productive assets (e.g. ploughs), 11% have lost non-productive assets (e.g. mobile phones), 6% have had their homes damaged, and 29% have had a household member lose work (see Figure 67). Analogous figures in Debre Tabor were 5%, 12%, 5% and 41%.

At endline, 14% of young people reported that their household had ever benefited from the country's flagship social protection programme, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) (see Figure 68). Only half as many (7%) reported that their household was currently benefiting. Location differences were highly significant, with rural young people more likely than their urban peers to have ever benefited (21% versus 7%) and to be currently benefiting (7% versus 4%).

It was rare for young people to report that their household had received any emergency aid in the past four years – only 4% in aggregate did so (see Figure 69). All emergency aid was distributed in rural areas (7%) rather than Debre Tabor (0%). Of young people who reported that their household had received emergency aid, half reported that it was due to conflict and half reported that it was due to drought.

Across locations, respondents reported that it has become more difficult in recent years for households to make ends meet. Rural respondents emphasised that farming is the only work available in rural communities,

Figure 67: Conflict-related events shaping young people's household economies (by location)

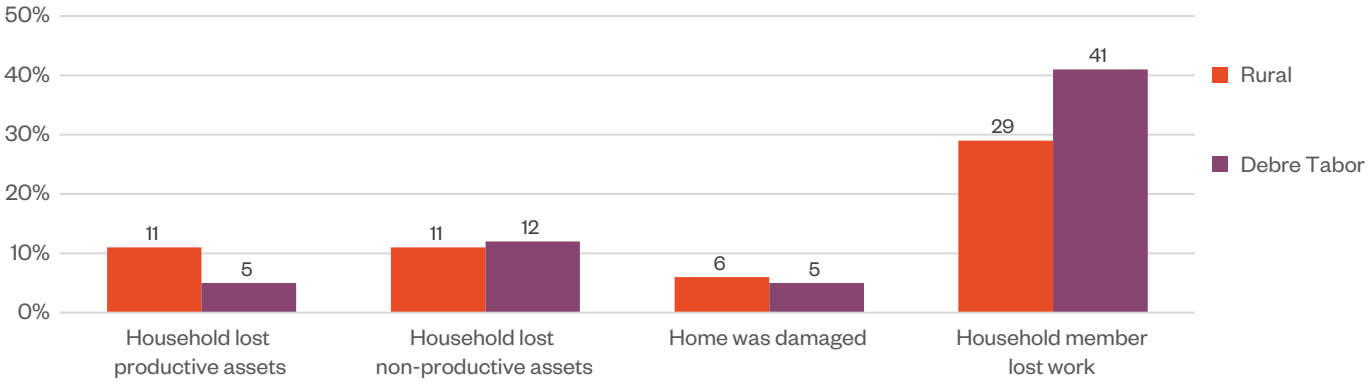


Figure 68: Proportion of young people benefiting from PSNP (by location)

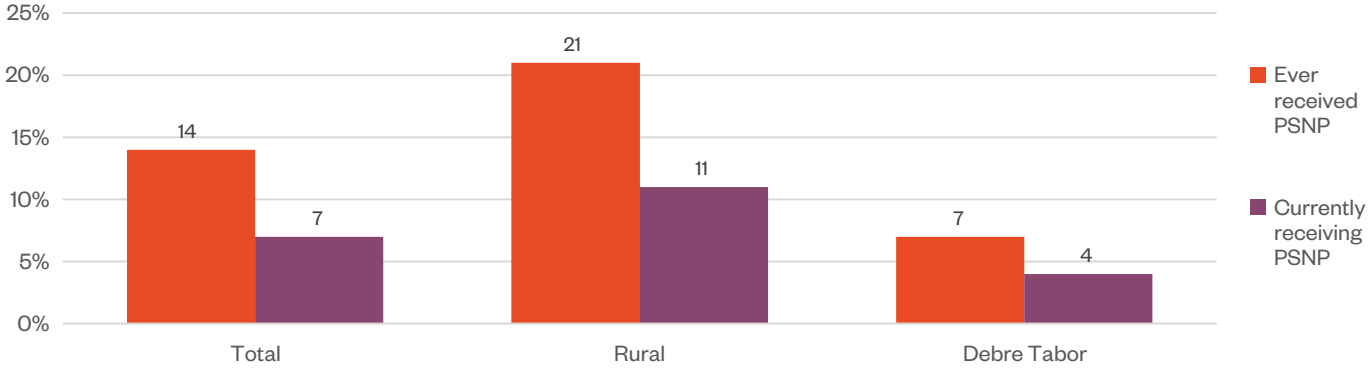
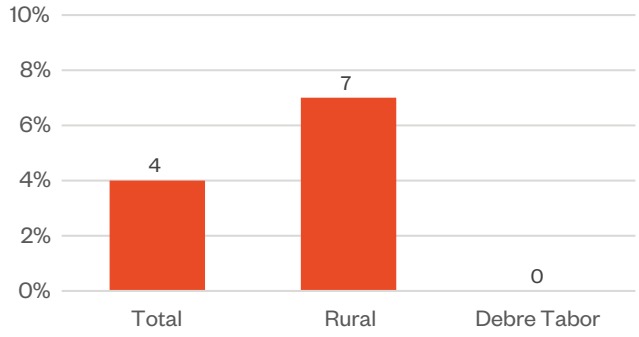


Figure 69: Proportion of young people who report their household receiving any emergency aid in the past four years (by location)



and that it is seasonal. A 22-year-old young man from Shumegie stated, '*Since we do not have irrigation, we only produce during the rainy season. There is no other job opportunity in our locality.*' An 18-year-old young man from Community A echoed that view, noting that productivity has been falling in recent years:

> *Now our productivity is not that much… There are wild animals that destroy beans and peas. For teff* [a grain] *we did not apply fertiliser, and its production was low. For sorghum there are pests that reduce its production.*

Although a mother from Debre Tabor noted that agricultural productivity has been falling for years because '*of population pressures since the people do not use birth control*', most respondents spoke of limited access to fertiliser, which the government is using as leverage to collect taxes and fees that the Fano have told farmers not to pay. A key informant from Community A explained that only those who have paid taxes and health insurance fees are allowed to buy fertiliser:

> *If a farmer wants to take the fertiliser, he has to pay different service payments like the annual payment of the health insurance service, which is around 1,250 birr, the land tax in accordance with the amount of land the farmer has, and also other types of service and support payments for the government. Those who are able to cover these payments can take the fertiliser and other services, including health insurance. But those who are not able to cover these expenses can't access these services.*

In rural areas and in Debre Tabor, respondents spoke of high inflation and how this has stressed household budgets. A mother from Community B stated, '*In the past, everything was cheap, but now it's hard to even buy a bar of soap.*' A mother from Debre Tabor echoed this view: '*It is impossible to fulfil what the family needs.*' Respondents added that the conflict is primarily responsible for high inflation. An 18-year-old young man from Community A stated, '*Everything is expensive… This is because of the closure of roads and markets due to the war in the area.*' A 28-year-old woman from Debre Tabor similarly stated: '*All the inflation is related to the security problems on the ways from and to the town.*'

In line with the survey findings, respondents reported that access to the PSNP is extremely limited, and highly dependent on location. In Debre Tabor, most reported that there is no access to the PSNP. A father stated, '*There is no safety net programme.*' Others reported that because of graft, only people who are politically well-connected are beneficiaries. A mother explained: '*There is a safety net programme but it is given to those who are related to the leaders. The poor are not included in it.*' A 28-year-old young woman similarly commented: '*Those who are assigned to identify the neediest are biased… They are corrupt.*'

In rural areas, respondents reported that support is only available in areas controlled by federal forces. A 21-year-old young woman from Community B stated, '*There is no safety net since Fano has existed in our community. The safety net is stopped now.*' A father from Community F explained:

> *There is a safety net programme. But recently, farmers have faced significant problems when trying to receive support from the woreda… The criminal group was robbing farmers on the road last year, and that led to the suspension of support.*

Even in rural communities where the PSNP is still functional, most respondents reported that benefits are more limited – and distributed less often – than they were prior to the onset of the conflict. A key informant from Community A explained that this is to reduce beneficiaries' travel but also because of increased fees and taxes:

> *Before the recent conflict started, they were paid every month. However, because of the insecurity and also to reduce their efforts, they will be paid every three months… Even though beneficiaries received the three months safety net financial support, most households paid the money for the health insurance service annual payment, to buy fertiliser and other expenses, and most of those who received the support returned home with empty hands.*

Also in line with the survey findings, respondents reported that access to emergency aid is rare and location dependent. Only a few households – all in government-controlled areas – reported receiving aid, and all in the form of grain. A 15-year-old girl from Community A recalled:

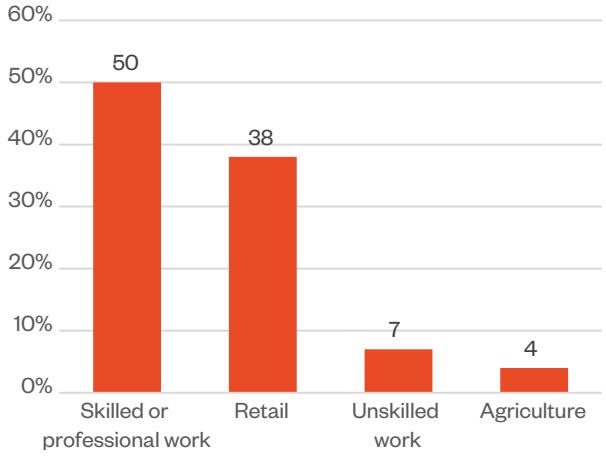
> *We were assisted with maize... It was three months ago... My parents are not now getting food assistance... Food assistance is provided in those places controlled by the government.*

An 18-year-old young woman from Community B, which is in an area controlled by the Fano, reported, '*No one has supported my family to cope with the challenges resulting from the recent conflict and insecurity*.'

Occupational aspirations

Half of young people reported on the endline survey that they aspire to skilled or professional work (see Figure 70). This was significantly more common for adolescents – more of whom were still pursing education – than for young adults (57% versus 33%, not shown). Another 38% of young people reported that they aspire to work in retail. This was significantly more common for young females than for young males (43% versus 31%), and for young adults than for adolescents (53% versus 31%). It was rare (4%) for young people to aspire to have agricultural work. It was, unsurprisingly, more common in rural areas than in Debre Tabor (8% versus 0%). Among the young people in the panel sample, occupational aspirations have fallen sharply in the years between Round 2 and endline. At Round 2, 76% aspired to skilled or professional work; this had fallen to 50% at endline. Declines were large for all groups.

Figure 70: Young people's occupational aspirations



Just over three-fifths of young people (61%) reported that they face a barrier to achieving their occupational aspirations (see Figure 71). Location differences were significant, with young people in Debre Tabor more likely to report a barrier than their rural peers (67% versus 55%). Cohort differences were also significant, with young adults – who have more practical aspirations – more likely to report a barrier than adolescents (70% versus 57%). Of those who reported a barrier, a plurality (59%) reported that the barrier was economic.

With the caveat that many young people have already migrated (see Box 4 below), just over two-fifths of young people (42%) reported that they believe they will need to migrate in order to achieve their occupational aspirations (see Figure 72). Location, gender and cohort differences were all significant. Young people in rural areas were more likely to believe that they will need to migrate than their peers in Debre Tabor (46% versus 38%). Males were more likely to believe they will need to migrate than females, and young adults were more likely to believe they will need to migrate than adolescents; girls (32%) were the least likely to believe this, and young men (58%) were most likely to. Young males in the rural panel sample were 28 percentage points more likely to report that they will need to migrate at

Figure 71: Proportion of young people who report that they face a barrier to achieving their occupational aspirations (by location and cohort)

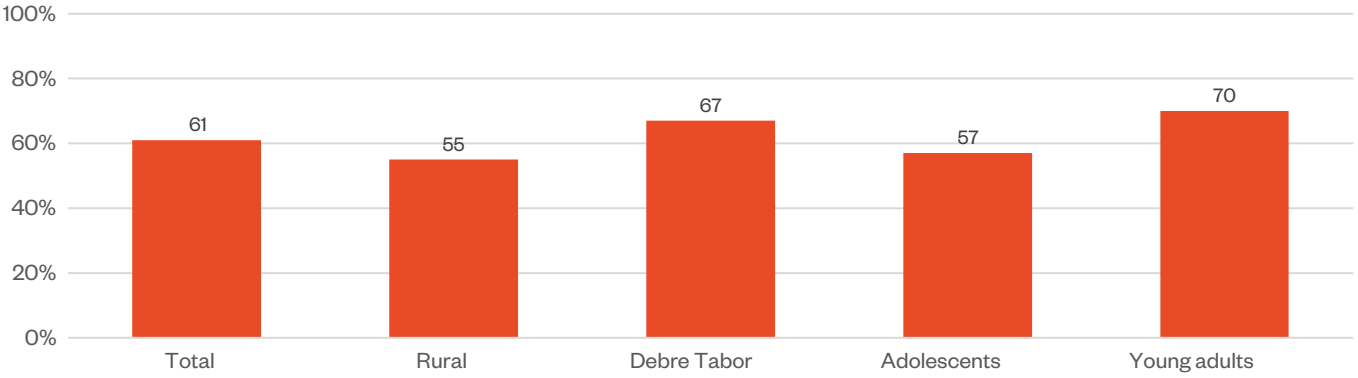
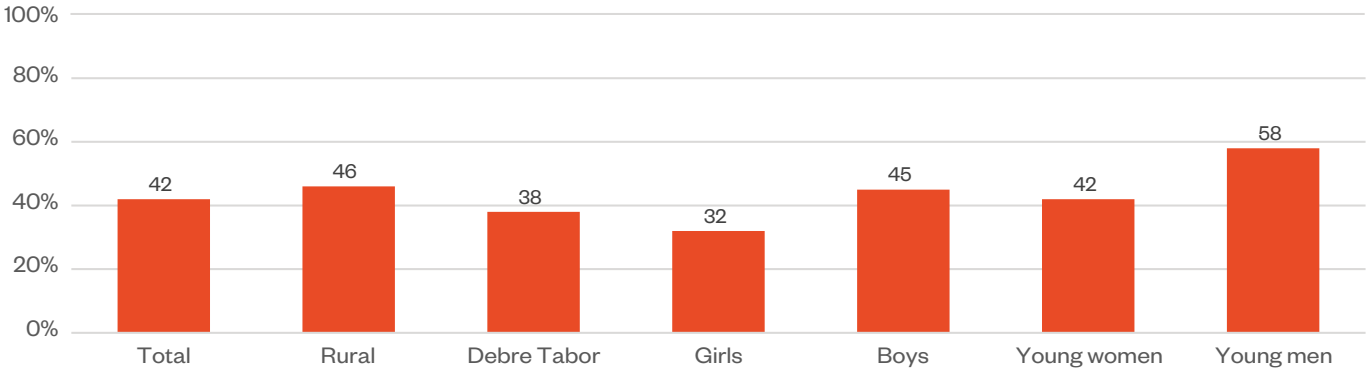


Figure 72: Proportion of young people who believe they will need to migrate to achieve their occupational aspirations (by location, gender and cohort)



endline than they were at Round 2 (61% versus 33%). There was no change for rural females.

In line with the survey findings, young people's occupational aspirations primarily reflect where they live and how old they are. Those who are still in school – who are disproportionately from Debre Tabor – are often aiming for professional work. An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, in the 12th grade, stated, '*The job that I aspire to for my future is a health professional or a doctor.*' A 16-year-old girl from Community A, in the 11th grade, reported, '*I aspire to have a government job.*' Out-of-school young people – especially young adults and adolescents who live in communities where schools have been closed for years – spoke not of what they aspired to do, but of what they had aspired to do. A 17-year-old boy from Community G stated, '*I was aspiring to become a government employee before. This would have been true if I attended my education.*' A 15-year-old girl from Community E similarly reported, '*I wanted to be an agricultural expert. There are experts here who advise farmers.*'

Most out-of-school young people have practical work aspirations. For young females, these aspirations almost always revolved around owning their own small shop. An 18-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor, when asked what she wanted to do for work, replied, '*I want to have a cosmetic shop.*' A 22-year-old young woman from Community B, asked the same question, elaborated:

> *I want to be a merchant and have a shop. Opening a shop is a great opportunity here because there are only a few shops, and they aren't providing all the necessary items for the community.*

Young males' occupational aspirations were more varied. Some, like their female peers, want to have their own shops. Others want to become drivers or (in rural areas) farmers. An 18-year-old young man from Community B stated, '*I would like to learn driving and to obtain the driving license and then I will work as an assistant driver and then I will be a driver.*' A 17-year-old boy from Community G stated that he wishes to become a farmer because:

> *The educated see no benefit from their education… The educated are joining defence forces and they are dying when they go to their work… There are also youths who completed their education and unable to get a job and finally become Fano.*

A large minority of out-of-school young people, aware that paid work is difficult to come by (both because Ethiopia is plagued with high youth unemployment and because of conflict), reported that their sole aspiration for work was to have an occupation that would allow them, and their family, to exit poverty. A 19-year-old young woman from Community D stated that she will take '*any work that God is willing to give me*'. A 17-year-old girl from the same community said, '*I want to work and get money… I want to support my family, I have no other interest.*' Many young males also agreed that work is the objective. A 22-year-old young man from Community G stated, '*I want to work.*'

Young people reported two main barriers standing between themselves and their occupational aspirations: lack of capital to fund education or business start-up costs; and the conflict. An 18-year-old man from Debre Tabor who wishes to have a shop selling shoes stated that he does not see how this will happen because he lacks capital: '*You must have a good family that can provide you with the starting capital to start a business, but I don't have anyone.*' A 24-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor echoed that view: '*If I have the money I can start a business.*' A 19-year-old young woman from Community G reported that for her, conflict is the main barrier to work: '*The security of the area stopped me from starting the*

business… The community is not buying things, the market is slowing down, it is not active.'

In line with the survey findings, many young people, particularly young males in rural areas, spoke in qualitative interviews about their aspirations to migrate. In the communities where schools are closed, young people reported that they wanted to migrate so they could attend school in the short term, and achieve their occupational aspirations in the longer term. A 17-year-old boy from Community A stated:

> *If school is not going to be opened next year, I will move to another town and attend my education… I want to be a teacher.*

Other young people stated that they want to migrate to find work. A 20-year-old young man from Community F reported, '*We feel hopeless, and we are planning to migrate to other places… We want to go to the cities and start working.*' Although parents were more likely to report that they refuse to allow their daughters to migrate, many girls and young women reported that they could not be stopped. A 17-year-old girl from Community G stated that because she sees no hope in education, she is leaving for the city:

> *I do not think the school will open soon. I am planning to move to Addis Ababa… I want to move to Addis and become a house worker.*

Key informants agreed that this sentiment has become increasingly common in the past few years. A key informant, from Ebinat town, explained:

> *Now, no one talks positively about education and learning, rather too many adolescents aspire to migrate to other places in search of jobs and to improve their living.*

Engagement with paid work

The endline survey found that 38% of young people had worked for pay in the past year (see Figure 73). Location differences were significant: paid work in the past year was more common in rural areas than in Debre Tabor (42% versus 34%). Gender and cohort differences were also significant, with adolescent girls (26%) the least likely to have had paid work and young men most likely to have (59%). For young people in the panel sample, the proportion who had worked for pay in the past year climbed 26 percentage points between Round 2 and endline (from 13% to 39%). Gains were large for all groups of young people.

Of those with paid work in the past year, fewer than half had had paid work in the past week. In aggregate, only 16% of young people reported working for pay in the week prior to the endline survey (see Figure 74). Location, cohort and (in Debre Tabor) gender differences were all significant. Rural young people were one-quarter as likely to have worked for pay in the past week as their urban peers (6% versus 26%). In rural areas, young adults were four times more likely to have worked for pay than adolescents (13% versus 3%). In Debre Tabor, age and gender both shaped access to paid work, with girls (16%) least likely to have had paid work in the past week and young men (42%) most likely to have. Of young people reporting paid work in the past week, the median number of hours worked was 20. There were no significant differences among groups.

Young workers' incomes were low. Of the 88 rural young people who had had paid work in the past year and who responded to the question about earnings, the median income in a typical week was 700 birr (£3.30). Of young workers in Debre Tabor, the median income in a typical week was 600 birr (see Figure 75). Cohort and gender difference were significant, but must be interpreted jointly.

Figure 73: Proportion of young people with paid work in the past year (by location, gender and cohort)

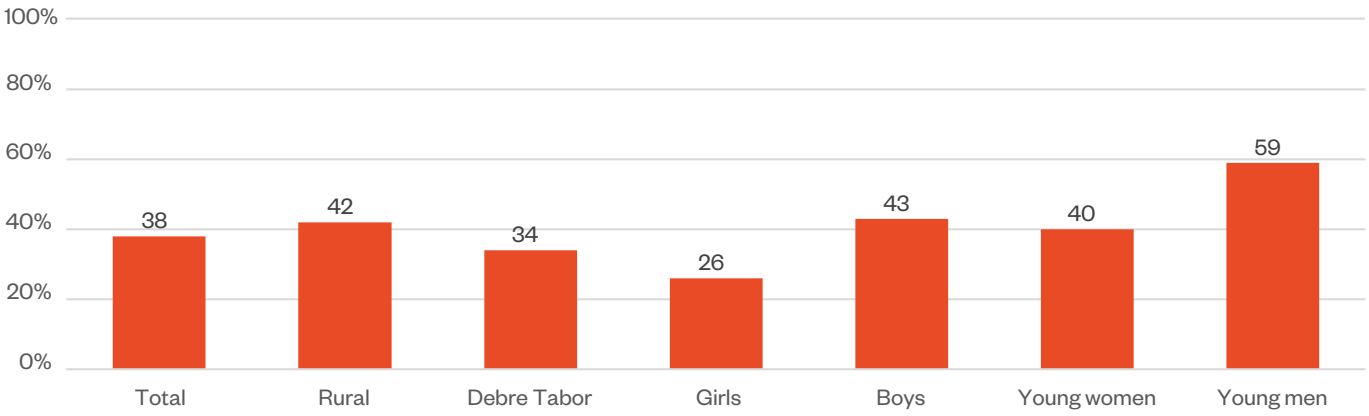


Figure 74: Proportion of young people with paid work in the past seven days (by location, gender and cohort)

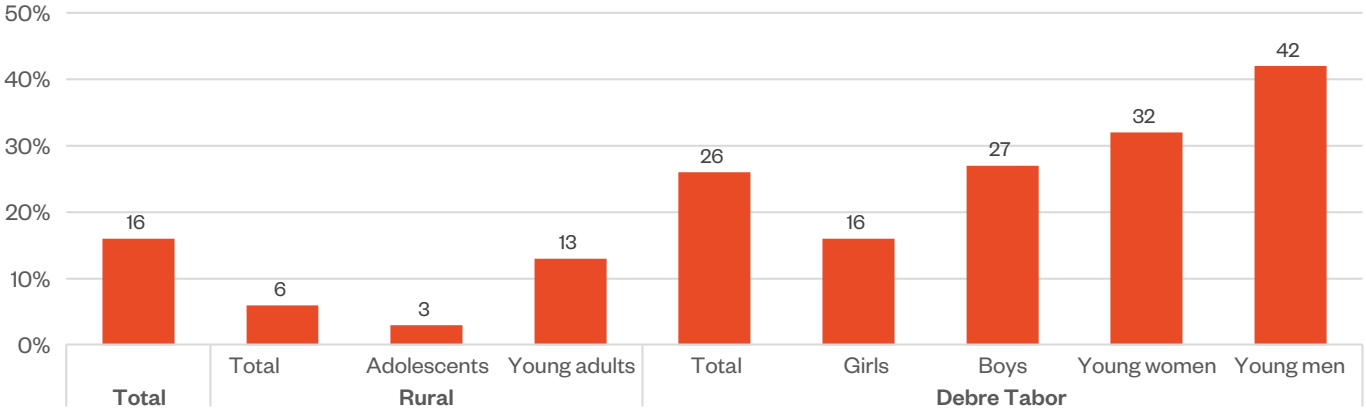


Figure 75: Median income in a typical week, of young people in Debre Tabor who have had paid work in the past year (by cohort and gender)

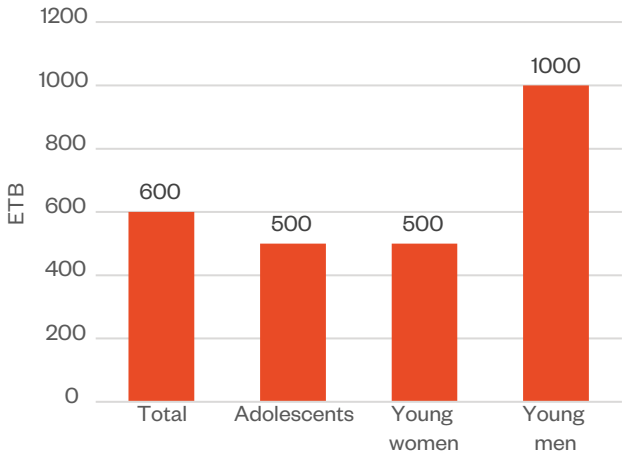
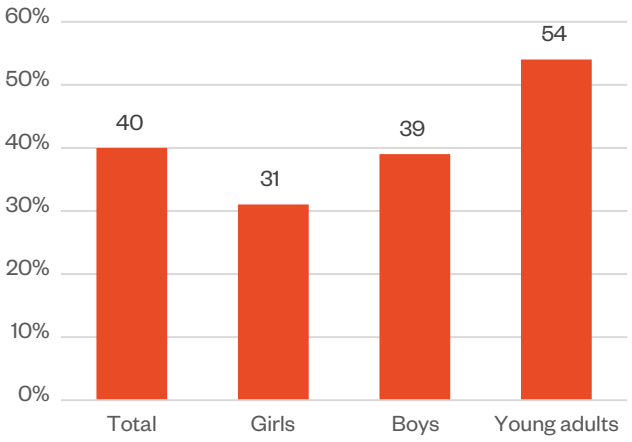


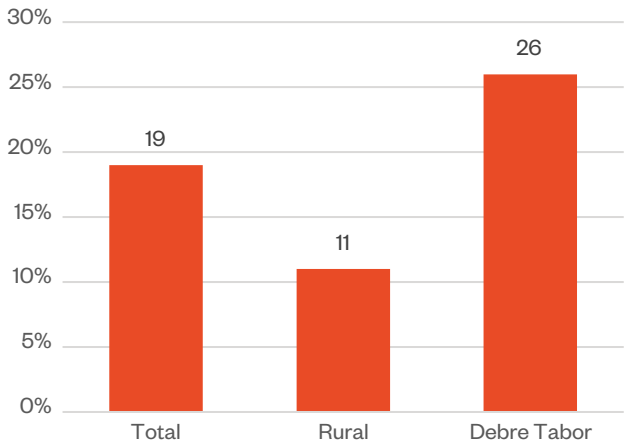
Figure 76: Proportion of young people who have searched for work in the past year (by cohort and gender)



Young men's median earnings (1,000 birr) were twice as high as adolescents' and young women's (500 birr).

Two-fifths of young people (40%) reported that they had actively searched for work in the past year (see Figure 76). Cohort and, for adolescents, gender differences were significant: young adults were more likely to have searched for work than adolescents (54% versus 35%, not shown), and boys were more likely to have searched for work than girls (39% versus 31%).

Figure 77: Proportion of young people who have ever taken a skills training course (by location).



Just under one-fifth of young people (19%) reported that they had ever taken part in a skills training course (see Figure 77). Location differences were highly significant, with young people in Debre Tabor more than twice as likely to have done so as their rural peers.

In rural areas, the dominant narrative about access to paid work was that there is none, because subsistence agriculture remains the primary source of livelihoods, and because of the conflict. A 23-year-old young man from Community B stated that farming is the only real option in rural communities, but that it has ceased to be profitable since the outbreak of conflict: '*The people are living on agriculture… We are having difficulty in both buying and selling because of the closure of the road.*' A 22-year-old young woman from that same community noted that although young people used to be able to work on others'

farms for cash, that is no longer possible: '*I do day labour, weeding… I used to work during the summer when school was closed… I earn 200 a day… There's no one working now… because of security concerns*.' A 25-year-old young man from Community E reported that civil service jobs in rural communities have also evaporated since the outbreak of conflict, saying, '*The government offices stopped employing… Now, there is no employment… It is because there is no stability*.' Critically, several young males from rural communities reported that a key reason why young males have joined Fano militias is that militia members receive a salary. A 21-year-old young man from Community G stated, '*Most youths joined Fano, citing as a reason the fact they do not get a job after they get educated*.'

Although narratives in qualitative interviews primarily revolved around the lack of paid work, some rural young people are earning an income without resorting to joining a Fano. Young females most often reported running small businesses. A 19-year-old young woman from Community D stated, of a market stall she runs with a friend, '*We sell coffee beans, sugar, spices*.' Young males often reported that they do farming work for others. A 19-year-old young man from Community B explained that he has been earning money for a decade already:

> *I work as a farmer for another family… I've been going to someone's house since I was a child… Six years of herding cattle and three years of farming.*

Rural females and males also commonly reported engaging in day labour, when they can find it. A 16-year-old girl from Community A stated, '*I work a daily labour job… It is working armata* [carrying construction materials].'

In Debre Tabor, the dominant narrative about access to paid work is that it is extremely limited, primarily because of the country's intractably high youth unemployment. A 24-year-old young man with a university degree in management, when asked what he does for work, replied, '*I don't have any job, I simply sit idle and I am now looking for a job*.' A 20-year-old young woman, who does day labour when she can find it, explained that the primary problem in Debre Tabor is that there are simply not enough jobs: '*Generally, there is no work these days. Generally, there is no permanent work*.' A key informant from the city echoed this view, noting that the lack of work is particularly acute for the most educated young people, who want jobs that justify their investment in education: '*In this town, there are too many boys and girls who graduated from the universities and colleges but who don't have a job, and these youth live in hopelessness*.' A teacher from Ebinat town stated that with the 'best' jobs in short supply, only those with political connections stand a chance of getting them: '*It is because of corruption and embezzlement that young people don't have access to jobs*.' Respondents in Debre Tabor often noted that the conflict has exacerbated youth unemployment and underemployment. A 28-year-old young man reported:

> *Currently, work situations here are not good. Everything has stopped and even I am not able to find daily labour work because of the conflict situation.*

Dominant narratives notwithstanding, young people in Debre Tabor were even more likely than their rural peers to report working for pay. As was common in rural areas, young females most often reported running market stalls. A 27-year-old young woman, when asked how she earns a living, replied, '*I make a living by buying grain and other things from the market and reselling them*.' Young males often reported working as day labourers or drivers. A 22-year-old young man said:

> *I am working as a daily labourer… I prepare wood for firewood and I also prepare charcoal. I collect wood from the forest for charcoal. I also prepare wood for construction materials for rich people.*

An 18-year-old young man described how he earns an income: '*I am working for a bank manager, driving his small car*.' Some of the most educated young people in Debre Tabor explained that they had been able to find some professional work, albeit not always on a permanent basis. A 23-year-old young woman who has a BSc degree in nursing stated, '*I work in a private clinic*.' A 28-year-old young man with a TVET diploma in electrical work similarly stated, '*I am working in Debre Tabor University temporarily employed as an electrician, but the employment type is temporary*.'

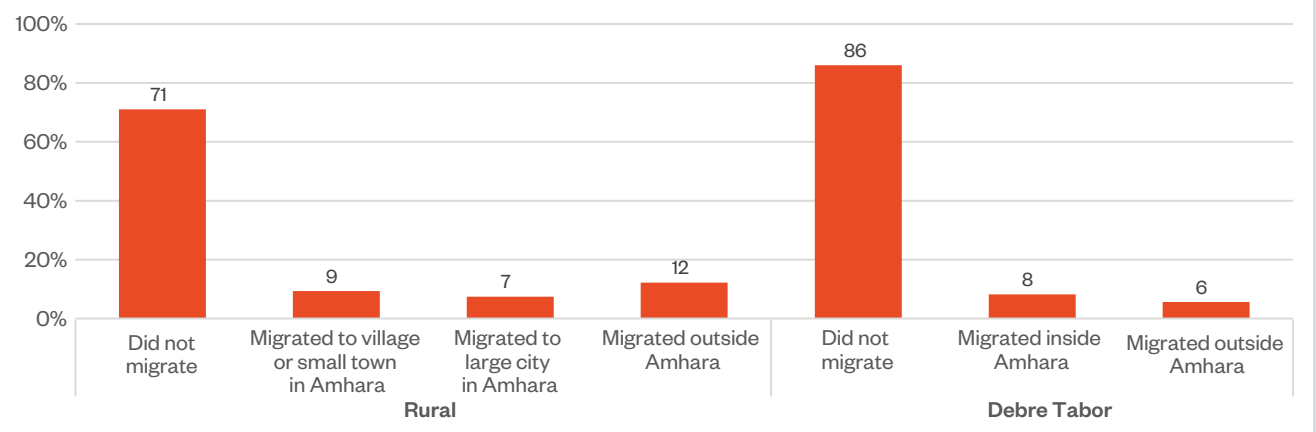
Because of the conflict, and the lengthy school closures and limited access to work it has caused, many young people had engaged in economic migration at endline (see Box 4). A father from Community F stated, '*Everyone is stressed in this area, so they are migrating to other places*.' A 22-year-old young man from Community B elaborated:

> *After the school has closed and students became out of school, many boys and girls migrated to different places seeking work and to earn an income. For instance, boys migrated to the desert – Metema and Humera, to work on the large farms of investors. Some boys also*

Box 4: Young people on the move

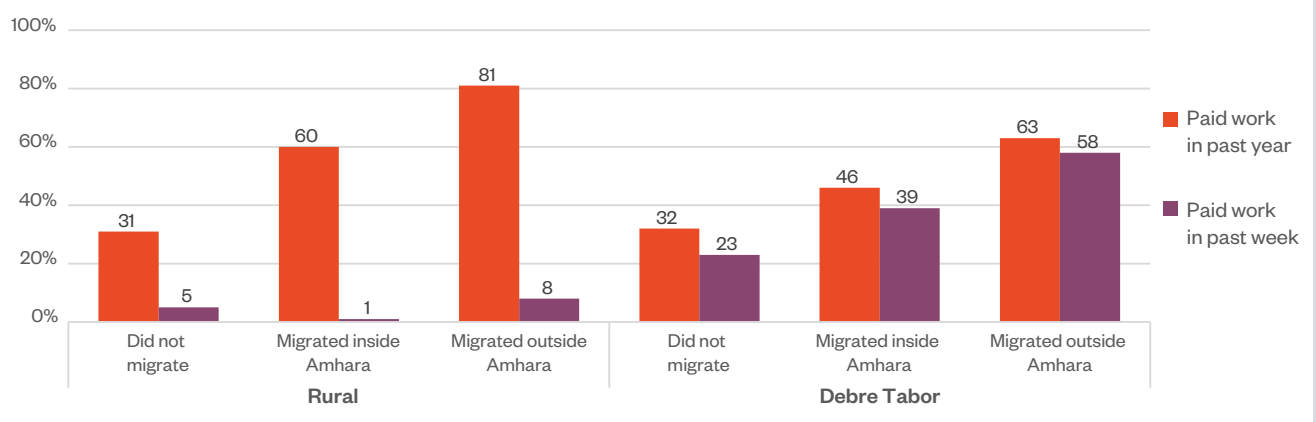
The endline survey found that 29% of rural young people and 14% of their peers in Debre Tabor were no longer living in their home communities. In rural areas, 9% of young people had migrated to other villages or small towns inside Amhara, 7% had migrated to large cities inside Amhara, and 12% had migrated outside Amhara (see Figure 78). In Debre Tabor, 8% of young people had migrated inside Amhara and 6% had migrated outside Amhara. In rural areas, females and males were equally likely to have migrated inside Amhara. However, females were twice as likely as males to have migrated outside the region (67% vs 33%). In Debre Tabor, females were significantly more likely than males to have migrated to all locations (62% vs 38%).

Figure 78: Proportion of young people who had migrated out of their home community (by origin and destination)



Although qualitative research found that young people primarily move to improve their access to work, the endline survey found that not all migrants have improved access to work. In rural areas, migrants inside (60%) and outside (81%) Amhara were significantly more likely to have worked for pay in the past year than those who did not migrate (31%)(see Figure 79). However, young people who had migrated inside Amhara were significantly less likely than their non-migrant peers to have had paid work in the past week (1% versus 5%)[1]. In Debre Tabor, access to paid work in the past year and past week were significantly better for both groups of migrants than for non-migrants. For example, 46% of those who left Debre Tabor for another location inside Amhara had paid work in the past year, compared to only 32% of their non-migrant peers.

Figure 79: Proportion of young people with access to paid work (by origin location and migration status)



Despite their improved access to paid work, young migrants were no more likely than their non-migrating peers to report being physically or mentally healthy and no less likely to report being hungry in the past month. Interestingly, given qualitative findings, young migrants were also no more likely to be enrolled in school than non-migrants.

1 Past week differences between non-migrants and those who left the region were not significant.

migrated to urban areas like Bahir Dar, Debre Tabor and even Addis Ababa. Girls mostly migrated to urban areas like Debre Tabor, Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa to work in others' homes as housemaids.

In some cases, young people's work migration had been temporary. An 18-year-old young man from Community A explained of his short stint in Sudan:

I went to Sudan. It is far from here. I was involved in harvesting cotton… I stayed for three months. I would have worked more there. I returned back when my father and my mother called. I could not refuse the order of my mother and my father.

In other cases, young people were still in destination locations when interviewed. A 19-year-old young woman from Community D, now living in Addis, stated, '*I decided to move here, to Addis… I have four relatives that live here… Now I am a house maid.*'

Key informants reported that there are some government efforts to help young people find (or make) employment. One, from Community E, stated, '*The government is working to support youths who have completed their education but are currently idle*.' Another, from Ebinat town, elaborated:

We are mostly working with the unemployed youth in our kebele. Therefore, we work with these youth based on the wealth or resources available in their kebele. This means that it can be irrigation, it can be beekeeping or chicken farming, after we identify the potential of the kebele and we engage the youth to work.

That said, key informants acknowledged that the conflict has severely impacted such efforts. The key informant from Ebinat town explained, *'In the current situation, we cannot go to the countryside and organise and employ youth*.'

During qualitative interviews, only two respondents discussed work-related trainings outside of formal TVET pathways. An 18-year-old young man from Debre Tabor reported having taken a course offered by an NGO:

There was one organisation called Pathfinder, and they gave us training. The training lasted for two months… It was on work skills [yesira kihiloot]*, ethics, how to communicate with other people, and other issues.*

A mother from Community G recalled of her daughter, '*My oldest daughter attended a training and she was working in the water points construction area. She attended the training in Ebinat town. She attended the training for two months*.' Indeed, most respondents reported that although they would like to take a training course, such programmes are either not offered any more or are only available to those with political connections. A teacher from Ebinat town stated that the conflict ended such programming: '*During the previous time, the government selected young people and gave different trainings to help them start businesses, like animal fattening, poultry and others.*' A 22-year-old young man from Community G noted that even prior to the conflict, only those who were well-connected benefited: '*Since the training opportunity is few and can be one or two, the official will send his relative.*'

Young people's limited engagement with paid work does not, of course, mean that they are not working. Although some students in Debre Tabor reported that being a diligent student is their only 'work', most young people reported spending hours each day contributing to household needs. A 17-year-old boy from Community G, whose mother died when he was aged 10, reported that he helps his father with everything:

I only work for my parent… I fetch water, wash clothes for my father and I do what my father orders me… I cook food… I started farming when I was 13 years old.

A 15-year-old girl from Community E similarly stated:

I am working with my family… I have tasks at home such as cooking, washing clothes, and after I finish those activities, I go to work in the garden… I plant things like cabbage, tomatoes, potatoes, and similar crops.

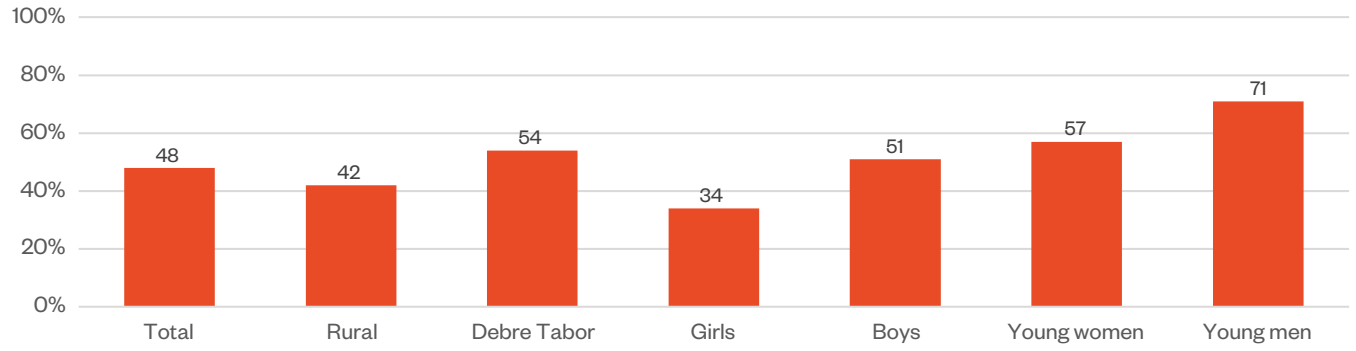
Parents did not gainsay young people's narratives; indeed, all agreed that such work is simply expected in order to ensure that the household economy functions. A mother from Debre Tabor stated:

Since they were seven or eight years old… The girls helped me with household chores while the boys helped their father plough the fields and harvest the crops.

Access to assets

Just under half of young people (48%) reported that they had money under their control in the past 12 months (see Figure 80). Location, gender and cohort different were all significant. Young people in Debre Tabor were more likely to have decided how to spend money than their rural peers (54% versus 42%). Young males were advantaged over young females (57% versus 41%, not shown), and young adults were advantaged over adolescents (64%

Figure 80: Proportion of young people who have had money under their control in the past 12 months (by location, gender and cohort)



versus 42%, not shown). Adolescent girls (34%) were least likely to have decided how money was spent; young men (71%) were most likely to have. For young people in the panel sample, control over spending has climbed sharply in the years between Round 2 and endline. At Round 2, only 21% of young people had decided how money was spent in the past year; by endline, this had climbed to 47%. Gains were larger in Debre Tabor (35 percentage points) than in rural areas (21 percentage points) and for young males (30 percentage points) than for young females (21 percentage points).

Fewer than one-third (29%) of young people reported that they had savings for the future (see Figure 81). Cohort and gender differences were significant, with boys more likely to have savings than girls (30% versus 23%), and young men more likely to have savings than young women (45% versus 30%). The proportion of young people in the panel sample with savings, who were disproportionately from Debre Tabor, has fallen significantly since Round 2 (from 40% to 29%). Declines were especially steep in Debre Tabor (from 43% to 30%).

Only one-fifth (20%) of young people reported that they had ever used mobile money (see Figure 82). Unsurprisingly, location differences were highly significant and favoured young people living in Debre Tabor (30% versus 8%). In Debre Tabor, gender and cohort differences were significant: young men (60%) were the most likely to have used mobile money; adolescent girls were least likely to have (14%).

Figure 81: Proportion of young people with savings for the future (by gender and cohort)

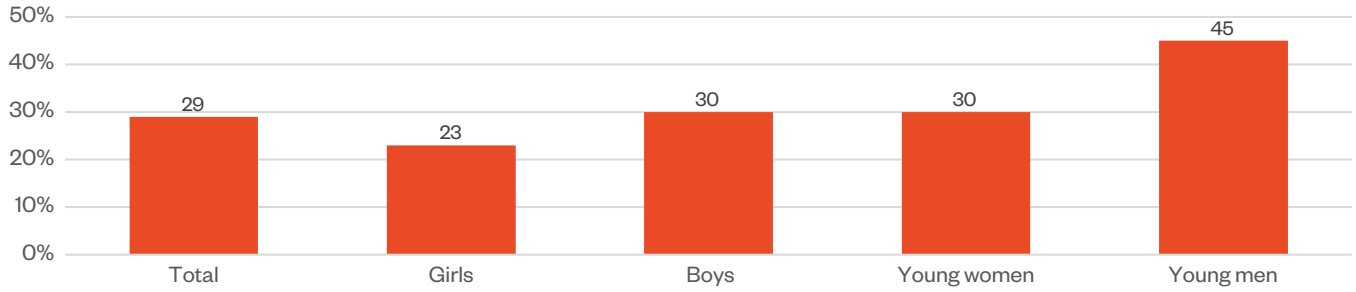


Figure 82: Proportion of young people who have used mobile money (by location and gender and cohort)

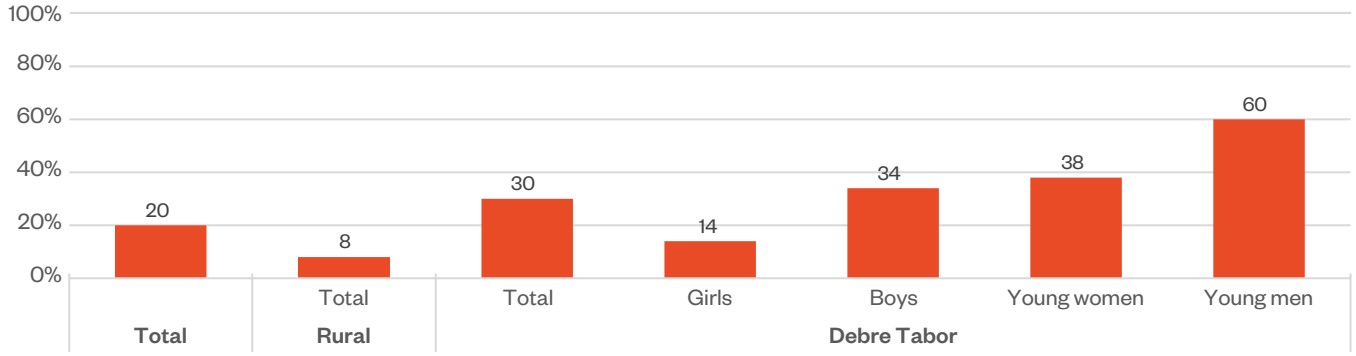


Figure 83: Proportion of young people who are able to take out a loan (by location and cohort)

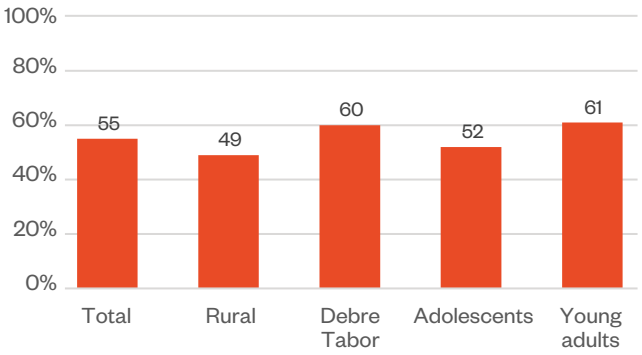
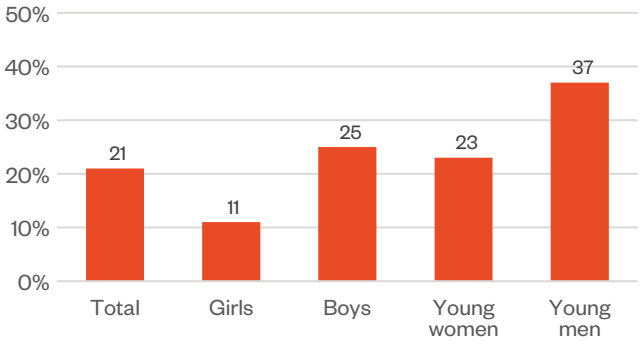


Figure 84: Proportion of young people who have ever taken out a loan (by gender and cohort)



Over half (55%) of young people reported that they could take out a loan if they needed one (see Figure 83). Location and cohort differences were significant: young people in Debre Tabor reported better access to loans than their rural peers (60% versus 49%), and young adults reported better access than adolescents (61% versus 52%).

Only one-fifth (21%) of young people reported that they had ever taken out a loan (see Figure 84). Gender and cohort different were significant: young men (37%) were the most likely to have taken out a loan; adolescent girls (11%) were least likely to have.

During qualitative interviews, it was rare for young people to discuss spending money. This is partly because few young people have access to money, partly because those who do have access to money often turn it over to their parents, and partly because most of the money that young people spend goes on survival needs and is not perceived as worth discussing. A 28-year-old young man from Debre Tabor explained, '*I give my money to my mother and she manages it to use for the family expenses.*' That said, some young people in rural areas reported buying their own livestock (or other productive assets), and some young people in all locations reported buying their own clothing, hygiene and school supplies, and mobile phones. A 16-year-old girl from Community C explained that she has turned her purchase into an income that allows her to buy her own necessities:

> *I bought a chicken. She gave me lots of eggs, and then had new chickens. Now, I sell their eggs and gained money and used it for my exercise books, pens, soap and oil.*

A 23-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, however, recalled that he was so delighted with his first online wages that he spent the money frivolously: '*I bought trousers with the first three weeks' salary. Then I just drank and ate in cafes and restaurants with my friends.*'

In line with the survey findings, it was unusual for young people to discuss having savings for the future. Most reported that they could not afford to save. A 20-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor stated, '*I'm trying to save money, but we're struggling to eat every day.*' A 21-year-old young man from Ebinat town echoed this sentiment: '*I don't have any money to save. I have a hand-to-mouth kind of business.*' Respondents noted that savings rates have fallen in recent years, as conflict has eliminated opportunities for work and forced families to use up existing savings. An 18-year-old young woman from Community B reported that she had to close her shop, when roads closed, and now, '*I have also spent the money I had saved due to the security* [situation].' That said, some young people do have savings. Although most young people reported '*saving 5 and 10 birr*' (17-year-old boy, Community G), an enterprising 15-year-old girl from Community C, whose parents supported her to open a shop so that she would have something to do while schools are closed, stated, '*I saved 6,000 birr in seven months.*'

How young people save money was varied. A few saved by themselves, in a box (or bag) at home. A 20-year-old young woman from Community C stated, '*For the time being, I am using a bag which I keep at home.*' Others save through traditional savings groups called *equubs*. An 18-year-old young woman from Debre Tabor, who works with her mother, reported, '*We are saving money through a traditional savings account called equub… The equub is in my mother's name.*' A 22-year-old young man from Community B, who works at the bus station, reported that he saves with his friends:

> *I am in a savings group established by members of the brokers' association. Since two months ago, we have started saving some money.*

Others still, primarily in Debre Tabor, save at formal financial institutions. A 28-year-old young man from Debre Tabor, the sole provider for his mother and siblings, stated, '*I have a saving account in the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia and the university deposits my salary through my account*'. A 26-year-old young woman from Community B, who farms alongside her husband, explained that she uses a bank – but must be creative to do so: '*I save the money in the bank... I save in my brother's account.*' A 19-year-old young woman from Community D noted that creativity can be required to access banking because of identification (ID) requirements:

> *They told me to have a digital ID to open a bank account. I have a school ID since our area is controlled. I tried to get an ID from the kebele but it was impossible, they said no, I use my school ID. I am in the process of getting my digital ID.*

Respondents reported that the mechanisms by which households save money have also been jeopardised by the conflict. Several key informants reported that Fano members have stolen funds from savings groups. One key informant, from Community C, stated, '*The Fanos also took money of Iddir* [funeral cooperation]. *They captured the cashier of Iddir and took the money.*' Respondents also noted that conflict has closed financial institutions in some rural areas. An 18-year-old young man from Community G, when asked if he has savings, replied:

> *I have not saved anything due to the problem in our locality. How can we save while there is conflict in our locality? The office where we were saving our money has been closed. Since Fano and the national military are fighting each other, the office where we save our money has been closed.*

Young people overwhelmingly reported access to informal rather than formal credit. A 20-year-old young woman from Community C, when asked where she got money to start her own small shop, replied, '*I borrowed from my family, my brother. I didn't take a loan from others.*' Indeed, a 29-year-old man from Community B, who would like to start a business after the conflict ends, reported that it had never occurred to him to access formal credit: '*In the future, I hope I will get a loan from my close friends or from my parents. However, I didn't think whether or not to take a loan from the government or others.*' A mother from Community C explained that rural households are wary of accessing formal credit because of repayment schedules, and that she actively discourages her children from doing so:

> *The market fluctuates. You may lose in business. When you lose, how can you repay the loan that you accessed from the government? Money is not certain. You may lose in business and lack money to pay for the loan, that leads to stress. I do not want to access a loan because of that.*

Key informants reported that even if young people wished to access formal credit, barriers to doing so are high, because the need for collateral or a co-signer has become greater since the outbreak of conflict. A teacher from Community E stated that banks and the *kebele* have stopped giving out loans, because of real concerns that they will not be repaid:

> *The ability to repay the loan is difficult under the current circumstance. I don't think the credit service is available now... because the situation is beyond control. Banks are not giving loans.*

A key informant from Ebinat town reported that loans are still available, to groups of young people who are willing to guarantee each other's loans, but admitted that the conflict has made wait times much longer:

> *We provided loans to some youths and will continue to offer more soon. However, there are criteria, and it takes a long time to process the loans. The youths have to wait longer to receive them.*

Nearly all young people reported that they had never received any financial education. A 23-year-old young man from Community B explained that such education is simply not available: '*In our locality, no one has been working on teaching people about such kinds of issues.*' Of the rare young people who reported receiving any financial education, all explained that they had been taught by family members or through the Act With Her programme implemented by the NGO Pathfinder (see Box 2 on page 21). A 23-year-old young man from Debre Tabor stated, '*I haven't received that kind of training from experienced people, just from family*'. A 21-year-old young man from Community E reported that he has been working to educate his younger sister about the risk of credit:

> *I urge her to be careful while borrowing money. It has a risk. The credit money will be repaid, which has risk, and I warn her to think it over before taking the credit.*

Conclusions and implications for policy and programming

GAGE endline research underscores that young people living in South Gondar are at high – and growing – risk of being left behind. Although the government has set a goal of becoming a 'Beacon of Prosperity' to other African nations, the daily reality for young people living in South Gondar is anything but. Indeed, intractable conflict, which has devastated local infrastructure and services and led to soaring poverty, is leaving a generation aspiring primarily to survive.

Although educational aspirations remain high, with most young people (regardless of whether they are enrolled in school or not) wanting to eventually complete university, enrolment has plummeted since GAGE Round 2 data collection, with rural areas bearing the brunt of this decline. In some rural communities, schools have been closed for more than four years. Location is the most significant predictor of educational attainment, with young people in Debre Tabor far more likely to complete primary school and attend secondary and post-secondary school than their rural peers – in part because secondary schools are not available in most rural communities. In rural areas, the gender gap is also large. Although girls often leave school to undertake domestic chores or due to safety concerns or child marriage, boys' educational access has deteriorated in recent years as they have little option for earning an income other than by joining armed groups or migrating for work. In addition, the 2023 shift to the new curriculum, implemented without adequate teacher training or textbooks, has compromised student learning outcomes.

The health and nutritional status of young people in South Gondar, especially those living in rural areas and those with disabilities, is at significant risk, due to conflict-induced food insecurity and the collapse of health services. Rates of hunger have doubled in rural areas, as crops are stolen, land productivity drops due to lack of fertiliser, and household budgets are devastated by inflation. In addition, access to health care is increasingly shaped by geography, with young people living in rural areas (where health clinics have been destroyed and the health insurance system is not functional) more likely than their urban peers to report that cost and distance limit access. Although uptake of contraception is higher than in other regions in the GAGE sample, with most married couples committed to delaying and spacing pregnancies, this success story also has a darker side. Namely, sexual violence is so common that unmarried young females often use contraceptive injections to ensure that they will not become pregnant if they are raped. Notably, young people are far more concerned with preventing pregnancy than with preventing the spread of STIs; very few young males, especially in rural areas, use condoms. Access to maternity care, like access to health care in general, has been devastated by the conflict.

At endline, and despite significant declines since Round 2, large minorities of young people reported experiencing violence at the hands of caregivers, teachers and peers. In qualitative interviews young people, and especially young males, predominantly spoke of experiencing and witnessing incessant conflict-related violence. Respondents noted that young people with disabilities have been at elevated risk, as some cannot sense when violent situations are developing, and many cannot flee in a timely manner. Respondents also spoke of the pervasive sexual violence that unmarried girls and young women are exposed to – violence that costs many girls access to (secondary) education and sees some forced into child marriage. Respondents reported that although child marriage had been becoming less common prior to the conflict, even in rural areas, it has spiked in recent years, because with schools closed, and less *woreda* oversight, child marriages are less likely to be reported and cancelled. On the other hand, they agreed that FGM has continued to decline, because most people understand the risks involved. Intimate partner violence is common, and often (especially in rural areas) believed to be acceptable and private. Access to justice services has been devastated by the conflict, and few people bother reporting violence, since doing so is likely to result in more violence.

Recurrent conflict and the trauma of experiencing or witnessing violence have also taken a huge toll on young people's psychosocial well-being. Depression rates in rural areas were five times what they were at Round 2. Many young people reported living in a state of constant fear. Although most young people are close to their parents, especially their mother, many (especially young females) have limited contact with peers. This is because schools

are closed in many communities, because mobility is restricted due to conflict, and because youth migration (for work and school) has increased. Young people with disabilities reported that disability-related stigma shapes even their relationships with their parents, who all too often see only deficits and not strengths. Although young people (and their caregivers) are highly traumatised by the conflict, access to semi-formal and formal psychosocial support services is nearly non-existent.

The dominant narrative about voice and agency is that young females are disadvantaged compared to young males. Their physical mobility is more restricted, they are less likely to have mobile phones, they are less able to express opinions to peers or adults or to be allowed to choose to work for pay, and they have fewer options to participate in the community or in civic life.. Although most young people reported that they want nothing to do with politics, because they have been living the resultant strife for years, young males in rural areas are often engaged at the local level, because many have joined Fano militias.

Both household economies and adolescents' transitions to productive adulthood have been devastated by the ongoing conflict. With roads and markets often closed, and youth unemployment an intractable problem throughout the country, few young people (especially in rural areas) have livelihoods that meet survival needs, and many aspire only to have any work they can find. In rural areas, young people are migrating en masse to other locations to look for work to support themselves and their families. In urban areas, young people, even those with post-secondary education, are regularly cobbling together intermittent jobs, hoping they will get lucky and find a permanent position. Limited access to credit is further limiting young people's access to work, as few have the assets that would allow them to launch their own small businesses. Although most young people understand the value of saving money for the future, primarily because they were taught about its importance by family members or through NGO programming, savings rates have fallen sharply since Round 2, because fewer young people have money to spend. Gender differences in access to paid work and assets are large and favour males, partly because young females are disproportionately responsible for domestic and care work.

Based on our endline research, we suggest the following priority actions to better support Amhara young people's transitions through adolescence and into young adulthood:

To improve young people's access to education:

- The Amhara Bureau of Education should allocate funding to rebuild educational infrastructure and restock classrooms in conflict-affected communities as quickly as possible. In areas that remain under Fano control, zonal and district officials should work directly with communities to ensure that funds and supplies are distributed (and used) as needed.
- Sub-regional authorities should negotiate with Fano to allow schools to re-open, to ensure that educational facilities are not used for military purposes, and to allow safe passage to and from school.
- All students in conflict-affected communities should be provided with free uniforms, school supplies, and school feeding programmes to reduce barriers to re-entry and relieve financial pressures on households.
- Educational officials should develop and implement a catch-up curriculum that allows young people who have been out of school to make up lost time (building on experiences following Covid-19 pandemic school closures and the post-conflict catch-up sessions rolled out in Tigray). This should be paired with teacher training, provided remotely if necessary, that helps increase the odds that the rollout of this curriculum will be smoother and better supported than the rollout of the updated curriculum from 2023. To attract the most competent teachers to the communities most in need of intensive educational support, the Bureau of Education should consider providing housing and transport allowance as well as bonus pay.
- Weekend schooling should be provided in rural communities, to ensure that older adolescents and young adults have an educational pathway that is compatible with the adult roles (income-generating, care and domestic work responsibilities) that most have assumed in recent years.
- Restore and strengthen girls' and gender clubs, to help improve girls' enrolment and reduce girls' drop-out.
- Schools in conflict-affected communities should provide students with integrated psychosocial support to help them process and heal from the trauma they have endured. Options for this might include allocating parasocial workers to groups of schools (using bonus pay as needed) and providing classroom teachers with training on psychological first aid.
- Stepped-up efforts are needed to ensure that more students with disabilities (including those with conflict-related disabilities) have access to special needs

education, and are given the adapted materials and assistive devices that allow them to learn. This should be paired with trainings aimed at improving the capacity of non-special needs teachers to support students with disabilities, by adapting materials and expectations. Religious leaders could be enlisted to help spread the message that children with disabilities should be supported to access education.

To improve young people's physical health:

- Food insecurity should be immediately addressed by providing emergency aid in conflict- affected communities. To ensure that aid reaches those who need it most, zonal and district officials could work with local religious leaders and health care workers to identify the most vulnerable households.
- Given ongoing and severe stress to household budgets, access to fertiliser in conflict-affected communities should be delinked from payment for health insurance and taxes.
- The regional Bureau of Health should allocate funding to rebuild and restock health clinics in conflict-affected communities as quickly as possible. In areas that remain under Fano control, zonal and district officials should work directly with communities to ensure that funds and supplies are distributed (and used) as needed.
- Health extension workers should be incentivised to work in conflict-affected communities with housing and transport allowances and bonus pay.
- Households in conflict-affected communities should be provided with free or sliding scale health services--including medication, contraceptives and abortion services. In all communities, the cost of health insurance should be re-evaluated, given climbing poverty rates.
- Provide young people with continual reminders, in school and in the community (e.g. in biology and health classes, in girls' and gender clubs, and at markets and youth centres) about the importance of contraception and disease prevention. This should be paired with free distribution of condoms in the public spaces that young people frequent, and with stepped-up access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including testing for STIs.
- Sub-regional authorities should negotiate with Fano to allow safe passage for ambulances.
- Health extension workers and religious leaders should work together to encourage the use of modern medicine over holy water for physical illnesses, and should actively seek out people with disabilities to encourage their families to seek appropriate health care.
- Provide parents with iterative parenting education courses that teach child and adolescent development, encourage the use of modern medicine, and expand parents' capacity to talk to their children about puberty, menstruation, and broader sexual and reproductive health issues.

To improve young people's bodily integrity:

- Use parenting education courses to teach alternative positive discipline strategies, and raise awareness about the risks and illegality of FGM and child marriage.
- Ensure that the Ministry of Education ban on corporal punishment is enforced and that students have a way to anonymously report violators (e.g. through suggestion boxes in schools, hotlines, or Telegram channels).
- Provide girls with school- and community-based empowerment programming that teaches them their rights and strengthens their voice; provide boys and young men with programming (perhaps using sports for development) aimed at fostering non-violent masculinities; and raise awareness among communities to end the victim-blaming that surrounds sexual violence.
- Ensure that schools are addressing the risks and illegality of FGM and child marriage, providing young people with a venue for reporting these rights violations, and raising awareness about the role of one-stop centres in delivering health, psychosocial and legal aid for survivors.
- Engage with and strengthen survivor-led advocacy networks to further raise awareness, including through the public hearings organised by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.
- Raise awareness about FGM and child marriage in the community through community conversations and mass and social media campaigns.
- Encourage religious leaders to preach against FGM and child marriage and remind them that they can be prosecuted for officiating child marriages.
- Strengthen both formal and traditional justice system to address all forms of violations of human rights in the

context of conflict. This may include strengthening transitional justice mechanisms.

- Invest in peace education – in schools, religious institutions and in the community, using classroom content, community conversations and mass and social media – in order to address reliance on arms and participation in armed militias to solve solutions. This is a longer-term initiative but will be important so as to start to tackle root causes of violence and conflict.
- Include young people in peace negotiations and community dialogue processes organised by the National Dialogue Commission to ensure that their needs are heard and prioritised, given that many have directly or indirectly sacrificed their futures during the conflict.

To improve young people's psychosocial well-being and voice and agency:

- Use parenting education courses to strengthen parent–child communication, teach parents the basics of psychological first aid, and raise parents' awareness of gender norms and how these shape parenting decisions and limit adolescent outcomes.
- Improve access to informal and semi-formal psychosocial support services by: providing religious leaders, women's affairs officers and health extension workers with courses on psychological first aid; by deploying parasocial workers to communities that have been impacted by conflict; and by establishing (and raising awareness about) hotlines and online resources that can help young people (and their caregivers) process trauma.
- Use sports for development and youth groups to bring young people together for the recreation and socialisation that they need for healthy development.
- Develop mass media and social media awareness-raising campaigns aimed at encouraging help-seeking and destigmatising mental health concerns.
- Develop mass media and social media awareness-raising campaigns aimed at destigmatising disability and building support for inclusion.
- Encourage *kebele* leaders to hold regular meetings with young people (females and males) to understand their concerns and priorities. Where possible, officials should endeavour to address those concerns while communicating the limitations under which local and district officials are working so as to foster trust and accountability.
- Provide young people with structured opportunities to volunteer in service to their communities, to help them feel they are a part of the future.

To help young people become economically empowered:

- Resume and expand access to PSNP and emergency aid.
- In the communities that have been heavily impacted by conflict, provide households with free or reduced-cost fertiliser, seeds and productive assets to help rebuild livelihoods.
- Sub-regional authorities should negotiate with Fano to ensure that roads and markets stay open, both to reduce inflation and improve access to incomes.
- Expand young people's access to credit, ensuring that repayment terms are flexible and that borrowers are simultaneously provided with financial education.
- Expand access to occupational training programmes, tailoring offerings to local geographies and economies.
- Sub-regional officials should facilitate safe migration and take action against illegal brokers, especially those who are luring young people into international migration.
- Ensure that destination cities are providing young migrants with opportunities for education and occupational training and are protecting young migrants' right to decent work.

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About GAGE

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a decade-long (2016-2026) longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit www.gage.odi.org for more information.

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