

GAGE CROSS-COUNTRY ENDLINE FINDINGS

A decade of adolescence in six countries

Bangladesh · Ethiopia · Jordan · Lebanon · Nepal · Palestine

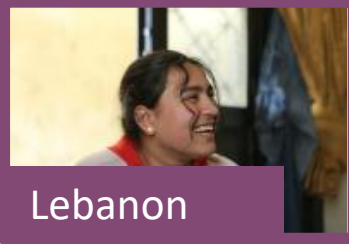


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Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE): A longitudinal research programme (2016-2026)



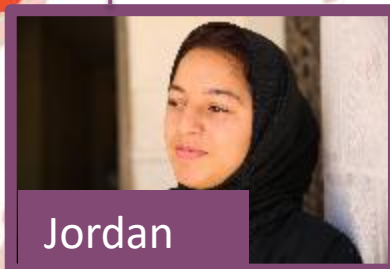
Palestine



Lebanon



Ethiopia



Jordan



Nepal



Bangladesh

- ◀ We are following 20,000 adolescent girls and boys - the largest cohort of adolescents in the Global South.
- ◀ By finding out '*what works*,' for whom, where and why, we can better support adolescent girls and boys to maximise their capabilities now and in the future.
- ◀ We are employing mixed methods research with young people from two age cohorts, 10-12 and 15-17 years at baseline (2017/8), midline (2021/2) and endline (2024/5)
- ◀ The study design combines observational longitudinal data with nested programme impact evaluations.

GAGE's research design: broad, intersectional, inclusive, and longitudinal

GAGE is employing a mixed-methods research and impact evaluation design, including:



20,000

Quantitative survey

- Surveys with adolescent girls and boys aged 10–12 and 15–17
- Surveys with their female and male caregivers
- Surveys with community leaders and school personnel



800

Qualitative research

- In-depth interviews with nodal adolescents, their siblings, caregivers and community leaders
- Key informant interviews and historical process tracing
- Policy and legal analysis to understand the politics of policy and programme implementation



200

Annual participatory research

- Followed the same young people from 2019-2025.
- Purposive recruitment of marginalised young people in collaboration w/ trusted community brokers (CBOs/ NGOs)
- Engaging with families to address concerns about participation.

Adolescents with disabilities

Married girls/ adolescent parents

Adolescents from refugee and IDP communities

The GAGE timeline and sample

All three core samples are the same shape: two age cohorts, females and males

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh	1,369	Ethiopia	6,673	Jordan	2,838
60% Rohingya refugees in formal camps, 40% Bangladeshis in host communities		62% rural: South Gondar, East Hararghe, Hari Rasu. 38% urban: Debre Tabor, Batu, Dire Dawa		71% Syrian refugees, 15% Jordanian, 10% stateless Palestinian	



GAGE timeline

DIFFERENT SAMPLES, DIFFERENT QUESTIONS

574 Nepal

girls and young women, mostly still in school

100 Lebanon

young researchers; participatory photography

1,380 Gaza

three cohorts; 2024 baseline, conflict-adapted tools

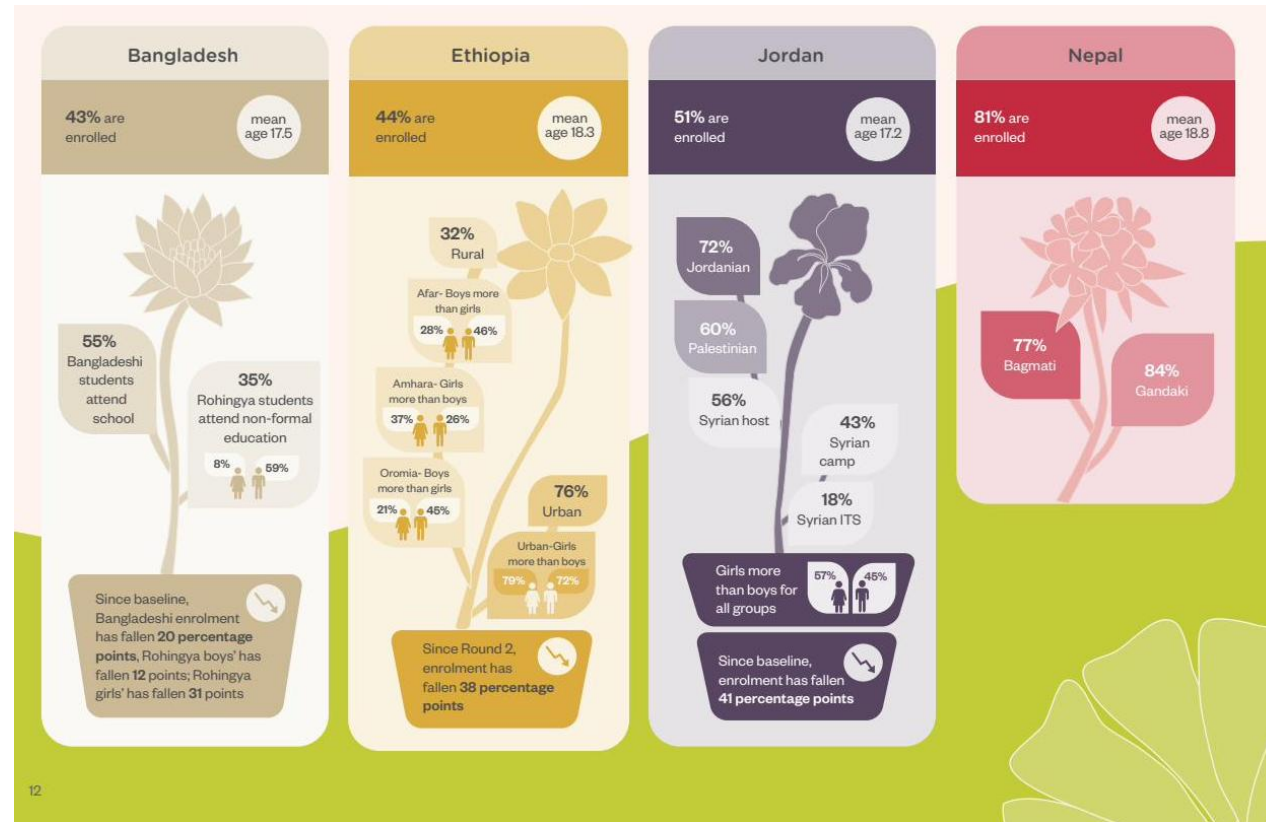
LONGITUDINAL FIGURES

Trends cover only young people surveyed in both rounds — about 83% of the baseline sample. Ethiopia is compared to Round 2, the others to baseline.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)

- To prepare the GAGE presentations GAI was employed, using Claude (version Opus 5.0).
- GAI was used to support the synthesis of capability level findings from existing GAGE endline reports and PowerPoints.
- All findings presented in these PowerPoints has been carefully checked by the GAGE team to ensure accuracy. All errors are the responsibility of the GAGE team.
- These PowerPoints should not be cited.
- All information is available in the GAGE reports online which should be cited instead.

Adolescent enrolment has collapsed over time as adolescents age



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- About half of adolescents are now out of school in all three countries
- Cost is the shared driver — what makes school unaffordable differs

DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — location matters and favours the urban
- Jordan — nationality and location matter and favour citizens and those in host communities
- Bangladesh — nationality and gender matter and favour citizens and, for the Rohingya, boys

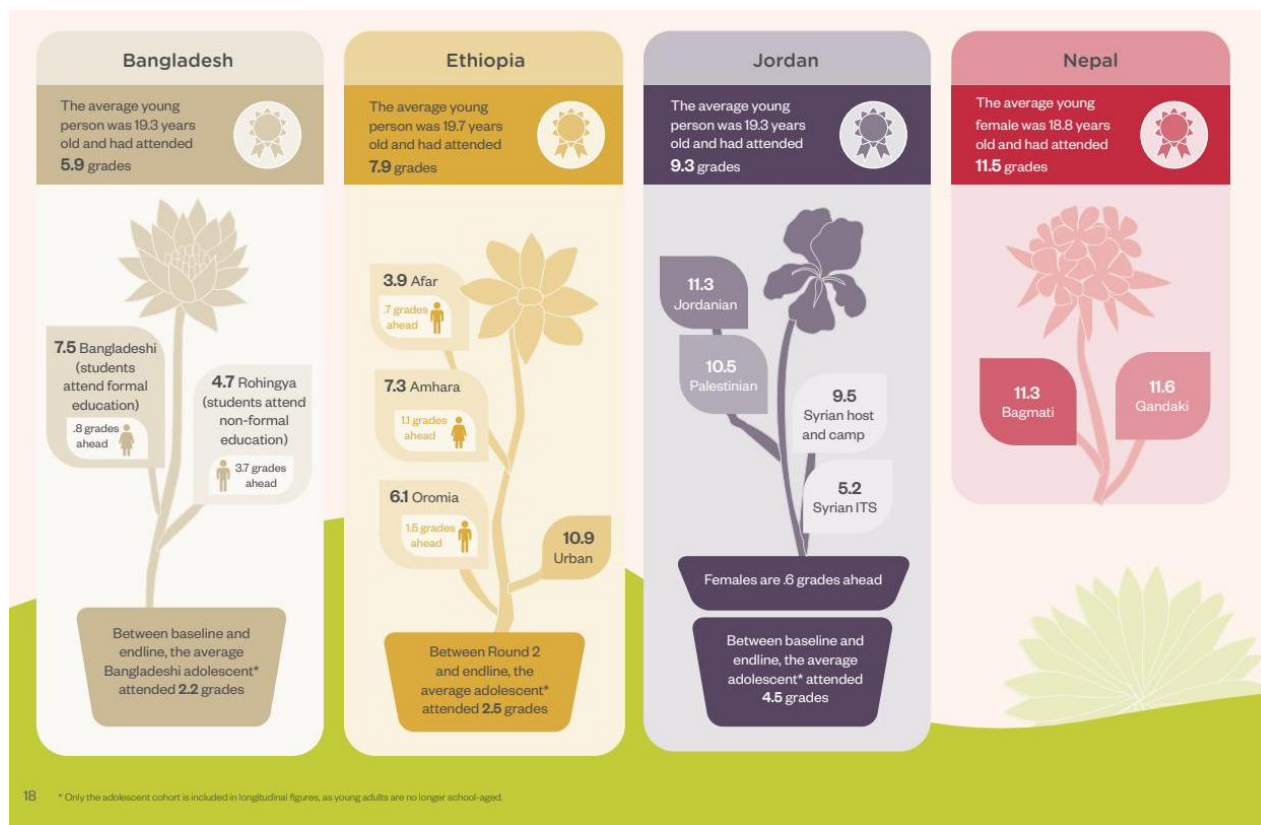
Proportion of adolescents enrolled in education

'Only those who have relatives there in the town or those who have well-to-do family having good income can go to secondary school.'
(17-year-old boy, Oromia, Ethiopia)

'Most students rely on private tutors who come to the house to help them prepare for exams.'
(20-year-old Syrian young woman, Jordan)

'If you want a good life, you have to study.'
(15-year-old Bangladeshi boy)

What averages hide



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Attainment is low everywhere—in part because of when most young people leave school.
- Refugees and displaced young people are disadvantaged vis-à-vis host communities in every country

DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — location matters and favours urban young people
- Jordan — nationality matters and favours citizens; gender favours girls
- Bangladesh — nationality and gender matter and favour citizens and, for the Rohingya, boys

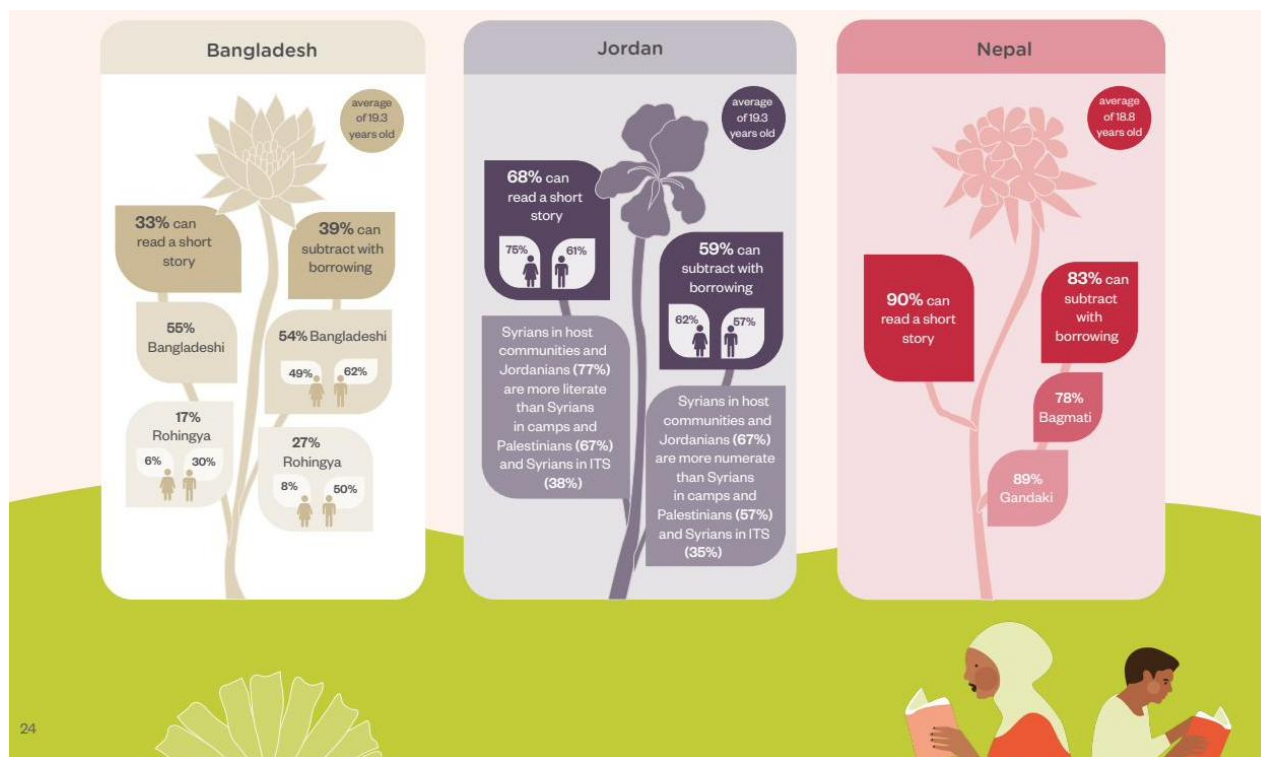
Highest grade of education

'You wake up early... go to the river to fetch water... go to school. When you come back, you leave for your job. There is no way to study your lessons.'
(16-year-old girl, Oromia, Ethiopia)

'I dropped out on my own after seeing my family's financial situation. Due to poverty at home, they are forced to work.'
(17-year-old Bangladeshi boy)

'You have to be among the top 10 to get a scholarship, otherwise there is no chance.'
(17-year-old Syrian girl, Jordan)

Time in school does not add up to learning



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Learning falls short of what age and grade attainment predict, everywhere tested
- The same causes are named: teacher absence, rote methods, overcrowding

DIFFERENT

- Bangladesh — nationality matters and favours citizens
- Jordan — nationality and location matter and favour citizens and those in host communities

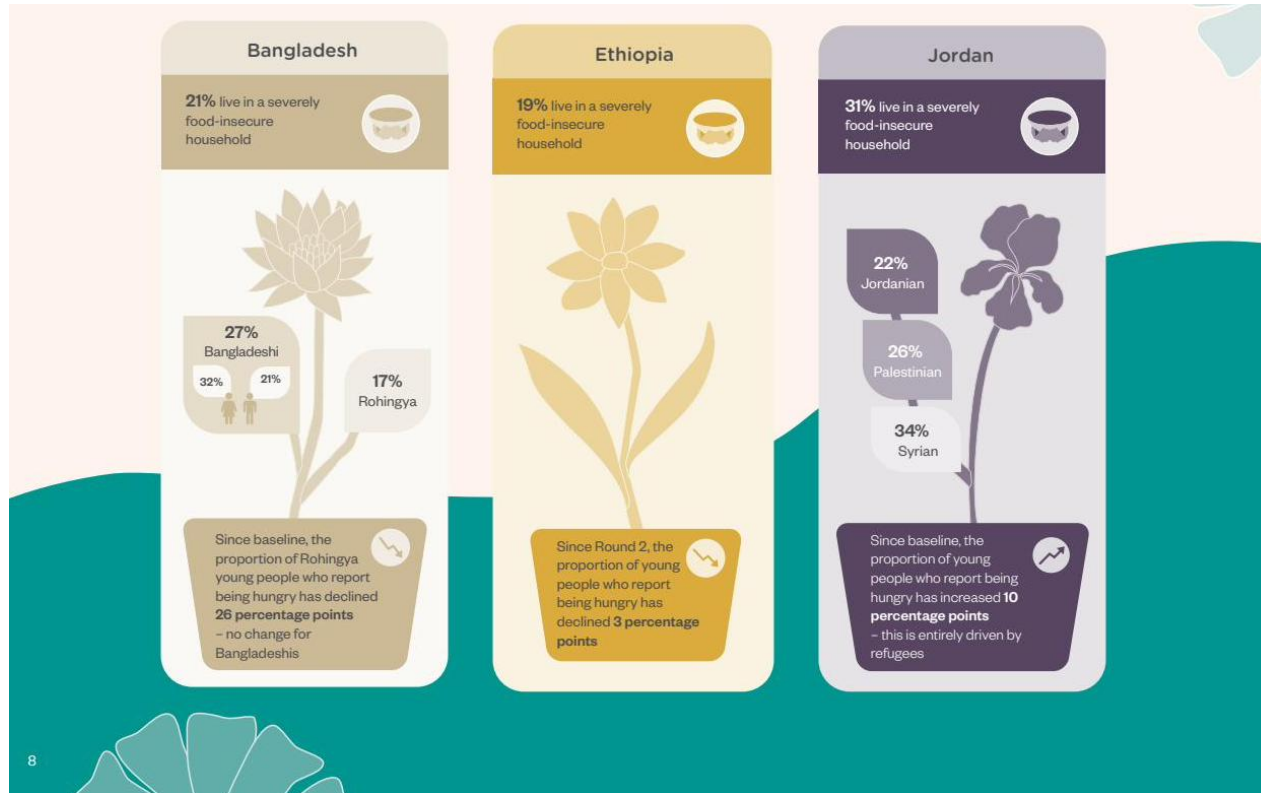
Proportion of young people literate and numerate at the second-grade level

'Teachers skip class, walk around, sit somewhere — no one checks if the children are learning or not.'
(Bangladeshi father)

'Teachers do not explain the lessons adequately... they punish the students and tell them to watch the lessons on YouTube.'
(Jordanian mother)

'Children who have reached grade 5 or 6 are unable to read and write.'
(Key informant, Oromia, Ethiopia)

Food insecurity is diverging



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- A large minority live in severely food-insecure households everywhere
- Disability raises the risk wherever it was measured

DIFFERENT

- Bangladesh — aid matters and favours the Rohingya; within households, food favours boys
- Jordan — nationality matters and favours citizens
- Ethiopia — hunger is common everywhere

Proportion of young people who live in a severely food insecure household

'I saw next to my house that a man has three daughters but he feeds all the good food to his sons.'

(21-year-old Bangladeshi young woman)

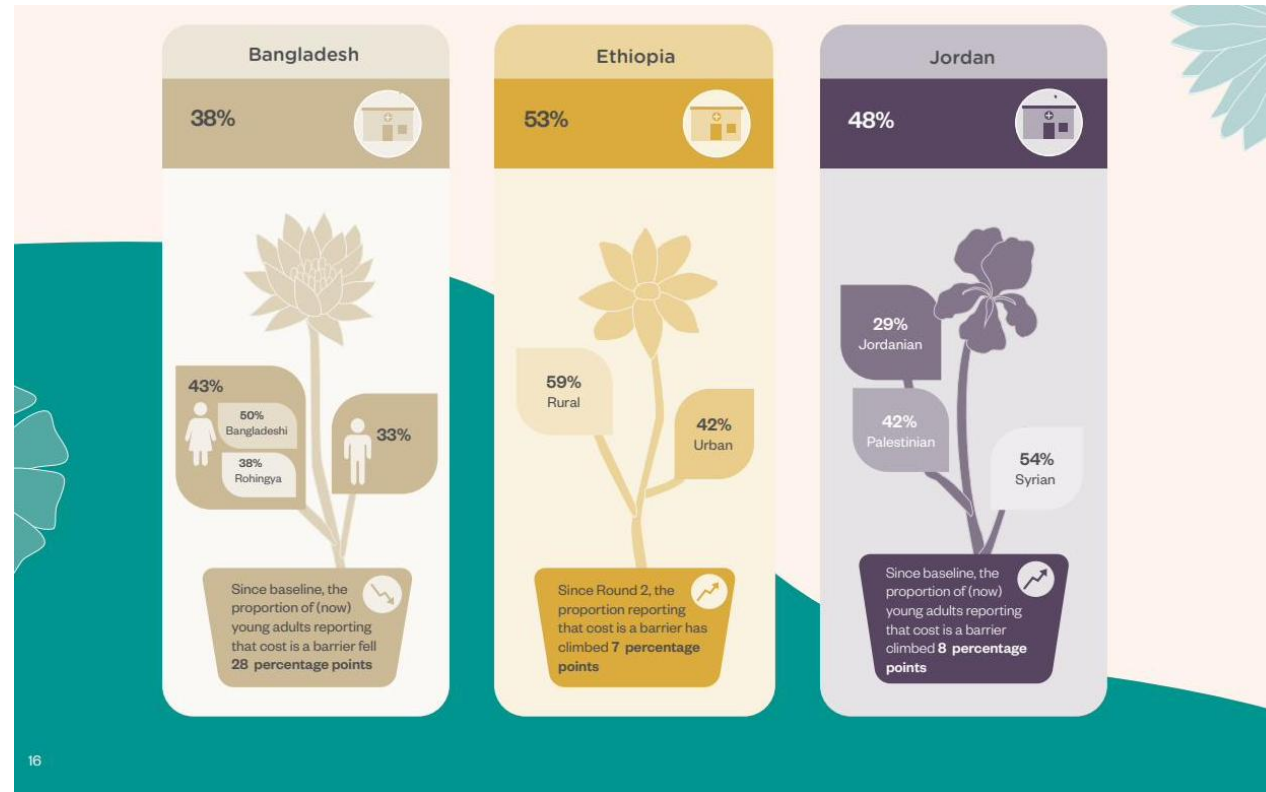
'Some people can't even afford bread, let alone fruits, vegetables or meat.'

(Palestinian key informant, Jordan)

'My health is not like before the war because of the famine... I feel no energy.'

(16-year-old girl, Gaza)

Cost and distance keep young people from care



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Cost and distance are key barriers in all three countries
- Young people with disabilities are worse off everywhere

DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — location matters and favours the urban
- Jordan — nationality matters and favours citizens, who have public insurance
- Bangladesh — nationality matters and favours the Rohingya, who have services in camp

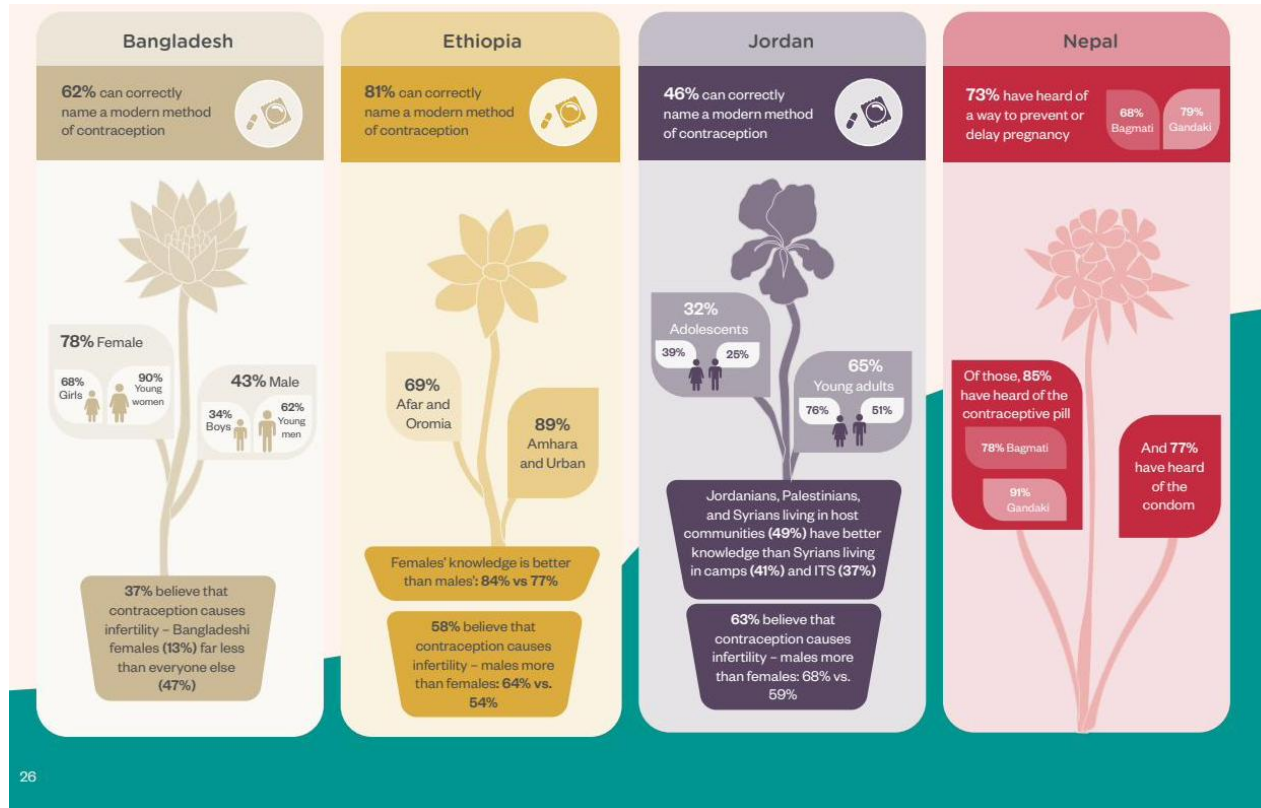
Proportion of young people who report that cost or distance is a major barrier to seeking health care

'The hospital takes 60 dinars from a Jordanian, but when a Syrian has to pay, they take from him 125 dinars.'
(Jordanian key informant)

'People are suffering death because of even minor illnesses, because of absence of health services in the area.'
(24-year-old young man, Afar, Ethiopia)

'I cannot go to the doctor. Who will take me? I need to be lifted, carried into a vehicle, taken out again.'
(26-year-old Rohingya young woman, Bangladesh)

Sexual and reproductive knowledge is thin — and not accurate



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- The belief that contraception causes infertility is widespread everywhere
- A higher proportion of males hold this belief than females in every country

DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — location and religion matter and favour Amhara and the urban
- Jordan — nationality and location matter and favour citizens and those in host communities
- Bangladesh — age and marriage matter and favour young women over girls

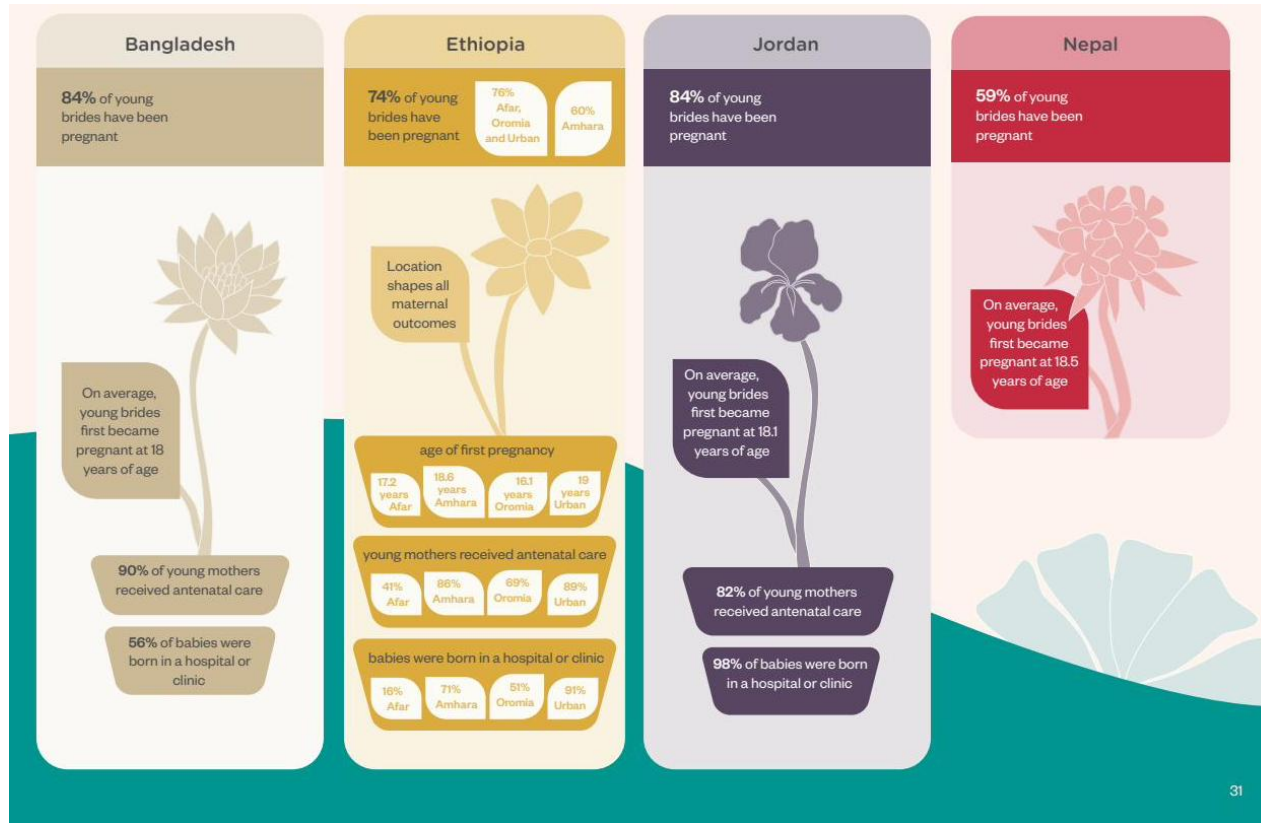
Knowledge and beliefs about contraception

'On my wedding day of course they taught me about sex, because here the girl does not know things except at the right time for her.'
(18-year-old Jordanian young woman)

'I do not think contraceptives are good. They can lead to infertility.'
(17-year-old girl, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia)

'After delivering my first baby, doctors told me about contraception. I first learned about it then.'
(21-year-old Rohingya mother, Bangladesh)

Young brides become young mothers



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Most young brides are already mothers in all three countries
- Antenatal care is far more common than a birth in a facility

DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — location matters and favours the urban
- Jordan — services reach nearly everyone; almost all births are in a facility
- Bangladesh — nationality matters and favours citizens

Young motherhood

'I will use family planning service if I get more than 7 children.'

(20-year-old mother, Oromia, Ethiopia)

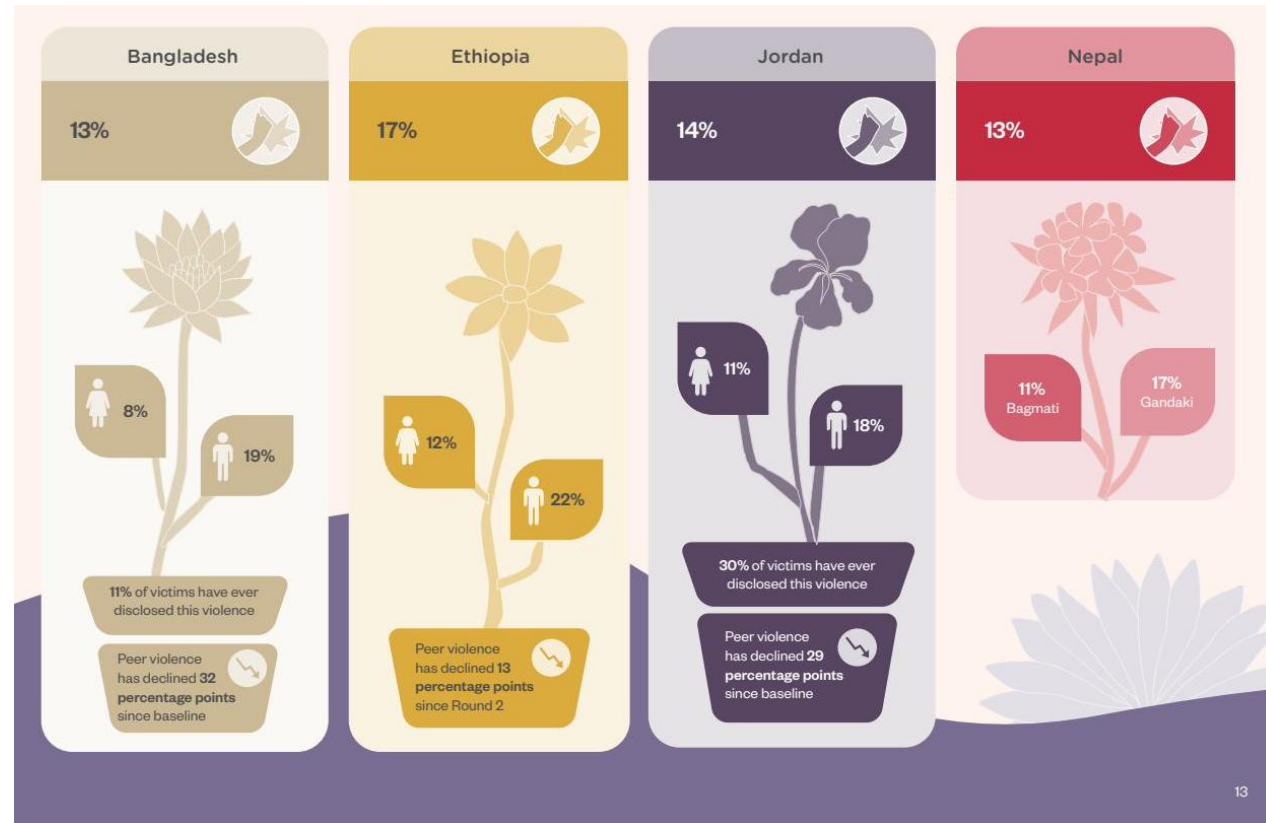
'I took a long time to get pregnant... They even brought me medicine for pregnancy.'

(21-year-old Jordanian mother)

'When I had my first child, I could not see a doctor. That is why the first child died.'

(22-year-old Rohingya mother, Bangladesh)

Bullying is declining over time, but gang violence is increasing



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Peer violence has fallen steeply in all three countries
- Males report roughly double females everywhere

DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — young people are the most willing to disclose
- Jordan — disability matters and raises the risk
- Bangladesh — disclosure is rarest, and gang violence is named most often

Proportion of young people who have experienced peer violence in the past year

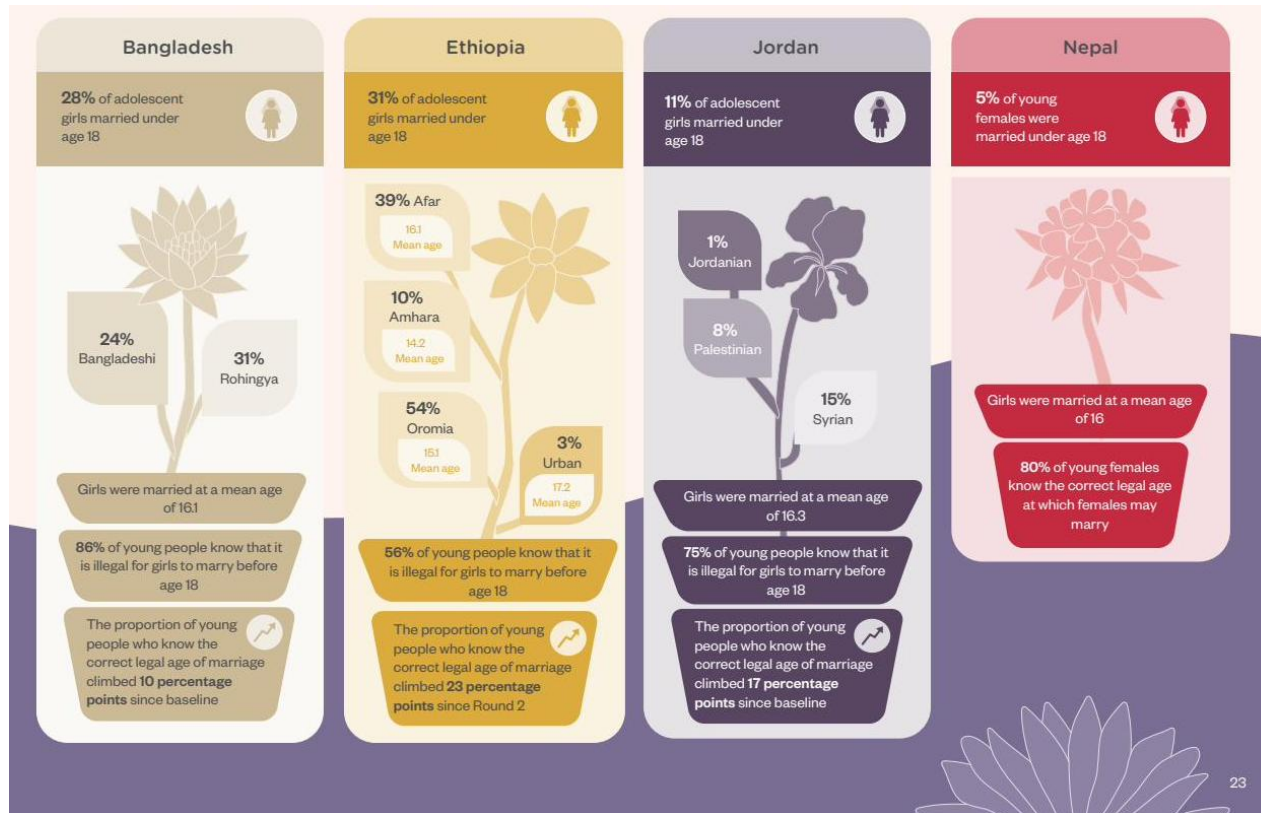
'One of my friends was murdered recently. Murder cases have been increasing.'

(21-year-old Palestinian young man, Jordan)

'Gang violence has increased. Many gangs are formed by Rohingya and Bangladeshi people in them.'

(24-year-old Bangladeshi young man)

Child marriage — who decides is the critical programming question



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Knowledge of the legal age has climbed in all three countries
- Marriage rates have not moved with it

DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — location matters and favours the urban; in Oromia adolescents marry on their own initiative
- Jordan — nationality matters and favours citizens
- Bangladesh — parents decide, and rumour pushes girls into marriage at menarche

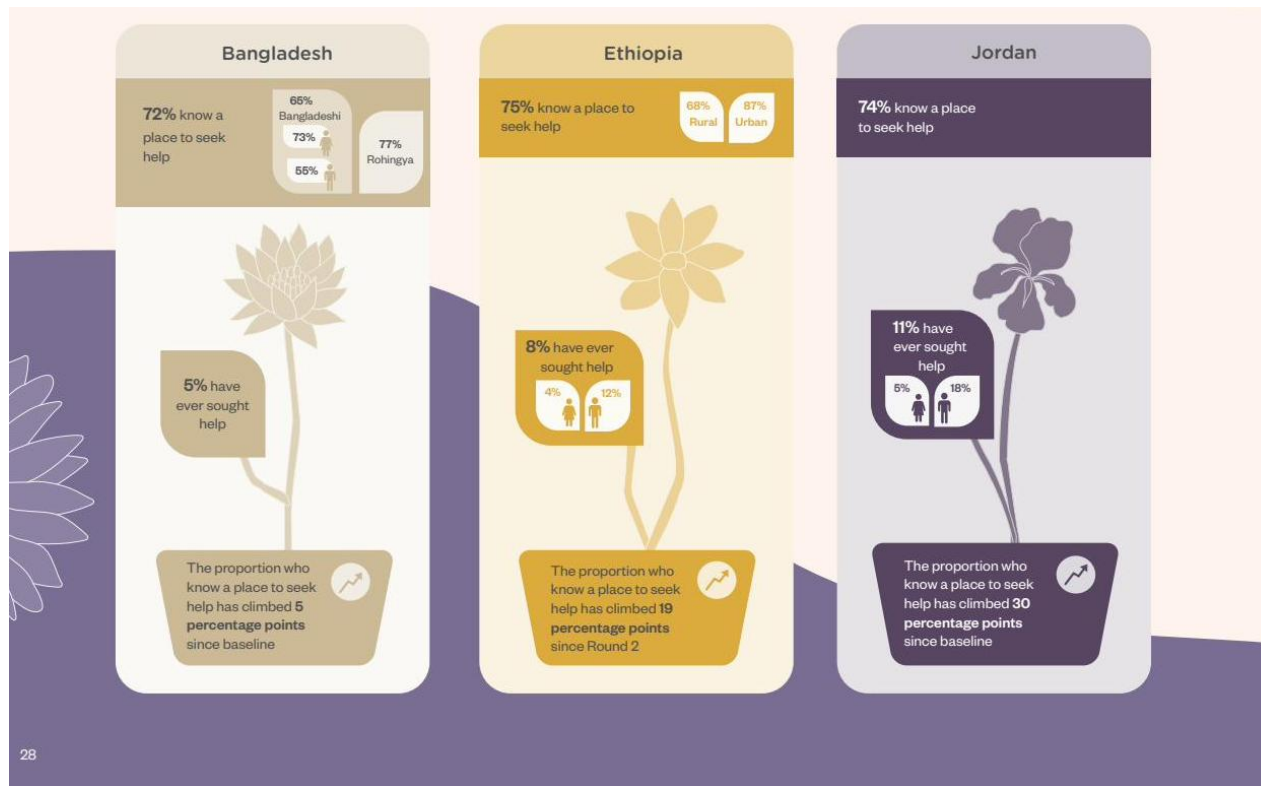
Young people's experiences with and beliefs about child marriage

'Girls are forced to marry off when they start menstruating at 12–13 because people around them spread bad rumours.'
(21-year-old Rohingya young woman, Bangladesh)

'It is my parent who will choose me a girl to be my wife. I will be asked if I am interested in her.'
(17-year-old boy, Amhara, Ethiopia)

'If the house is good and the young man is suitable, I give her to him... after asking her opinion. I might convince her.'
(Syrian father, Jordan)

Young people know where to go. But few seek support



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- About three-quarters know where to seek help in all three countries
- Almost none go — disclosure risks more violence, and brings shame on the family

DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — location matters and favours the urban
- Bangladesh — programming matters and favours the Rohingya
- Ethiopia and Jordan — gender matters and favours boys

Young people's awareness and use of violence-support services

'There is a community office, but if we drag it there, I fear our respect will get lessened in society.'

(20-year-old Rohingya mother, Bangladesh)

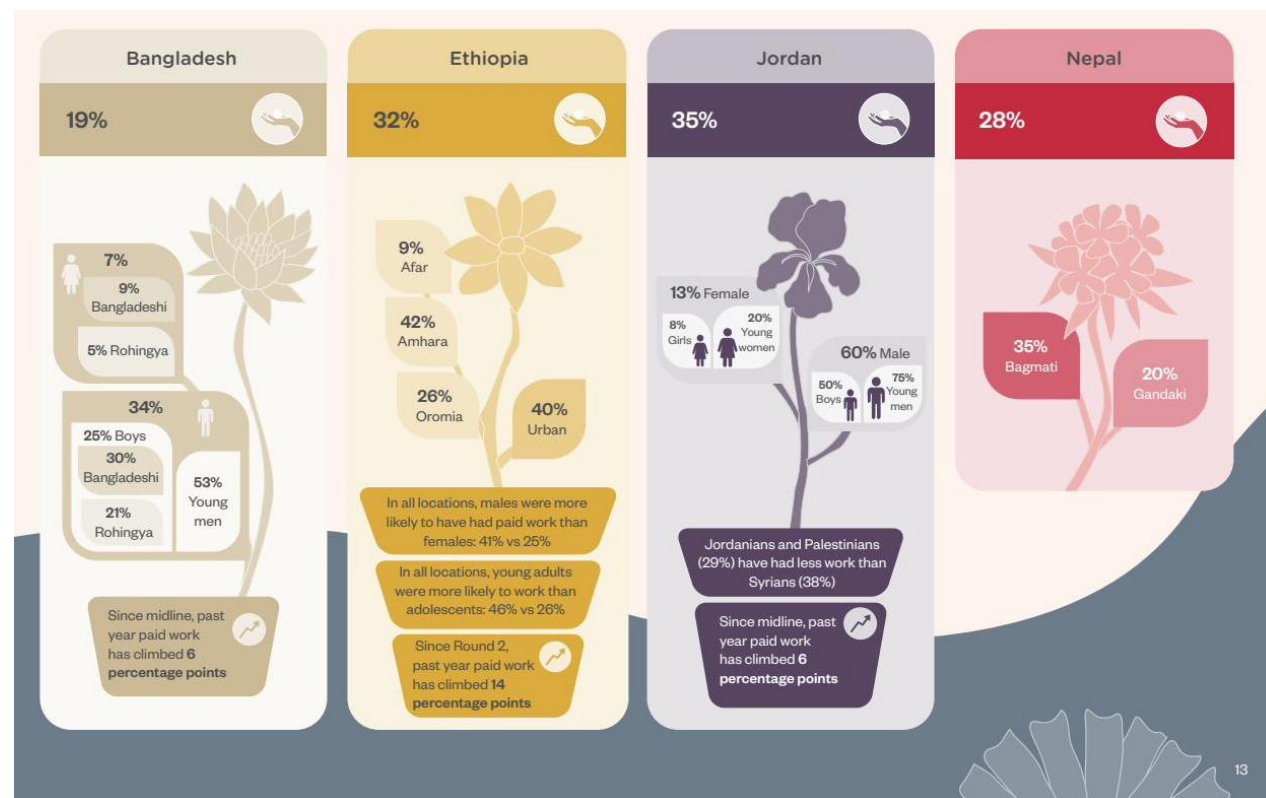
'Issues related to violence are not openly reported because it is considered as shameful.'

(17-year-old girl, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia)

'Some teachers threaten students that if they complain, they will send him back to Syria.'

(Teacher in a boys' school, Jordan)

Waithood



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Only a minority had any paid work in the past year, in all three countries
- Males work far more than females, and young adults more than adolescents

DIFFERENT

- Bangladesh — the law matters: the Rohingya have no right to work at all
- Jordan — permits and closed occupations matter and favour citizens
- Ethiopia — capital matters and favours those who can start a business

Proportion of young people with paid work in the past year

'If you don't earn money, you're worthless as a man.'

(16-year-old Bangladeshi boy)

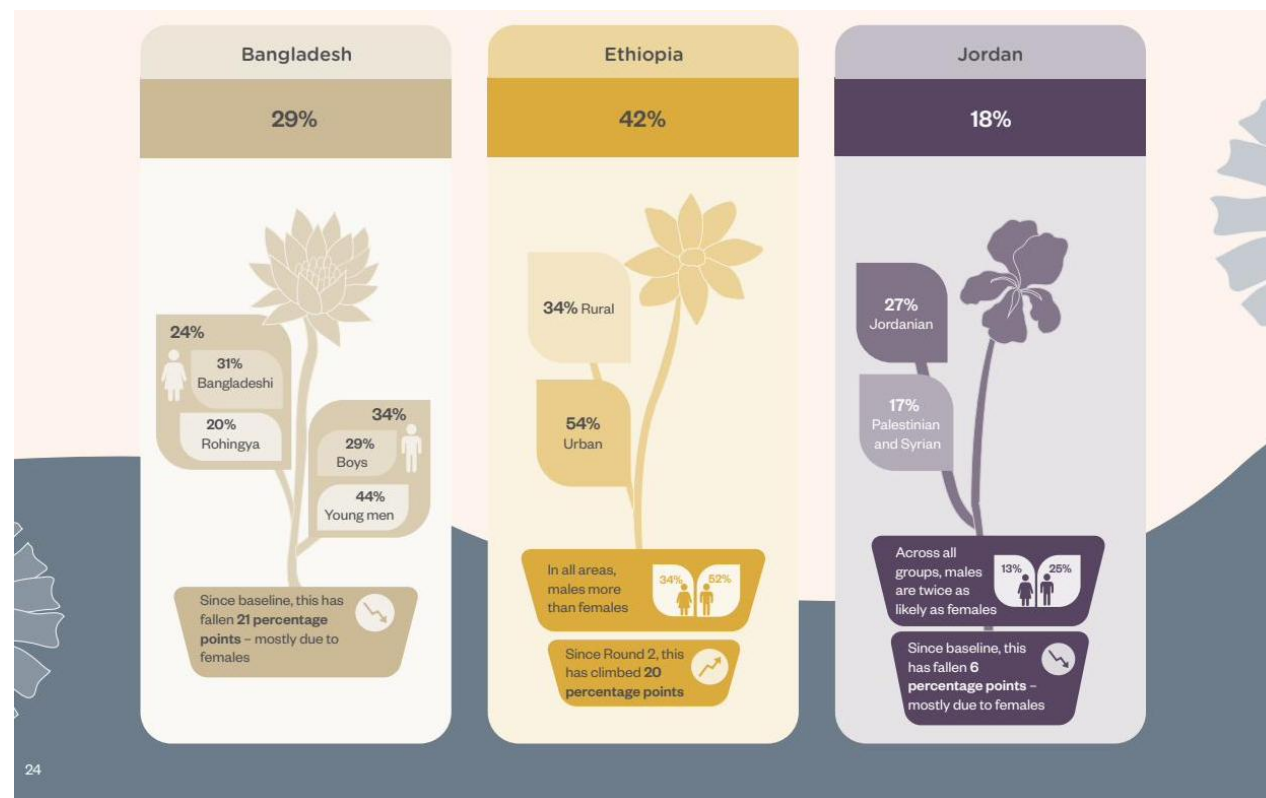
'There is no job opportunity. You will not get a single job after searching for months.'

(23-year-old young woman with a degree, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia)

'My brother works at night at a bakery... He endures it for our sake — what else can he do?'

(17-year-old Syrian girl, Jordan)

Young women are losing ground in terms of control over money



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Few young people control money in any of the three countries
- Males control more than females in every location

DIFFERENT

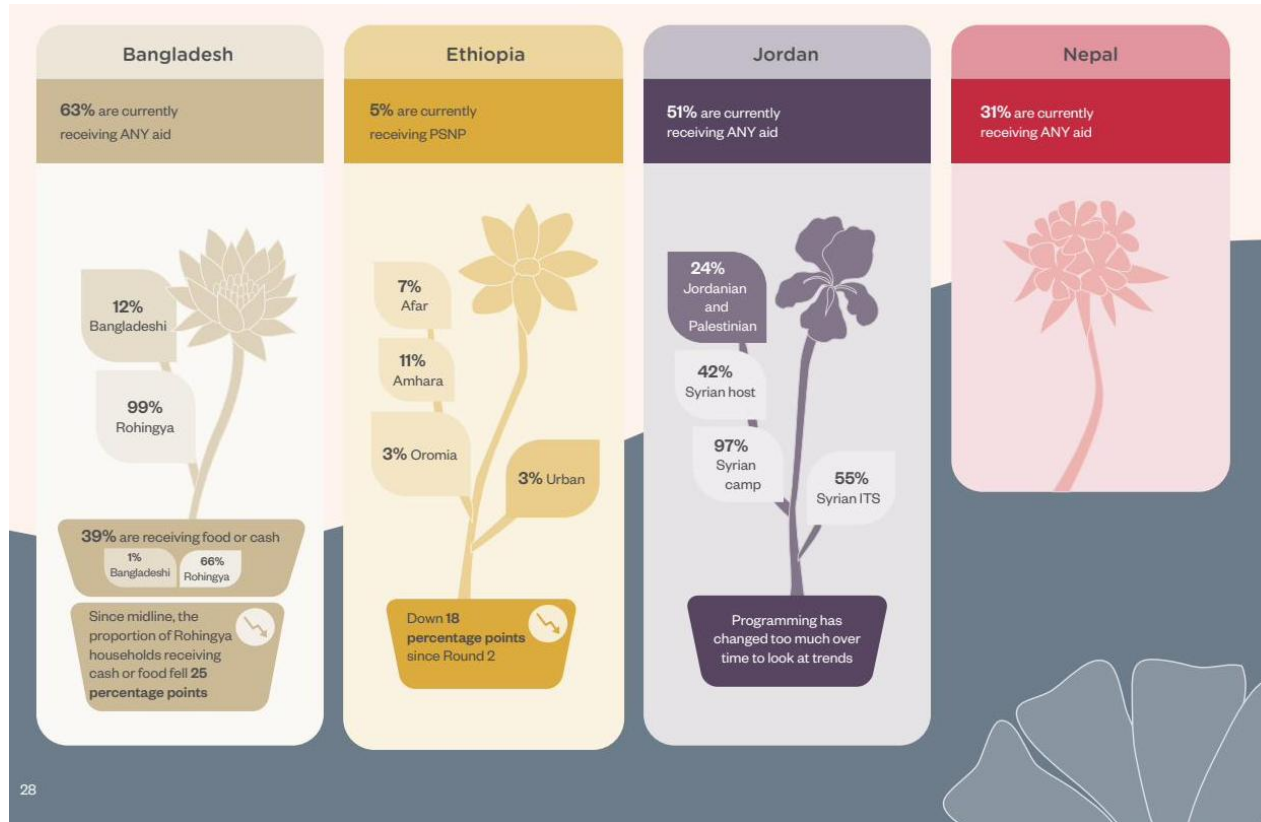
- Ethiopia — savings groups matter, and control is rising
- Jordan — nationality matters and favours citizens; control is falling for young women
- Bangladesh — nationality matters and favours citizens; control is falling for young women

Proportion of young people who have had money that they control in the past year

'I can't find the price of bread. How do I save?'
(18-year-old Jordanian young man)

'I save with my friends, we contribute 50 birr each week, which is given to a member in rotation.'
(16-year-old boy, Oromia, Ethiopia)

Social protection is being withdrawn



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Coverage follows legal status rather than need
- Nowhere are young people with disabilities more likely to receive support

DIFFERENT

- Bangladesh — refugee status matters and favours the Rohingya, but support is being cut
- Jordan — refugee status matters and favours Syrians living in camps
- Ethiopia — conflict matters; the safety net reaches furthest in Amhara

Young people's access to social protection

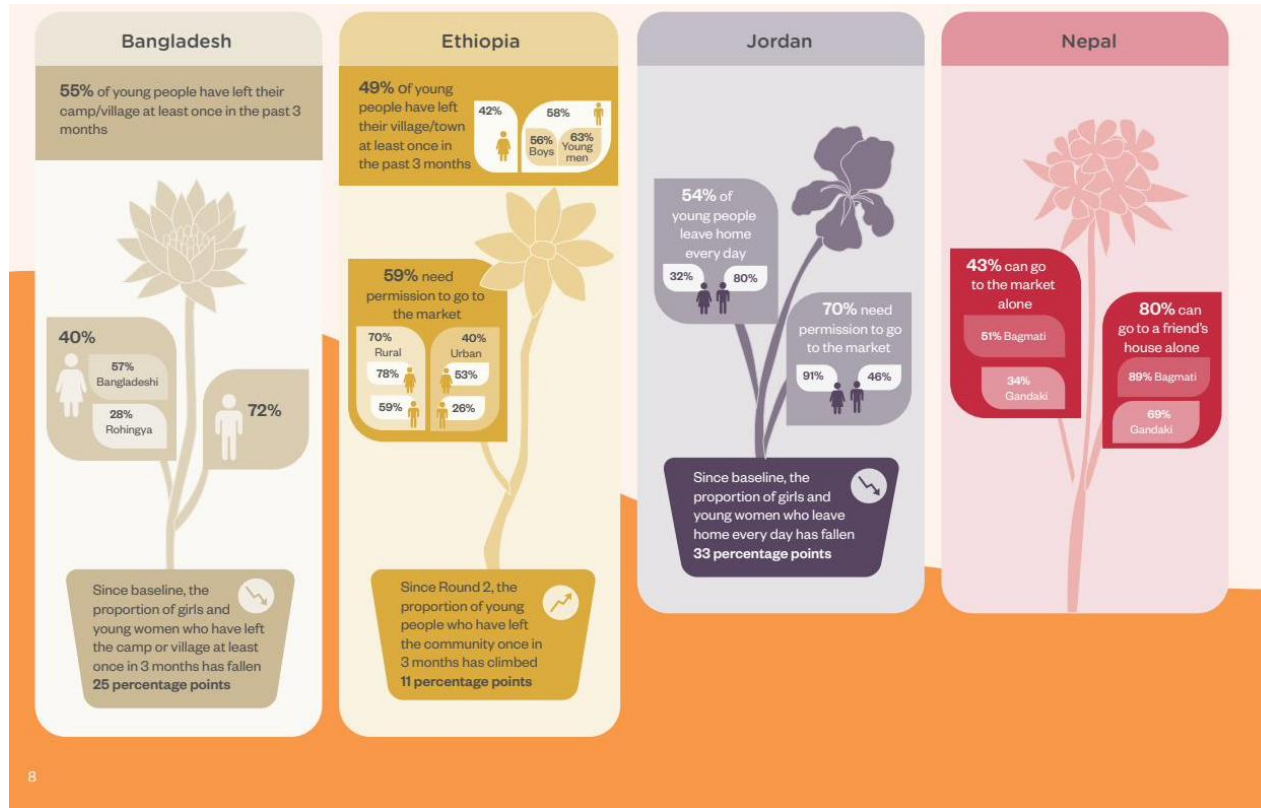
'We used to receive aid from UNRWA... This aid stopped and we no longer receive it.'

(21-year-old Palestinian young man, Jordan)

'I can't work. No one teaches us any skill.'

(20-year-old Bangladeshi young man)

Girls' worlds are shrinking as boys' expand



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Males move more freely than females in all three countries
- Mobility narrows at puberty and narrows again at marriage

DIFFERENT

- Bangladesh — nationality matters and favours citizens; Rohingya girls are confined to the shelter
- Jordan — gender matters most, and girls' daily movement is shrinking
- Ethiopia — location matters; rural young people travel further, mostly for work

Young people's mobility

'Here, the girl's only place is at home... She is locked up.'

(18-year-old Syrian young woman, Jordan)

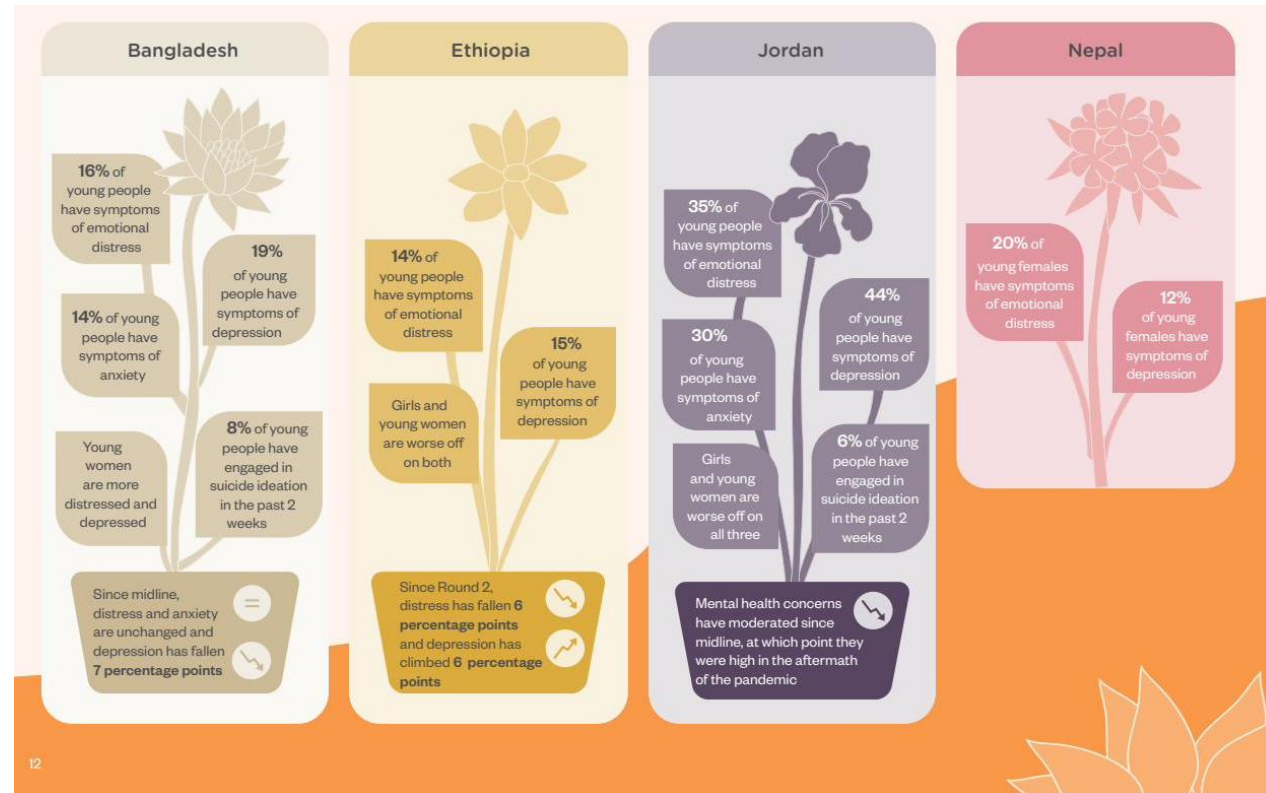
'We have a rule about leaving the house after 12 years. If she leaves, that girl will never get married again.'

(Rohingya mother, Bangladesh)

'Boys can move everywhere they want. My sister is not able to, because my parents forbid her.'

(17-year-old boy, Afar, Ethiopia)

Mental health challenges are significant but services very limited



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Young females report more symptoms than young males in every country
- The reasons are the same: poverty, violence, exhaustion and loneliness

DIFFERENT

- Jordan — young people name distress most readily
- Ethiopia and Bangladesh — reported rates are far lower, where survival comes first
- Everywhere — services for young people are almost absent

Proportion of young people with symptoms of mental ill-health

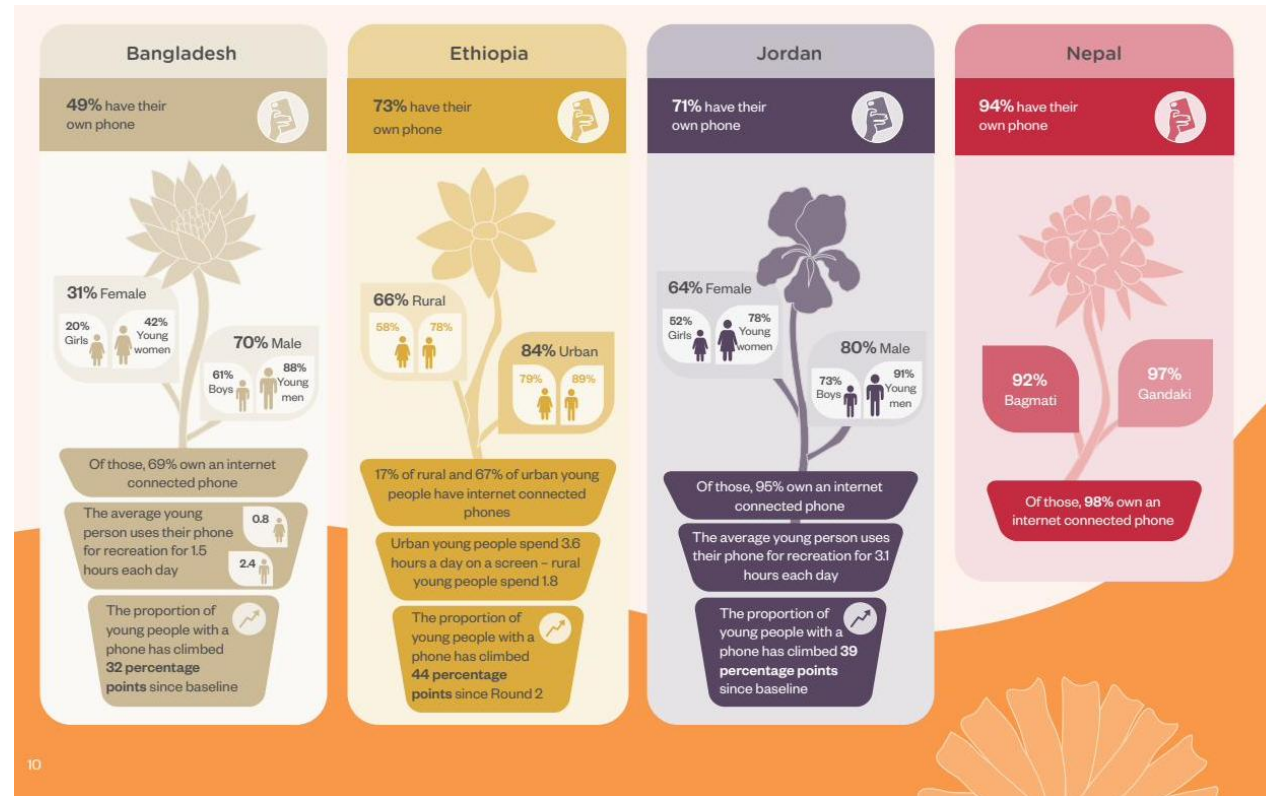
'I do not know what makes us happy or sad. Every day we do the same work. We will do this work tomorrow.'

(16-year-old girl, Oromia, Ethiopia)

'It gave me a sense of failure inside.'

(20-year-old Syrian young man, Jordan)

Digital connectivity has burgeoned— but access is strongly gendered



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Ownership has risen faster than any other indicator in the study
- Males own more, and use more freely, in every country

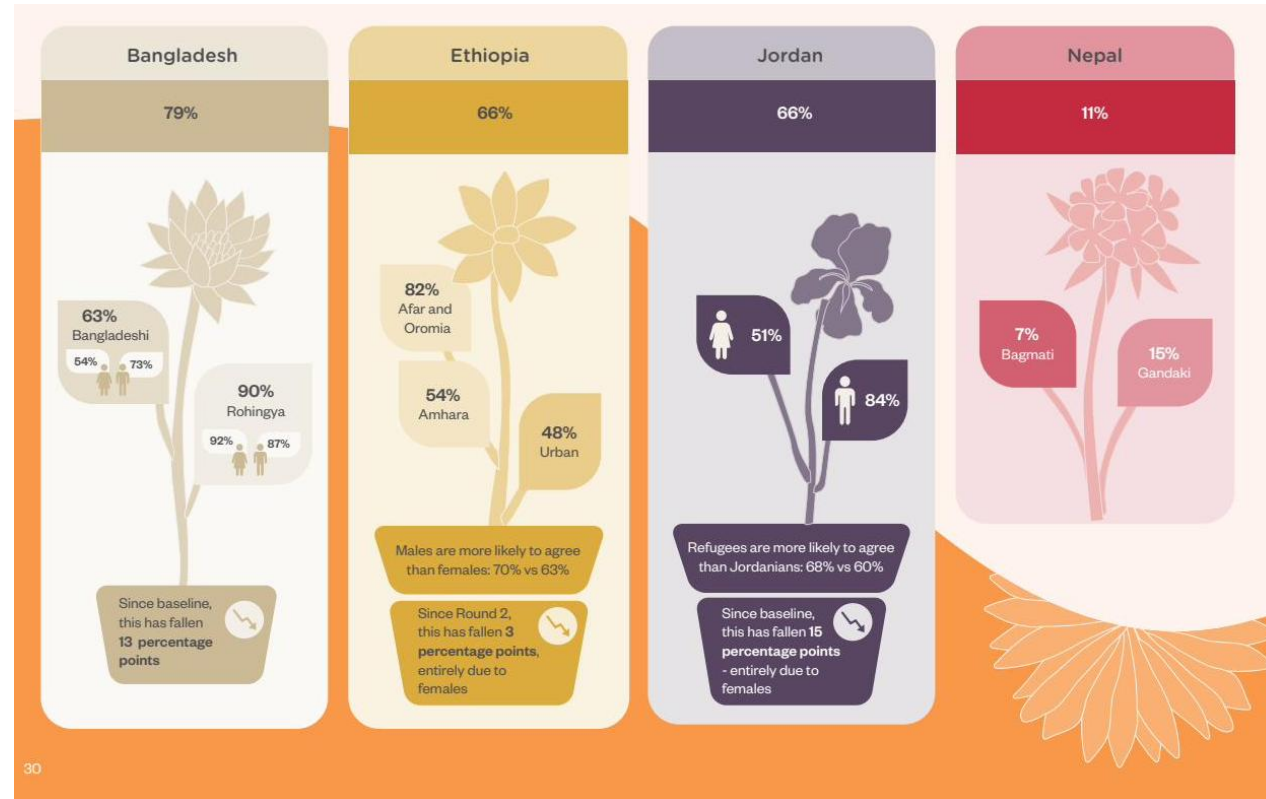
DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — location matters and favours the urban
- Bangladesh — gender and age matter and favour young men
- Jordan — almost every phone connects to the internet

Young people's use of mobile phones

‘My sisters have limited access to the internet. I have installed an app on my phone to track their usage.’
(21-year-old Palestinian young man, Jordan)

Household authority is shifting — but only due to shifts in young women's attitudes



Proportion of young people who agree that men should make final decisions in the household

SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- A majority in all three countries agree men should make the final decisions
- Young males hold more inequitable views than young females everywhere

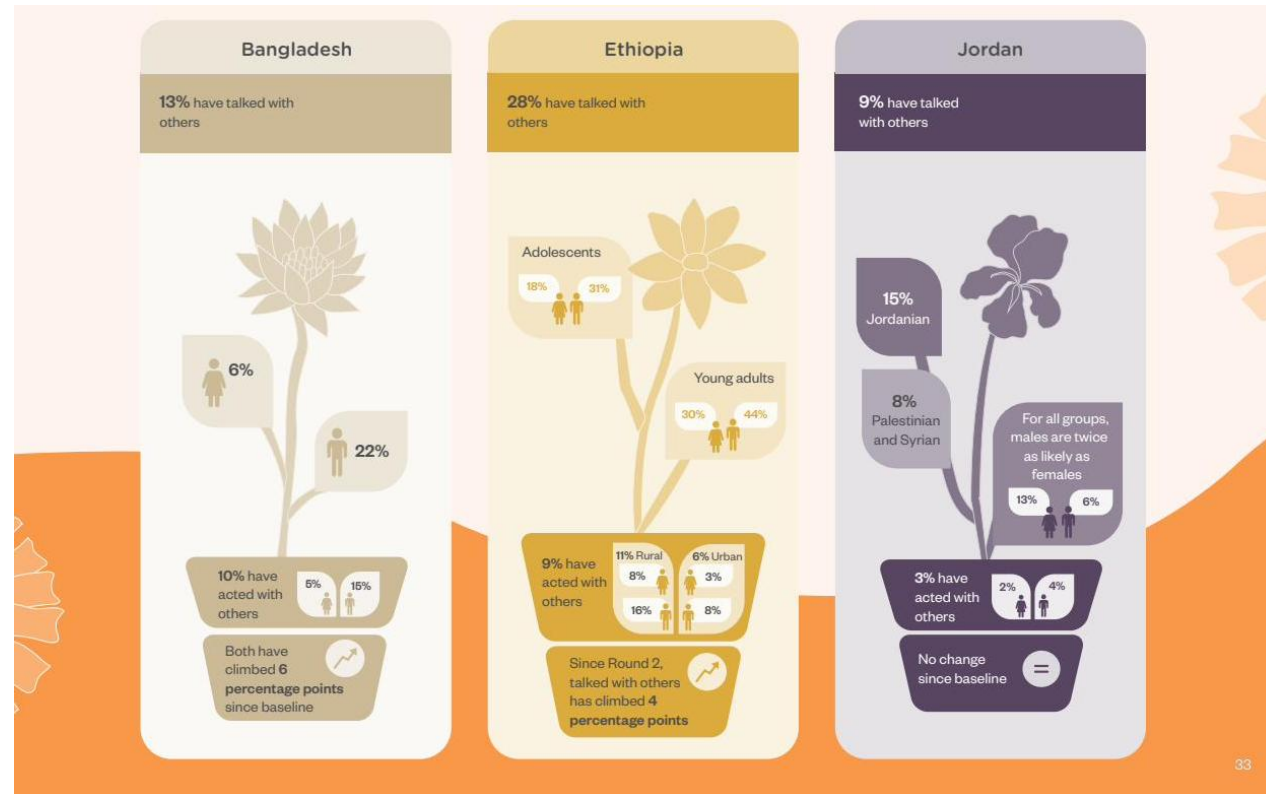
DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — location matters and favours the urban
- Jordan and Bangladesh — views are shifting, but only among young women
- Everywhere — young men's views are broadly unchanged

'No matter how women know it, men decide on it.'
(28-year-old man, Debre Tabor, Ethiopia)

'Why should a woman work? Her brother provides for her. Her husband provides for her. I am against women working.'
(22-year-old Jordanian young man)

Many young people are disengaged from the community and from politics



SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES

- Civic engagement is very low in all three countries
- Males are about twice as likely as females to have engaged

DIFFERENT

- Ethiopia — engagement is highest, though still low
- Bangladesh — norms matter: women in politics are widely seen as poor wives and mothers
- Jordan — young people are least likely to believe that speaking changes anything

Proportion of young people who have engaged with others about a community problem

‘People's voices don't matter... They protest, but it's pointless because nothing changes.’
(18-year-old Jordanian young man)

‘Because I am a girl, no one will listen to me... I am just a girl.’
(18-year-old Rohingya young woman, Bangladesh)

Conflict shapes all capability outcomes

Four of the six GAGE countries collected endline data during or shortly after armed conflict.

Education

- Gaza: 10% did any learning in the year to autumn 2025
- Rural Amhara: enrolment fell 49pp, against 35pp elsewhere
- Older boys are pulled into work or into militias

Health

- Gaza: 89% say lack of food is a major household problem
- Gaza: 43% went without needed care
- South Gondar: hunger doubled to 25%

Livelihoods

- Amhara: 11% receive the safety net, double the national figure
- Rohingya cash and food down 25pp since midline
- Refugee status bars legal work in three countries

Wellbeing

- Gaza: 93% show symptoms of psychological distress
- Violence at home rose during the war in Gaza
- Almost no mental health services in any conflict site

'The schools became shelters... Many of my teachers were killed, everything is gone.'
(16-year-old girl, Gaza)

'Fano militias ordered that schools should never be opened and threatened to punish teachers.'
(Teacher, Amhara, Ethiopia)

'Food coupons used to be 21 dinars per person... Now, it is 15 dinars.'
(17-year-old Syrian boy, Jordan)

Recommendations for policy and programming

Education

- Free education through grade 12, with transport, boarding, feeding and uniforms covered
- Smaller classes, teacher training in hands-on methods, and an end to corporal punishment
- Non-formal and accelerated routes for those out of school

Economic empowerment

- Skills training with a stipend, transport for young women, and links to local employers
- Credit and start-up capital, including work young women can take
- Strengthen outreach & inclusion of young people with disabilities in social

'I never gave up on my dream to become a nurse... I am saving up money every month to collect the registration fees.'

(Palestinian young woman, Lebanon)

Health

- Subsidise costs and place services where young people already are
- Iterative sexual and reproductive health education — for boys as well as girls
- Counselling for engaged and newly married couples on contraception and consent

Wellbeing, voice and agency

- Safe spaces, digital access and safe-mobility programming
- Norm change work aimed at fathers, husbands and brothers as well as at girls
- Mental health services, and work on the stigma that keeps young people away

Bodily integrity

- Invest in services survivors will use, alongside awareness of the law
- Tailor child marriage work to who decides — parents or adolescents
- Parenting education on alternatives to physical discipline

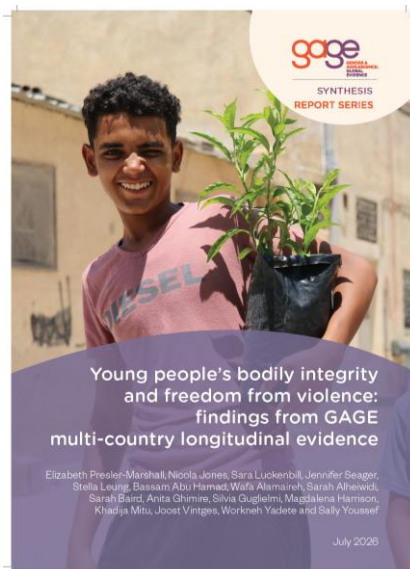
Because the same outcome has different drivers in each country, programme design must be tailored to specific groups of young people rather than to the national average.

'After 12th grade, I will join a Korean language class and go to Korea for foreign employment.'

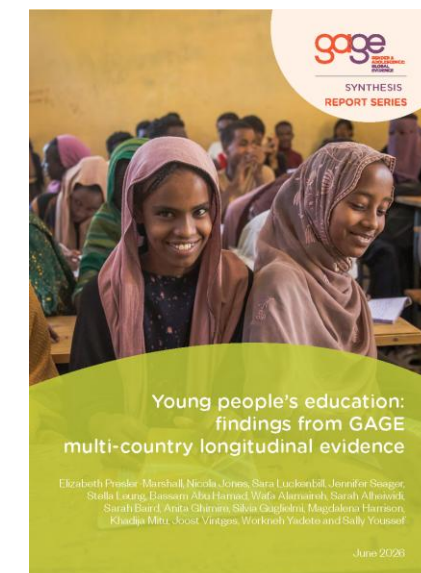
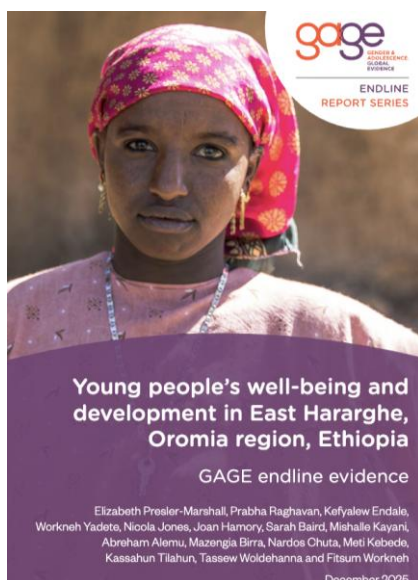
(19-year-old Nepali young woman, Gandaki)



Young people's bodily integrity and freedom from violence: findings from GAGE multi-country longitudinal evidence



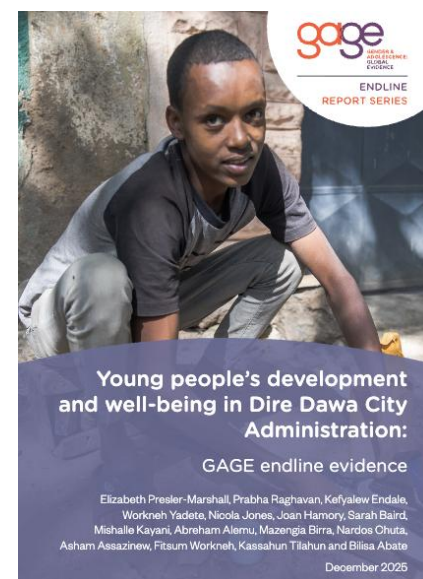
Young people's well-being and development in South Gondar, Amhara region, Ethiopia



Young people's education: findings from GAGE multi-country longitudinal evidence



Young people's development and well-being in Afar, Ethiopia: GAGE endline evidence



Young people's development and well-being in Dire Dawa City Administration: GAGE endline evidence

For more resources see:
<https://www.gage.odi.org/publications/>

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GenderandAdolescence

About GAGE:

- Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a ten-year (2016-2026) mixed-methods longitudinal research programme focused on what works to support adolescent girls' and boys' capabilities in the second decade of life and beyond.
- We are following the lives of 20,000 adolescents in six focal countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.



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Ethiopian young people's education and learning: GAGE endline findings

Prof. Tassew Woldehanna, Prof Sarah Baird, Dr Kefyalew Endale

What we measure — and where the evidence comes from

Aspirations

How much education would young people like to complete?

Enrolment

Who is still enrolled in school?

Grade attainment

Are young people enrolled in the 'right' grade given age?

Gateway grades

At a population level, how many young people complete what grades?

Who is left behind?

Married girls and young people with disabilities.

Where the evidence comes from

- Sample is 55% female and 45% male.
- Two cohorts: mean age 18.3 and 22.5 at endline
To keep these straight, they are called 'adolescents' and 'young adults'.
- Multiple locations:
 - Rural Hari Rasu, Afar (n=732)
 - Rural East Hararghe, Oromia (n=2166)
 - Urban Batu (Oromia), Debre Tabor (Amhara) and Dire Dawa (n=2521)
- Young people were followed for 5 rounds—baseline (2017-2018) to endline (2024-2025).
- Qualitative data collected from young people, caregivers and key informants in individual and group interviews.

Young people's educational aspirations are high, but....

- Most young people—even those who have never enrolled—see the value of education and would like to complete at least secondary school.
- But most of those in rural areas know that they are unlikely to achieve their aspirations, because of the high real and opportunity costs of attending school after 8th grade.
- Aspirations are generally falling over time, as young people lose access to education and also as they see that even those with university educations are having a hard time finding stable work.
- This is especially evident among girls and young women in rural areas, most of whom were out of school at endline.

STEEPEST DECLINE: AFAR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

Aspirations for secondary school dropped 15 pp between R2 and endline.

AFAR 52% aspire to secondary ▼ 11 pp since R2

'I have a plan to start school and I will start learning 1st grade.'

(17-year-old boy, never attended school)

OROMIA 90% aspire to secondary ▼ 4 pp since R2

'Here, it is possible to attend school only as long as you attend the school in the village.'

(18-year-old young woman)

URBAN 93% aspire to secondary ▼ 6 pp since R2

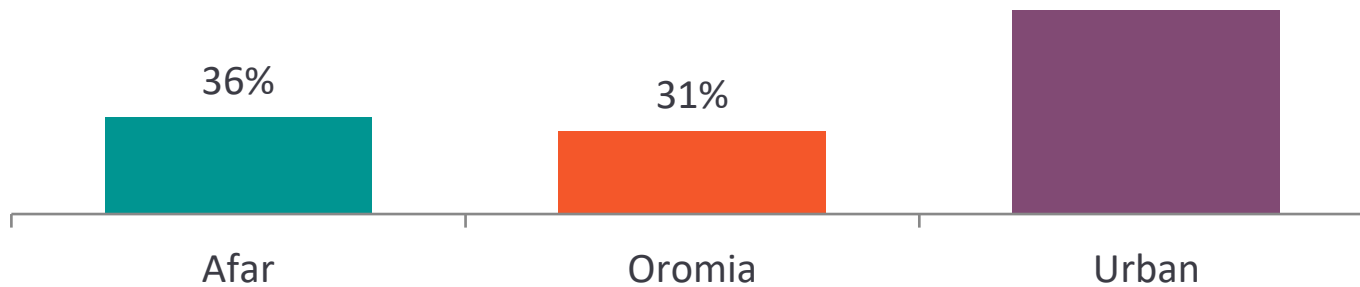
'If someone learnt five years at university and became a Bajaj driver, how are others motivated?'

(key informant, Dire Dawa)

Urban-rural education divide persists and is growing over time

Urban adolescents' enrolment is more than twice as high as rural adolescents'

Proportion of adolescents enrolled in education at endline



In Afar, only 75% of adolescents have *ever* attended formal education.

In Oromia, parents often prioritise Qur'anic education over formal education.

OROMIA

'Only those who have relatives there in the town or those who have well-to-do family having good income can go to secondary school.'

(17-year-old boy)

AFAR

'We went to school every day, but the teachers disappeared and stopped coming to school, so we were forced to discontinue our education.'

(16-year-old girl, left after grade 2)

In rural areas, students are years over age for grade

Of enrolled adolescents only:

AFAR

6.6 mean grades

at a mean age 18.0

OROMIA

8.0 mean grades

at a mean age 18.1

URBAN

11.3 mean grades

at a mean age 18.8

- In rural areas, many children enrol years late, because their parents need them to herd animals or mind younger siblings.
- They also repeat grades often, because their attendance is poor and because they choose to not promote because they know they have learned little.
- This means that most of those who are still enrolled in school are years over age for grade.

AFAR

'The problem is that we can't come to school leaving the livestock alone in the bushes. They may be attacked by predators. That is why we stay with the livestock and don't come to school.'

(19-year-old young man)

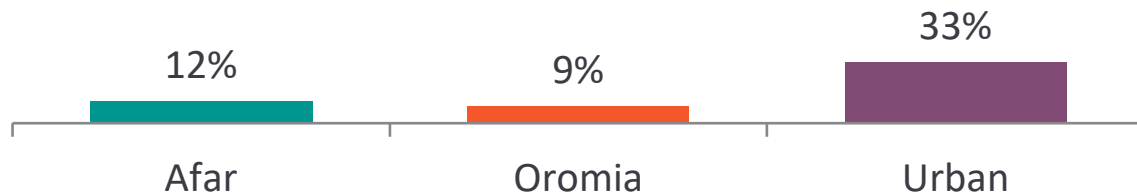
OROMIA

'Since my childhood, I started working on the farm. I began farming when I was in grades 5 and 6.'

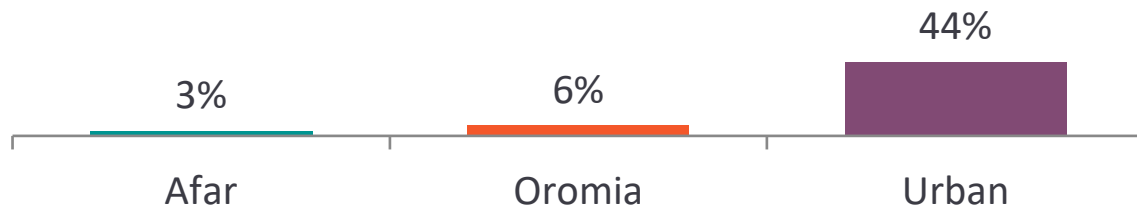
(18-year-old young man)

Few rural young adults have access to education

Proportion of young adults enrolled in education at endline



Young adults who have ever studied at the post-secondary level



- By their early twenties, almost no rural young people are still studying—they have assumed adult roles.
- Of those who are enrolled, most are still studying at the secondary (or even primary) level.
- Urban young people have access to night school, which allows them to combine work and education.
- They also have access to post-secondary education.
- Urban young people attend public universities (if they can pass entrance exams), private colleges (if they can afford tuition) and TVET (which they hope will improve job prospects).

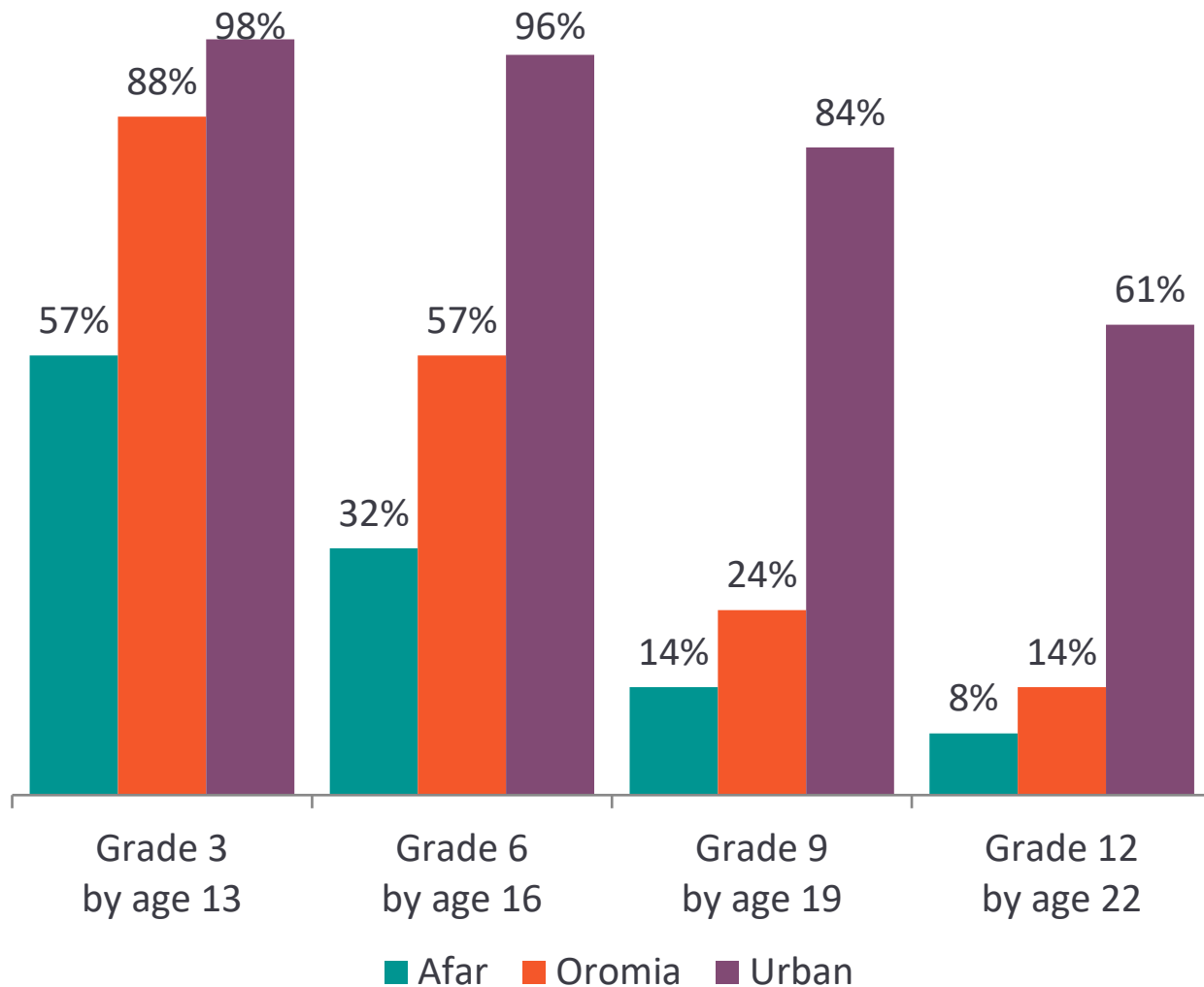
URBAN

'My father wanted me to achieve academically, but I wanted to learn a vocational field and start making money.'

(23-year-old young man, Dire Dawa)

Although access to education is improved, most rural young people are still poorly educated

Attended a 'gateway' grade by a given age



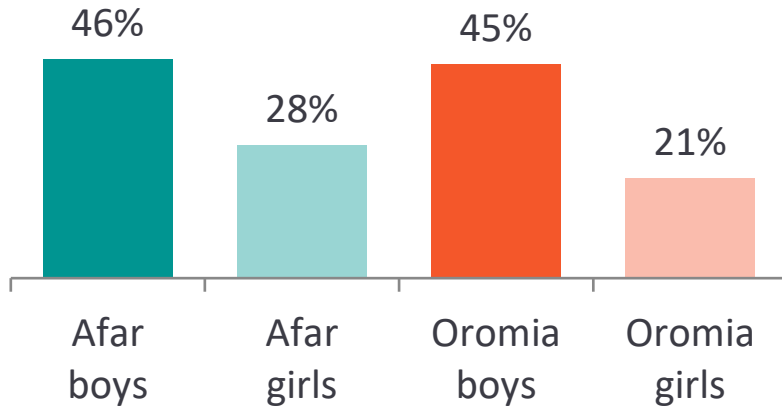
Another way to understand young people's lack of education is to look at whole cohorts and how much education they eventually receive.

- In Afar, fewer than 3/5 of young people attended grade 3— in part because many communities only provide basic education.
- In Oromia, fewer than 3/5 of young people attended the last grade primary school (grade 6).
- In neither Afar nor Oromia did more than one-quarter of young people transition to secondary school (grade 9)—largely because secondary schools are primarily located in urban areas.
- In urban areas, the story is very different: three-fifths of young adults had attended grade 12.

In rural areas, girls have far less access to education than boys

- Girls are less likely than boys to be enrolled in rural areas, because girls are buried under domestic work, because parents are afraid to let girls commute, because schools lack toilets and water to help girls deal with their periods, because of child marriage, and because parents do not want to 'waste' household resources on girls' education.
- In urban areas this is not true. Adolescent girls attend as regularly as boys, reach secondary school as often, and complete grade 12 at similar rates. Urban differences are due to migrants.

Adolescents enrolled at endline



AFAR

'We can't send the girls... For the boys, they are not so busy and can go for schooling.' (mother)

OROMIA

'You wake up early... You go to the river to fetch water... There is no way to study your lessons.' (16-year-old girl)

URBAN

'There is no girl from here that reaches grade 7 or 8.'
(22-year-old young woman, displaced)

Marriage almost always ends girls' education

Adolescent girls enrolled — never-married against ever-married

AFAR

44% vs 13%

OROMIA

44% vs 5%

URBAN

83% vs 27%

- Marriage and schooling are treated as alternatives for girls, not as things that can run alongside one another.
- Husbands decide whether a wife may attend school, and most decide that she may not.
- Even where a husband agrees, a young bride has no time for lessons or homework—and once she has a child, none at all.
- The loss is permanent. Girls who marry leave with fewer grades than their unmarried peers, and almost none of them return.
- The causation runs both ways. Girls with no school within reach marry earlier, and girls who marry stop attending.

AFAR

'I dropped out of school when I married... It is my husband who kept me back from learning.'

(25-year-old young woman)

OROMIA

'You can attend school well before marriage... after marriage attending school is challenging.'

(20-year-old young woman)

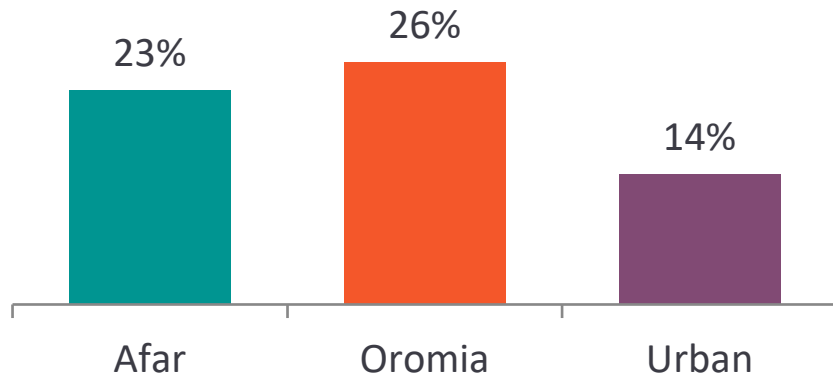
URBAN

'Since he is the leader of the family, I could not decide.'

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

Teacher violence remains common in rural areas

Hit by a teacher in the past year, of those enrolled



- Students are hit by educators for many reasons—talking in class, lateness, absence, unfinished homework, academic mistakes, and not having the correct school supplies.
- Urban students are less at risk than rural students in part because urban students are almost exclusively enrolled at secondary and post-secondary levels, while rural students are often still in primary school.
- Boys are hit more often than girls, because girls are more compliant. Girls are most often hit for lateness and unfinished homework, both of which follow from the work they are expected to do at home.

AFAR

'The teacher flogged my hand and my back using a stick. It was painful.'

(15-year-old boy)

OROMIA

'Females are more malleable. The male is rigid—this is why they beat the male more often.'

(16-year-old boy)

OROMIA

'I would leave school early to do works. The next morning, they would beat us.'

(19-year-old young woman)

AFAR

'If the teacher punishes you, my family see it as normal—they assume he is correcting your behaviour.'

(18-year-old young woman)

Disability limits young people's access to education

Disability vs. no disability

**EVER ENROLLED FORMAL
EDUCATION**

78% vs 93%

MEAN GRADES ATTENDED

5.9 vs 7.7

- Young people with disabilities are less likely to enrol in school than their peers without disabilities.
- This is due to the stigma that surrounds disability, and also to the fact that special needs education is exclusively available in towns and cities.
- Where young people with disabilities DO enrol, they enrol later, repeat more often (because teachers and learning materials are poorly suited) and drop out sooner.
- Young people with disabilities who are afforded the opportunity to attend special needs schools find the experience transformative.

OROMIA

'I never heard of that... If there is an education for children like me, I could have attended school.'

(14-year-old girl with a vision impairment, never enrolled)

URBAN

'Most of the disabled people are getting an education through the inclusive approach... our city could be the role model.'

(key informant, Bureau of Education, Dire Dawa)

Quality deficits in rural areas are large

- Especially in Oromia, classrooms are often severely over-crowded.
- In Afar, teachers often do not speak Af-Afar.
- Rural classrooms are short of learning materials. Two or three students share one textbook, some subjects have no textbook at all, and desks run out. Shortages became far worse when the curriculum changed in 2021.
- Teachers are frequently absent. In Afar they leave their posts altogether when there is no water or food in the kebele.
- Teachers are assigned to subjects they were never trained to teach.
- Children are often promoted whether or not they have learnt anything, so some arrive in grade 5 or 6 still unable to read or write.
- Young people drop out because of this—they can see they are learning too little to justify the time and money it takes to go to school.

OROMIA

'In this school there are 12 teachers, while there are 894 students.'

(educator)

AFAR

'Normally the students don't understand what the teachers say in Amharic.'

(16-year-old girl)

URBAN

'The school here is not active. Teachers come sometimes, but they are absent other times.'

(19-year-old young woman, displaced)

Exam failure has become a crisis

- At the national level, only 13% of students who sat the university entrance exam in 2026 passed—up from 5% the year GAGE field work was done.
- Many schools in rural areas did not have a single student pass.
- Boys' pass rate is higher than girls', because girls are given so much less time to study.



Students at school, Afar, Ethiopia ©
Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2025

OROMIA

'Even very clever students aren't passing... It is making our students hopeless.'

(educator)

OROMIA

'No female student has passed the grade 8 exam.'

(18-year-old young woman)

URBAN

'I took the national entrance exam, but I failed.'

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

Priorities for programming and policy

1

Build schools offering more grades closer to rural children—and ensure that they are equipped with desks and learning materials.

2

Reduce the cost of education by providing students from poor households with free uniforms and school supplies—and stepped-up access to the PSNP.

3

Invest in campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of education—including for girls and those with disabilities—and how parents can practically support educational success.

4

Invest in teacher training, including on non-violent discipline and by building a cadre of Afar (+ other linguistic minorities) speaking teachers through service-linked scholarships.

5

Empower girls with structured girls' / gender clubs that address gender norms—and expand outreach to girls who have been married.

6

Restore school feeding, especially in Afar, as a way to attract students to school.

7

Ensure all schools have water and sex segregated toilets.

8

Fund tutoring and boarding for rural students, especially girls and especially in the years they sit gateway exams.

9

Expand disability inclusive education and see that 'regular' classroom teachers are trained and equipped to educate those with disabilities. Pair this with efforts to reduce stigma.

10

Widen second-chance routes such as night school—but make these routes age segregated to safeguard younger students.

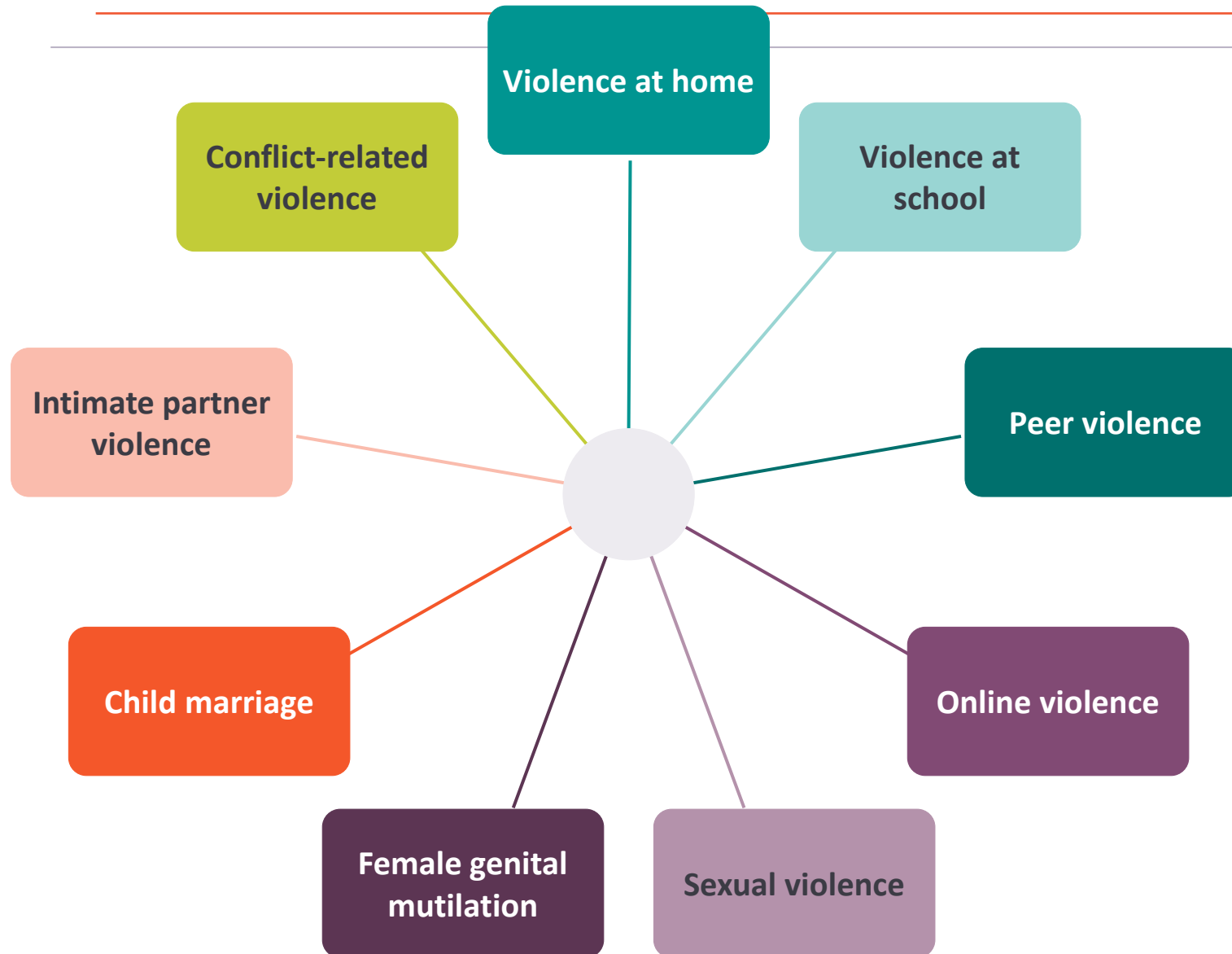


Ethiopian young people's bodily integrity: endline findings from GAGE

Dr Guday Emirie and Workneh Yadete

Adolescent Rights and Resilience International Conference,
September 2026, Addis Ababa

What do we mean by bodily integrity?



Where the evidence comes from

- Sample is 55% female and 45% male.
- Two cohorts: mean age 18.3 and 22.5 at endline.
- Multiple locations:
 - Rural Hari Rasu, Afar (n=732)
 - Rural East Hararghe, Oromia (n=2166)
 - Urban Batu (Oromia), Debre Tabor (Amhara) and Dire Dawa (n=2521)
- Young people were followed for 5 rounds—baseline (2017-2018) to endline (2024-2025).

Corporal punishment is widely believed necessary to childrearing

- At endline, one-fifth of young people had been hit by a caregiver in the past year.
- Violence is seen as necessary—by caregivers and young people—to teach children how to behave, including—for girls—how to be 'proper women'.
- Gender also shapes how violence is meted out. While girls are not immune, boys tend to bear the brunt of physical violence starting in early adolescence, because by then girls are generally better behaved.
- The risk of caregiver violence has more than halved since Round 2 (2019-2020).
- Declines are gendered. For girls, this is generally because they have been socialised further into compliance. For boys, it is because they are often stronger and faster than their parents.
- Different prevalence rates across locations primarily reflect awareness. In urban areas, young people are more likely to recognise violence for what it is.

AFAR

15%

'I beat my children when they misbehave. If they are not beaten, they will not be corrected.'

(Young father)

OROMIA

21%

'They tied my hands behind me... They beat me hard... their intention was to correct me.'

(19-year-old young man)

URBAN

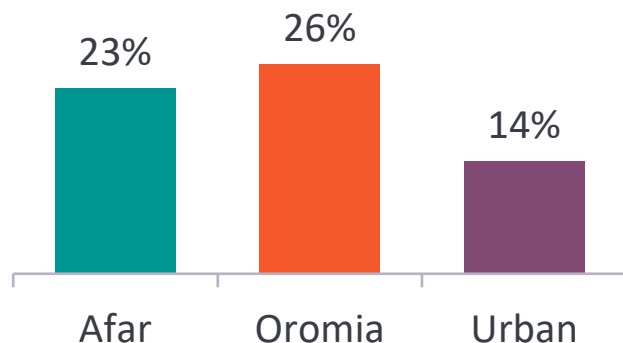
30%

'I punish with whatever is available. There was a time I threw a knife at my children.'

(Mother, Dire Dawa)

Teacher violence remains common in rural areas

*Hit by a teacher in the past year,
of those enrolled*



- Students are hit by educators for many reasons—talking in class, lateness, absence, unfinished homework, academic mistakes, and not having the correct school supplies.
- Urban students are less at risk than rural students in part because urban students are almost exclusively enrolled at secondary and post-secondary levels, while rural students are often still in primary school.
- Boys are hit more often than girls, because girls are more compliant. Girls are most often hit for lateness and unfinished homework, both of which follow from the work they are expected to do at home.

AFAR

'The teacher flogged my hand and my back using a stick. It was painful.'

(15-year-old boy)

OROMIA

'Females are more malleable. The male is rigid—this is why they beat the male more often.'

(16-year-old boy)

OROMIA

'I would leave school early to do works. The next morning, they would beat us.'

(19-year-old young woman)

AFAR

'If the teacher punishes you, my family see it as normal—they assume he is correcting your behaviour.'

(18-year-old young woman)

Nevertheless, teacher violence has more than halved as young people age

Fall in the risk of being hit by a teacher, Round 2 to endline

–59%

Afar

–54%

Oromia

–70%

Urban

- Declines are largely related to students' development: they are better behaved in the classroom—and they are adult sized.
- Declines are also due to efforts to reduce corporal punishment—including teacher training and providing students with more and better ways to report.
- Only one-quarter of students who experienced or witnessed teacher violence in the past year ever told someone.

URBAN

'In high school, a teacher cannot dare to beat students. Students are older.'

(22-year-old young man, Dire Dawa)

OROMIA

'Below 15, he will be advised by a stick. Above 15, beating him has no result.'

(16-year-old boy)

OROMIA

'Now they ask you to bring your parent if you do something wrong. They don't beat you.'

(18-year-old young man)

URBAN

'There was training for the teachers on positive discipline. It had a great impact on their attitudes.'

(Teacher, Dire Dawa)

AFAR

'If the teacher punishes you, my family see it as normal—they assume he is correcting your behaviour.'

(18-year-old young woman)

Peer violence has declined—but also transformed

- Especially in rural areas, few young people reported experiencing peer violence in the past year.
- Higher urban rates partly reflect awareness rather than incidence.
- Peer violence has declined in every location since Round 2, as young people have grown up and stopped hitting each other and calling each other names.
- Violence between young males, however, has become more dangerous—as they fight over girls and to prove that they are strong, and increasingly use weapons.
- Much of this violence is not seen by young people as 'peer violence'. They perceive it instead as clan discipline (in Afar), ethnic violence (especially in mixed urban areas), or youth and gang violence, because the perpetrators—while similarly aged—are not felt to be peers.

AFAR

5%

'Sometimes people die when the fiema punishes them hard, but no one will be blamed.'

(17-year-old boy)

OROMIA

11%

'This is caused by issues with a girlfriend. They hit each other with fists or tools like a menca (scythe), and break each other's teeth.'

(17-year-old boy)

URBAN

24%

'It is the Oromos who throw stones at us. They think this neighbourhood is Amhara.'

(23-year-old young man, Dire Dawa)

Sexual violence is rarely reported—for myriad reasons

- Reporting is low everywhere: only 2% of young women in Afar, 5% in Oromia and 15% in urban sites reported having ever experienced sexual violence.
- Everyday forms—unwanted touching, teasing, having schoolbooks taken, being followed—are described as ordinary behaviour by young men and young women alike. They are not perceived as sexual violence.
- In Oromia, abduction into marriage is rarely counted as sexual violence, because it almost always ends in a marriage that the community then accepts.
- Survivors are widely held to be at fault, and young people are aware that prosecution is rare. Both suppress reporting further.
- As with other forms of violence, the gap between locations mainly reflects recognition. Urban young women are more likely to identify what happened to them as violence.

AFAR

2%

'We never consider unwanted touching or teasing as sexual violence. We consider these things normal.'

(Militia member)

OROMIA

5%

'If she refuses to go willingly, they abduct her and take her to a far place.'

(16-year-old girl)

URBAN

15%

'Why bother reporting the case to the police if you don't get the justice?'

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

Online violence is emerging faster than young people's ability to recognise it as violence

3%

had been treated badly online

43%

had seen messages targeting ethnic or religious groups

14%

had seen sexual images online

- Direct online abuse is rarely reported, but exposure to harmful content is widespread—and young people do not generally understand either as violence.
- Hate speech aimed at ethnic and religious groups has moved existing community tension onto social media, where it reaches young people who would not otherwise encounter it.
- Two forms dominate young people's accounts. Financial scams target those with least education and most need. Sexual extortion begins with a request for images and continues as a threat.

URBAN

'There are those who ask girls to send their photos with their naked body... They use it as a tool to frighten the girl. They threaten to share it in public, or with her boyfriend. So she can't stop sending the photos as long as they continue to threaten her.'

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

Disability compounds young people's risk of violence

- Young people with disabilities report more violence at home than their peers: 29% vs. 23%.
- Respondents reported that even more than active violence, many young people with disabilities are simply neglected by their caregivers.
- Young people with disabilities are less likely to know where to seek out support services than their peers: 63% vs. 74%.
- Impairment limits the ability to avoid violence—to run from a fight, to leave a household, or to flee danger where there is conflict.
- At baseline and midline, young people with disabilities reported elevated rates of teacher and peer violence. By endline this was not the case—because so many were out of school and isolated at home.

OROMIA

'Adolescents with disabilities don't even leave the house.'

(Key informant)

OROMIA

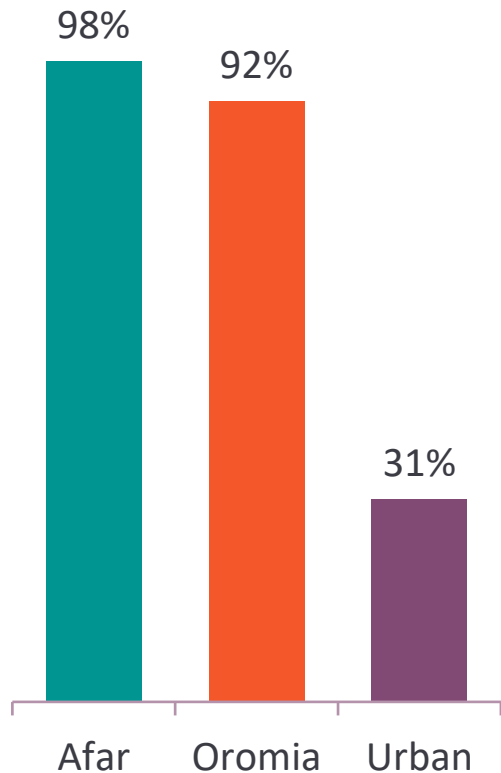
'If a child is born with a disability... they say it is the work of God.'

(Key informant)



FGM remains near universal in rural sites in Afar and Oromia—and common in some urban populations as well

Girls and young women who have undergone FGM



- FGM is understood as a religious requirement and as a condition of marriage—because of the way in which it controls female sexuality.
- Urban rates vary by religion. In Dire Dawa, 79% of Muslim young women have undergone FGM, against 22% of Orthodox young women.
- Awareness of harm is lowest where the practice is most common. Only 34% of young people in Oromia believe FGM carries risks, against 86% in urban sites.
- There are also wide variations in type. In Oromia, excision is most common. In Afar, most girls are infibulated.

OROMIA

'It is haram to be not mutilated according to Sharia's rule.'

(20-year-old young woman)

AFAR

'Unless girls are circumcised, they will become rude, disobedient and have high sexual desire.'

(17-year-old boy)

OROMIA

'It is culture. Every human being practices it.'

(Father)

Girls undergo FGM at different ages—with very different implications for their agency in the process.



In **South Gondar**, **Amhara** and most communities in **Afar**, girls undergo FGM in infancy, often when they are only a few weeks old.



In other communities in **Afar**, girls undergo FGM in early childhood.



In **East Hararghe**, **Oromia**, most girls undergo FGM in late childhood or early adolescence.



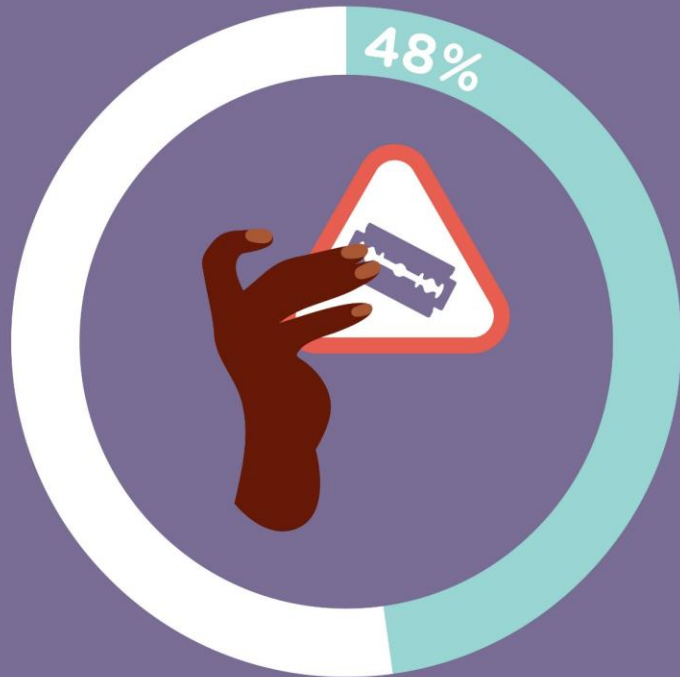
In **Somali**, most girls undergo FGM in late childhood or early adolescence—but for some, FGM is delayed until middle adolescence.

‘When my friends prepared to have it [FGM], I also asked my mother to help me have it... That brings shame for you to stay without. You want to have it like your friends.’

(17-year-old girl, East Hararghe, Oromia)

In Oromia, where girls usually undergo FGM in early adolescence, girls often ask for FGM—to be like their peers and to show that they are growing up.

In pastoralist areas, young people have limited knowledge of the law prohibiting FGM.



In **Afar**, 48% of young people were unaware that **FGM is illegal**. Girls' knowledge of the law was better than boys'.



In **Somali**, 82% of young people were unaware that **FGM is illegal**. Two-thirds did not know what the recent fatwa said about FGM.

66%

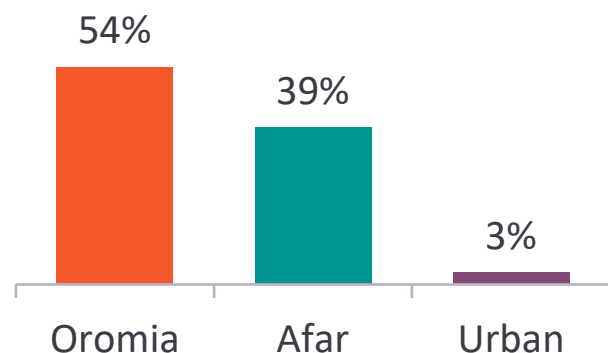
'I used to think FGM was legal, but now I know it's illegal.'

(20-year-old young man from Fafan, Somali—took part in Save the Children programming)

Afar and Somali regional government's have not ratified the Federal law that forbids FGM.

Child marriage remains common for rural girls but is increasingly rare in urban settings

Adolescent girls married before age 18



- Just over half of adolescent girls in Oromia and around two-fifths in Afar married before 18, against only 3% in urban sites.
- Very early marriage is concentrated in Oromia, where 14% of adolescent girls married before the age of 15 and respondents agree that the age of marriage is declining.
- Boys marry as children too, though far less often—around 6% in both rural sites.

OROMIA

'Getting married is better than education... otherwise, you will have a chance of only falling into the hands of old husbands.'

(15-year-old girl)

AFAR

'Most girls in our community will marry when they turn 12 or 13, because they will start menstruating.'

(Militia member)

URBAN

'My teacher stopped a girl from getting married... She has now completed 12th grade.'

(16-year-old girl, Dire Dawa)

There are major gaps in terms of knowledge about the legal age of marriage, esp. in communities where Shariah Courts sanction marriages

Afar:

At endline, **23%** of young people knew that marriage before age 18 is illegal.
Males were 8 percentage points more likely to know than females.

Amhara:

At endline, **71%** of young people knew that marriage before age 18 is illegal.
Females were 12 percentage points more likely to know than males.

Oromia:

At endline, **42%** of young people knew that marriage before age 18 is illegal.
There were no gender differences.

Somali:

At midline, **7%** of young people correctly identified age 18 as the minimum age at which girls may marry.
Males were 5 percentage points more likely to do this than females.

Urban:

At endline, **69%** of young people knew that marriage before age 18 is illegal.
There were no gender differences.

Child marriage type and drivers vary by location

- In Afar, marriage is a clan obligation. Girls marry maternal cousins and have no say into which cousin or when—91% of marriages were decided by parents.
- In Oromia, most child marriages are adolescent initiated—76% of young brides reported that they decided. Many ‘chosen’ marriages follow sustained harassment by young men, or abduction, after which returning home is not possible.
- In urban areas, child marriage is sometimes driven by adolescent pregnancy.
- Age gaps differ accordingly: young brides in Afar were on average 5.8 years younger than their husbands, against 3.0 years in Oromia, where young people marry age-mates.
- Readiness is gendered everywhere. 84% of young men said they were ready to marry at the time, against 62% of young women.

AFAR

'I got married when I was 10. My absuma asked my parents, and it was impossible to refuse.'

(18-year-old young woman)

OROMIA

'They want a girl younger than them. He wants to lead her as per his needs.'

(Key informant)

OROMIA

'I told her that I loved her... I asked for her phone number... Now, we are preparing for marriage.'

(17-year-old boy, of a 10-year-old girl)

URBAN

'Her parents had no choice but to give her to the boy, since she was already pregnant.'

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

Decision-making on child marriage

Girls in Afar and South Gondar have little input into marriage decision-making compared to their peers in urban areas, Oromia and Somali.

In Afar culture, there is no practice of asking for girls' consent
20-year-old married woman, married at 15, Hari Rasu, Afar

If she gets married at her young age, she will be safe from violence.'
Father, Northwestern Tigray

Because the decision-maker differs, so must the response—clan elders and parents in Afar, parents in Amhara and Tigray; young men and their peers in Oromia and Somali.

They choose each other.
Previously, parents had more influence and decided who the girl would marry. Nowadays, with mobile phones and easier travel, it's rare for parents to choose for the girl.
Religious leader, Harshen, Somali

It was my desire [to get married], and my family did not interfere.
15-year-old married girl, East Hararghe



Very few girls married as children remain in education after marriage

The enrolment gap between married and unmarried girls is largest in East Hararghe (Oromia)

Afar:

Of adolescent girls, **7.4%** of those who were married as children—vs. **45%** of those who have never married—are enrolled in school.

Amhara:

Of adolescent girls, **10.9%** of those who have been married—vs. **44%** of those who have never married—are enrolled in school.

(Enrolment rates are historically higher but are shaped by recent conflict.)

Oromia:

Of adolescent girls, **4.4%** of those who have been married—vs. **44%** of those who have never married—are enrolled in school.

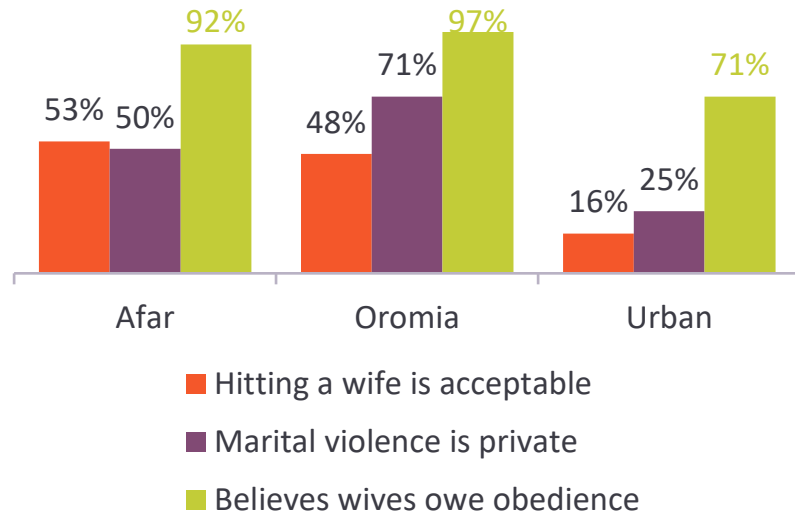
Somali:

No young brides are enrolled in our sample.

Urban:

Of adolescent girls, **10.9%** of those who were married as children— vs. **83%** of those who have never married — are enrolled in school

Marital violence is normalised



- Most young people—nearly all in Afar and Oromia—believe that wives owe their husbands total obedience.
- Young people—and especially young males—often believe that a husband has a right to discipline his wife, including with physical violence.
- As more girls and young women have married, and been beaten, fewer believe that wife beating is acceptable.
- Because marital violence is seen as private—including by young wives and their parents—it is rare for girls and young women to seek help.
- Traditional justice tends to restore the household rather than protect the woman: the husband compensates her family, and the wife returns.

AFAR

'It is not for hatred that I beat her, but to correct her so she does not disobey again.'

(24-year-old young man)

OROMIA

'We would punish the husband... he would compensate her family and stay away while she recovers.'

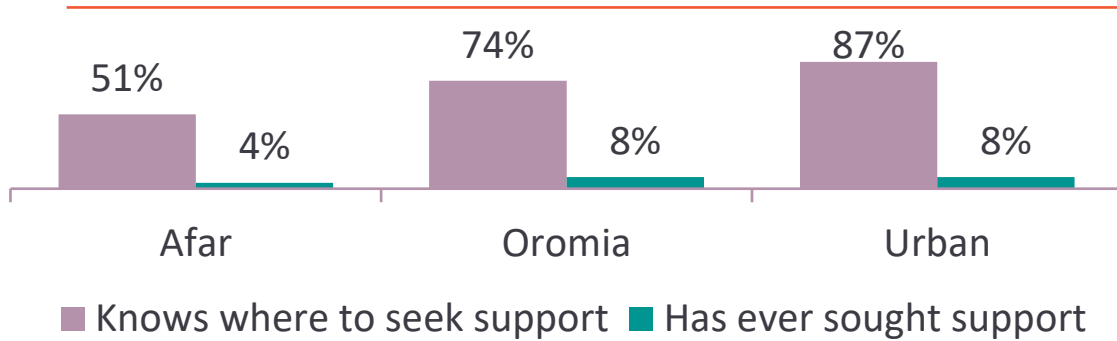
(Clan elder)

URBAN

'I do not talk to anyone when he beats me. Even if I did, they cannot bring any change.'

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

Young people increasingly know where to seek help, but they rarely do so



- At endline, most young people knew where to get help if they experienced violence, but very few had done so.
- Knowledge of how to access violence support services improved from 55% to 74% between Round 2 and endline.
- Awareness is shaped by location: young people in Afar were the least likely to know where to get help, those in urban areas the most.
- Help seeking is also shaped by location: Afar young people were the least likely to have sought help.
- Young people's silence is shaped by shame, fear and a reliance on customary justice.

Has ever sought help for violence



OROMIA

'[I told] him he can't beat her in front of me.'

(Father, on his son beating his wife)

AFAR

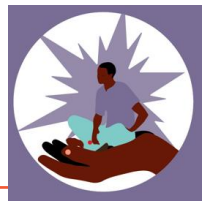
'Wife-beating is decreasing as women speak out.'

(30-year-old woman)

URBAN

'Why report to the police if you don't get justice?'

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



Priorities for programming and policy

1

Work to shift beliefs that corporal punishment is required for childrearing—scaling up parenting education and using mass and social media to raise awareness that everyone has a right to be free of violence.

2

Continue teacher training on positive discipline approaches and expand anonymous reporting options for students and parents.

3

Support boys and young men to show masculine strength in positive ways—rather than fighting or committing sexual and gender-based violence.

4

Empower girls to recognise and report violence, whilst strengthening referral monitoring and follow up.

5

Continue, scale up and more carefully tailor programming aimed at eliminating FGM and child marriage (both family arranged and adolescent initiated marriages).

6

Lower barriers to reporting, including in conflict-affected contexts and for those with disabilities—expanding support services, securing access to formal justice, and raising awareness that victims are never to blame.

7

Tackle the stigma that surrounds disability, using mass and social media campaigns as well as efforts embedded in schools.

8

End forced recruitment, and work to help those affected re-integrate into their communities.



FGM and child marriage attitudes, norms and practices in Afar and Somali regions: Midline findings

FGM and child marriage attitudes, norms and practices in Afar and Somali regions

Midline findings

Kefyalew Endale, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall, Workneh Yadete, Nicola Jones, Yitagesu Gebeyehu, Abdilahi Abdelsalam, Kassahun Tilahun, Fitsum Workneh and Tasew Woldehanna

April 2025

The impacts of the northern Ethiopia conflict on adolescents in Tigray

Policy Brief

July 2024

The impacts of the northern Ethiopia conflict on adolescents in Tigray

Elizabeth Presler-Marshall, Kefyalew Endale, Workneh Yadete, Nicola Jones, Tasew Woldehanna, Kiros Biharu, Amanuel Gebrehiwot, Tewodros Abdisaba, Kassahun Tilahun and Abel Tesfaye

Introduction

The devastating civil war in northern Ethiopia that began in November 2020 and ended with a peace deal brokered in Pretoria in November 2022 has had far-reaching effects in Tigray. As many as 300,000 to 800,000 people are estimated to have lost their lives (Capula et al., 2022) and more than 18 million were displaced (ICM, 2022).

Relatively little is known about the specific impacts of the conflict on young people in Tigray, despite the fact that 34.4% of the country's population are between the ages of 10 and 24 years (UNICEF, 2023). With ongoing consultations across the country about transitional justice (UNICEF, 2023), this is an important juncture at which to consider young people's experiences and priorities for post-conflict rebuilding and reconciliation. As such, this short research brief synthesises findings from a mixed methods study carried out in the eastern, northwestern and southern zones of Tigray in early 2024 with 703 adolescents and 375 caregivers. The study focused on the effects of the conflict on Tigrayan households' livelihoods and food security, and on adolescents' bodily integrity (including girls' risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage), psychosocial well-being, education and health. This brief begins with a short overview of the study sample and methods, followed by a summary of our key findings, before concluding with priorities for policy and programme action.

Suggested citation: Presler-Marshall, E., Endale, K., Yadete, W., Jones, N., Woldehanna, T., Biharu, K., and Tesfaye, A. (2024) The impacts of the northern Ethiopia conflict on adolescents in Tigray. Policy brief London: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence

Policy Brief

April 2025

FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia's Afar and Somali regions

Patterns, risks and priority entry points for change

Authors: Kefyalew Endale, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall, Workneh Yadete, Nicola Jones, Yitagesu Gebeyehu, Abdilahi Abdelsalam, Kassahun Tilahun, Tasew Woldehanna and Kiya Gashaghe

Introduction

The Ethiopian government is committed to ending female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. The country has a strong legal framework, which outlawed both practices two decades ago, as well as multiple policies and strategies designed to eliminate these harmful practices (Disarmament and Civilised Project, 2023). Despite these commitments, and the sustained efforts of the government and its development partners, progress remains highly uneven and too slow to meet targets. Although prevalence rates of both FGM and child marriage are falling at the national level, the absolute number of girls at risk continues to rise, due to population growth (UNICEF, 2023). Girls in the pastoralist regions of Afar and Somali are at especially high risk. According to the most recent Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS), rates of FGM among girls aged 15–19 years in both regions are over 80% and stable, with most girls subject to the most severe type of FGM – infibulation (Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA) and ICF, 2017). Rates of child marriage are also very high. Among young women aged 20–24 years, 67% in Afar and 40% in Somali had been married prior to age 18.

1. Between 2010 and 2015, the percentage of girls aged 15–19 years who had undergone FGM fell from 88% to 57% in Afar and 63% to 43% in Somali. In 2015, the percentage of girls who were married prior to age 18 was 18% in Afar and 15% in Somali.

2. In the Afar and Somali regions, 81% of girls aged 15–19 years had undergone FGM. In the Somali region, the percentage of girls who had undergone FGM was 81% in Afar and 81% in Somali. In the Afar region, the percentage of girls who had undergone FGM was 81% in Afar and 81% in Somali. In the Somali region, the percentage of girls who had undergone FGM was 81% in Afar and 81% in Somali.

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FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia's Afar and Somali regions Patterns, risks and priority entry points for change

For more resources see:
<https://www.gage.odi.org/publications/>

Adolescent girls' and women's economic and social empowerment in pastoralist Ethiopia: midline survey (2023/2024)

Core respondent module

Endale, K., Yadete, W., Woldehanna, T., Presler-Marshall, E., Jones, N., Gebeyehu, Y., Abdelsalam, A. and Tesfaye, A.

December 2024

Adolescent girls' and women's economic and social empowerment in pastoralist Ethiopia: midline survey (2023/2024)

Young people's development and well-being in Dire Dawa City Administration: GAGE endl ine evidence

December 2025

Elizabeth Presler-Marshall, Prabha Raghavan, Kefyalew Endale, Workneh Yadete, Nicola Jones, Joam Hunoro, Sarah Baird, Mishale Karyen, Abraham Alemu, Mazanga Birra, Nardos Chirsa, Asham Assazinew, Fitsum Workneh, Kassahun Tilahun and Bilisa Abate

The impacts of the northern Ethiopia conflict on adolescents in Afar

A generation disrupted

How conflict has reshaped young people's capabilities in Afar, Amhara and Tigray

GAGE evidence, 2023-2025

Tigray

Afar

Amhara

Yitagesu Gebeyehu, Mishalle Kayani and Asmeret Gebrehiwot



Presentation overview

Conflict has had negative effects on all young people's capabilities in all three regions - but through different mechanisms, at different speeds, and with different gender patterns.

1 Sample and methods

2 Conflict-related violence What young people saw and survived

3 Livelihoods, food and aid Assets, hunger, PSNP and emergency relief

4 Education and learning Access, gender and catch-up

5 Health services Disruption and partial recovery

6 GBV Sexual violence and child marriage

7 Psychosocial well-being Trauma and the absence of support

8 Economic transitions Migration, militias and waithood

9 Voice and agency Mobility and participation

10 Priorities For policy and programming

Sample and methods: three separate studies in three locations

Afar

- August 2023-January 2024
- Kilbety Rasu: Aba'ala, Magale, Koneba
- Quantitative:
 - 755 adolescents (10-19)
 - Half girls, half boys
 - Mean age 15.3
 - 375 caregivers
- Qualitative:
 - 144 adolescents
 - 72 parents
 - 22 key informants
- Conflict-focused study

Amhara

- Late 2024-mid 2025
- Rural South Gondar & Debre Tabor
- Quantitative:
 - 2,610 young people (16-24)
 - Half rural, half urban
 - Half females, half males
 - Mean age 20.1
 - Longitudinal panel includes 1,824 since Round 2
- Qualitative:
 - 165 young people
 - 118 caregivers
 - 64 KIs
- GAGE longitudinal research has been tracking young people since 2017

Tigray

- January-February 2024
- Atsbi Wemberta, Tsimbela, Samre
- Quantitative:
 - 753 adolescents (10-19)
 - Half girls, half boys
 - Mean age 15.3
 - 375 caregivers
- Qualitative:
 - 144 adolescents
 - 72 parents
 - 22 key informants
- Conflict-focused study

Findings



Most young people witnessed violence and a sizeable minority experienced it

Afar

- 27% witnessed violence with weapons
- 29% were injured-- 9% seriously
- 55% of caregivers lost a clan member
- 5% were asked to perpetrate violence

'We found our people hanged from the tree... I saw four people by my naked eye.'

13-year-old boy, Afar

Amhara

- 35% of rural and 42% of urban witnessed violence with weapons
- 7% of rural and 5% of urban were harmed directly
- 9% of rural and 4% of urban were asked to perpetrate violence
- Violence comes from government forces and Fano militias

'What I observed in this town during the conflict... was unforgettable. I saw too many human corpses thrown on the street like trash.'

18-year-old young man, Debre Tabor

Tigray

- 39% witnessed violence with weapons
- 23% were injured-- 2% seriously
- 15% of caregivers lost a household member
- 4% were asked to perpetrate violence

'We have seen our friends and comrades laying besides us, and we had left their dead body everywhere.'

17-year-old girl, Tsimbila, Tigray

Households lost the assets they live on - and hunger followed

Afar

- 78% lost productive assets, mainly livestock
- 73% displaced-- 60% had homes damaged
- Only 16% still live off livestock - fewer than live off casual labour

'Our cattle were our hope and our life, so since we lost our cattle, my parents could not afford us with food...'

15-year-old boy, Afar

Amhara

- Rural households hold one-third of the assets they held at Round 2
- 29% of rural and 41% of urban young people had a household member lose work
- Rural hunger doubled

'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.'

16-year-old girl, rural South Gondar

Tigray

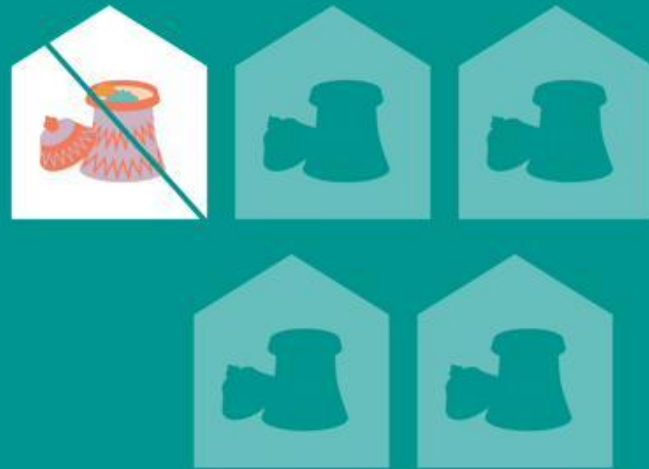
- 82% of households displaced
- 45% lost productive assets-- 24% lost crops
- 41% of adolescents report a family member going hungry in the past month

'My sisters are doing daily labour work and they are feeding my mother... Previously they were going to school.'

17-year-old girl, Tsimbila, Tigray

Food insecurity is a growing concern.

One-fifth of young people live in a severely food insecure household.



Food insecurity is just as common in Debre Tabor as it is in rural South Gondar.

In rural South Gondar, young people were more than twice as likely to report being hungry at **endline** than they were at **Round 2**.



Amhara



Conflict has devastated rural households' assets. Households have one-third as many assets at endline as they did at Round 2.



Amhara

Emergency aid is not meeting need

85%

of caregivers in Afar had ever received emergency aid

7%

of rural households in South Gondar received any emergency aid in three years

99%

of caregivers in Tigray had ever received emergency aid - 95% of it food

- **Coverage is not the same as sufficiency.** At the height of the Tigray conflict, emergency aid still reached only 56% of households in a single year.
- PSNP enrolment is falling where conflict is active.
 - In rural South Gondar, 21% of households have ever benefitted and only 11% do now; in urban Debre Tabor only 7% had ever benefitted and 4% were current beneficiaries.
 - In Tigray, 46% ever and 29% now.
 - Afar is the outlier: 77% ever, and 91% of those still receiving.

‘Out of 500 households, safety-net may give support to 100. The remaining 400 will not get it.’

18-year-old young man, Afar

‘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.’

23-year-old young man, rural South Gondar

Conflict has devastated access to education

Afar

- Only 82% had ever enrolled - the lowest baseline of the three
- 85% said conflict disrupted schooling
- 85% of those enrolled before the war re-enrolled after it

'Before this conflict our children had a place to sleep, healthy food to eat, school to attend... But now they are in hunger.'

Mother, Afar

Amhara

- Enrolment fell since Round 2-- 49 percentage points in rural areas and 29 in Debre Tabor
- Only a third of rural adolescents, were enrolled at endline - some schools have been closed for five years
- Males were especially disadvantaged – 45 percentage points decline vs 39% for females

'Parents worry sick when their children go outside... The school is closed, and children are staying at home.'

Mother, rural South Gondar

Tigray

- 98% had ever enrolled, but only 62% were enrolled at the survey
- 95% said conflict disrupted schooling; 77% lost two to three years
- 69% re-enrolled when schools reopened

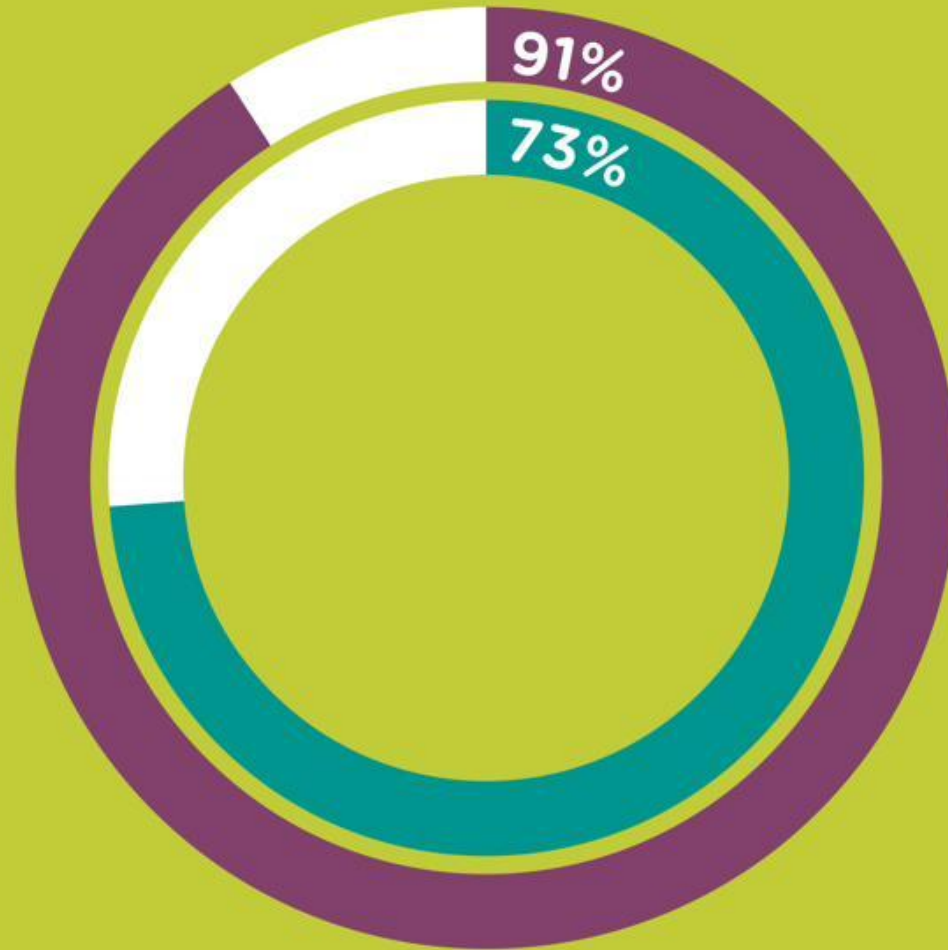
'There are many girls who didn't want to return back to school thinking that there is no point.'

15-year-old girl, Samre, Tigray

Aspirations for education remain high, despite the conflict—but they are higher in Debre Tabor than in rural areas.

In **Debre Tabor**, 91% of young people would like to complete university.

In **rural areas**, this is true of only 73% of young people.



Amhara

In Amhara and Tigray, boys' education was disrupted more than girls'

Boys have been pulled into paid work—and the conflict itself.

Amhara

- Young males are falling behind: enrolment fell 45 points for young males since Round 2, against 39 for young females
- Rural school leavers: young females completed 7.4 grades, young males 6.3

Tigray

- Girls are ahead: 65% of girls are enrolled, against 62% of adolescents overall
- 73% of girls re-enrolled, against 66% of boys
- Enrolled girls have completed 4.7 grades, boys 3.8

'The problem is now on the side of the boys. That is because they are joining the Fano.'

Teacher, rural South Gondar

'Things are changed now. They [boys] don't want to learn. They hate schooling... We think of the martyrs and we don't have the strength to learn.'

18-year-old young man, Samre, Tigray

Educational catch-up programming has not been scaled to need

- Buildings, books, records and teachers were all targets.
- Teaching capacity was lost with the teachers. In Tigray, many teachers were killed or displaced. In rural South Gondar, teachers report threats of abduction for teaching against militia instructions.
- Tigray's accelerated learning programme asks students to cover a full year in a single semester - after three years out of school and with no remedial base to build on. Only 17% were offered catch-up tutorials, though 84% of those offered took them up.
- Afar shows the same pattern at a smaller scale: 16% were offered tutorials, and 92% of them took part. Demand is not the problem.

'The school refuse to take students who doesn't have the documents on hand. Many students here lost their documents due to the war.'

16-year-old girl, Afar

'Since 2021, the schools have been closed in the area... Since 2023, there has been conflict between the Fano and government forces.'

20-year-old young man, South Gondar

'The enemy came and set the books on fire.'

15-year-old girl, Tsimbila, Tigray

Health services have been severely disrupted

Afar

- 78% of caregivers report severe disruption to general services
- 71-79% report severe disruption across contraception, antenatal, delivery and HIV services
- Only 27% say general services have fully recovered

Amhara

- Half of young people say cost is now a major barrier - up 17 points since Round 2
- A third of rural young people say distance is a barrier
- Rural health insurance has stopped functioning

Tigray

- 74% of caregivers report severe disruption to general services
- 66% report severe disruption to contraception, antenatal and delivery care; 77% to HIV services
- Only 15% say general services have fully recovered

'While fleeing, many pregnant women faced miscarriage... many gave birth in the forest without the help of health workers. Most of those newborn infants died.'

Father, Afar

'Contraceptive did not exist even by paying our own money... Women were having children one over another.'

19-year-old young woman, Tsimbila, Tigray

The mental health toll on young people is very high

Nearly 6x

more rural young people in South Gondar were depressed at baseline than at Round 2; one in five young people were depressed overall

20%

of adolescents in Tigray screened positive for depression on the PHQ

- Qualitative interviews in all three regions describe intrusive memories, loss of any sense of the future, and - in Afar and Amhara - suicide attempts and heavy alcohol and drug use.
- In Amhara, the fear itself is chronic, because the conflict has not ended. Anticipation of violence is as disabling as exposure to it.

'We live in constant anxiety... If you don't die, you survive, but it's very terrifying.'

22-year-old young woman, Debre Tabor

'We don't know if we are alive or dead because we have not yet recovered from the trauma of the conflict.'

16-year-old girl, Tsimbila, Tigray

Many young people are depressed.



One-fifth were depressed at endline, using scores from the Patient Health Questionnaire.

In rural South Gondar, young people were nearly six times more likely to be depressed at endline than they were at Round 2.

Amhara

Despite trauma, young people do not have access to psychosocial support

- No adolescent in the Tigray qualitative sample had accessed formal psychosocial support. In addition, adults explained that they cannot help because they have had no help themselves.
- In Afar, 74% of adolescents said mental health services were severely limited during the conflict, and a third say they have not improved at all since.
- In South Gondar, formal and semi-formal psychosocial services are effectively non-existent. Only two young people in the whole qualitative sample knew of any service, both in Debre Tabor.
- Teachers are doing the work by default – at least with their students - but they are untrained, unpaid and traumatised themselves.

'Young men become hopeless and addicted after the war... They spend their time chewing khat that is to forget what happened.'

18-year-old married girl, Afar

'There is no one that provides them with counselling.'

Teacher, rural South Gondar

'We cannot provide support to adolescents and their families because first we also need support.'

Local official, Tsimbila, Tigray

Sexual violence: the survey figures capture stigma, not prevalence

2%

of girls in Afar reported rape or attempted rape on the survey

Not asked

in the South Gondar endline - phone interviews could not guarantee privacy

4%

of girls in Tigray reported rape or attempted rape on the survey

- In qualitative interviews, where interviewers had time to build trust, rape was described as routine in all three regions – by various armed groups.
- Stigma, not incidence, drives the gap between the survey and the interviews. Survivors who disclose lose marriage prospects and community standing - and in all three regions there is no functioning service to disclose to.

'In some cases 3 men raped a woman, in other cases 7... They do not want to tell that they were raped.'

Mother, Afar

'Girls and women have been raped by ... fighters... in some cases, their bodies are even cut with knives.'

Militia member, rural South Gondar

'They raped the girls and killed the boys... whatever age the girls are, they are raped.'

17-year-old girl, Samre, Tigray

Child marriage rates increased - as a means of protection and survival

Afar

- 13% of girls were already married
- Of those married before 18, 74% married after conflict broke out
- Girls are being married to older men as second, third or fourth wives to rebuild clan numbers

'We want our children to give birth to many children... we lost many during the war, we want to replace them.'

Mother, Afar

Amhara

- Qualitative research reports a resurgence where schools have closed, because girls lost the protected status of 'student' and because there is nowhere for girls to report planned marriages

'They wanted to continue their education, but the schools are closed right now... The only option left for them was marriage.'

Father, rural South Gondar

Tigray

- 4% of girls married before 18, in a sample averaging 15 years old
- Parents married daughters early to deter soldiers
- Marriage approval committees ceased functioning
- Pre-marital pregnancy also triggered child marriages in some localities

'The soldiers would refrain from sexual attacks if they learned that a girl was already married.'

19-year-old young man, Tsimbila, Tigray

Coping strategies: boys' limited choices for transition to adulthood

Afar

- Boys aim for Saudi Arabia or petty trade
- Young men cannot marry, because the livestock that paid bridewealth is gone

'Nowadays many young people particularly boys wish to migrate to Saudi Arabia and many others wish to be a merchant.'

19-year-old young man, Afar

Amhara

- Aspirations for skilled or professional work are down 27 points since Round 2
- 42% of young people believe they must migrate to reach their work goals
- Militia membership pays a salary

'Most youths joined Fano, citing as a reason the fact they do not get a job after they get educated.'

21-year-old young man, rural South Gondar

Tigray

- A key informant put jobless youth in one woreda at 12,000
- Migration to the Gulf is now the default, including for 13- and 14-year-olds
- Farming no longer pays-- fertiliser supply stopped with the war

'We have seen our parents' economy weakened, we are not able to continue learning... There are youth who started working on the gold mining.'

19-year-old young man, Samre, Tigray

Shrinking voice and agency: an under-recognised cost of conflict

- Insecurity limits mobility. In rural South Gondar, parents describe curfews, closed schools and children who cannot safely leave the compound. Because of the risk of sexual violence, girls and young women have been more impacted than boys and young men.
- Social networks have thinned alongside—since young people have no place to interact with their peers.
- Young people are absent from transitional justice and reconciliation processes in all three regions, despite being the group that fought, fled and lost schooling.
- Three-fifths of young people in South Gondar say politics is irrelevant to them - and parents actively steer sons away from it, because political visibility is dangerous.

'I hate my womanhood when I couldn't move to different places I wanted to go.'

18-year-old young woman, rural South Gondar

'Parents worry sick when their children go outside because we don't know if they will return safely. Youths find it difficult to go anywhere.'

Mother, rural South Gondar

'We gave our life so that the military wins and the enemy is out of our land, but after that, the situation seems ignoring us.'

19-year-old young woman, Tsimbila, Tigray

Priorities for policy and programming

1 Social protection

- Expand access to the PSNP and emergency aid to help families survive and rebuild.
- Once schools re-open include school feeding and distribution of educational supplies to encourage re-enrollment

2 Education

- Rebuild and restock schools - using financial incentives to attract teachers and providing young people with free school supplies and regionally tailored catch-up options.
- Develop early warning systems and community-wide protection initiatives to protect teachers and students at risk of attack by armed groups.

3 Psychosocial support

- Invest in a cadre of para-social workers to help communities process trauma.
- As an interim measure, train teachers and health extension workers in psychological first aid.

4 Livelihoods

- Restore funding for skills training and credit programmes aimed at helping young people find or make work.
- Support safe migration routes for young people escaping conflict, including strengthening justice system response vis-à-vis illegal brokers

5 Protection from gender-based violence

- Immediately rebuild the monitoring systems and justice mechanisms that prevent child marriage.
- Increase awareness about peace and security for young people in communities including strengthening security systems at woreda and kebele levels
- Expand national dialogue process to regions and ensure systematic involvement of young people
- Follow up on dialogue process with mediation and reconciliation efforts, again ensuring representation of youth.

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GenderandAdolescence

About GAGE:

- Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a ten-year (2016-2026) mixed-methods longitudinal research programme focused on what works to support adolescent girls' and boys' capabilities in the second decade of life and beyond.
- We are following the lives of 20,000 adolescents in six focal countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.



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