

Next Generation

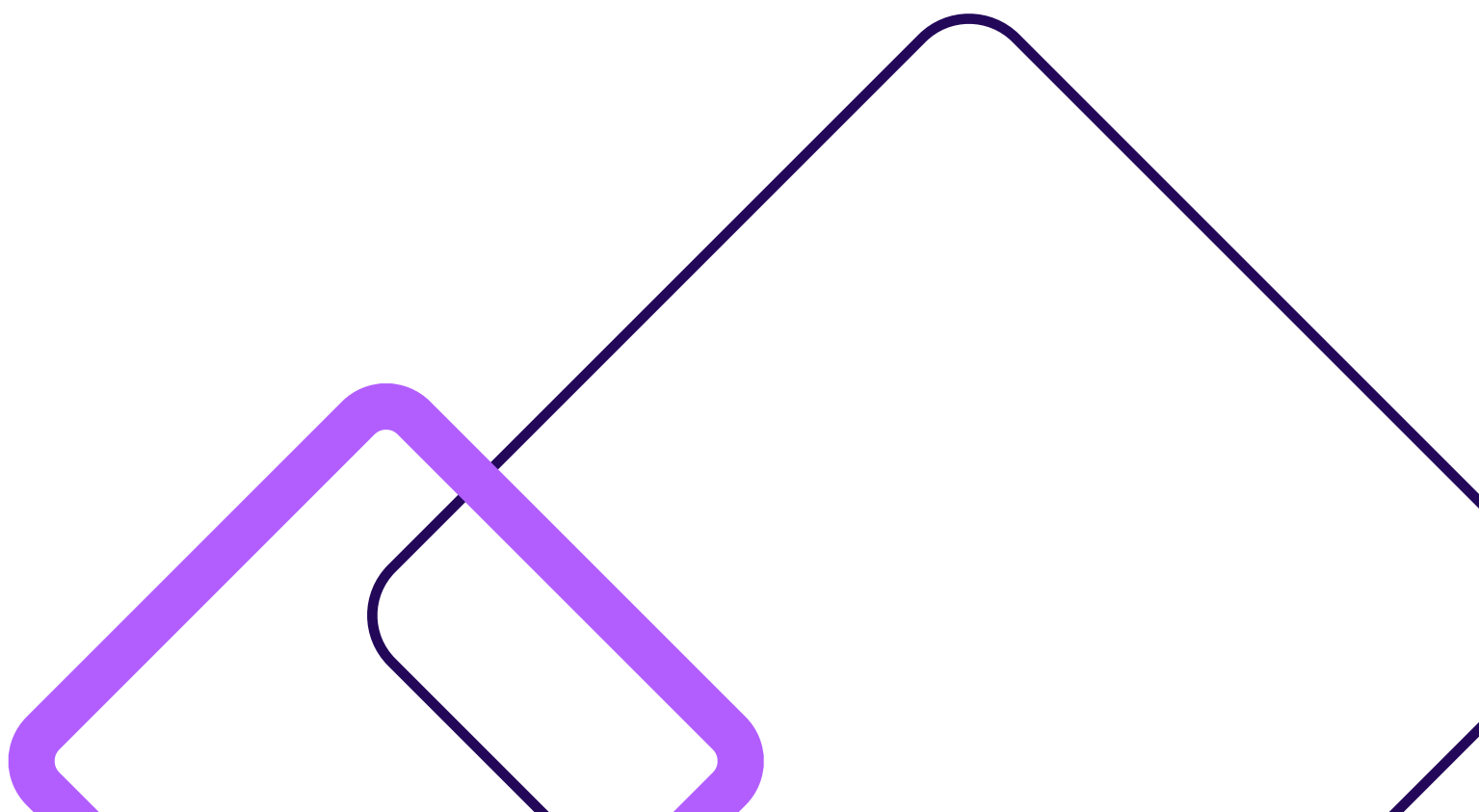
What we know on women and girls

7 March 2024



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Five thematic briefing papers are part of this 'What We Know' publication series:

1. *Education and skills* (by Amina Khan and Fatimah Khan).
2. *Ending violence against women and girls* (by Amina Khan and Sophia Raineri).
3. *Economic empowerment of women and girls* (by Amina Khan, Sophia Raineri, and Fatimah Khan).
4. *Political empowerment of women and girls* (by Amina Khan and Sophia Raineri).
5. *The power of gender norms* (by Amina Khan).

Disclaimer

The findings of this report are entirely those of the authors and do not reflect the positions or policies of the British Council. Equally, we note that many of the findings draw from insights of the Next Generation reports that were published between 2018 and 2023.

Acronyms and abbreviations

BC	British Council
CSE	Comprehensive sexuality education
CSO	Civil society organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
IDI	In-depth interview
IPV	Intimate partner violence
KII	Key informant interview
NTYTRA	Not Too Young to Run Act
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
TFGBV	Technology-facilitated gender-based violence



Key terms and definitions

Empowerment	<p>Empowerment refers to a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilisation that challenge basic power relations. For individuals and groups where class, caste, ethnicity, and gender determine their access to resources and power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognise the systemic forces that oppress them but act to change existing power relationships. Empowerment, therefore, is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces that marginalise women and other disadvantaged sectors in each context.</p> <p>Source: O'Flynn and Cowell (2022).</p>
Empowerment of women and girls	<p>This refers to the expansion of their abilities to make and influence choices that affect their lives. It is a process of transformative changes that are dynamic, iterative, and nonlinear. It is about redistributing power between women and girls, and boys and men. It is context specific and driven by women and girls themselves.</p> <p>Source: UN Women (2020).</p>
Political empowerment	<p>Political empowerment refers to the ability to participate in decision making focused on access to resources, rights, and entitlements within communities. It includes legal rights as well as outcomes such as political participation.</p> <p>Source: Fox and Romero (2017).</p>
Gender	<p>A socially constructed concept made up of the expectations, beliefs and norms attributed to men and women that inform expected behaviour, roles, and characteristics, and vary from place to place and change over time. These are learnt from families and friends in the home, school, the community, workplaces, the media, religion, and the government.</p> <p>Source: O'Flynn and Cowell (2022).</p>
Gender discrimination	<p>Gender discrimination refers to a situation where people are treated differently simply because they are male or female, rather than based on their individual skills or capabilities. Often, women and girls are disproportionately disadvantaged in all spheres of life. Social exclusion, inability to participate in decision-making processes, and restricted access to and control of services and resources are common results of this.</p> <p>Source: O'Flynn and Cowell (2022).</p>
Gender norms	<p>Gender norms are the standards and expectations to which women and men generally conform, within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point in time. They are ideas about how women and men should be and act. Internalised early in life, they can establish a life cycle of gender socialisation and stereotyping. Failure to comply can trigger strong social sanctions, such as ridiculing, ostracising or even violence, or less visible punishments, such as exclusion from employment opportunities or marriage. People also self-regulate their own behaviour to conform to what they think is expected of them by others.</p> <p>Source: O'Flynn and Cowell (2022).</p>
Intersectionality	<p>Intersectionality is when different forms of inequality intersect to create unique and varied experiences of discrimination, meaning that power may be sustained or perpetuated through other social divisions such as age, caste and class, not only sex.</p> <p>Source: O'Flynn and Cowell (2022).</p>

Foreword

We are delighted to share this What We Know: Women and Girls report. This stems from the development of our flagship Next Generation youth series, using our research with young people worldwide to dig deeper into their aspirations as a generation, the opportunities ahead of them, and the challenges they face along the way. For this project, working with the talented team at CineKhan, we have applied a gender lens to the work, and conducted new interviews with stakeholders across seven of our Next Generation countries to amplify the voices of young women.

At the British Council, our engagement with young people is critical to our work. We run many programmes supporting youth aspirations worldwide, and we use the Next Generation research to listen to young people, and to understand what they need to reach their full potential and contribute to their community and broader society.

While many people are aware that gender inequalities are entrenched around the world, and that harmful gender norms and stereotypes limit the choices, opportunities and potential of girls and women, this research brings the impacts on young people, particularly young women, into sharp focus. Notably, it highlights that these harmful norms limit the social and political empowerment of young women, and that while digital technologies offer potential positive benefits, they also carry the possibility of violence and abuse. We also see a disconnect between the existence of policies to support gender equality, and their implementation – something we urge any policy makers reading this report to consider.

Overall, this research demonstrates how critical it is to keep our collective attention on the achievement of the global commitments that have been made to achieve gender equality through the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against all Women (CEDAW). Without constant vigilance and continued progress, gender inequalities, already impacting on the lives of young people, will continue into their futures.

The reports call for action to address inequalities from a wide range of stakeholders, including governments and policymakers, educators, civil society and the media. It also recognises the vital role of the family in both constraining and enabling the choices for girls and young women,

and their ability to achieve their potential. It is our shared responsibility to challenge discriminatory gender norms and practice wherever we are, and whatever role we hold. As we mark International Women's Day 2024 with the launch of this report, each one of us should take note of the theme of 'Inspiring Inclusion' and look to ourselves as role models, ready to call out inequities and injustices.

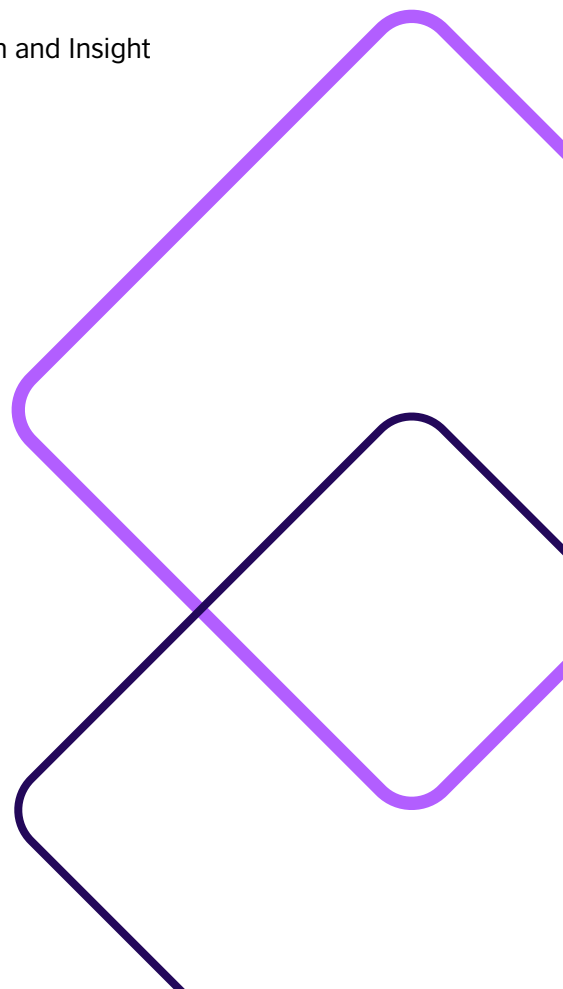
Throughout all our work at the British Council, we aim to take this into consideration and contribute to reducing gender inequalities. This is central to contributing to a more peaceful and prosperous world, as set out in our organisation's vision. This research will help us to shape the many programmes we offer that impact on young people: bringing their voices to the fore, focusing our attention on what hinders, what helps and what inspires them. It will ensure we continue to focus on helping young people to critically engage with, and challenge, the gender norms that impact on them, and work to driver positive change for all. We look forward to working with our partners to achieve this.

Gillian Cowell

Head Gender and Inclusion
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What is the Next Generation programme?

The Next Generation is a global research programme that explores the needs, potential, and aspirations of young people across the world. The research seeks to analyse the conditions that support young people to reach their potential as fulfilled, productive and active citizens. It includes those from underprivileged or geographically isolated backgrounds, as well as those from more established communities and represents the aspirations of young women and girls, as well as young men and boys.

Research is initiated in countries that are experiencing a period of notable change, with the purpose of ensuring that young people's voices are heard, no matter their background or gender, and that their interests are properly represented in decisions that will have lasting implications for their lives. The research is always completed with a series of recommendations to support policy change.

The overall aim of Next Generation is defined through three strands:

- **Research:** Understanding youth attitudes and aspirations, including those from underprivileged backgrounds and differences by gender.
- **Youth voice and capacity building:** Amplifying youth voices from a range of backgrounds, including supporting their active participation, inclusion within the research process and opportunities for skills development.
- **Policy impact:** Supporting better youth policymaking, including perspectives of underprivileged youth and support that increases the inclusion of women and girls.

Next Generation research has been conducted in the following regions and countries:

- **Asia:** Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam.
- **Middle East and North Africa:** Lebanon and Turkey.
- **Sub-Saharan Africa:** Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.
- **Europe:** Albania, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and the UK.
- **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Colombia.

Follow-up reports have been developed for Myanmar and Lebanon, and an overview report has been conducted on Next Generation countries in Africa. Work is currently underway in Iraq and Bangladesh, and new research will shortly be launched in Brazil and Kazakhstan.

This is the second of the What We Know research series based on the Next Generation studies, with a central focus on women and girls.



Executive summary

This report presents what we know about women and girls across three main areas: education and skills, ending violence against women and girls, and socio-economic and political empowerment. The central focus is on seven Next Generation countries spread across South and East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe. They include Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland.

The report applies a socio-ecological lens to identify the factors that enable or hinder progress for women and girls within and across the three areas. It also incorporates the principles of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) to research design and delivery across the various country contexts. It reanalyses seven Next Generation datasets to the extent possible based on age (15–24 and 25–35), sex (women and men), and location (rural and urban). Insights are also drawn from qualitative interview data collected in 2023.

Overall, the report found four themes recurring across the three areas:

- Harmful societal and gender norms exert a detrimental influence on the well-being and opportunities for empowerment of young people, especially women and girls.
- A significant gap exists between the formulation of laws and policies and their implementation, resulting in a disconnect between government planning and enforcement.
- The dual nature of digital technologies unfolds new possibilities for empowerment alongside potential avenues for the perpetuation of violence and harm.
- An overwhelming volume of evidence on barriers relative to enablers, pointing to the urgent need for galvanising action on amplifying enablers and removing the reported barriers to the extent possible.

Theme-specific findings are as follows:

Education and skills for women and girls:

Young women and girls positively associate education and skills with self-empowerment. Supportive families, international and civil society organisations, extra-curricular activities, safe spaces, education policies as well as alternative forms of learning constitute key enablers. On the other hand, financial constraints, family expectations, discrimination against persons with

disabilities and minority communities, gender stereotypes and social norms are key barriers. At a broader level, the uneven distribution of infrastructure services including the lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure and digital connectivity reinforces the rural-urban divide and constrains women and girls from pursuing education.

Ending violence against women and girls:

Progress on drafting legislative frameworks on addressing violence against women and girls and investment in support services available to survivors are the major enablers for ending violence against them. While governments have made strides to promote gender equality and end violence, there are discrepancies between the laws in place and their implementation. The inefficient enforcement of existing laws manifests in limited and low-quality services available to survivors, and in the continued social acceptance of harmful gender norms.

Socio-economic empowerment of women and girls:

Government support for entrepreneurship, access to education, and the growing digital economy are facilitating the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls. Furthermore, many young women want to become entrepreneurs. However, nepotism and favouritism and the lack of support for working mothers amplify the challenges women face in the labour market. Discrimination based on traditional gender norms also hinder their empowerment journeys.

Political empowerment of women and girls: Youth-centric policies and initiatives are important enablers of political empowerment. However, young women and girls emphasise the need for better support for their rights, safety, and representation in political spaces. The lack of opportunities to engage in political activities, awareness of government initiatives, and scepticism towards governments hinder political empowerment among young people. Gender stereotypes, lack of safe spaces (offline and online) and regressive gender and social norms condition them to see their primary role as caregivers rather than leaders, although women have made substantive progress as politicians and parliamentarians.

Way forward

The findings of this report demonstrate potential areas for key stakeholders to collaborate to empower women and girls across the different areas.

Families and friends are central to the personal development of young people, especially women and girls, and can play a major role in creating safe spaces and in debunking negative societal and gender norms.

- Greater awareness among families and communities could ensure that women and girls (including those with disabilities and from minority communities) are not undervalued but encouraged to pursue education and skills, to protect themselves from violence at home and in other social settings, and to achieve their career aspirations and financial security.
- Critical and non-judgemental discussions within the home and familiar social circles can help women and girls develop greater self-confidence and self-expression.
- Instilling respect for all family members, especially women and girls, and sharing household responsibilities more evenly can rectify power imbalances within the home.
- Educated women and girls need to be enabled to act as role models for other family and community members.

Overall, a supportive family ecosystem can allow women and girls to thrive.

Schools and higher education institutions provide the knowledge, tools, connections and facilities for young people to empower themselves and can help a smoother transition to adulthood. To support young people, especially women and girls, schools and higher education institutions could consider a range of initiatives.

- Instilling values like curiosity, honesty, integrity, fairness, and leadership among students – the qualities they most valued in their choice of leaders.
- Embedding skills development into learning agendas and rewarding critical thinking and

analysis, effective persuasion and influencing, public speaking, networking, and leadership for social and political causes.

- Improving learning and teaching quality through well-designed curricula and updating the knowledge base of teachers to align with emerging labour market needs, plus an explicit focus on gender-transformative teaching methods.
- Investing in and upgrading existing educational facilities to enable access for people with disabilities.
- Providing more targeted career guidance and mentorship to break gender stereotypes and promote science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) among women and girls. Career counselling services could enhance greater collaboration with potential employers, as could apprenticeships for practical learning during academic calendars and holiday periods.
- Expanding the pool of extra-curricular activities for early soft skills development and career exploration.
- Integrating gender-sensitive education within the curriculum, emphasising mutual respect, consent, sex education, and the dignity of all individuals, irrespective of gender.
- Shifting gender and social norms and facilitating an educational environment where young people of all genders can pursue the studies and careers they aspire to.
- Ensuring safe campuses and educational facilities for all students and teachers.
- Establishing and empowering student bodies for activism with sufficient resources.
- Creating networking opportunities between young students and successful women in unconventional roles to inspire and challenge gender stereotypes.

Civil society actors and public and private service providers possess the platforms and expertise to develop programmes and initiatives to engage and support young people in their growth, especially women and girls.

- Collaborating with local communities to address contextual needs and challenges and thinking beyond projects' immediate impacts.
- Contributing to awareness campaigns to challenge patriarchal gender norms (specifically engaging men and boys as advocates for gender equality).
- Advocating supportive working environments and developing initiatives for economic opportunities (e.g. coaching, training, networking, and financial support).
- Creating avenues for students to apply for work or submit business ideas through public and private incubators.
- Promoting opportunities in activism, volunteering, and social development.
- Strengthening collaboration with government actors to address violence against women and girls comprehensively and scaling up successful programmes on women's empowerment and violence prevention and response.
- Amplifying women leaders as role models to share empowerment journeys and political experiences.
- Addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) against women by developing monitoring and safeguarding tools that are country specific and informed by local languages and cultural norms.

Workplaces play an important role in the quality of life of young people. Organisational culture, policies, and recruitment processes may encourage or discourage youth to seek or resume employment and to derive job satisfaction and overall well-being. Workplaces can be more inclusive of young women and girls in several ways, including:

- Establishing workplace regulations on violence against women and girls and gender equality where they are absent and strengthening their implementation and oversight where they already exist.
- Ensuring fairer recruitment processes for all individuals, regardless of gender, sexual

orientation, personal connections, or disability status, and addressing nepotism.

- Leveraging the pandemic-induced changes in working habits (i.e. increased flexibility and remote working) to hire a more diverse workforce (e.g. young people who live outside of urban hubs and young people with disabilities) and being more family-friendly.
- Providing mental health support to young entrepreneurs, especially young women.

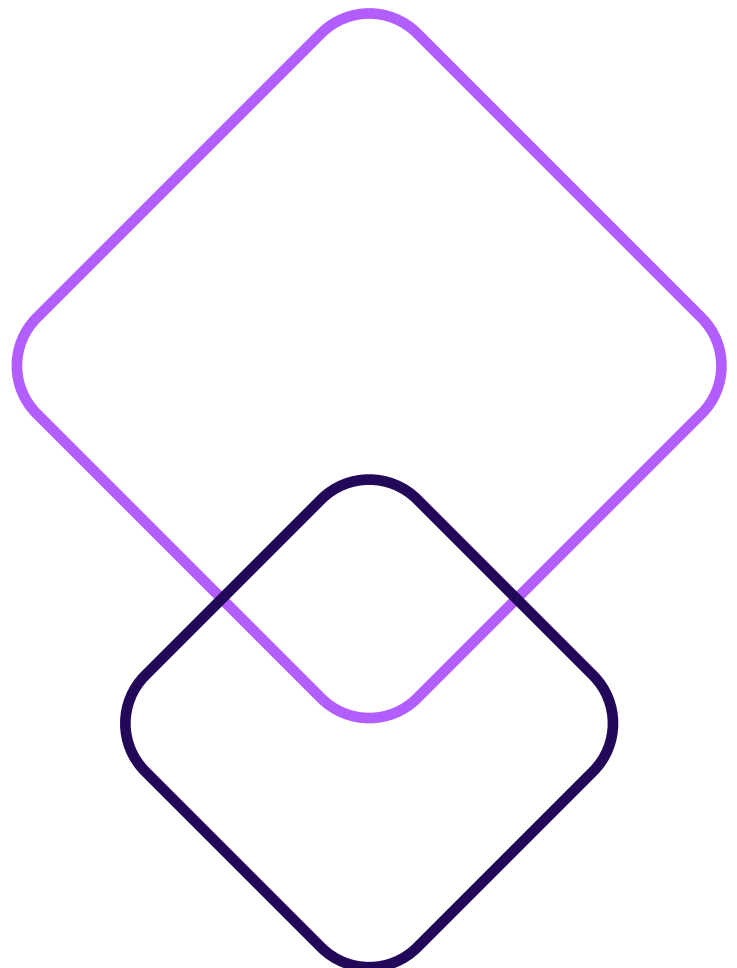
Media are responsible for the representation of different social groups and in perpetuating or deflating existing societal and gender social norms. Thus, their work can actively empower the younger generation through:

- Developing online safeguarding mechanisms with technology companies to better protect young women from online harassment and violence.
- Building safer spaces for young people and women to share their political preferences and views while alleviating fear of intimidation.
- Representing the concerns of young people, especially women and girls, to hold governments accountable for their actions and catalyse changes they want to see.
- Developing respectful narratives that do not objectify women or victimise and blame survivors of violence but focus on success stories.
- Disseminating information on the resources and support available for and needed by women and girls affected by violence.



Policy and lawmakers play a critical role in enacting laws and policies that have a direct impact on young people's empowerment and wellbeing. Areas of focus would include:

- Ensuring sufficient attention to intersectionality in new policies and laws by engaging diverse social groups in planning discussions and co-creating measurable outcomes that increase public scrutiny over the implementation of policies and laws.
- Providing services closer to marginalised groups, especially in remote areas, for minorities, and those with disabilities.
- Addressing geographic disparities through long-term infrastructure development planning.
- Making education compulsory for equal opportunities and investing in digital infrastructure for online learning and employment.
- Formulating long-term policies to increase women's representation in non-traditional fields of study with measurable outcomes.
- Reforming existing policies to integrate violence prevention across sectors and addressing legal barriers and strengthening laws on TFGBV.
- Launching nationwide campaigns to raise awareness of violence against women and girls and change negative norms.
- Investing in sensitisation and training programmes for policymakers to improve their understanding of the impacts of violence against women and girls and on societies.
- Enforcing workplace diversity quotas, mandating transparency in diversity, equity and inclusion statistics, and penalising workplace discrimination.
- Revising maternity leave policies and implementing mandatory paternity leave for workforce inclusivity.
- Improving access to finances and land ownership for women, which often play a central role in their economic empowerment.
- Introducing better social protection for women and girls in the informal sector to reduce the impact of existing unregulated mechanisms.
- Increasing political representation through targeted quotas for diverse demographics, including youth, women, and people with disabilities.
- Improving access to different types of political information, such as on political parties and their agendas, the election system, and current political debates, so that young people can make more informed decisions about their role in political change processes.
- Amending laws and their enforcement to create a political environment that does not silence political engagement in the form of peaceful protests and activism.



1 Introduction

Countries around the world stand at a critical juncture in advancing the rights and opportunities of women and girls. Access to education and skills and ending violence against them emerge as cornerstones in this pursuit. Their socio-economic and political empowerment – defined as the expansion of abilities to make and influence choices that affect their lives – is equally critical.

However, the exclusion of many young women and girls from social, political and economic change processes perpetuates gender inequalities and obstructs their visible participation in decisions that affect their daily lives and in the futures that they would want for themselves.

By excluding this demographic, societies miss out on the richness of ideas, unique problem-solving approaches, and the transformative power that diverse voices bring to decision making. It also hinders the overall development trajectory of nations. Empowering this demographic is not just a matter of equity; it is an investment in the collective future and prosperity of nations.

This report, a part of the British Council's thematic study, *Next Generation: What we know on women and girls*, shares learnings from across seven countries: Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland, based on the following questions.

What do we know about:

- education and skills for women and girls?
- ending violence against them?
- their socio-economic and political empowerment?

The report is organised as follows:

- Chapter 2 discusses the research methodology and acknowledges limitations.
- Chapter 3 presents the country contexts.
- Chapter 4 focuses on education and skills for women and girls.
- Chapter 5 addresses the issue of ending violence against them.
- Chapters 6 and 7 focus on their socio-economic and political empowerment.
- Chapter 8 concludes with recommendations.



2 Methodology

The report uses a mixed-methods approach. It combines insights from the seven Next Generation reports and country-level datasets from 2018 to 2023 and new qualitative interview data from 2023.¹

2.1 Analytical framework

Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model from the 1970s, which posits that people exist and interact within a complex ecology of interrelated levels and sub-systems, provides a compelling framework to analyse and present the data. The three sub-systems are categorised as follows:

Macro-system

- **Policy and legal:** Public policies, laws and regulations at various levels – including local and national policy frameworks – and programme interventions around education, skills, violence against women and girls, and broader policies on empowerment.
- **Societal:** The broad societal factors that shape youth participation in education, political, social and economic change processes, including social and cultural norms that help to maintain or address inequalities and violence between groups in society.

Meso-system

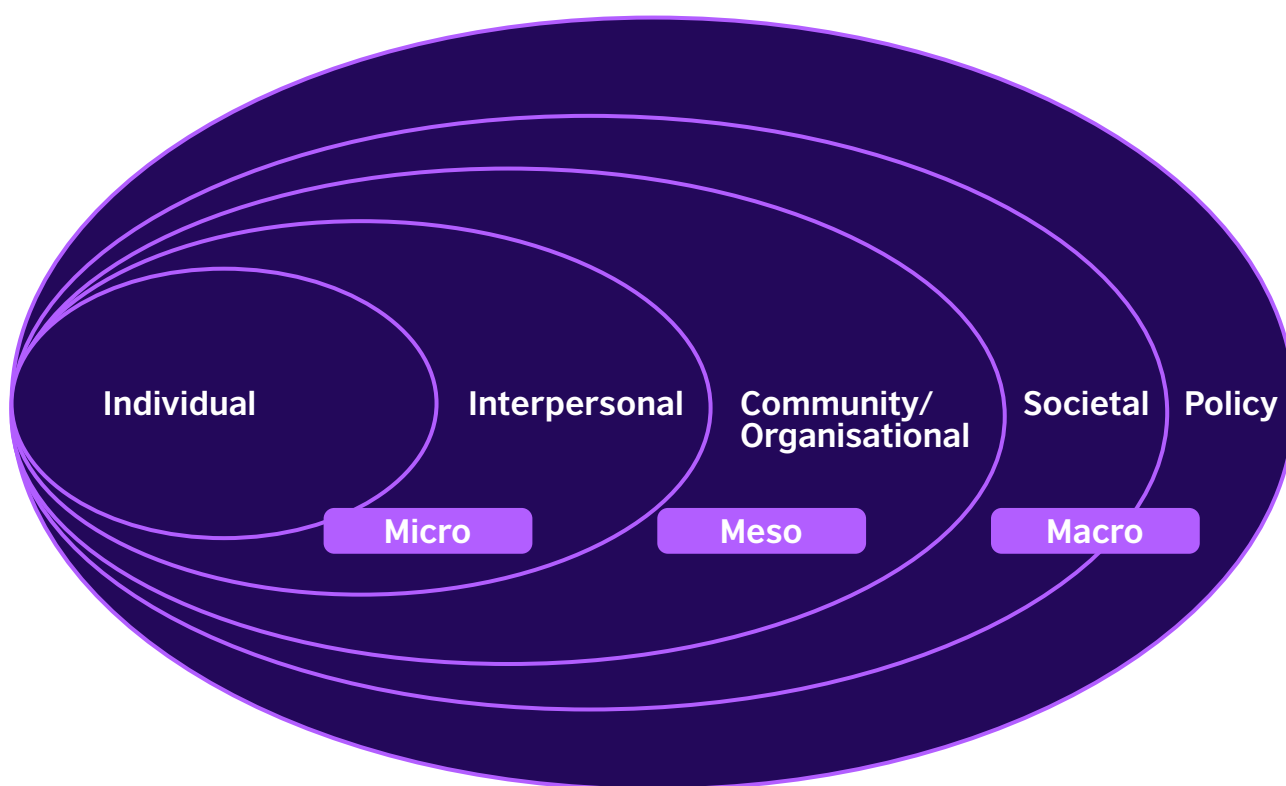
- **Community/organisational:** The structured communities and settings in which social relationships occur, including schools, workplaces, training academies, and neighbourhoods. The characteristics and interactions in each space can either facilitate or hinder young people's access to education, political, social and economic empowerment. Furthermore, they play a crucial role in fostering or addressing violence against women and girls.

Micro-system

- **Interpersonal:** The immediate social circle of youth, such as peers, partners, family, teachers, and community leaders, who influence young people's perceptions and behaviours.
- **Individual:** The physical and cognitive characteristics of youth, such as age, education, income, experience, interests, attitudes, and beliefs.

¹ Reports (most recent first): Pakistan (June 2023), Indonesia (October 2022), Poland (May 2021), Nigeria (November 2020), Viet Nam (August 2020), Ethiopia (October 2019), and Sri Lanka (March 2019).

Figure 1. Analytical framework



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model.

The lenses of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), intersectionality, and disability inclusion are also applied to analyse how gender and other markers of social identity such as age, geography, ethnicity, citizenship, disability status, and socio-economic background influence young people's perceptions, experiences, and empowerment journeys.

2.2 Methods and analysis

Since the Next Generation reports were published at various points in time over the five-year period, the team reviewed policy and grey literature published between 2018 and 2023. This helped to better understand the contexts of each country. The research team also clustered key findings from the seven reports into themes, enablers, and barriers using the different socio-ecological levels.

Fifty-eight semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) and 31 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted across the seven countries in native languages and English. Stakeholders for the KIIs included government officials, bilateral and

multilateral development agencies, implementing partner agencies, and civil society (academics, thought leaders, activists, influencers, and rights-based organisations). IDI participants were selected from a pool of British Council and its partners' beneficiaries as well as from networks of the research team in each country. They reflected a mix of young people aged 18–24 and 25–35 from marginalised backgrounds. Data from the interviews was anonymised and coded in a qualitative analysis grid using the socio-ecological levels. Enablers and barriers common to at least three or more countries are presented in the report.

Cross-country insights that are derived from global or Next Generation datasets focus on questions that allowed comparisons across at least four of the seven countries. The Next Generation data was disaggregated by age (15–24, 25–35), sex (women and men), and geography (urban and rural) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Quantitative data used for comparative analysis

Theme	Global data	Next Generation data
Education and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of upper secondary school (UNICEF, 2022) • Completion of upper secondary school (UNICEF, 2022) • Educational attainment, a sub-index of the 2023 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education quality • Reasons for drop-out • Educational attainment level and disability status
Ending violence against women and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country scores on restricted physical integrity, a sub-index of the OECD's 2023 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) • Prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and its social acceptance among women • Rate of child marriages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Socio-economic empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic participation and opportunity, a sub-index of the 2023 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top three challenges faced by young people • Community engagement activities
Political empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political empowerment, a sub-index of the 2023 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest/engagement in politics • Voting rates and reasons for not voting • Participation in different types of political activities • Membership in political parties

2.3 Limitations

Key limitations of the research and mechanisms to address these include the following:

1. The contexts of each country and young people's perceptions have changed since the publication of the reports. The latest studies are from Pakistan (2023) and Indonesia (2022). New qualitative interview data was collected in 2023 and new literature and recent global datasets were reviewed to reflect current country contexts. The period of this report is also deliberately focused on youth/key informant perceptions about the past five years, the present, and the future, to overlap with the publication periods of the seven reports.
2. Although the Next Generation studies broadly captured youth perceptions, the questionnaires were not standardised across the seven countries. Distinct cultural, social, political and economic contexts would impact how questions were interpreted and responses provided. To address this challenge, we reclassified broadly similar questions and response options to fall within a coherent structure. This adjustment facilitates greater comparability across findings.
3. Next Generation reports did not have an explicitly gendered lens as most findings relate to young people in general. Unlike other themes, violence against women and girls was not covered as a topic across countries. The greater focus on women and girls in KIIs and IDIs, alongside reanalysis of comparable quantitative data with age and sex disaggregation, reflects an attempt to fill this gap and to enrich the overall analysis.

3 Country context

The seven countries in this report have diverse political, social, and economic conditions. Three of them (Indonesia, Pakistan, and Nigeria) are the world's fourth, fifth, and sixth most populated countries with sizeable youth demographics. Youth aged 15–35 constitute a significant share in each country (25 per cent in Poland and between 30 per

cent and 38 per cent in the other six countries). In most, women and girls make up equal shares of the population, and their representation in socio-economic and political change processes is crucial for their empowerment journeys and for the nations they represent.

Table 2. Key data on each country

Key indicators	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Indonesia	Viet Nam	Nigeria	Ethiopia	Poland
Country classification	LMIC	LMIC	UMIC	LMIC	LMIC	LIC	HIC
Total population (in millions)	234	22	277.5	99	219	123	38.4
Share of girls and women in total population	50%	52%	50%	51%	49%	50%	52%
Share of youth aged 15–35 in total population	37%	30%	33%	32%	34%	38%	25%
Year CEDAW ratified ²	1996	1981	1984	1982	1985	1981	1980

Sources: UNDESA (2022), World Bank (2024), OHCHR (n.d.). Note: LMIC – lower-middle-income country, UMIC – upper-middle-income country, LIC – low-income country, HIC – high-income country.

3.1 Brief country profiles

Pakistan has faced economic and political instability, radical extremism and militancy over the past 20 years (Babar et al., 2023). The floods in 2022 submerged a third of the country and affected the lives and livelihoods of 33 million people (UNICEF, 2023). Current challenges include declining household incomes and rising poverty levels (close to 40 per cent as of 2023) due to poor economic growth, inflation, and lower remittances (World Bank, 2023a).

Sri Lanka came out of a 26-year civil war in 2009, which claimed 100,000 lives (BBC, 2020)

and displaced 800,000 people (Janowski, 2003). The country continues to face both political and economic instability, including violence across ethnic groups and religious extremism (Perera et al., 2019). While poverty has been on the rise since 2019, it doubled between 2021 and 2022 (28 per cent in 2023) and is expected to increase further (World Bank, 2023a).

Indonesia is the largest economy in Southeast Asia (World Bank, 2023b). Since the Asian Financial Crisis in the 1990s and the Global Financial Crisis a decade later, the economy has made significant gains in reducing poverty by more than 50 per cent (ibid.).

² The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international legal instrument that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promotes women's and girls' equal rights (OHCHR, n.d.).

Viet Nam has experienced significant economic growth under the Đổi Mới market liberalisation reform policies that started in the mid-1980s (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). Alongside sustaining growth in employment and productivity, it has reduced poverty within a single generation by granting universal access to basic services such as education, health, and infrastructure (UNDP, 2023a). Between 2010 and 2020, those below the poverty line declined by 70 per cent (World Bank, 2023a).

Nigeria is Africa's biggest economy and its largest oil producer (BBC, 2023). It faces multiple challenges including low provisions of health and education, high inflation, and deteriorating security conditions. In 2023, 37 per cent or 84 million Nigerians were estimated to live below the poverty line, constituting the world's second-largest poor population (World Bank, 2024a).

Ethiopia has been one of the fastest growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2023c; World Bank, 2024b). Since the mid-1990s, poverty levels have continued to fall considerably to 27 per cent (World Bank, 2024c). However, Ethiopians are vulnerable to ongoing and emerging conflicts as well as drought conditions (CRS, 2024; UN News, 2022). While a two-year-long conflict in Tigray came to an end in 2022, the region is at the brink of famine; conflicts in the Amhara and Oromia regions broke out in 2023 (Tadesse, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023).

Poland transitioned into a market economy following the revolution in 1989. It became a member of the European Union in 2004. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, almost a million Ukrainians have sought refuge in Poland (UNHCR, 2024).

3.2 Country alignment with international frameworks

Each country has endorsed several international conventions to promote and protect the rights of women and girls, however progress on these has been variable, as subsequent chapters will show. Table 3 presents some of the key frameworks these countries have aligned their national priorities with in recent decades.

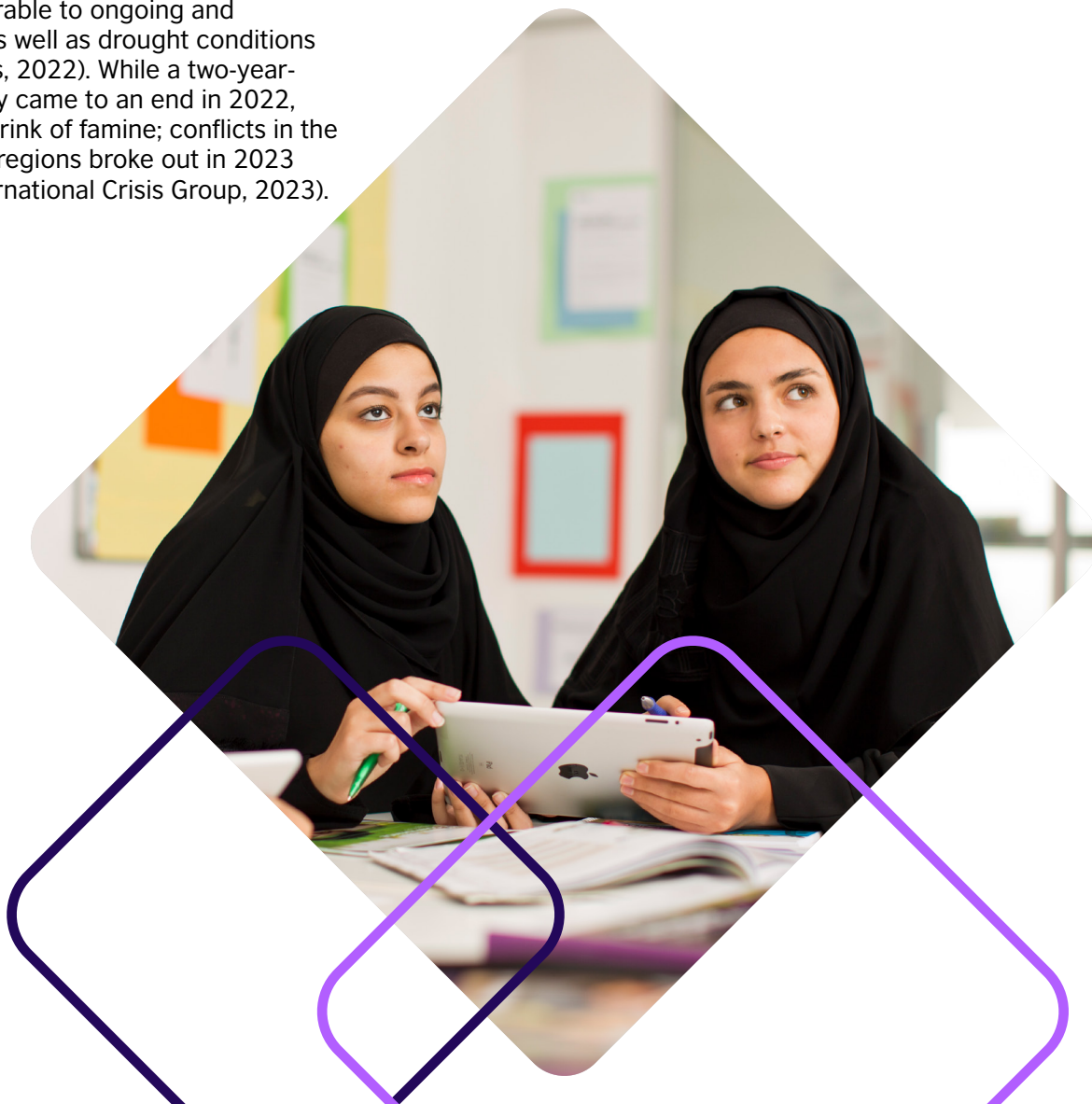


Table 3. International frameworks to protect the rights of women and girls

Year	Instrument	Description
1981	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	The Convention is an international legal instrument that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promote women's and girls' equal rights.
1993	UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women	The Declaration defines a wide scope of contribution that the states, organs and specialised agencies could make to the elimination of violence against women.
1995	Beijing Declaration	The Declaration aims to take all necessary measures to prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls and remove all obstacles to gender equality and the advancement and empowerment of women.
2000	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace, and Security	The Resolution urges all conflict parties to safeguard women and girls, specifically against gender-based violence, including rape, in armed conflict settings. It underscores the obligation of all nations to eradicate impunity and prosecute individuals accountable for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, particularly those involving violence against women and girls.
2003	The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa/ Maputo Protocol	The Protocol calls on all States Parties to adopt and implement appropriate measures to ensure the protection of every woman's right to respect for her dignity and protection of women from all forms of violence, particularly sexual and verbal violence.
2012	The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations	The Declaration calls on all States Parties to strengthen and enact or amend national legislations, integrate legislations, policies and measures, build capacity of relevant staff, and encourage relevant research and data collection for the elimination of violence against women and violence against children.
2014	The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence/ Istanbul Protocol	The Convention calls on all Parties to take the necessary legislative and other measures to promote and protect the right for everyone, particularly women, to live free from violence in both the public and the private sphere.
2015	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	The 2030 Agenda aims to have all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls eliminated, including through the engagement of men and boys.

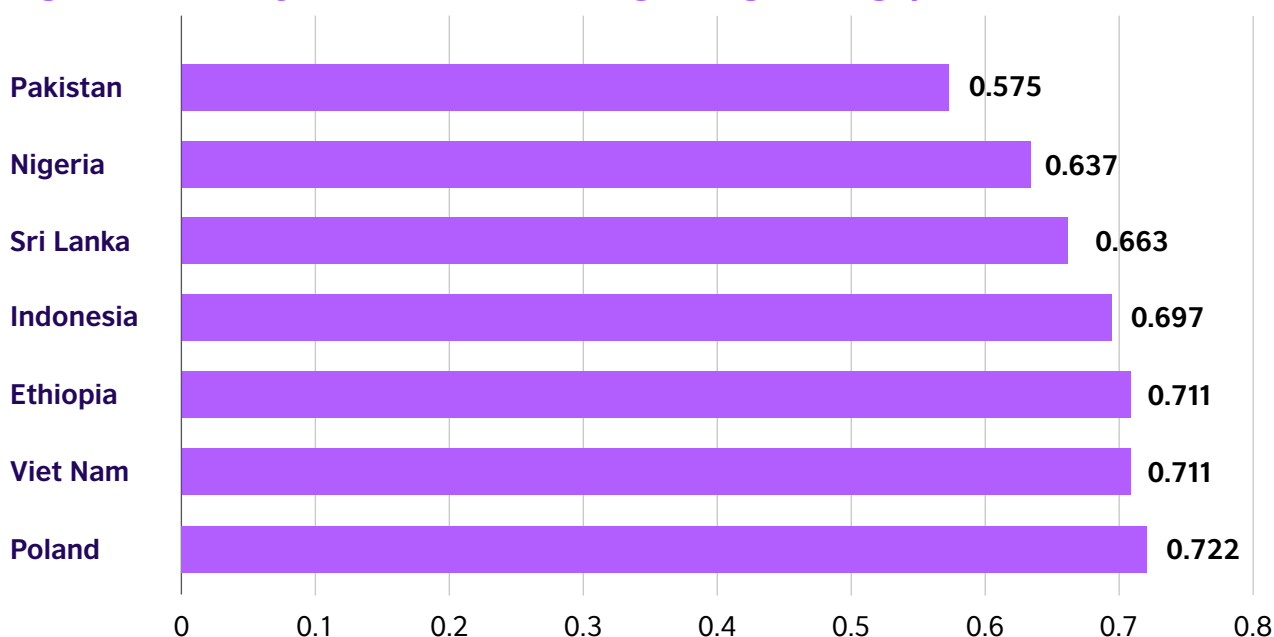
3.3 Country performances on gender parity

The 2023 Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks 146 countries for their current state and evolution of gender parity across four dimensions (educational attainment; health and survival; economic participation and opportunity; and political empowerment) (WEF, 2023). It reveals how the seven countries perform on gender parity overall.

Of all seven countries, Poland leads with the highest score, 0.722, and ranks 60 in the world in terms of closing the gender gap. Pakistan has the lowest score, 0.575, and ranks 142 out of 146 countries (WEF, 2023).³

Subsequent chapters deal with the themes of education and skills, ending violence against women and girls, and their socio-economic and political empowerment.

Figure 2. Country scores on the 2023 global gender gap index (0–1)



Source: WEF (2023).

³ Other country rankings out of 146 countries on the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index are as follows: Viet Nam (72), Ethiopia (75), Indonesia (87), Sri Lanka (115), and Nigeria (130) (WEF, 2023).

4 Education and skills for women and girls

Education and skills are fundamental to empowering women and girls. Yet, millions of them have had short learning journeys. This chapter presents findings on the factors that have enabled access in the different countries at macro, meso, and micro levels. It also highlights the key barriers that undermine ongoing national efforts.

4.1 Overview

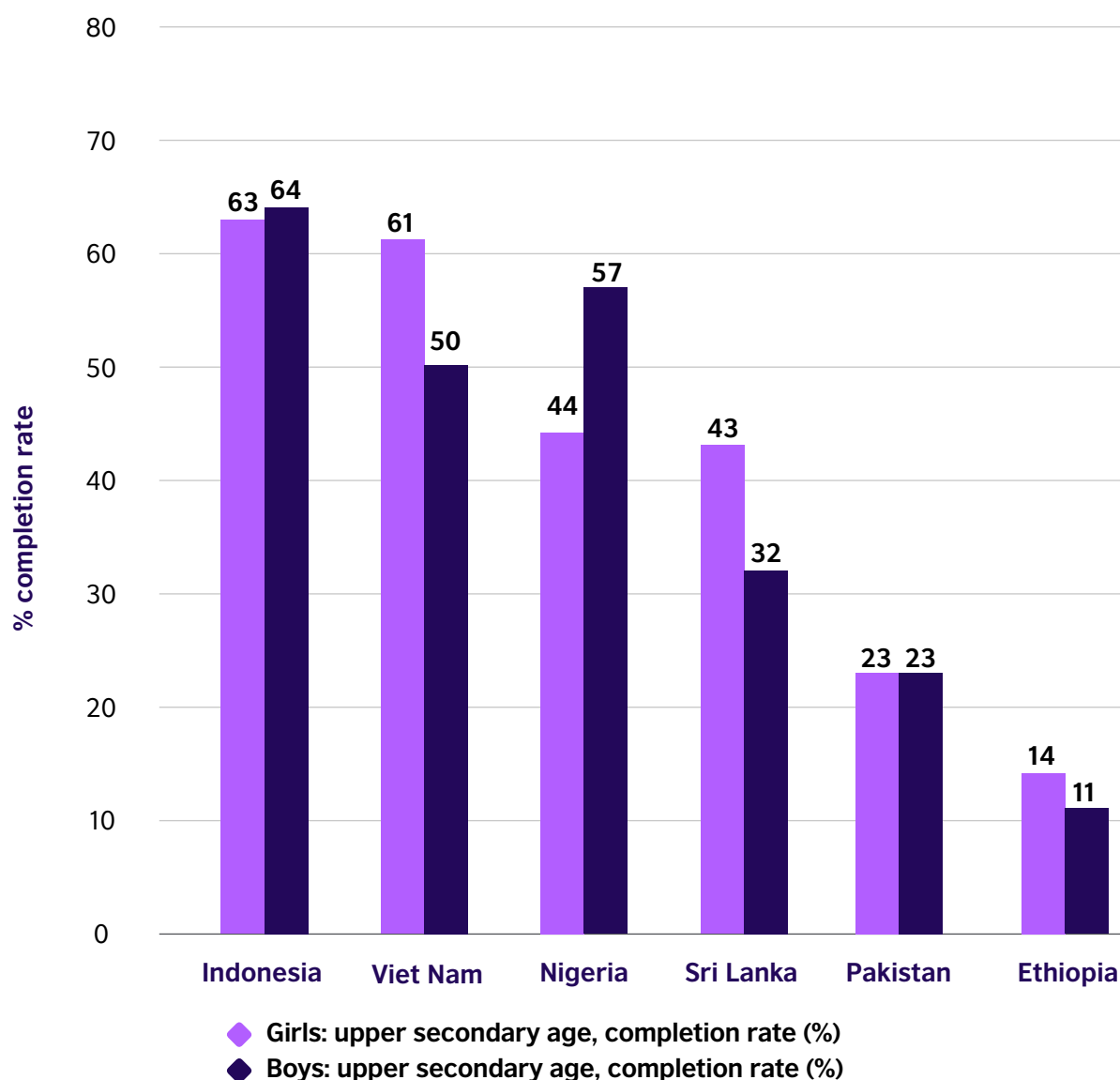
Over 50 per cent of girls of upper secondary school age in Ethiopia and Pakistan are out of school (see Figure 3). Over 60 per cent of girls of upper secondary school age have completed secondary education in Indonesia and Viet Nam (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. Rate of children out of school



Source: UNICEF (2022).

Figure 4. Upper secondary school completion rates (%)



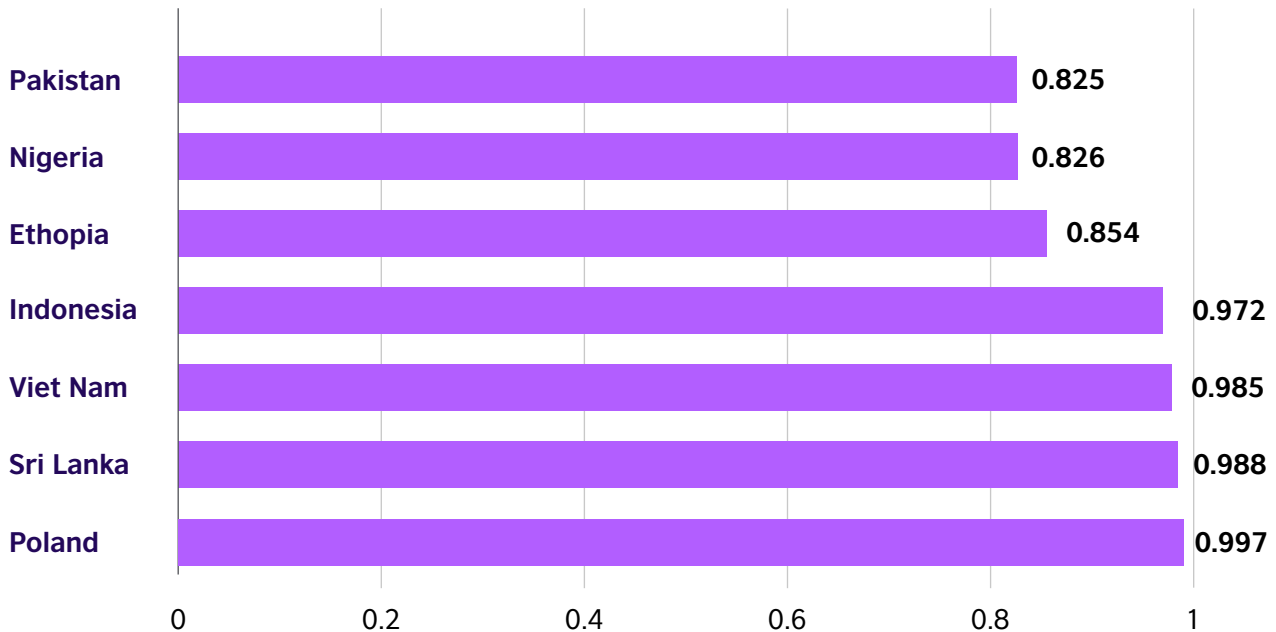
Source: UNICEF (2022).

The educational attainment sub-index of the World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Gender Gap Index is another useful measure for understanding different countries' performance on closing the gap between women and men. This sub-index captures the gap between women's and men's current access to education through the enrolment ratios of women to men in primary, secondary and tertiary education (WEF, 2023). A longer-term view of the country's ability to educate women and men

in equal numbers is captured through the ratio of women's to men's literacy (ibid.).

Of all seven countries, Poland leads with the highest score, 0.997, and ranks 50 out of 146 countries in terms of closing the gender gap in educational attainment between men and women. Pakistan has the lowest score, 0.825, and ranks 138 (WEF, 2023).⁴

⁴ Other country rankings out of 146 countries on the Educational Attainment sub-index of the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index area as follows: Sri Lanka (85), Viet Nam (89), Indonesia (106), Ethiopia (135), and Nigeria (137) (WEF, 2023).

Figure 5. Country scores on the educational attainment sub-index (0–1)

Source: WEF (2023).

4.2 Enablers for education and skills

This section explores the enablers for accessing education and skills among young people, with a focus on women and girls.

4.2.1 Macro-level enablers Education policies

Education policies play a critical role in strengthening education systems for young women and men. In Viet Nam, 75 per cent of young women and 76 per cent of young men reported improvements in the quality of education (Next Generation data). Equal shares of young women and men (73 per cent) also stated that the government has good education policies in place. These policies have translated into improvements in the type and quality of education provided in

the public education sector. These range from an improved curriculum with an increasing focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and technical and vocational education as well as the provision of better facilities (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020).

Key informants also found Viet Nam to be relatively advanced in terms of education compared to other lower-middle-income countries, and that girls perform well in education (interviews, 2023). Women and girls are becoming increasingly represented in STEM education where the proportion of female graduates has increased in recent years (ibid.). State support for ethnic minority students including waivers on school fees and entrance exams – as well as policies to preserve minority languages – have also contributed towards improvements in the education system (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020).

Alternative forms of learning

Alternative forms of learning fill a critical gap for those who cannot access or drop out of formal education. Education service providers address the needs of young people with limited socio-economic opportunities. These efforts help them to continue their education and amplify their social status within their communities. In Viet Nam, informal education has a wide outreach among young women and girls who cannot attend formal institutions because of costs, distance, and family obligations (interviews, 2023). Service providers of informal programmes address these concerns and facilitate students with manageable schedules and access to nearer-by locations. In Ethiopia, key informants highlight the benefits of non-formal education to include a flexible schedule and a functional curriculum with an emphasis on skills development (ibid.). This is most relevant for young people who do not have access to formal education and those living in rural areas.

Vocational training is also a pragmatic way for young people who are outside the formal education system to access learning that can lead to gainful employment (interviews, 2023). Key informants from Indonesia drew attention to the role of non-formal vocational training in facilitating young women and girls with necessary skills to find employment (ibid.). This is especially effective since non-formal training tends to be relatively shorter in duration, less expensive and provides young people with an opportunity to develop their portfolio and exhibit their skills to companies that do not require formal qualifications (ibid.). In Poland, young people find vocational training to be a viable alternative to traditional academia in seeking employment because curriculum design is better aligned with the needs of the job market (Raven et al., 2021).

4.2.2 Meso-level enablers

Role of international organisations and civil society

International organisations and civil society actors address crucial gaps in knowledge that are often overlooked in educational settings. Key informants from Indonesia, Viet Nam and Poland stressed the role of these actors in filling gaps in information on gender rights, reproductive health, and sex education. Notably, initiatives by UN agencies (UN Children's Fund and UN Population Fund) in Indonesia addressing knowledge gaps in menstruation and sex education, along with the Young Catalyst's role in comprehensive conflict resolution education

(covering issues like mental health and bullying) were highlighted as counteracting the limitations of existing education curricula (interviews, 2023). In Viet Nam, civil society training for education providers on gender and sexuality, healthcare and empowerment was also found to be valuable (ibid.).

Extra-curricular activities for personal development

Young people value extra-curricular activities for their role in cultivating new skills for personal development and voice. In Indonesia, young people view opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities as key to nurturing their personal development and voice (Allison et al., 2022). In addition to focusing on academic pursuits, student participation in a variety of spaces, including youth clubs, constitute important channels for developing analytical skills (ibid.). In Viet Nam, students regard extra-curricular activities as key to addressing skills gaps whereas learning foreign languages and technology are viewed as vital for pursuing career goals (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). In some instances, young people note that institutions that provide opportunities to develop soft skills improve their competitiveness in the labour market (ibid.).

In Pakistan, extra-curricular activities are identified as pivotal sources of confidence and skills development. Being involved in school-run societies and debate clubs is considered an important predictor of young women's self-confidence in the long run (interviews, 2023).

In Ethiopia, students regard participation in extra-curricular activities as an important driver of personal development (De Schryver et al., 2019). According to key informants, clubs for young women and girls on campuses enable them to develop leadership skills, confidence in public speaking, and interest in topics such as gender roles and relationships that empower female students to question discriminatory and regressive norms (interviews, 2023).

Safe spaces for learning

Safe school and university campuses enable young people to remain motivated. In Poland, key informants note that some schools have weekly sessions for teachers dedicated to anti-discrimination that create a safe space for them to speak about a wide range of topics, including gender, identity, privilege, poverty, disability, and immigration (interviews, 2023). The

sessions allow participants to reflect on critical and current issues that would otherwise not be addressed at large or be considered taboo. Similar conversations have been replicated for teenage girls and boys and these help them to speak about topics such as gender stereotypes (ibid.).

In Indonesia, some organisations take a proactive approach to addressing sexual violence on campus through prevention programmes that positively contribute to students' sense of safety and eagerness to learn (interviews, 2023). In Viet Nam, interventions such as installing cameras in classrooms help to reduce incidents of teacher-student violence (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). This has implications for students' associations with educational environments.

Key informants in Ethiopia note that institutions that create spaces for young women to hold conversations without fear of reprisal (such as women's clubs) encourage them to discuss various topics (interviews, 2023). They also highlight an intergenerational transformation where increasing levels of awareness among young women and girls through targeted campaigns empower them to seek assistance on health matters (including menstrual hygiene) without feeling embarrassed or ashamed (ibid.). Another important initiative in Ethiopia relates to monitoring levels of violence on campus alongside training for the school management and faculty on how to address the issue (ibid.).

4.2.3 Micro-level enablers Supportive families

Family support is critical to sustaining young people's interest and engagement in education and skills. In Indonesia, 46 per cent of young women and 44 per cent of young men reported that their families encouraged them to get a good education (Next Generation data). Key informants note that parental support for young people, especially with respect to allowing girls the freedom of choice, increases the likelihood of studying in different fields (interviews, 2023). In recognising that a delicate balance prevails between the personal choices of a girl and the overriding mindset of her immediate family, initiatives to address family concerns and creating awareness about gender equality go a long way in developing a solid support system (ibid.). Some interviewees also state that family support is critical for young mothers who seek ways back into education, particularly those living in remote areas with limited opportunities (ibid.). Key informants note that when families create enabling

environments for young women to study again, benefits materialise in both the short run and the long run, and not just for the individual (ibid.).

In Viet Nam, family plays a central role in defining a young person's identity, with young people naming it the most important factor in making them who they are (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). This is reflected in the views of key informants who highlight that supportive families enable women and girls to pursue their dreams, be confident, and excel in their education and career (interviews, 2023).

In Ethiopia, 56 per cent of young women and 53 per cent of young men attribute positive encouragement from their families as a key driver in their pursuit of education (Next Generation data). Key informants stress that where girls do not have easy access to formal education, families play an important role in encouraging them to pursue vocational training or short-term training programmes that enable them to continue their learning journeys and seek employment (interviews, 2023).

In Pakistan, key informants note that families' overarching expectations on young people strongly influence whether they engage in education and skills development in the long run. In the case of women and girls, key informants stressed that families constitute the first layer of encouragement to perform well in and continue with their education (interviews, 2023). Supportive parents strongly motivate and empower daughters to excel in their chosen fields of study (ibid.). Moreover, with higher levels of education, young women and girls become effective agents of positive change not just in their families as role models for siblings but within their network of friends and the wider community (ibid.).

Positive outlook on education among young people

Young people recognise education as key to self-empowerment and success over time. In Pakistan, young people not only regard education as integral to empowerment at an individual level but also as a key driver of positive social transformation and innovation (Babar et al., 2023). They recognise that education instils confidence and equips them to address future challenges (ibid.). In recent years, this has been evident especially in the case of young women and girls, where signs of outperforming male students in science and engineering are increasingly seen (interviews, 2023). Young Sri Lankans think that education plays an integral role in fostering social

cohesion across diverse groups in their post-war society. According to them, an inclusive curriculum that values diversity across the board can instil a sense of unity from a young age (Perera et al., 2019). Key informants state that sustained access to education also enhances social protection among marginalised youth (interviews, 2023). Additionally, young women and girls have higher aspirations compared to the previous generation and are increasingly assertive in pursuing education beyond high school, partly motivated by the desire to migrate elsewhere after attaining educational and professional qualifications (ibid.).

In Indonesia, youth underscore the role of education as vital to character formation and equally important in terms of creating a shared sense of identity that reinforces national identity and pride (Allison et al., 2022). Having supportive parents who understand that quality education leads to stable employment is also a key factor (ibid.). Moreover, a greater proportion of young women compared to young men (43 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively) view education as important in preparing young people for life in general (Next Generation data). This sentiment resonates strongly in Viet Nam, where many young say that education is important in defining their personal identity (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020).

Similarly in Nigeria, young people find that education and skills enhance not only a person's potential but also their voice – including being aware of social issues and their rights (Curran et al., 2020). Additionally, 71 per cent of young women and 68 per cent of young men consider

good education to be essential for success in life (Next Generation data).

While this view prevails among young people with access to education, key informants draw attention to the increasing awareness among marginalised girls and boys from mining communities of the need to read and write (interviews, 2023). While financial constraints of the household contribute to most dropping out of secondary school to work in goldmines, when asked about what they want, girls eagerly express their desire to study or at the least be able to read and write and become independent (ibid.). In Ethiopia, where young people generally feel that access to education has improved in recent years, they underscore the role of completing education in contributing to self-improvement (De Schryver et al., 2019).



CASE STUDY 1

Raising the quality of higher education in Viet Nam

Name of programme: Empowering Women Leadership in Higher Education

Location: Viet Nam

Year: 2021–2024

Funded by: British Council

Implemented by: Coventry University and Viet Nam National University (VNU)

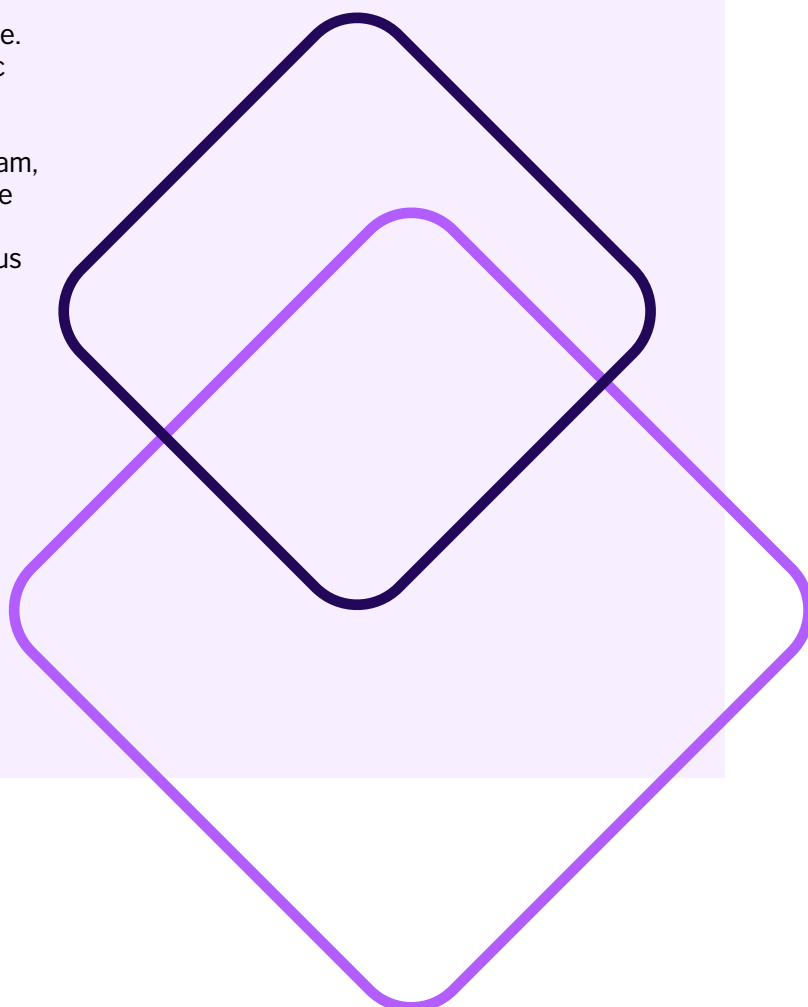
Programme objective: The programme aims to empower women in Vietnamese universities and enhance their capabilities in adapting to the evolving landscape of higher education in the eras of digitalisation and globalisation.

Method of delivery: The programme is being delivered through a series of training sessions, seminars, and workshops led by ASEAN, Vietnamese and UK professors and leaders. Additionally, personalised mentoring seminars are being provided to ensure the practical application of acquired knowledge. The programme has established a dynamic network, facilitated by dialogues and workshops, promoting ongoing knowledge exchange among women leaders in Viet Nam, the UK, and ASEAN. The project's innovative digital platform, managed by VNU Hanoi, is also providing a digital space for continuous participation and collaboration, ensuring the sustainability of the initiative.

Target beneficiaries: Women in higher education institutions in Viet Nam.

Key outcomes of the programme: The initiative aims to:

- Directly benefit 500 people and indirectly benefit 5,000 people, of which at least 50 per cent are women.
- Enable and create sustainable, diverse and inclusive higher education partnerships and networks between the UK, Viet Nam and other East Asian countries in teaching, research, innovation and knowledge transfer.
- Strengthen the performance of Viet Nam's higher education sector.
- Promote mobility and exchange for students and academics.



CASE STUDY 2

Leadership trainings for young people to promote greater social cohesion and gender equality in Poland and Europe

Name of programme: Stronger Together

Location: Poland and EU Region

Year: 2022–Present

Funded by: British Council

Implemented by: British Council in co-operation with regional partners (Clore Social Leadership and Women on Top), at regional level and with local partners (The Polish Council of Youth Organisations, Strategic Consulting Centre, Level Up, In-Krea and GrowSpace Associations)

Programme objective: The Stronger Together programme empowers young people with skills and collaboration spaces to actively contribute to fostering social cohesion and gender equality within their communities.

Method of delivery: The programme delivers impactful offline and online leadership trainings, emphasising inclusive community-building, while supporting youth conferences, roundtable discussions, and virtual initiatives to foster dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge exchange among young activists, experts and policymakers in Poland and Europe.

Target beneficiaries: Young, community-driven Polish and European activists and professionals aged 18–35.

Key outcomes of the programme: At the regional level:

- Established a network of over 100 young leaders promoting gender equality in their communities.
- Network members underwent a course on social leadership skills for gender equality and received micro grants for 25 projects across Europe, including Poland. These grants were co-designed through focus group discussions, addressing various gender equality themes such as women in

academia, sexism in the media, reproductive health, and awareness raising of gender issues.

- The projects engaged over 6,000 people both face to face and online.
- The programme also facilitated networking activities connecting young people with policymakers and gender experts.

In Poland:

- The programme also fostered partnerships with a nationwide network of youth-centric institutions, resulting in impactful initiatives. These included inclusive community-building training sessions held nationwide, collaboration with the GrowSpace Foundation to engage LGBTQ+ Schools Ranking co-ordinators across Poland (reaching over 1,800 individuals by 2022/23 through face-to-face and online platforms), and the implementation of mini-grant programmes for enthusiastic youth activists.
- During 2022/23, participants translated their knowledge into action by executing 23 social action projects in their local communities.
- Additionally, the programme played a vital role in enhancing cross-border networking and collaboration through its involvement in the Stronger Together initiative in Europe. A notable highlight was the active participation of 25 young representatives in a visit to Warsaw and Lublin, including their engagement in the Cross-Border Cooperation Congress.

4.3 Barriers to education and skills

This section explores the barriers to education and skills among young people, with a focus on women and girls.

4.3.1 Macro-level barriers

Uneven distribution of infrastructure

A key impediment to education relates to the uneven distribution of infrastructure between rural and urban areas. In most countries, infrastructure disparities between urban and the rural areas are highly pronounced, with substantial implications for young people living in remote places. In Pakistan, the absence of essential school infrastructure predominantly in the rural areas affects access to education. A very small share of young women aged 15–24 from rural areas had attained tertiary education at the time of the Next Generation survey (3 per cent relative to 16 per cent in urban areas) (Next Generation data). Among 25–35-year-olds, the rural-urban gap was larger: 8 per cent of young women of this age group in rural areas had completed tertiary education relative to 25 per cent of young women in urban areas (ibid.). Inadequate road infrastructure and the lack of public transport further compound the challenges for rural women and girls trying to reach educational facilities. These factors demotivate families from sending them to school (Babar et al., 2023). Additionally, geographic disparities across the provinces are apparent where access to education is most difficult in less developed provinces (ibid.).

Indonesia's eastern provinces face critical gaps in infrastructure development, with implications for access to adequate educational facilities and training centres especially in remote rural locations (Allison et al., 2022). Challenges pertain to substandard educational facilities, insufficient space inside the classrooms and other key facilities such as laboratories and washrooms (ibid.). The inadequacy or absence of essential infrastructure demotivates young people.

Gender stereotypes inhibit uptake of STEM subjects

Existing stereotypes hinder women and girls from studying or pursuing a career in STEM. Key informants across several countries emphasise the role of prevailing social norms and gender stereotypes that deter women and girls

from pursuing STEM education. They also argue that professions that highlight the role of women as caregivers have greater social acceptance. In Pakistan, women are more likely to study to become doctors or nurses – traditionally regarded as an appropriate occupation for females (interviews, 2023). Teaching is another occupation generally considered suitable for women (ibid.). Key informants in Sri Lanka also state that families discourage girls from pursuing engineering and ask them to consider other areas where they can assume the role of caregiver (ibid.). In this case, being a doctor or a teacher is considered acceptable (ibid.).

In Indonesia, key informants note that socio-cultural factors steer women away from subjects that are considered masculine. For example, despite grants and scholarships being offered to women to study a vast array of subjects, most are inclined towards programmes that relate to education and teaching (interviews, 2023). At the same time, programmes that pertain to nursing, midwifery, and pharmaceuticals are preferred because they are considered feminine, whereas engineering is considered masculine (ibid.). Consequently, those areas within STEM considered feminine are acceptable for women to pursue (ibid.). Additionally, subjects such as communication, psychology and/or the social sciences and the humanities are common among young women (ibid.).

Gender stereotypes in Viet Nam mean that engineering, physics, maths, and technology are seen as masculine and 'too difficult for women', whereas areas of study considered more appropriate for women include the humanities, social sciences, teaching, and nursing (interviews, 2023). These inclinations are symptomatic of a broader responsibility of women to assume the role of caregivers in predominantly domestic but also in professional settings (ibid.).

In both Nigeria and Ethiopia, the rural-urban divide is a key factor in the functioning of social norms. In Nigeria, interviewees find that young girls in rural areas are likely to be inspired by local role models such as teachers and midwives with whom they associate positive attributes (interviews, 2023). In Ethiopia, interviewees believe that women and girls in urban areas have more freedom to choose what they want to study, including STEM. In rural areas, however, they are likely to conform to existing mindsets and settle for what is socially acceptable, thereby limiting their educational aspirations (ibid.).

In Poland, key informants note that women are generally associated with fulfilling traditional roles as caregivers (interviews, 2023). This affects what girls choose to study while at school and eventually the professions that young women pursue (ibid.). The predominant professions associated with women are teaching and nursing (ibid.). In rural areas, religion is a key factor that reinforces existing mindsets (ibid.). Some interviewees suggest that the indoctrination begins at an early stage at primary level and textbooks are an effective medium in communicating and reinforcing social norms and gender stereotypes (ibid.). For example, primary school textbooks commonly depict mothers and daughters cooking in the kitchen while fathers take sons out for bike rides; in depictions of work, women are shown as nurses, and men as doctors, but not the other way around (ibid.).

4.3.2 Meso-level barriers

Discrimination associated with gender, disability, and minority status

Discrimination against young people based on gender, disability, and ethnicity creates barriers to education. In Pakistan, sons are prioritised over daughters, especially in the rural areas, resulting in higher drop-out rates among girls (interviews, 2023). The challenges regarding access to education become more complex since close to two-thirds of people with disabilities are women and girls, half of whom are denied education (ICRC, 2023; UNDP, 2023b). In the survey data, a higher share of 25–35-year-old women with disabilities reported having no formal education in comparison to those of the same age with no disabilities (15 per cent vs 3 per cent) (Next Generation data). Almost 50 per cent of women and girls in rural areas from religious minority communities never attended schools (Chaudhry, 2021). For some interviewees, constraints to education arise from a pattern of systemic discrimination against minority communities that ranges from negligible provision of education facilities in Hindu-majority areas to ongoing harassment of minority girls and forced conversions to Islam, all of which cause parents to not want to send their girls far from home (ibid.; interviews, 2023).

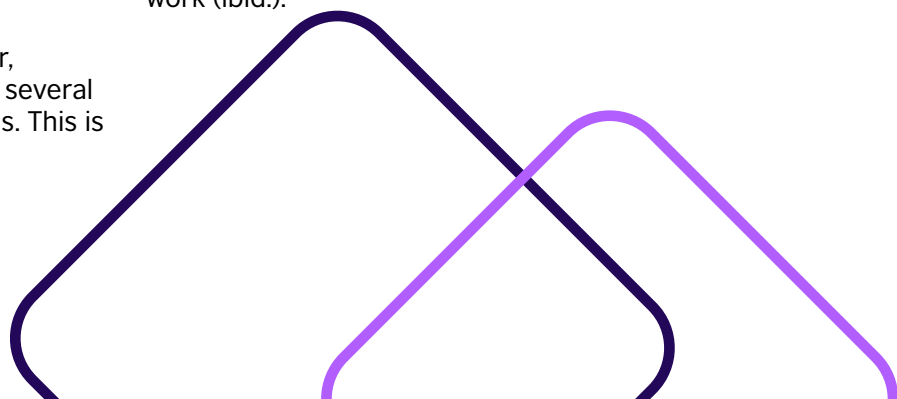
In Nigeria, discrimination based on gender, disability, and minority status manifests in several ways to limit access to education and skills. This is

particularly evident in the case of young women with no partners (whether single, divorced, or widowed) including teenage mothers (Curran et al., 2020). Women also face discrimination when they pursue higher education (interviews, 2023). Gender and ethnicity further compound existing challenges for women from the northern parts of the country (Curran et al., 2020). Among 15–24-year-old girls and women with disabilities, 27 per cent have no formal education, compared to 13 per cent of those with no disabilities. For the older age group, the corresponding figures are 28 per cent and 13 per cent (Next Generation data).

In Poland, members of the ethnic Roma community face discrimination. While substantive gains are visible in terms of access to education arising from initiatives such as the Programme for the Integration of the Roma Community (2014–2020), key informants highlight Roma are commonly perceived as inherently lazy and have no aspirations (CoE, 2019; interviews, 2023). The key barriers to education are poverty and social exclusion which, over time, reinforces existing patterns of deprivation and lack of empowerment (ibid.). Moreover, following Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022, an estimated 50,000 Ukrainian Roma refugees fled to Poland (Samber, 2023). Already stigmatised as a minority in Ukraine, refugee status in a new country adds another layer of dispossession reinforced through systemic discrimination and has negative consequences in terms of access to basic services (ibid.; interviews, 2023).

Mismatch between existing curricula and priorities of young people

Existing curriculum design and delivery does not match the priorities and preferences of young people. In Pakistan, 50 per cent of young women and 60 per cent of young men regard university curricula as outdated (Next Generation data); 56 per cent of young women and 61 per cent of young men report that the education system does not provide them with the knowledge and skills needed for jobs in the 21st century (ibid.); while 74 per cent of young women and 73 per cent of young men say that online learning can provide them with the skills needed for future work (ibid.).



In Indonesia, young people feel that existing curricula emphasise science and mathematics rather than the humanities and creative subjects, thereby limiting the possibilities to explore specific areas of interest (Allison et al., 2022). There is also a strong demand for skills related to information technology, financial literacy, and business development, reflecting a gap in the current educational offerings (ibid.). In Viet Nam, youth stress the need to learn both practical and soft skills: their appreciation of the demand for communications, creativity, teamwork, and time management skills reveals a broad understanding of labour market requirements domestically and internationally (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020).

In Nigeria, young people note a greater emphasis on theoretical learning rather than practical skills development (Curran et al., 2020). This is also the case in Ethiopia, where students raise concerns about the disconnect between what is taught and real-world applications – for example, being taught biology without access to a microscope or a laboratory (De Schryver et al., 2019). Young people in Ethiopia also draw attention to the need for training in practical terms such as finance and accounting related to entrepreneurship and skills related to technology to transition to professional life (ibid.).

4.3.3 Micro-level barriers

Lack of financial resources

While a range of financial constraints hinders young people from accessing education and skills, insufficient household income is a key factor in dropping out of school. In Pakistan, 19 per cent of young women and 23 per cent of young men cited financial barriers as a major reason for dropping out (Next Generation data). Key informants note that travel-related expenses alone can impede young people's access to education owing to the lack of public transportation and affordable alternatives (interviews, 2023). Women and girls, especially those living in rural areas, are disproportionately affected by the cost (or unavailability) of private transportation.

Similarly in Sri Lanka, monetary constraints play a key role in students dropping out in the early stages of schooling and looking for employment to support their households (Perera et al., 2019). Low household income was cited by 20 per cent

of young women and 27 per cent of young men to be the main reason for discontinuing studies (Next Generation data).

In Indonesia, young people living in rural areas and in the eastern part of the country underscore that a certain level of household income is needed to support their academic aspirations and how many of them need to find employment to meet household expenses (Allison et al., 2022; interviews, 2023). This resonates with young people in Viet Nam, where hardship experienced by their families pushes them to enter the workforce early in life (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). For young people from ethnic minorities, poverty and remote locations compound challenges in accessing education (interviews, 2023). With limited resources, households invariably prioritise boys over girls (ibid.).

In Nigeria, despite public sector education being officially free at the primary and lower secondary levels, costs associated with purchasing uniforms and books significantly impede access to education among poor households (interviews, 2023). In Ethiopia, boys in rural areas tend to drop out when transitioning to secondary school to meet the financial obligations of their families (De Schryver et al., 2019). Owing to a scarcity of high schools in rural areas, students are required to relocate to urban areas, but the costs associated with renting accommodation, meals, and transport constitute hidden barriers to education and skills development (interviews, 2023).

At the other end of the spectrum, where young graduates aspire to attain further qualifications, domestically or abroad, the costs of higher education tend to be prohibitive. In Indonesia, for example, most students who go abroad need to cover expenses from their own resources, with only one in ten receiving scholarships or grants (Allison et al., 2022). In Viet Nam, despite young people's willingness to explore opportunities for advanced degrees at home and globally, educational costs create significant barriers (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020).

Family influences and expectations

Despite young people's aspirations to pursue education and acquire skills, the mindsets of their families pose significant barriers. In Pakistan, a higher share of young women (19 per cent) relative to young men (12 per cent) stated

that their families did not want them to continue their education (Next Generation data). Around 16 per cent of young women also dropped out to carry out domestic responsibilities (ibid.). According to interviewees, parents' perceptions are biased against young women and girls – particularly in rural areas, where high drop-out rates are associated with less buy-in from parents (interviews, 2023). The overriding mindset is both dismissive of girls' ability to achieve anything and resigned to believing there are no opportunities for women and girls (ibid.). Additionally, women and girls are automatically expected to assume several roles that range from carrying out domestic tasks to looking after younger siblings or elders as well as working in the field (ibid.).

In Viet Nam, families impinge on young people's decisions to pursue education, particularly among dropouts (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). Broadly, where households struggle financially, boys are prioritised, and girls are invariably obliged to drop out (interviews, 2023). The situation is particularly prevalent among girls who belong to ethnic minorities and face multiple challenges: poverty, remote locations, poor access to quality education, and discrimination (ibid.). Girls with disabilities are far less likely to pursue education at all levels owing to family restrictions (ibid.). Early marriage and subsequent motherhood are also key factors that hinder girls' access to education (ibid.).

In Nigeria, women and girls have fewer educational opportunities than boys (Curran et al., 2020). According to key informants, in the northern areas, parents' decisions significantly contribute to girls dropping out after lower secondary school to get married (interviews, 2023). Girls get left behind in education because they are expected to fulfil the requirements of the household, which can range from taking care of siblings, undertaking domestic chores, or even helping parents with odd jobs related to their trades (ibid.). As a result, girls do not have the opportunity to regularly attend schools (ibid.).

In Ethiopia, despite improvements in access to education over the past decade, women and girls tend to discontinue their studies over time. Factors such as a disproportionate share of household responsibilities, early marriage, pregnancy, and expectations that they follow the wishes of their husband are key impediments over and above parents' influences (De Schryver et al., 2019). This resonates with the reflections of key informants who note that while girls' access to formal primary education is almost on a par with boys, or even ahead in some instances, girls tend to drop out at the junior and secondary levels. A key reason is that families grossly undervalue the significance of educated girls, and boys are generally prioritised (interviews, 2023).

Table 4. Summary of enablers and barriers

Level	Enablers	Barriers
Macro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education policies Alternative forms of learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uneven distribution of infrastructure Gender stereotypes inhibit uptake of STEM subjects
Meso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role of international organisations and civil society Extra-curricular activities for personal development Safe spaces for learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discrimination associated with gender, disability, and minority status Mismatch between existing curricula and priorities of young people
Micro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supportive families Positive outlook on education among young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of financial resources Family influences and expectations

Source: Authors' analysis.

CASE STUDY 3

Increasing school enrolment and retention for girls in Pakistan

Name of programme: ILMPOSSIBLE – Take a Child to School Phase I and II

Year: 2014–2021

Funded by: British Council and Education Above All Foundation

Implemented by: Children’s Global Network Pakistan, School of Leadership Foundation and LMKT, along with 24 CSOs

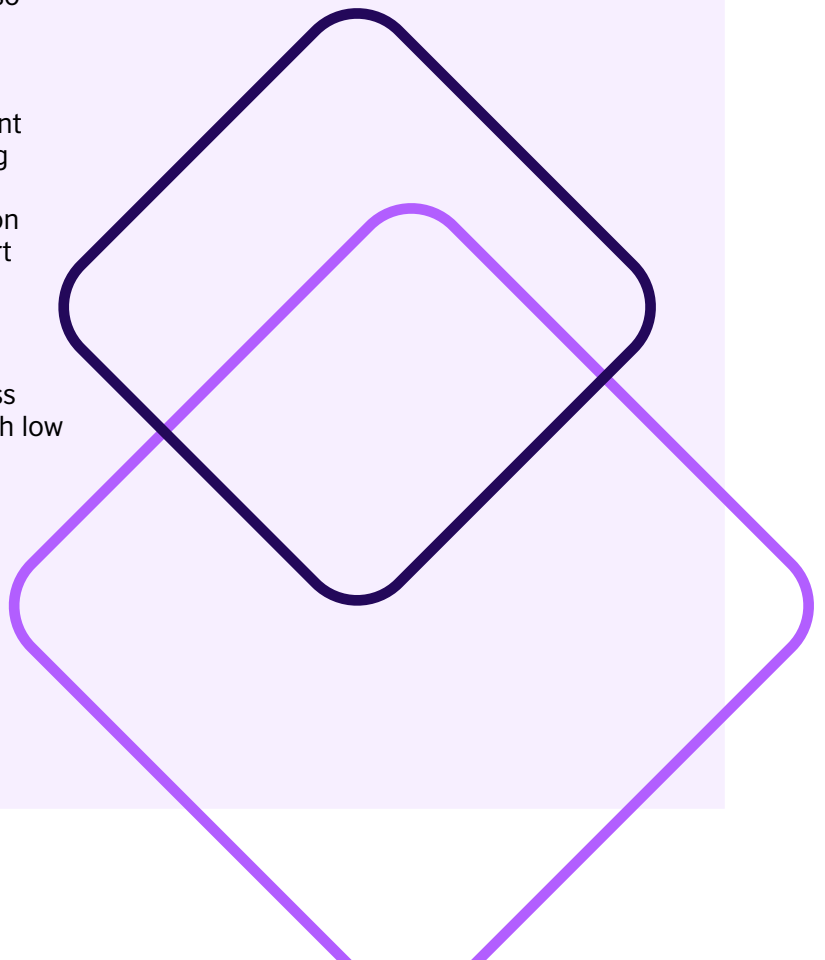
Programme objective: The programme aimed to increase school enrolment and retention rates.

Method of delivery: The programme adopted a rights-based and participatory community engagement approach. It established 556 ‘Mohalla (neighbourhood) Committees’ comprising over 7,000 trained community members, who collaborated with parents and local administrations to advocate for and facilitate school enrolment and retention. Additionally, the programme implemented a targeted retention intervention named DOSTI, promoting life skills and physical education in 676 schools. Infrastructure grants were also disbursed to over 200 schools, addressing infrastructure barriers such as lack of classrooms, water pumps, solar-powered fans, and classroom furniture. A key element of the programme design included building partnerships between communities, and local and provincial governments/education authorities to develop a network of support for out-of-school girls and boys.

Target beneficiaries: The programme targeted out-of-school children aged 6–11 from marginalised communities across Pakistan, with a specific focus on areas with low enrolment rates, especially for girls.

Key outcomes of the programme: The programme achieved significant milestones, including:

- The enrolment of over 473,000 out-of-school children, of which 47 per cent were girls.
- A retention rate of above 75 per cent.
- Tangible improvements in school infrastructure.
- Seventy-six per cent of students surveyed shared that they were more likely to attend school because of the DOSTI sessions.
- Forty per cent of the advocacy initiatives led by the Mohalla Committees resulted in decisive actions on resolving specific barriers hindering school enrolment by government officials.



5 Ending violence against women and girls

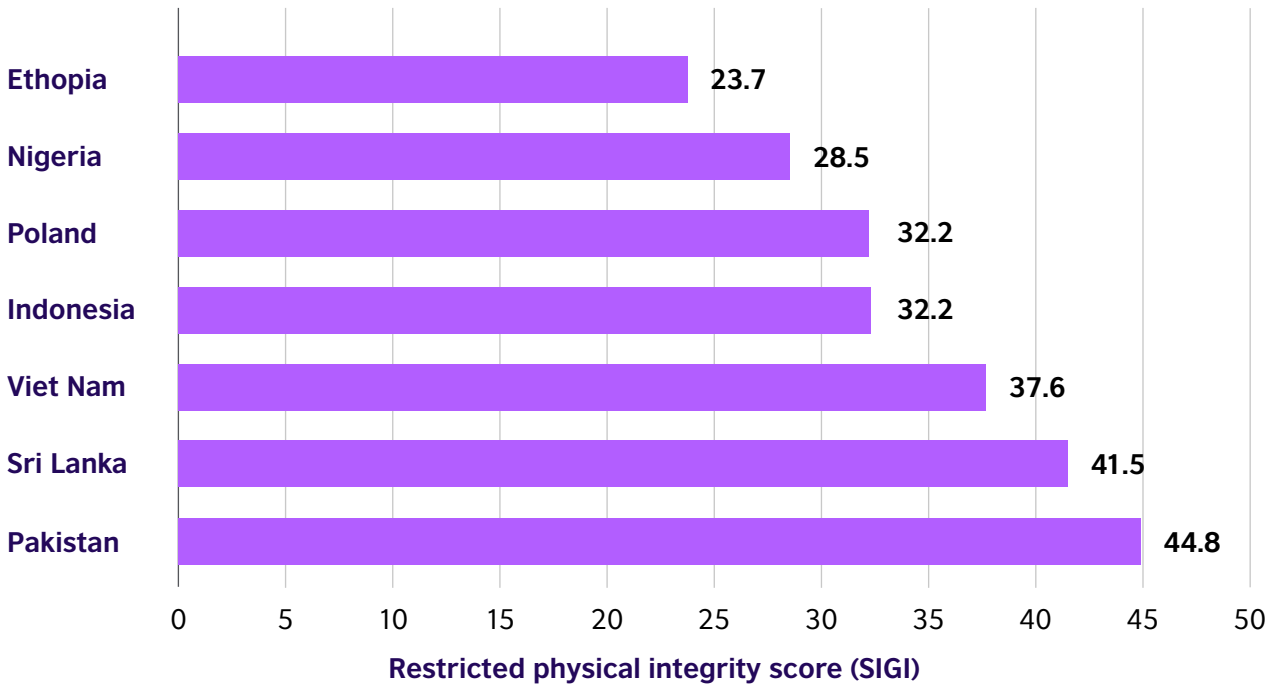
Violence against women and girls is a violation of fundamental human rights and is detrimental for individuals, communities, and societies. Although the rights of women and girls are constitutionally protected in each country in this study, violence remains a major issue.

5.1 Overview

Of all seven countries, Pakistan shows relatively higher discrimination against women

and girls, with a score of 44.8 out of 100 on the OECD's SIGI sub-index on restricted physical integrity (see Figure 6). This sub-index refers to the extent to which women and girls are vulnerable to forms of gendered violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV), rape and sexual harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM), and control of their sexual and reproductive rights. Zero denotes no discrimination while 100 means absolute discrimination.

Figure 6. Country scores on restricted physical integrity of women and girls (0–100)

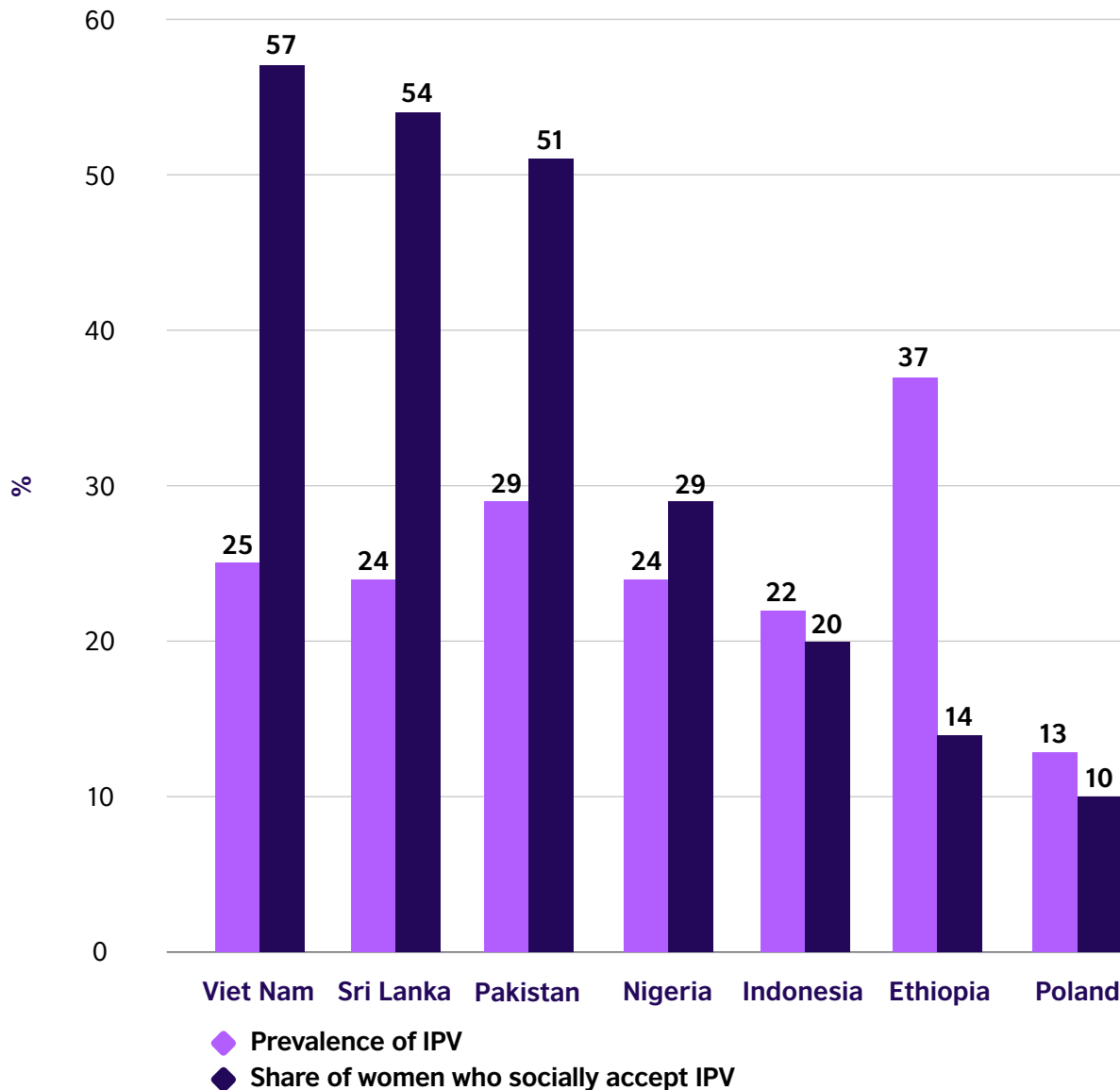


Source: OECD (2023).

The share of women who justify or condone IPV is over 50 per cent in Viet Nam, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan (see Figure 7), while there is also a high prevalence of IPV in those countries at 25 per

cent, 24 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively. By contrast, prevalence in Ethiopia is significantly higher at 37 per cent compared to its social acceptance by women at 14 per cent (OECD, 2023).

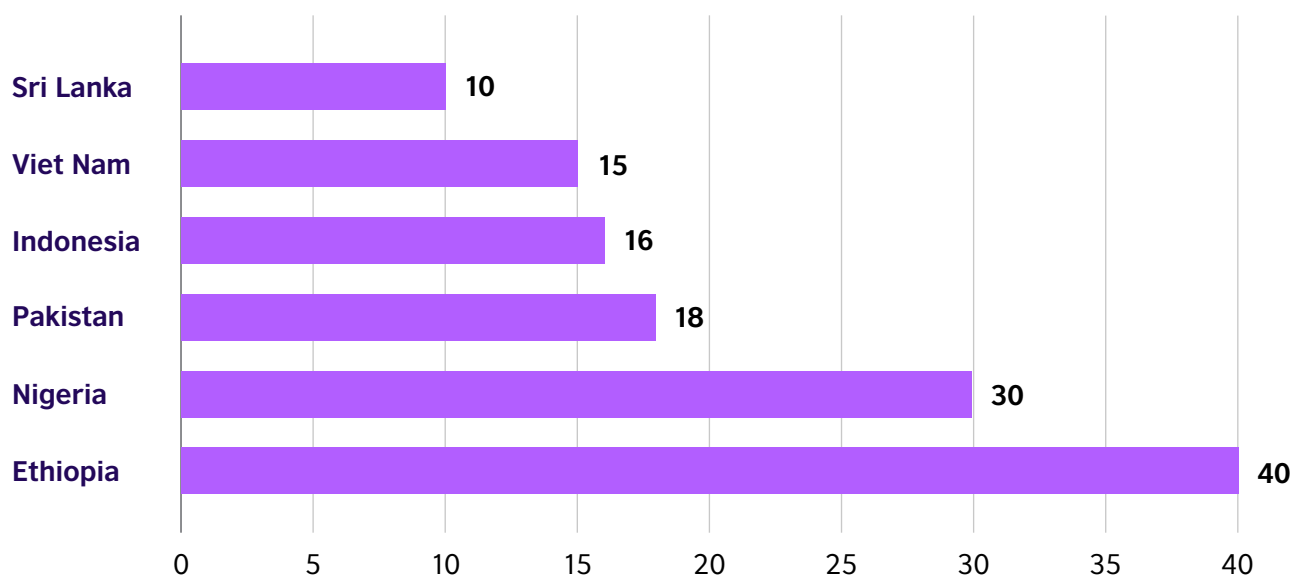
Figure 7. Prevalence of IPV and its social acceptance by women (%)



Source: OECD (2023).

Many women aged 20–24 in our study countries married before they turned 18 (see Figure 8). Four countries represent relatively large numbers: Indonesia (25.5 million), Nigeria (19.4 million), Pakistan (19.4 million), and Ethiopia (18.6 million). In percentage terms, Ethiopia and Nigeria have the highest shares at 40 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively.⁵

⁵ Data is not available for Poland, and it is excluded from this comparative analysis.

Figure 8. Share of women aged 20–24 married before the age of 18 (%)

Source: Child marriage data portal (2023).

The laws to protect women and girls vary from country to country. Table 5 documents some of the key enactments to address issues around harassment of women in the workplace, rape, child marriage and rights, acid crime, domestic violence, human trafficking, and FGM, alongside some new laws that have curtailed the rights of women and girls. Subsequent chapters discuss the extent to which the enforcement of these laws, together with policies and national action plans to protect women, have enabled or hindered progress on ending violence against women and girls.



Table 5. Notable laws in each country with a focus on recent years

Country	Notable laws
Pakistan	Amendment of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act of 2022, which also criminalises harassment in the informal sector; Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act of 2021; Anti-Rape Act of 2016; Anti-Honour Killing Act of 2016; Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act of 2011 (PCSW, n.d.; Pakistan National Assembly, n.d.; Pakistan Senate, 2022).
Sri Lanka	Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act of 2015; amendment of Article 11 in 2015 prohibiting the use of degrading treatment; Domestic Violence Act of 2005; amendment to the Panel Code in 1995 that criminalises sexual harassment (World Bank, 2021; WDP, 2009; Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2015; Parliament Secretariat, 2023).
Indonesia	Law No. 12 on the Crime of Sexual Violence (UUTPKS) of 2022; amendments to the Penal Code in 2022 criminalise abortion and non-marital sex; Law on Anti-Trafficking of 2007; Victim Protection Law of 2006; Law on Domestic Violence of 2004 (UN Women, 2011; Anggiana and Dian Agustino, 2022; Satriana and Dewi, 2022, HRW, 2022).
Viet Nam	Prohibition of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace of 2012, which was updated by ministerial decree in 2023; the Amendment to the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control in 2022; the Law on Children of 2016; Anti-Human Trafficking Law of 2012; Domestic Violence Law of 2007 (Global Database on Violence Against Women, 2023; ILO (2016); UNFPA Viet Nam, 2022; IOE, 2023).
Nigeria	Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency Law of 2021; the Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act (Amendment) of 2015; the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015 which criminalises the practice of FGM; and the Child Rights Act (Minimum Age for Marriage) of 2005 (Global Database on Violence Against Women, 2023; Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency, 2022).
Ethiopia	Labour Proclamation No. 1156/ 2019 of 2019 prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace; Civil Servants Proclamation: Sexual Harassment in the Workplace of 2017; ban on the medicalisation of FGM of 2017; and proclamation No. 909/2015 on Prevention of Trafficking in Persons of 2015 (World Bank, 2022; Global Database on Violence Against Women, 2023).
Poland	Anti-Violence Act of 2020; ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2015; Act on Counteracting Family Violence of 2005 (CoE, 2020).

5.2 Enablers for ending violence against women and girls

5.2.1 Macro-level enablers

Government commitments and legal reforms

Developing new laws and policies to support women's rights, amending existing ones, and committing to international agreements are positive national efforts to address violence against women and girls. In Pakistan, a noteworthy transformation has taken centre stage with the implementation of the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act in 2021 (interviews, 2023). Here, the legal landscape has undergone a profound transformation, with calls to establish rape crisis cells in hospitals to provide critical support to survivors and the abolition of the two-

finger virginity test (ibid.). Furthermore, changes in the definition of rape, combined with a strong emphasis on consent and gender-neutral laws, pave the way for more equitable and inclusive legal recourse (ibid.).

In Sri Lanka, key informants saw a noticeable increase in interest in violence against women and girls from various ministries (interviews, 2023). In 2023, the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security were launched, aimed at promoting women's rights in the country (UNFPA Sri Lanka, 2023; Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment, 2022). Crucially, interviewees see a discernible change in societal discourse, with violence against women and girls and menstrual health issues moving from hushed to open discussion, fostering a positive and inclusive dialogue (interviews, 2023).

Indonesia has made significant legislative progress on women's empowerment and preventing violence against women and girls, according to key informants. FGM was recently contested by female religious leaders, signalling a change in cultural norms (interviews, 2023; UNFPA Indonesia, 2023). The country is also in the process of introducing a comprehensive National Strategy (Stranas) aimed at preventing child marriages, demonstrating a proactive approach to addressing critical societal issues related to women's and children's rights (interviews, 2023). Some interviewees also noted a degree of backsliding, which is documented in the next section on barriers.

In Viet Nam, laws and recent amendments are prominent in efforts to combat domestic violence. Examples include the 2016 Law on Children, which protects them from sexual abuse and any other exploitation (interviews, 2023), and the 2007 Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, which was amended in 2022 (interviews, 2023; UNFPA Viet Nam, 2022). These initiatives reflect Viet Nam's commitment to fostering an environment of safety and equity.

In Nigeria, key informants cited evidence of the enactment of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) of 2015 as legal progress (interviews, 2023). Designed to protect girls, this legal framework guards against harmful practices such as FGM (WFD, 2021). Moreover, Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu signed the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency bill into law in 2021, establishing the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (Salau, 2023; Lagos State Ministry of Justice, 2023), which aims to increase awareness on sexual violence, domestic violence, and child abuse and develop proactive measures to end violence against women and girls (interviews, 2023; Udombana, 2017; Lagos Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency, n.d.).

In recent years, many governments introduced or amended acts to protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace. Examples include Pakistan's amendment of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act of 2022, which also criminalises harassment in the informal sector (PCSW, n.d.); Viet Nam's Prohibition of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace of 2012, which was updated by ministerial decree in 2023 (Global Database on Violence Against Women,

2023); and Ethiopia's Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019 of 2019 prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace (World Bank, 2022).

New digital technologies as an opportunity for empowerment

New digital technologies are a transformative force in shaping societal attitudes and providing avenues for empowerment to women and girls. Where there is access to the internet, digitalisation has created diverse opportunities, from knowledge dissemination to connecting with friends, enabling women and girls to address violence in innovative ways. In Pakistan and Poland, digital platforms are seen as safe spaces for women and girls to disseminate information, seek advice, educate themselves and be more assertive (interviews, 2023). However, concerns remain over technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).

In Viet Nam, social media platforms were found to be especially useful to survivors of violence, who sometimes use them to speak up about the violence they have experienced and to find support (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). In Sri Lanka, where mobile and digital uptake is high, the post-COVID shift towards digital platforms has created numerous opportunities for women and girls (interviews, 2023). For key informants, the Know4Sure website stands out as a prime example of leveraging digital platforms to offer discreet and convenient access to health services (ibid.). This service extends to individuals in rural areas, underscoring the potential of digitalisation in enhancing healthcare accessibility (ibid.).

Key informants from Indonesia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia view technology as an inspiration for young women. Digital platforms provide avenues to share experiences, social activities, and reading initiatives, creating opportunities for positive change (interviews, 2023). Through social media, technology becomes a driving force for progress and empowerment, facilitating information dissemination, education, and challenging stereotypes. An example of this is provided by the #ArewaMeToo movement in Nigeria, which highlighted violence against women in socially and religiously conservative states in the North (Curran et al., 2020).

5.2.2 Meso-level enablers

Civic activism

Civic activism is a powerful force in ending violence against women and girls, fostering change and resilience in diverse cultural contexts. Key informants from Pakistan say that the prevention and response landscape is shaped by the work of feminist groups in the country (interviews, 2023). They have been using social media for activism, recognising the internet as a powerful tool for advocacy, yet they struggle to reach vulnerable women, since most do not have access to the internet (ibid.). Girls at Dhabas was cited by key informants as a particularly active feminist group, known for its work on reclaiming public spaces for women and for organising the Aurat March (ibid.). In Nigeria, activists and civil society organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in launching campaigns, safe spaces, and strategic collaborations (ibid.). The commemoration of significant days, such as the Day of the Girl Child and International Women's Day, serves as a platform for raising awareness and mobilising local communities (ibid.).

In Poland, key informants shared some of the successes of CSOs working to bring about legal change in the country. They explained that pressure from CSOs contributed to improvements in the legal system, with legal entities more likely to support victims now than several years ago (interviews, 2023). For instance, mandatory reporting was implemented, requiring survivors to testify only once, with their statements recorded in court to prevent harassment and retraumatisation (Grevio, 2021). Safeguards during court hearings, such as separate safe rooms and the option to testify via electronic means, were also introduced (ibid.).

Community engagement and creation of safe spaces

Organisations play a crucial role in shaping safe environments and disseminating essential knowledge on violence against women and girls. They represent spaces of safety, growth and support, and can significantly prepare women and girls to address violence. In Ethiopia, key informants said that religious places are perceived as sanctuaries for women, and they noted ever more organisations working on women's and children's rights (interviews, 2023). They claimed that there are over 4,700 civic organisations in the country: more than half of these work to support

women and children and, as a result, various activities are aiming to increase awareness among women and girls and strengthen their ability to protect themselves (ibid.).

In Poland, key informants mentioned that many CSOs, such as the Ponton Group and the SEXEDPL Foundation, are creating safe spaces and conducting educational programmes on violence against women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) (interviews, 2023). Examples of CSO efforts to support marginalised and vulnerable women and girls include the creation of women's, feminist and queer camps and mothers' circles, which serve as spaces for self-care, self-education, awareness-building, and skills improvement (Grabowska and Rawłuszko, 2021).

Donor and private sector support

Donor and private sector support plays a crucial role in helping organisations that are working to end violence against women and girls. Increases in investments allow for the development and strengthening of services and programmes aimed at prevention and response. Key informants from Sri Lanka explained that a noteworthy surge in donor investments has facilitated technological enhancements within local organisations and developed their exposure and capacity in the field of violence prevention and response (interviews, 2023). In their view, this influx of financial support has contributed to the augmentation of shelter facilities, increasing the spaces available for women and girls affected by violence (ibid.). They also noted an increase in private sector engagement in the country, with major corporations such as MAS and Brandix working on preventing sexual exploitation, a trend connected to global brand advocacy needs and priorities (ibid.). Training initiatives for private sector entities have also become more common, with an increasing number of private sector partners aligning with and supporting anti-violence initiatives (ibid.).

In Nigeria, key informants referred to the creation of a national Gender-based Violence (GBV) Fund (interviews, 2023). This ambitious initiative was launched by gender-responsive private companies and women chief executives with the support of UN Women, the European Union's Spotlight Initiative and Women in Successful Careers (WISCAR) (WFM, 2023). The Fund will address critical issues such as support systems for

survivors, prevention work, and service provider training (interviews, 2023; Agbonkhese, 2023). It marks a concerted effort to increase private sector participation and investment in GBV initiatives (WFM, 2023).

Prioritising formal and comprehensive sexuality education

Formal and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) emerge as powerful catalysts for change across diverse countries. Education instils confidence in women, empowering them to take proactive steps against abuse, and provides them with the tools to navigate both personal and professional spheres. In Pakistan, key informants noted a shift away from traditional views on education with the inclusion of CSE (interviews, 2023). Incorporating life skills and CSE information into the government curriculum is critical to ending violence (ibid.). This strategic shift aims to challenge and unlearn normalised violent behaviours against women and girls, fostering a sense of confidence and awareness among them (ibid.).

In Sri Lanka, key informants noted a growing interest in CSE within the Ministry of Education (interviews, 2023). This comprehensive approach emphasises norm change and life skills, launching nuanced discussions about respect, consent, communication, and empathy (ibid.). Interviewees also saw CSE as a long-term tool for reducing violence, dispelling traditional gender norms, and cultivating empathetic individuals (ibid.).

Key informants in Nigeria recognise education as the foundation for empowerment (interviews, 2023). Education is seen as a tool to prevent early marriages, facilitate informed decisions about family planning, and carve out diverse career paths in addition to mitigating childhood abuse (ibid.).

5.2.3 Micro-level enablers

Supportive familial bonds and friendships

Relationships with family and friends act as powerful enablers to end violence against women and girls. Their influence and support have the power to shape women's and girls' understanding and potential experience of violence and they can educate men and boys on crucial issues of consent, boundaries, and

respect. In Ethiopia, key informants recognised families as pivotal agents of change as they play an essential role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of their daughters and prioritising their education and empowerment (interviews, 2023). In Poland, key informants underscored the significance of friends and support systems (ibid.). These connections provide an additional layer of influence and support for women and girls and have the potential to reinforce messages of gender equality and foster a culture where violence is not tolerated.

Engaging men and boys in actions to end violence against women and girls

Men and boys are critical allies in the pursuit of gender equality. In Sri Lanka, key informants recognised that bringing men into clinics and sensitising them to behavioural change and relationship counselling is not just an addendum to the conversation, but a critical component in the holistic effort to eradicate violence against women and girls and build a society founded on equality and mutual respect (interviews, 2023). In Viet Nam, key informants emphasised the importance of involving men and boys in raising awareness of violence against women and girls and in promoting behaviour change (ibid.).



CASE STUDY 4

Towards a future without violence against women and girls in Sri Lanka

Name of programme: A future without violence: Creating greater opportunities for women and girls to enjoy their right to a safe life

Location: Four districts in Sri Lanka (Hambantota, Anuradhapura, Monaragala and Jaffna)

Year: 2020–2021

Funded by: British Council

Implemented by: Foundation for Innovative Social Development (FISD) and Jaffna Social Action Centre (JSAC)

Programme objective: The future without violence programme was designed to address harmful gender norms that hinder effective prevention and response to violence against women and girls. It also aimed to strengthen service delivery for women and girls who are vulnerable to experiencing violence, along with improving gender responsive communications.

Method of delivery: The programme developed knowledge materials which identified harmful gender norms that contribute to violence against women and girls in the four districts. These were then disseminated during online and offline workshops.

Target beneficiaries: 225 women and youth from Hambantota, Anuradhapura, Monaragala and Jaffna.

Key outcomes of the programme: The programme:

- Successfully empowered 150 youth in the four districts by raising awareness on gender norms contributing to violence against women and girls.
- Equipped youth with digital storytelling skills to advocate for positive gender norms.
- Led to innovative communication campaigns such as a rap song on cyber sexual violence and 12 digital storyboards created by youth to challenge online violence against women and girls.
- Formed a district vigilant committee of 160 service providers, 12 district stakeholders, and CSOs to serve as an effective response mechanism against violence against women and girls.
- Promoted improved services in the target districts with information on helplines and tips on gender-sensitive response to incidents of violence against women and girls.

5.3 Barriers to ending violence against women and girls

There are several barriers to ending violence against women and girls.

5.3.1 Macro-level barriers

Inadequate implementation and enforcement of existing laws

While governments are making efforts to end violence against women and girls, more work needs to be done to effectively address this issue. Despite legislative strides, the effectiveness of these measures remains hampered by a range

of systemic issues, according to key informants. This leads to inefficient support for survivors, low rates of prosecution and, as a result, discourages survivors from reporting violence.

In Pakistan, where legal reforms have been implemented, a victim-blaming culture and the lack of awareness among duty-bearers impede the translation of laws into tangible change (interviews, 2023). Despite the enactment of laws, the gap between legal frameworks and practical implementation remains wide, rendering them ineffective in reducing the incidence of violence

In Indonesia, there is a need for robust policies that foster empowerment that is impeded by deeply entrenched cultural and social values (interviews, 2023). Despite collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, the financial backing for women's empowerment initiatives in regional government agencies remains severely limited (ibid.). Moreover, the amalgamation of family planning programmes with women's empowerment, despite being distinct fields, reflects the lack of prioritisation (ibid.).

Viet Nam's struggle lies in outdated laws and the lack of gender equality guidelines, rendering prevention interventions unsustainable in key informant views (interviews, 2023). The negligible allocation of government funds for services underscores the lack of commitment to tackle the issue, leaving international organisations to fill the void through alternative budgeting exercises (ibid.).

Nigeria encounters slow justice processes and challenges in law enforcement, especially concerning issues like FGM (interviews, 2023). Despite having legal frameworks in place, the effective implementation of these laws is marred by systemic obstacles, contributing to a situation where justice for victims remains elusive (ibid.).

In Ethiopia, interviewees find that ineffective justice systems and the lack of accountability allow perpetrators to act with impunity (interviews, 2023). Inadequate law enforcement, defective investigative processes, and lenient sentencing fail to act as deterrents, fostering an environment where violence is accepted or viewed as inconsequential (ibid.).

In Poland, the fight against violence against women and girls is entangled with political agendas, notably of right-wing groups (interview, 2023). The past eight years witnessed a government targeting human rights advocates and, by extension, efforts to combat violence (IPFF, 2022). The prior administration, characterised by a reluctance to champion women's rights, often engaged in counterproductive meddling with laws rather than constructive reforms (Amnesty International, 2022). The negative trajectory persisted with the reduction in funding for human rights organisations and CSOs dealing with violence and women's rights, as well as introducing anti-abortion laws, described by a key respondent as the 'institutionalisation of violence against women and girls' (interview, 2023). While the administration elected in 2023 may renew hope

in ending GBV and promoting gender equality, women and girls still face numerous legal barriers that are yet to be addressed (OHCHR, 2023).

Harmful gender and social norms

Harmful gender and social norms are a prevalent obstacle to ending violence against women and girls. These norms, deeply embedded in patriarchal systems shaped by traditional, cultural, and religious beliefs, give rise to discriminatory practices that harm women and girls from an early age and minimise their prospects of reaching their full potential. Likewise, these norms harm young men and boys, proscribing ideas around masculinity, femininity, and romantic relationships, and promoting power imbalances that fuel discrimination, harassment, and abuse.

In Sri Lanka and Viet Nam, key informants raised concerns over the prevalence of IPV and cyber violence and explained that cultural norms profoundly influence perceptions of romantic relationships (interviews, 2023). Harmful norms in Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia frequently lead to practices such as child marriage and FGM and impede the comprehensive dissemination of information on family planning and sexuality, especially to young girls.

Interviewees from Indonesia said that there are many vulnerable girls in the country who are victims of child sexual abuse, child marriages, and FGM (interviews, 2023). In eastern Indonesia, the Nusa Tenggara Timur province has a cultural practice known as 'Kawin Tangkap' (capture tradition). In this tradition, a man forcibly kidnaps and impregnates a woman without her consent. If the woman becomes pregnant, the man then proceeds to marry her (ibid.).

Social stigma and victim-blaming linked with under-reporting

Social stigma, victim-blaming, and the normalisation of violence deter survivors from seeking help and reporting violence.

The way societies view violence against women and girls has detrimental consequences on survivors' reporting rates and recovery journeys. Underreporting emerged as a common barrier in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland.

Key informants attributed this to deeply ingrained patriarchal mindsets, stigma surrounding reporting, and strong cultural traditions

(interviews, 2023). In Ethiopia, key informants explained how societal norms encourage women to remain silent, and how reporting violence is met with shaming (ibid.). In Poland, women and girls are concerned about escalating violence and are not confident that the legal system would support them. A pervasive fear of being ridiculed and blamed makes victims and survivors less likely to report violence, while the lack of adequate support networks throughout the reporting process magnifies these challenges (ibid.).

Increase in technology-facilitated gender-based violence

As technology advances, it introduces new dimensions to the spectrum of violence, expanding the potential for harm through digital channels. TFGBV has become a shared reality in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland. In Pakistan, the surge in internet and social media use not only propels progress but also begets an unsettling rise in cyberbullying and harassment, posing a direct threat to women's safety, according to key informants (interviews, 2023).

In Indonesia, interviewees are concerned over the links between grooming and online violence (interviews, 2023). The virtual realm, intended for connection, becomes a breeding ground for exploitation, particularly impacting vulnerable groups like young girls (ibid.). Viet Nam navigates the dual nature of technology, which offers women opportunities in areas like e-commerce while simultaneously posing new threats (ibid.). Online recruitment is especially perilous, exposing those with limited access to employment opportunities to the risk of trafficking (ibid.).

In Nigeria, key informants saw the digital landscape as a deceptive terrain where women and girls fall victim to online violence, including sexual violence and death (interviews, 2023). In urban Ethiopia, interviewees noted that even though digital technology enhances access to information, it exposes women to a spectrum of potential risks, including the amplification of exploitation and negative portrayals on social media (ibid.).

In Poland, key informants warned of the hidden dangers of seemingly benign technological spaces, such as rideshare app drivers engaging in sexual violence against passengers (interviews, 2023; Mazur and Serafin, 2022).

Geographic disparities

Geographic disparities emerge as a significant determinant of violence against women and girls across countries. Differences in location within a country influence attitudes to violence against women and girls, and how survivors report on it and access services. Key informants from Pakistan noted a stark rural-urban divide (interviews, 2023). While major cities struggle with attitudes perpetuating victim-blaming within the justice system, rural areas face the additional challenge of limited access to basic services for women (ibid.). In Sri Lanka, key informants highlighted regional disparities, with notable differences in reporting across districts (ibid.). They also mentioned that rural-urban dynamics influence service accessibility, noting the variable effectiveness of referral systems in different settings (ibid.).

In Indonesia, interviewees discussed barriers to education in rural areas, with children enduring long commutes to school (interviews, 2023). This geographic challenge hampers their educational opportunities: young girls are more vulnerable to violence on their commute and at school (ibid.). In Viet Nam, key informants pointed towards the limited access of migrant populations to support services (ibid.).

In Nigeria, a north-south divide is prominent, with women in the south more likely to report domestic violence than their northern counterparts (Curran et al., 2020). In Ethiopia, interviewees noted a geographic dimension to reporting difficulties, with the intimidation of victims by perpetrators and the delayed resolution of reported cases being higher in rural areas, particularly for girls (interviews, 2023). This highlights the importance of understanding local dynamics to address violence against women and girls (ibid.).

Escalation of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic

As the world struggled with COVID-19, a 'shadow pandemic' of escalated violence against women and girls spread in different countries, including Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. The contexts of each country presented distinct challenges, but the growth of violence manifested as a global phenomenon (UN Women, n.d.; Dawsey-Hewitt et al., 2021). In Pakistan, interviewees explained how economic stressors during lockdowns heightened

family tensions, resulting in an alarming increase in violence, particularly against women (interviews, 2023).

In Indonesia, key informants referred to the surge in internet and social media use, resulting in a concerning increase in TFGBV, including the dissemination of pornographic images (interviews, 2023). The National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) received 940 reports of TFGBV in 2020, which was four times higher than the figure in 2019 (USAID, n.d.). Similarly, the Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SafeNet) registered an increase from 60 complaint cases in 2019 to 620 in 2020 (ibid.).

Lockdowns and restrictions in Nigeria had a disproportionate impact on female caregivers (interviews, 2023). The inability of women to move freely exacerbated their vulnerability to gender-based and domestic violence (ibid.).

5.3.2 Meso-level barriers

Limited services and resources

Limited services and resources for survivors pose serious health and safety challenges for women and girls. Poor service quality impacts survivors' trust in institutions and their overall well-being, safety, and healing. The issue of limited services and recourse is acute in Indonesia, according to interviewees, with survivors facing significant obstacles (interviews, 2023). The scarcity of services and shelters adds to the difficulties women face when attempting to leave abusive situations (ibid.). Key informants thought that the presence of institutionalised violence and patriarchy within existing shelters, which are predominantly government-run, complicates survivors' path to safety and recovery (ibid.). A similar theme emerged in interviews in Viet Nam, with key informants stating that the lack of services and shelters for women in need makes them vulnerable to violence and deters them from seeking help (ibid.).

Limited and restricted funding also has an impact on the work of CSOs in many of these countries (interviews, 2023). While these organisations may implement effective programmes, the short duration of funding cycles and their prescriptive nature compromises the initiatives' sustainability and scalability. This jeopardises the long-term effectiveness of projects aimed at assisting survivors.

Ineffective first responders

First responders, such as the police and healthcare providers, are often unable to provide support. This tends to be related to the lack of training in, sensitisation about, or prioritisation of a survivor-centred approach. In Pakistan and Nigeria, there are notable challenges concerning first responders, particularly the police and healthcare providers. From key stakeholder perspectives, these providers often lack the necessary sensitisation to address domestic violence and sexual assault effectively (interviews, 2023). Inadequate resources impede the ability of providers to offer the requisite support, on time and to high standards. These affect the overall response to such incidents and impose a heavy burden on survivors who come forward (ibid.).

Challenges in Poland's medical system exacerbate the difficulties survivors face when seeking help (interviews, 2023). Key informants mentioned that chaotic mandatory reporting procedures contribute to inefficiency, potentially discouraging survivors from reporting violent incidents (ibid.). Access to essential services and assistance is also hampered by the lack of a streamlined and supportive medical response system (ibid.).

Hostile working environments

Work environments are found to be hostile places, where discrimination and violence are widespread. The issue of workplace-related violence is prevalent, extending beyond just sexual violence and abuse. In Pakistan, there are numerous workplace challenges, including the absence of adequate policies addressing issues such as gender pay gaps or harassment (ibid.). The environment in many workplaces is not conducive for women (millions work in the informal sector), posing obstacles to their active and equal participation in the workforce (ibid.). In Sri Lanka, women face various forms of violence and discrimination, including gender pay gaps (interviews, 2023). This underscores a broader challenge within the workplace, where unequal treatment and opportunities contribute to a hostile environment for women.

5.3.3 Micro-level barriers

Normalisation of violence and limited awareness of rights

Women and girls often normalise violence due to limited awareness of their rights and social conditioning. This barrier emerged strongly in interviews in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. In Pakistan, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, women commonly perceive violence as an ordinary aspect of their lives, often unaware of their rights and the protective legal frameworks in place (interviews, 2023). This frequently results in the lack of reporting. Despite high education levels among women and girls in Sri Lanka, key informants were concerned about women's acceptance of violence and the impacts of wider social conditioning that make many women feel that if they do not get punished, they are not loved (ibid.).

While key informants did not specifically talk about men and boys' normalisation of violence against women and girls, it is crucial to highlight that harmful societal and gender norms have a negative impact on all genders. Societal norms and expectations surrounding masculinity, including the pressure to embody toughness and power, significantly contribute to gender

inequality, harassment, and abuse. These expectations shape the thinking and behaviour of men and boys, often having adverse effects on their mental well-being and relationships, contributing to the pervasiveness of violence against women and girls (Burrell, n.d.).

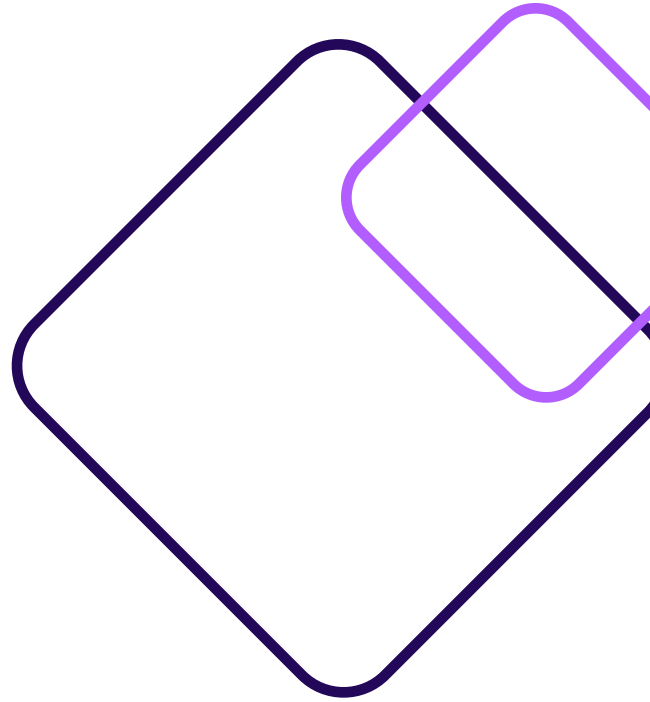


Table 6. Summary of enablers and barriers

Level	Enablers	Barriers
Macro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government commitments and legal reforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate implementation and enforcement of existing laws Harmful gender and social norms Social stigma and victim-blaming linked with under-reporting Increase in TFGBV Geographic disparities Escalation of violence during COVID-19
Meso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civic activism Community engagement and creation of safe spaces Donor and private sector support for organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited services and resources Ineffective first responders Hostile working environments
Micro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supportive familial bonds and friendships Engaging men and boys in actions to end violence against women and girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normalisation of violence and limited awareness of rights among women and girls

Source: Authors' analysis.

6 Socio-economic empowerment of women and girls

Global progress in sustainable development and people's wellbeing rests on the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls. While appreciating its relevance and critical need, most nations have left women and girls behind in social and economic change processes.

6.1 Overview

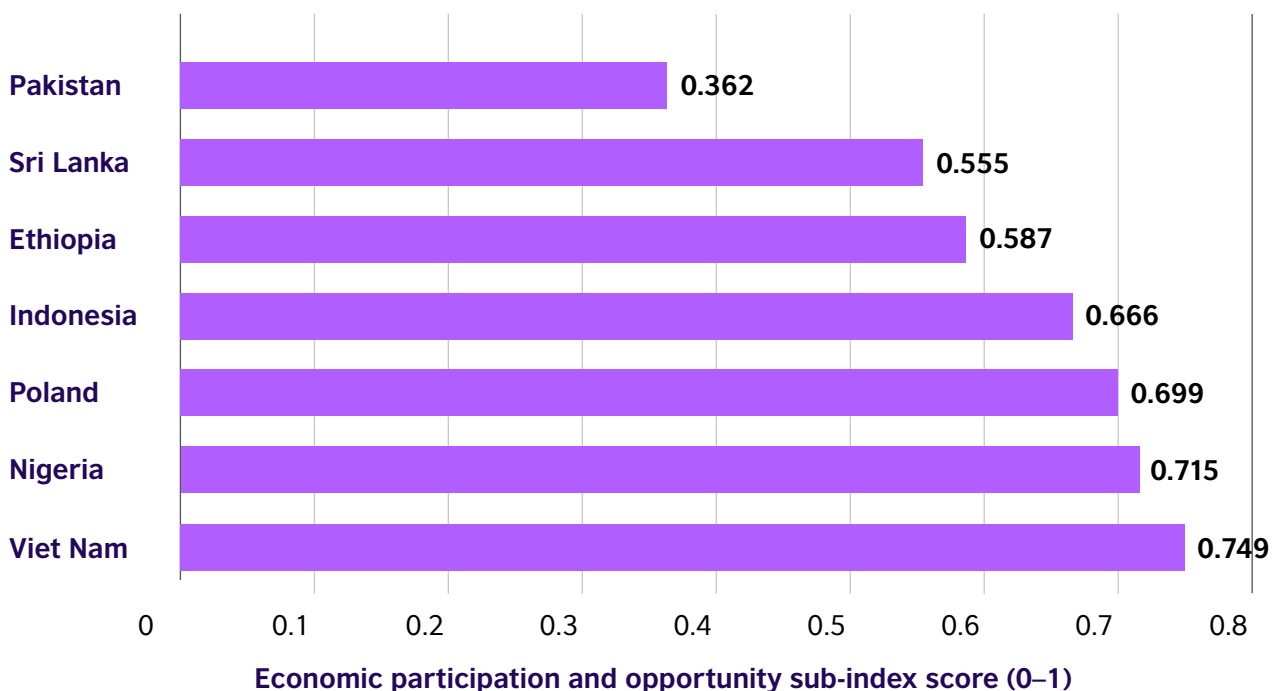
Of the seven countries, Viet Nam leads with the highest score, 0.749, and ranks 31 out of 146 countries in terms of closing the gender gap in economic participation between men and women. Pakistan has the lowest score, 0.362, and ranks 143 (WEF, 2023) (see Figure 9). Progress on economic participation is also evident in the case of Nigeria, with a score of 0.715 and rank of 54, despite its lower-middle-income status. On the other hand, both Poland and Indonesia reflect relatively higher gender gaps in economic participation, scoring 0.699 (rank: 64) and 0.666

(rank: 87) despite their respective high-income and upper-middle-income statuses.

This sub-index contains three concepts: the participation gap, the remuneration gap and the advancement gap (WEF, 2023).

- The participation gap is captured using the difference between women and men in Labour Force Participation Rates.
- The remuneration gap is captured through the ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income and a qualitative indicator gathered through the World Economic Forum's annual Executive Opinion Survey (wage equality for similar work).
- The gap between the advancement of women and men is captured through the ratio of women to men among senior officials and managers, and the ratio of women to men among technical and professional workers.

Figure 9. Economic participation and opportunity sub-index score (0–1)



Source: WEF (2023).

Young people report a range of challenges in Next Generation surveys that they have either directly faced in the recent past or think people their age are facing. The top three challenges varied from country to country, with some challenges featuring across a few countries.

Lack of employment opportunities featured in the top three challenges for women in five countries: Sri Lanka (67 per cent), Poland (65

per cent), Ethiopia (42 per cent), Viet Nam (35 per cent), and Indonesia (33 per cent). Lack of access to healthcare and health problems were in the top three challenges for women in three countries: Viet Nam (45 per cent), Indonesia (30 per cent), and Pakistan (26 per cent). Lack of access to affordable quality housing was in the top three challenges in two countries: Poland (66 per cent) and Ethiopia (33 per cent).

Table 7. Top three challenges facing young people, by country and sex

Country	Share of young women facing this challenge	Share of young men facing this challenge
Pakistan		
Lack of access to food and/or water	28%	34%
Marriage at a young age	27%	11%
Lack of access to healthcare (excluding sexual and reproductive healthcare)	26%	36%
Sri Lanka		
Cannot complete education due to economic hardships	77%	76%
Lack of employment opportunities/unemployment	67%	70%
High costs involved in obtaining higher education	64%	61%
Indonesia		
COVID-19 pandemic	55%	52%
Lack of employment opportunities	33%	37%
Mental health issues	30%	22%
Viet Nam		
Financial difficulties	49%	48%
Health problems	45%	43%
Lack of employment opportunities	35%	36%
Ethiopia		
Lack of employment opportunities	42%	52%
Lack of access to quality housing	33%	44%
Ethnic conflict/discrimination	30%	37%
Poland		
Lack of access to affordable housing	66%	57%
Lack of employment opportunities	65%	51%
Drug/alcohol abuse	62%	55%

Source: Next Generation data. Note: Data not available for Nigeria.

6.2 Enablers of socio-economic empowerment

6.2.1 Macro-level enablers

Government support for entrepreneurship

Governmental support for entrepreneurship is a crucial enabler for nurturing the entrepreneurial ambitions of young women and men. Governments in all seven countries have implemented various policies and reforms aimed at simplifying business processes, providing financial support, and integrating entrepreneurial skills into education. These have had varying degrees of success.

Interviewees from Indonesia mentioned the government's approach toward building an entrepreneurial ecosystem to address key areas, including culture, skills, and funding to enable more women to start their businesses. Several ministries, including the Ministry of National Development Planning (BAPPENAS), Ministry of Youth and Sports (MENPORA), Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture (MENKO PMK), and Ministry of Home Affairs (KEMENDAGRI), have collaborated to build this ecosystem, together with partners like the United Nations Development Programme (interviews, 2023).

Nigeria has demonstrated progress, evidenced by its 15-place rise in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business ranking (Curran et al., 2020), primarily due to reforms such as the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020 (ibid.) These target the challenges faced specifically by small and medium enterprises. Ethiopia has channelled efforts into nurturing young entrepreneurs through initiatives like the Micro and Small Enterprises Development Policy and the Youth Revolving Fund (De Schryver et al., 2019).

The digital economy

The digital economy is a vital catalyst for youth employment and entrepreneurship. In all seven countries, the digital sphere provides alternative platforms that circumvent traditional obstacles, enabling youth to harness internet-based opportunities in freelancing, e-commerce, and digital entrepreneurship. It also nurtures creativity, self-sufficiency, and youth resilience.

In Pakistan, 70 per cent of young women and men believe that the internet will emerge as a major source of employment in the future,

with 59 per cent considering online freelancing a viable career choice (Babar et al., 2023).

The burgeoning tech start-up ecosystem and the growth of the gig economy play pivotal roles in driving this emerging trend (ibid.). The online space also offers women a path towards economic empowerment and enhanced financial independence: 68 per cent of Pakistani youth believe that women can harness the internet to access new economic opportunities, while 62 per cent agree that women will predominantly benefit from e-commerce (Next Generation data). Interestingly, both men and women endorse this perspective (ibid.). Yet, it is important to acknowledge the presence of expected resistance to this notion, particularly among youth educated in religious institutions, where support stands at 39 per cent, in contrast to the national average of 68 per cent (ibid.). Interviewees mentioned an increasing use of social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram among women entrepreneurs to promote their products, sell them online, and connect with their customers in innovative ways (interviews, 2023).

Indonesian youth increasingly rely on social media as a means of income generation, particularly in urban areas, where they use these platforms for live streaming, product sales, and promoting small businesses, circumventing the competitive traditional job market (Allison et al., 2022). The influence of accomplished young entrepreneurs in the online domain as role models and reservoirs of valuable insights for youth is also evident, as indicated by 50 per cent of young women and men concurring that there are many thriving young entrepreneurs to emulate and acquire knowledge from (ibid.).

In Viet Nam, there is an upbeat sentiment among young entrepreneurs about the future of digital start-ups, particularly in innovative digital solutions and remote work. E-commerce and online service platforms are popular, offering both consumer and seller benefits (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). Moreover, the digital space serves as a trusted resource for job hunting and education, with 57 per cent of young women and men placing their trust on the internet and 51 per cent on social media for such opportunities (Next Generation data).

Nigeria has witnessed a significant shift towards online business ventures in response to the pandemic, with young Nigerians actively exploring e-commerce and digital services as essential for sustaining their livelihoods (Curran et al., 2020). Interviewees noted that even though many women are digitally excluded, the ones who have access

to technology in the cities are smartly adopting it to run online businesses and market their products (interviews, 2023). Many organisations are also embedding digital literacy into their skills training portfolios to support women in their work (ibid.).

6.2.2 Meso-level enablers

Access to higher education

Higher education helps young people secure jobs that are more aligned with their fields of study and personal interests. Educational achievement is pivotal in bridging the divide between youth aspirations and subsequent job placements. In Viet Nam, higher education significantly influences this dynamic, as 59 per cent of young women aged 15–24 with higher education reported that their first job was related to their chosen field of study, compared to 13 per cent among those who completed secondary education. This was also the case for the older cohort of 25–35-year-olds (Next Generation data). In Poland, educational attainment shapes attitudes towards work and life. Those with higher educational qualifications often see work as an essential source of personal fulfilment (Raven et al., 2021).

Key informants from Pakistan, Indonesia, Viet Nam, and Ethiopia also note a positive shift among women with higher education as it helps them to pursue better jobs and, equally critically, to make better life choices and advocate and stand up for themselves (interviews, 2023).

Tech and innovation hubs foster entrepreneurship

Supportive hubs for entrepreneurs enable economic empowerment and social change. In Pakistan and Nigeria, tech incubators and innovation hubs are addressing crucial gaps that have traditionally hindered entrepreneurship. In Pakistan, tech incubators are pivotal in creating centres for learning and facilitation, and in fostering mutual engagement and acceptance among young entrepreneurs (Babar et al., 2023). These also enable women and girls, who face restrictions to work outside the home, to participate in e-commerce (ibid.).

Nigeria is witnessing a significant growth in its tech and innovation hub ecosystem, with at least 85 active hubs, the largest number in Africa (Briter Bridges, 2019; Curran et al., 2020). These hubs provide services like skills training, mentorship, incubation programmes, and access to workspaces. They also act as forums for

communication and networking, fostering strong social and professional networks. They have become platforms for collective action, as seen in initiatives like the women-led Market March Movement, which raises awareness and organises protests on social issues like sexual harassment (Curran et al., 2020). Key informants also gave other examples, which aim to stimulate innovation in the African creative economy (interviews, 2023). For instance, the Co-Creation Hub's Women in Business programme helps women entrepreneurs from across Nigeria become more investment ready (ibid.).

Organisations addressing women's economic needs

Creating organisations that are tailored to address women's economic needs yields many benefits. In Sri Lanka, interviewees welcomed the establishment of business consortia that are led by women (interviews, 2023). In these organisations, decisions on how to act as a business community of women are made collaboratively. Issues around business regulations and operations, access to finance, and how to influence organisations and end corruption are extensively discussed. Women have found convening around common goals and collectively bargaining for their rights to be powerful (ibid.).

Key informants from Ethiopia gave the example of member-owned Saving and Credit Cooperatives, operational across many cities and rural areas. These cater to young people aged 15–29 and aim to ensure equal membership of women (interviews, 2023). They receive incentives such as lower interest rates, specialised coaching, and mentoring support (ibid.).

Poland's experience with Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers has also enabled the creation of new civil society organisations that are focused on preventing the loss of professional credentials among Ukrainian women, who had decent educational qualifications and good quality jobs prior to being displaced. Two years into living in Poland, many require support on economic integration (interviews, 2023).

Growing inter-organisational collaborations

Inter-organisational collaborations, including between government, international agencies, the private sector, and civil society, are on the rise in many countries. Interviewees from Pakistan, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, and Ethiopia gave several examples of promising

collaborations. In Pakistan, since 2023, a partnership focused on women's social innovation between the United Nations Development Programme and Jazz (the largest digital operator) has resulted in the creation of the Women Initiative in Social Entrepreneurship (WISE) (interviews, 2023; UNDP, 2023b). The WISE Bootcamps aim to empower 400 women social entrepreneurs across 12 cities with business knowledge and skills to manage sustainable enterprises.

In Nigeria, interviewees gave examples of the work between civil society and government agencies including the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (interviews, 2023). In Ethiopia, informants cited work on disability inclusion involving different types of CSOs (disability advocates, human rights organisations, and women's rights organisations) who are working with the Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA) to help people with disabilities gain greater self-esteem and self-confidence in accessing education and skills training and gainful employment (ibid.).

Women as community role models

Empowered women who lead by example inspire and provide economic opportunities to others in their community. In Pakistan, key informants gave examples of role models who rose against gender discrimination and cultural barriers to create organisations such as Kashf Foundation and the Women's Digital League (WDL), which is one of the first digital platforms for women that provides training and jobs (interviews, 2023). Other examples include the founder of a youth- and women-led organisation called Baithak – Challenging Taboos, who is recognised for her work on advocating for women's rights, especially in rural areas, and in educating them (ibid.).

In Indonesia, key informants mentioned many examples of role models who have become ministers, celebrities, and well-known academics and entrepreneurs (interviews, 2023). They also gave examples of ordinary women with extraordinary stories of empowerment. Many of the ordinary stories come from rural areas and informal settlements. For instance, Resa Boenard from Bantar Gebang Integrated Waste Disposal area, who was born and raised around there, 'provides education and scholarships to children of scavengers in the area. She established a non-profit organisation named the Kingdom of BGBJ and a start-up of products from waste disposal' (ibid.). In all the countries, key informants

explained that the personal stories of role models inspire other women and support them through their empowerment journeys (ibid.).

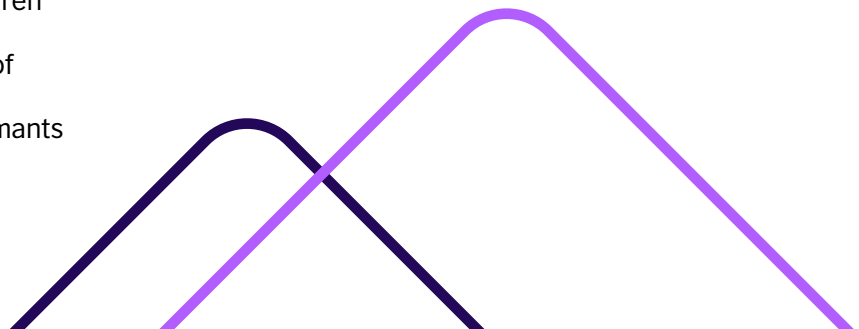
6.3.3 Micro-level enablers

Young women's interest in entrepreneurship

Youth inclination towards self-employment and business creation is a significant enabler for economic empowerment. In Pakistan, 92 per cent of young women aged 15–24 in urban areas feel very or somewhat prepared to become entrepreneurs, in comparison to 73 per cent of women of the same age in rural areas (Next Generation data). This is also the case for the older age group, where 91 per cent of women aged 25–35 feel very or somewhat prepared to start their businesses in urban areas relative to 70 per cent of women of the same age in rural areas (ibid.). Key informants also noted an upward movement in women's mindsets towards entrepreneurship driven by a 'shift in the general economy because it is more flexible for them to work in' (interviews, 2023), even though they face significant labour market discrimination.

In Indonesia, 57 per cent of young women aged 15–24 in both rural and urban areas want to set up their own businesses (Next Generation data). Among young women aged 25–35, this rate is higher: 67 per cent in rural areas and 66 per cent in urban areas (ibid.). For many, this is a 'means to an end' in a challenging job market where there are limited opportunities and intense competition (Allison et al., 2022).

In Viet Nam, 81 per cent of young women aged 15–24 in urban areas feel very or somewhat prepared to become entrepreneurs, in comparison to 68 per cent of women of the same age in rural areas (Next Generation data). This is reversed for the older age group, where 79 per cent of women aged 25–35 feel very or somewhat prepared to start their businesses in rural areas relative to 75 per cent of women of the same age in urban areas (ibid.). A desire for authority and freedom drives this inclination, and many young people are saving capital to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020).



CASE STUDY 5

Empowering digitally excluded young women and men with skills for learning and earning in Indonesia

Name of programme: Skills for Inclusive Digital Participation (SIDP)

Location: South Sulawesi, East Nusa Tenggara, Ambon, Banda Island, West Papua, Papua

Year: 2021–Present

Funded by: FCDO under the UK Government's Digital Access Programme

Implemented by: British Council in Indonesia

Programme objective: The programme builds the capacity of digitally excluded individuals to help them develop digital skills. It also contributes to improved livelihoods by promoting access to online resources for entrepreneurship.

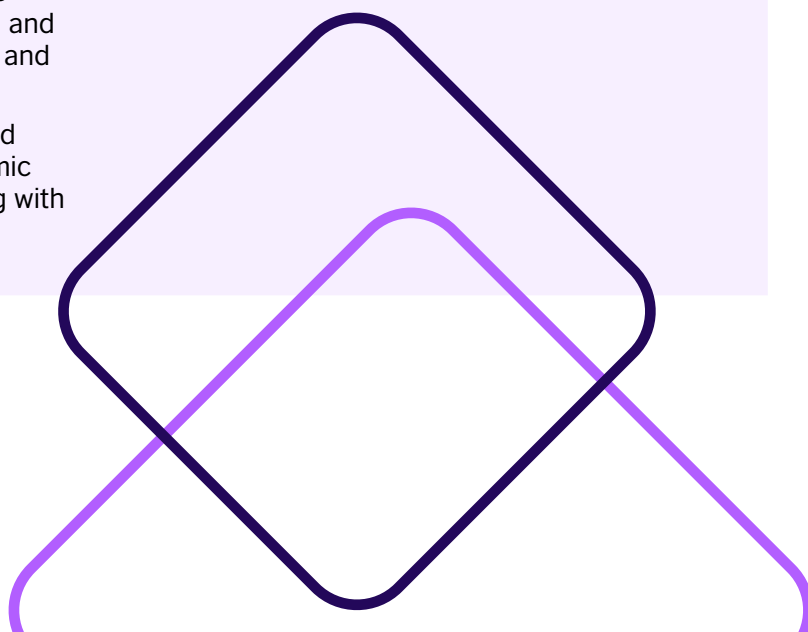
Method of delivery: SIDP works with local implementing partners who co-ordinate the work of Community Level Trainers (CLTs), selected from digitally excluded groups and supported by Expert Level Trainers (ELTs). They deliver basic and intermediate digital skills training to 'Learners' in priority locations. The project uses training manuals and supplementary materials co-created with the CLTs and ELTs and based on internationally recognised digital literacy frameworks.

The project has also created a Community of Practice (CoP) for digital skills trainers trained in the project. The CoP offers a platform for continuous engagement on emerging issues and opportunities in the ICT area. In the CoP, the trainers benefit from coaching and mentorship from industry practitioners and their peers.

Target beneficiaries: Digitally excluded young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, women, and people living with disabilities (PLWD).

Key outcomes of the programme: Benefits included:

- Beneficiaries increased their knowledge of digital skills and how they can apply this to a business they run and/or how to get work online and are using their skills in a business (if they have one) or when they sell goods or services online. This has led to business benefits, with learners saying their businesses are more visible and better promoted online.
- Beneficiaries are also looking for, finding, and registering for other training opportunities. During Phase 1 (October 2022) of the SIDP, 65 per cent of the CLTs and 72 per cent of learners were aged between 18 and 35, while 70 per cent of learners and 53 per cent of CLTs were female.
- Sixty-three per cent of CLTs reported to have benefited economically following their involvement in the SIDP. The SIDP has also [digitally empowered persons living with disabilities including a deaf female baker](#) who, following her training, is now using digital applications such as Google, YouTube, Canva and Instagram to promote her business and learn new baking skills.



6.3 Barriers to socio-empowerment of women and girls

This section presents the key barriers to the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls.

6.3.1 Macro-level barriers

Harmful gender norms

Harmful gender norms pose a significant barrier to young women's socio-economic empowerment. Societal expectations deeply rooted in traditional gender roles and biases contribute to the limited job opportunities for women across countries.

In Pakistan, 91 per cent of women aged 25–35 reported being out of the labour force and identified as mothers/homemakers, whereas no men of the same age identified as homemakers (Next Generation data). In Indonesia, 68 per cent of unemployed women aged 25–35 reported having to look after their children as a reason for unemployment, relative to only 6 per cent of men of the same age bracket (ibid.). Key informant views were consistent with these findings.

Discrimination based on age, ethnicity, religion and ability

Discrimination in the labour market and in the workplace hinders young people's economic empowerment and their career opportunities. Diverse forms of discrimination are widespread across the Next Generation countries, including discrimination based on age, ethnicity, religion and ability. Age discrimination makes it harder for young people to assert themselves and advance in their careers (De Schryver et al., 2019; Perera et al., 2019).

Ableism further exacerbates young people's struggle to access employment opportunities and achieve career success. In Indonesia, youth with disabilities face substantial challenges in various aspects of life, with employment being particularly daunting (Allison et al., 2022). In Indonesia, a higher share of young women with disabilities are unemployed relative to men with disabilities (34 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively) (Next Generation data).

Ethnic and religious discrimination poses a significant barrier to the economic empowerment of young people. In Pakistan, religious and ethnic minorities encounter socio-economic barriers,

with Christians, constituting less than 2 per cent of the population, disproportionately occupying jobs related to cleaning and sanitation (Babar et al., 2023). In Sri Lanka, minority communities have limited upward social mobility, perceiving better job opportunities with decent pay to be primarily available to the majority Sinhalese population (Perera et al., 2019). In Nigeria, members of minority groups are approximately twice as likely to report ethnic and religious discrimination as factors hindering their selection for employment, alongside higher instances of tribalism, favouritism, nepotism, and mistreatment in the workforce (Curran et al., 2020).

Nepotism and favouritism in the labour market

Nepotism and favouritism in the labour market pose a significant barrier to the economic empowerment of young women. This issue is prevalent across Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, where young women struggle to find merit-based opportunities. In Nigeria, favouritism and the lack of personal connections pose significant challenges for young women: 18 per cent of women aged 25–35 in urban areas and 13 per cent in rural areas cited not having connections in the relevant company as a reason for not getting a job, while 15% of women aged 25–35 in urban areas and 12 per cent in rural areas cited favouritism (Next Generation data).

In Sri Lanka, young women are deterred from seeking state sector employment due to perceived discrimination and corruption in recruitment processes, leading them to prefer private sector jobs (Perera et al., 2019). In Indonesia, young women face challenges related to nepotism, prompting them towards more entrepreneurial endeavours and alternative means of income generation out of necessity rather than choice (Allison et al., 2022).

6.3.2 Meso-level barriers

Workplaces fail to support working mothers

Women's economic empowerment is held back by inadequate support for working mothers. Insufficient childcare assistance, inflexible working hours, and restricted maternity leave contribute to the challenges faced by working mothers in Pakistan, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Ethiopia, and Poland. In Pakistan, key informants said that the

absence of day-care facilities and limited maternity leave options in urban areas force many women to leave the workforce prematurely, hampering their professional growth (interviews, 2023).

In Indonesia, Viet Nam and Poland, key informants report that organisations are hesitant to hire women with young children (interviews, 2023). Furthermore, childcare is often expensive or inaccessible, especially in rural areas, and balancing work and childcare is challenging for working women. This prompts many of them to stay at home and raise their children instead (ibid).

6.3.3 Micro-level barriers

Family influence on career choices

Young individuals often face challenges in achieving economic empowerment due to a lack of support from their families. This is a common challenge in Pakistan, Indonesia, and Viet Nam. In Pakistan, young individuals, especially women, encounter obstacles in finding jobs, mainly due to family limitations and expectations. Women particularly struggle to achieve career success due to a lack of family support, leading to dissatisfaction and unequal career opportunities compared to men (Babar et al., 2023). Key informants from Pakistan said that women often lean towards a career in academia, which is seen as a safer option due to societal constraints related to household responsibilities and early marriages (interviews, 2023).

In Indonesia, young individuals navigate conflicting motivations between securing traditional, family-approved formal sector jobs and aspiring for unconventional careers. A generational gap is evident, with younger individuals favouring creative, better paid, tech-oriented sectors that offer freedom from nepotism and hierarchies

(Allison et al., 2022). Yet, key informants explained that family approval remains a major hurdle for young people, especially women, impacting their access to funding and participation in economic programmes (interviews, 2023).

In Viet Nam, key informants underscored that family plays a central role in a woman's life, affecting her career path. The degree of family support she receives significantly impacts a woman's ability to return to work after giving birth. The division of household workload and the sacrifice of career paths are topics of serious discussion even before marriage (interviews, 2023). Because of this, young people often feel compelled to pursue family-preferred fields (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020).

Expectations to financially sustain the family early in their careers

Young women's economic empowerment is impeded by financial constraints, exacerbated by the responsibility to provide financial support to their families. In Pakistan, 63 per cent of girls and women aged 15–24 and 61 per cent of women aged 25–35 stress the substantial influence of their family's financial situation on their career choices (Next Generation data). In Indonesia, young people are expected to financially support their parents and siblings (Loasana, 2021; Allison et al., 2022). This added responsibility compels many young women to take on multiple jobs: 23 per cent of women aged 15–24 and 26 per cent of women aged 25–35 report needing to do more than one job (Next Generation data).



Table 8. Summary of enablers and barriers

Level	Enablers	Barriers
Macro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government support for entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmful gender norms • Discrimination based on age, ethnicity, religion, and ability • Nepotism and favouritism in the labour market
Meso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women acting as community role models • Young people's access to higher education • Hubs fostering entrepreneurship among young women and men • Creating organisations to address women's economic needs • Growing inter-organisational collaborations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplaces fail to efficiently support working mothers
Micro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive families • Young people's growing interest in entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family influence on career choices • Expectations to financially sustain the family early in the career

Source: Authors' analysis.

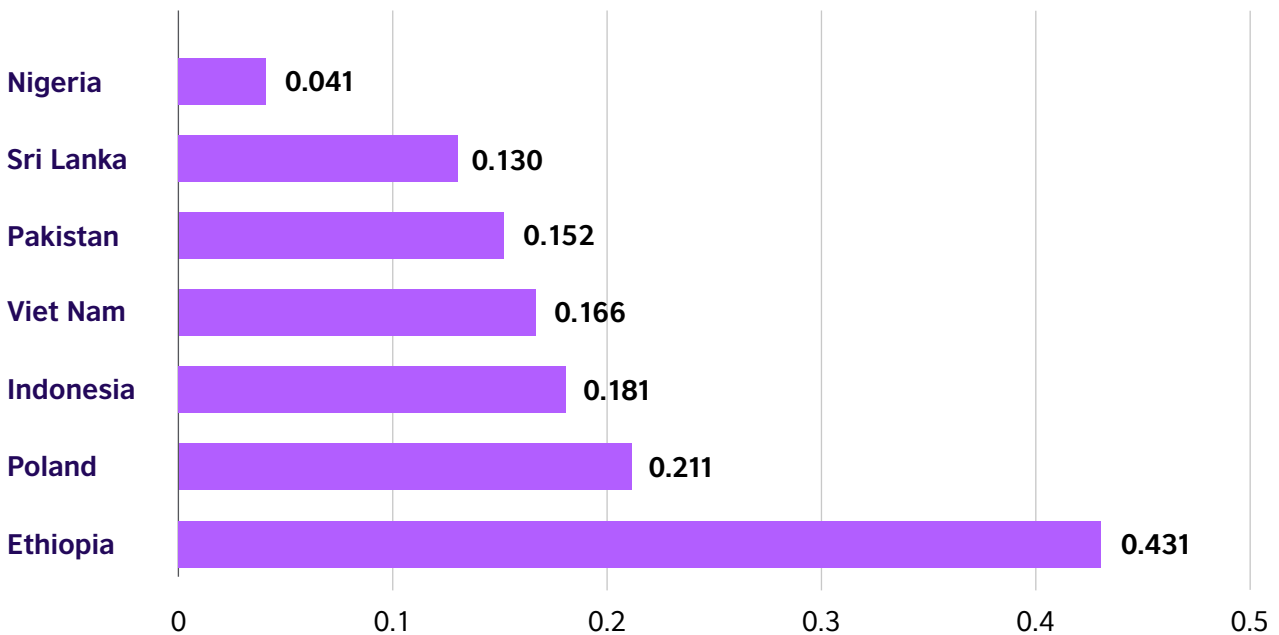
7 Political empowerment of women and girls

Political empowerment, defined as the ability to participate in decision making and to create change within political systems, is pivotal for realising human rights and fostering inclusive governance (Fox and Romero, 2017; Sandler and Lane, 2021). However, the exclusion of many young people, especially women and girls, from the political sphere perpetuates gender inequalities and obstructs democratic participation.

7.1 Overview

Of the seven countries, Ethiopia has the highest score in the political empowerment sub-index, 0.431, and ranks 25 out of 146 countries in terms of closing the gender gap in political empowerment between men and women. Nigeria has the lowest score, 0.041, and ranks 142 (WEF, 2023) (see Figure 10). This sub-index measures the gap between men and women at the highest level of political decision making through the ratio of women to men in ministerial positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions. In addition, the index includes the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office (prime minister or president) for the last 50 years (ibid.).

Figure 10. Political empowerment sub-index (0–1)

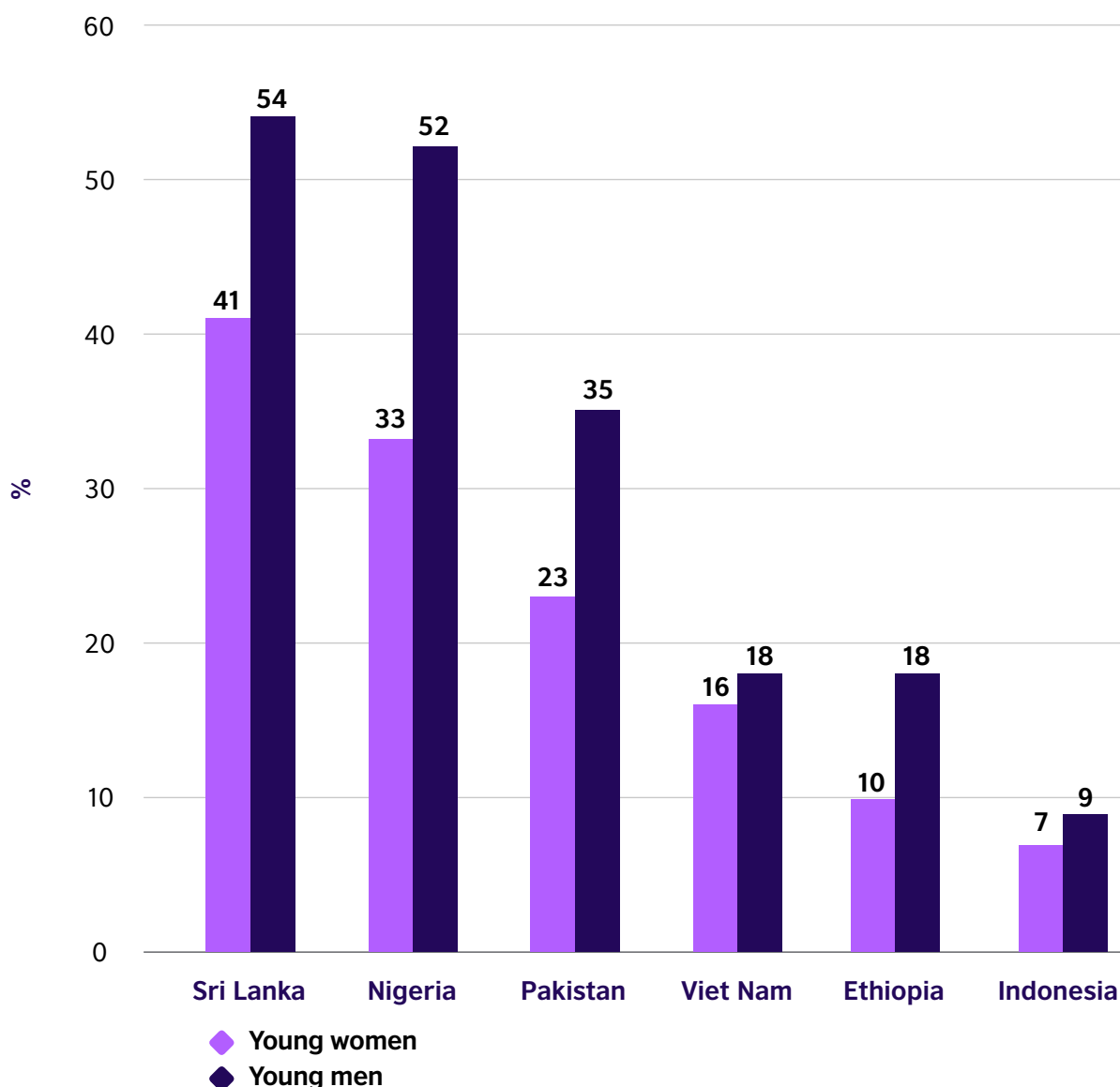


Source: WEF (2023).

Next Generation data shows higher shares of young men with interest/engagement in politics relative to young women in six countries. Young women in Sri Lanka, both urban and rural, have a higher rate of interest relative to young women in five other countries. Engagement/interest is at 41 per cent

overall (and 40 per cent and 42 per cent in rural and urban areas, respectively) (see Figure 11). Indonesia demonstrates very low engagement – less than 10 per cent – for both women and men.

Figure 11. Personal interest/engagement in politics (%)



Source: Next Generation data.

7.2 Enablers of political empowerment

This section explores the enablers of political empowerment of young people, with a focus on women and girls.

7.2.1 Macro-level enablers

Legislative and policy changes

Changes in legislation and policy have contributed to the political empowerment of young women and girls. Interviewees highlighted various initiatives to promote social change and enhance the political representation and

engagement of young people. In Pakistan, key informants underscored the pivotal role played by female legislators and parliamentarians in developing laws that directly address women's concerns, including on child marriage, child labour, rape, and honour killings. Over the parliamentary sessions from August 2018 to August 2020, even though women constituted only 20 per cent of the total assembly, they proved to be highly engaged in scrutinising the government and holding it accountable. This involvement included using legislative tools such as resolutions, raising points of order, and asking questions (HRCP, 2020). While women have demonstrated their capabilities in handling parliamentary business and outperforming their

male colleagues (ibid.), they recognise the need to increase direct representation in elected seats and decision-making bodies and to address legal and cultural barriers that hinder their performance and growth (interviews, 2023; HRCP, 2020).

In Sri Lanka, where women face underrepresentation at all levels of the national legislature (IFES, 2022), interviewees emphasised the positive impact of initiatives such as the legislative quota mandating that 25 per cent of local council members be women (Vijayarasa, 2020; UN Women, 2023). In key informant views, this has resulted in increased capacity building, opportunities, and exposure for women. Additionally, they stated that women's confidence and security have grown through the National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security and the Parliamentary Women's Caucus (interviews, 2023).

Interviewees from Nigeria cited a range of progressive policy changes. This includes the role of the Gender Technical Unit in the National Assembly, which aims to support legislators in addressing the needs of young people, especially girls and, more critically, the reduction in the minimum age for political positions that has been made possible under the Not Too Young to Run Act (NTYTRA) of 2018 (interviews, 2023). This legislation led to a decrease in the age requirements to be President, from 40 to 35 years, and to be elected to the national House of Representatives or a state House of Assembly, from 30 to 25 (Itodo, 2023). Developed and co-ordinated by young Nigerians, the act signifies a commitment to dismantling age barriers in elective offices (Curran et al., 2020). The 2023 general election in Nigeria marks the second election following the enactment of the NTYTRA. The subsequent increase in young Nigerians running for and holding elective positions underscores the profound impact of legislative changes on political empowerment.

Increased representation of young people

Steps to increase the political representation of young people fosters political empowerment. Greater representation of young people in the government and in laws and policies makes young people feel listened to and empowers them to further engage in politics.

In Pakistan, initiatives like the Young Parliamentarians Forum serve as conduits

for engaging young individuals from diverse backgrounds in policy discussions, aiming to augment inclusivity and participation in political activities (Babar et al., 2023). This approach not only empowers the youth, but also enriches the political landscape with diverse perspectives. A similar youth-centred shift is taking place in Indonesia with the women-led Indonesian Solidarity Party (Partai Solidaritas Indonesia, PSI). It aims to improve the representation of youth and women in the policymaking process and to take an active stand against any forms of 'old guard' political corruption and nepotism (Allison et al., 2022). While the party's strong reformist agenda does not sit well with all young people, the rising representation of young generations in politics inspires the country's youth, acting as a catalyst for heightened political engagement (ibid.).

Political alignment with young people's value systems

Aligning with young people's values on issues like corruption has become a key enabler, driving increased political engagement and support. While politicians are often associated with corruption and bribery, research suggests that young people appreciate those with cleaner track records. Instances where politicians demonstrate integrity and honesty capture the attention of young people, sparking an interest in politics among them.

In Sri Lanka and Pakistan, ending corruption significantly shaped the voting decisions of young people (Perera et al., 2019; Babar et al., 2023). The emphasis on combating corruption not only reflected the moral compass of the youth but also underscored their desire for a clean and transparent political landscape (ibid.). Next Generation data shows that 83 per cent of young women and 88 per cent of young men stated being honest and free of corruption were important qualities they look for when voting for candidates in Sri Lanka (Next Generation data). In Pakistan, 40 per cent of young women and 41 per cent of young men expressed similar views (ibid.).

In Indonesia, youth revealed that politicians who embody admirable qualities such as honesty and integrity and align with young people's values wield considerable influence in fostering youth engagement and trust (Allison et al., 2022). Around 24 per cent of young women and 25 per cent of young men expressed a willingness to engage more politically if Indonesian politics better reflected their personal views or opinions, emphasising the pivotal role of shared values in mobilising youth

participation (Next Generation data).

In Viet Nam, the younger generation viewed government efforts to tackle corruption favourably, indicating a shared commitment to ethical governance (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). While most young focus group participants felt there was little they could do to tackle corruption personally, their expressed desire that it be a priority for the government underscored an aspiration for active participation and transparency in governance (ibid.).

Digitalisation's growing influence

Digitalisation plays a crucial role in young people's political empowerment. In Pakistan, young people regard the internet as a transformative tool that elevates voices that were once marginalised and allows them to engage in political discussions (Babar et al., 2023). Similar shares of young women and men in urban areas (61 per cent and 62 per cent, respectively) agreed that online political and civic activism will help change Pakistan (Next Generation data). A higher share of young men in rural areas (62 per cent) in comparison to young women (41 per cent) agreed with this statement (ibid.). Unlike urban areas, the large gap between men's and women's responses in rural areas points to a gendered digital divide in rural settings (ibid.).

In Indonesia, youth see social media as a powerful instrument for political expression (Allison et al., 2022). From creating memes to mobilising around key issues, digital platforms provided them with an outlet to express frustrations with the existing political status quo (ibid.). In the 2019 elections, the leading contenders amplified their digital campaigns to connect with young voters. As a result of these efforts, there was a noticeable rise in youth voter participation (Jakarta Globe, 2019). Present patterns of online presence suggest that social media will continue to be a significant factor in the 2024 elections (Allison et al., 2022; Rachmah, 2023).

In Nigeria, 16 per cent of young men and 11 per cent of young women shared content on social media to raise awareness or show support for a political issue (Next Generation data); 51 per cent of political engaged young men were social media users relative to 32 per cent of young women (ibid.).

In Poland, digital tools are being used for political

activism (Raven et al., 2021), and 19 per cent of young women and 22 per cent of young men reported participating in online activism (Next Generation data). Grassroots-led actions expressing dissatisfaction with the former ruling party unfolded through protests, online actions, and the development of mobile apps offering guidance on safety and legal assistance for young people joining peaceful protests (ibid.).

Political parties have astutely capitalised on the digital activism of young people, harnessing social media to amplify their messages. In Indonesia and Nigeria, high levels of political disinformation and use of generative AI reinforce the need for educating younger audiences on how to better engage with these messages.

7.2.2 Micro-level enablers

Voting is a key form of political and civic engagement

Young people participate in civic and political activities through diverse avenues. Voting ranked as the most prominent political activity for women in four of the seven countries.

The shares for young women varied significantly across countries, from as high as 83 per cent in Poland, 59 per cent in Nigeria, 48 per cent in Viet Nam, to as low as 18 per cent in Pakistan, and 7 per cent in Ethiopia (Next Generation data). Signing political petitions ranked in the top three political activities for young women in both Poland and Sri Lanka. In Poland's case, a higher share of young women compared to young men engaged in this activity (41 per cent vs 35 per cent) (ibid.). This was reversed in Sri Lanka, with a lower share of young women signing petitions relative to young men (26 per cent vs 37 per cent) (ibid.).

Watching or listening to political talk shows on TV or radio and political podcasts appeared in the top three activities for young women in Indonesia and Ethiopia. In Indonesia, a slightly larger share of young women watched or listened to political shows on TV, radio, and podcasts in comparison to young men (29 per cent vs 27 per cent).

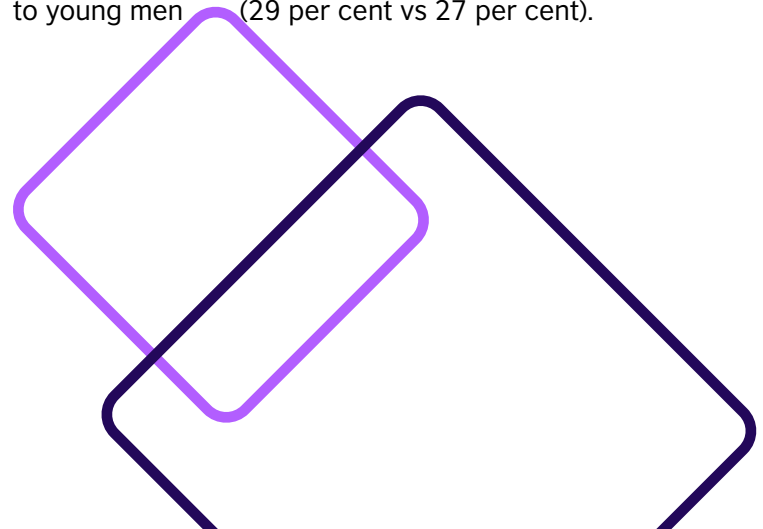


Table 9. Top three political activities of young women and men (%)

Top three political activities by country	Share of young women engaging in the stated activity	Share of young men engaging in the stated activity	Percentage point difference between young women and men engaged in the stated activity
Poland			
Voted	83%	80%	+3
Signed a petition	41%	35%	+6
Bought goods for ethical or environmental reasons	21%	24%	-3
Sri Lanka			
Attended community meeting	49%	57%	-8
Contacted local government about an issue	30%	40%	-10
Signed a petition	26%	37%	-11
Nigeria			
Voted	59%	70%	-11
Became a party member	13%	24%	-11
Persuaded others to vote	13%	20%	-7
Pakistan			
Voted in a national/provincial/local election	18%	20%	-2
Attended a discussion on national/local issues	6%	10%	-4
Attended a political rally	5%	10%	-5
Viet Nam			
Voted	48%	47%	+1
Joined the Communist Youth Union	39%	37%	+2
Engaged in political discussions through an informal club	3%	3%	0
Ethiopia			
Discussed politics with family and friends	29%	43%	-14
Watched/listened to political talk show on TV/radio/podcast	28%	38%	-10
Voted	7%	9%	-2
Indonesia			
Watched/listened to political talk show on TV/radio/podcasts	29%	27%	+2
Volunteered for a social cause	25%	30%	-5
Discussed politics with family and friends	17%	17%	0

Source: New analysis of existing datasets. Notes: + denotes share of women exceeding that of men, - denotes share of men exceeding that of women.

Open political discussions with family and friends

Political empowerment among young people is significantly influenced by open discussions within the familiar circles of family and friends.

These play a crucial role in creating a space for exchanging political ideas and opinions and can act as fertile ground for politically empowering young women and men.

In Viet Nam and Indonesia, young people feel comfortable expressing their views and concerns in small, closed circles and online (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020; Allison et al., 2022). Interestingly, the Next Generation research in both countries found that youth in rural areas have a stronger connection to policymakers than their urban counterparts, which is often due to their family's personal relationships (ibid.).

In Indonesia, similar shares (17 per cent) of young women and men held open discussions with family and friends (Next Generation data). In Ethiopia, however, a much larger share of young men (43 per cent) relative to young women (29 per cent) held open discussions with family and friends (ibid.).

Close family and friend relationships are also important in shaping political awareness and opinions among politically engaged young Nigerians and Ethiopians (De Schryver et al., 2019; Curran et al., 2020). In Nigeria, these networks are used to disseminate political information, with fathers playing an important role in educating and guiding their children (Curran et al., 2020). Fathers' roles in politically empowering children underscore the gendered experience of political engagement, where societal norms confine women to domestic roles and men to public spheres.

CASE STUDY 6

Strengthening civil society in Ethiopia to protect young women and men

Name of programme: Civil Society Support Programme Phase Two (CSSP-2)

Location: Ethiopia

Year: 2018–2023

Funded by: FCDO and the embassies of Ireland, Sweden, and Norway in the UK

Implemented by: Pact Inc. and Social Development Direct

Programme objective: To contribute to inclusive and accountable governance; and an improved environment for the promotion and protection of the human rights of all Ethiopians.

Method of delivery: The programme provided financial and technical support to civil society organisations. In addition, the programme included working with government stakeholders to build their knowledge base and create platforms for effective civic engagement.

Target beneficiaries: The programme supported 173 CSOs working with marginalised communities, women, youth, and children.

Key outcomes of the programme: The programme successfully:

- Led to the formation of the Ethiopian Civil Society Organisations Council.
- Reformed prisoner rehabilitation and reintegration projects; improved interventions on prevention and response to substance abuse; and enforced and revised VAWG-related laws.
- Shifted social norms and values to reduce VAWG and improved practices in VAWG response, including toll-free reporting call lines in Dessie Zuria (#7790), Artuma fursie (#9947) and Batti Zuria (#6625). Increased women's political participation and leadership and promoted inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Increased wage rates, tripling daily wage rate incomes in certain instances (notably, in the Wolayita 'Woybo' irrigation project, the payment rate increased from 50 birr to 150 birr per day) and enforced adoption of safeguarding protocols among CSSP2 CSO partners.

7.3 Barriers to political empowerment

Even though political empowerment serves as a cornerstone for an inclusive society, numerous barriers impede young people's active participation in the political landscape. Whereas many barriers apply to both young women and men, women and girls face distinct challenges owing to their gender and other markers of marginalisation.

7.3.1 Macro-level barriers

Underrepresentation in government and political priorities

Young people, especially women and girls, are underrepresented in government and political priorities: this is a common challenge with distinct manifestations across countries. Both Pakistan and Sri Lanka share a notable experience of youth feeling underrepresented and lacking a meaningful political voice. In Pakistan, despite significant youth-focused investments, representation remains symbolic and tokenistic: 63 per cent of young women and 62 per cent of young men believe their voices on national issues are either not heard by the government or if they are listened to, no action is taken (Next Generation data). While women in Pakistan have representation in parliament, it is primarily through reserved seats on party lists, and the inadequate nature of this representation is exacerbated by the reluctance of male candidates to relinquish their general seats for women (interviews, 2023). Female parliamentarians in Pakistan often experience marginalisation and are not treated as equals by their male counterparts (ibid.).

In Sri Lanka, despite the establishment of a 25 per cent women's quota for parliament, the intended impact has not materialised in key informant perceptions (interviews, 2023). In 2022, the proportion of seats held by women in Sri Lanka's national parliament remained nearly unchanged at around 5 per cent (that is only 12 out of 225 parliamentary seats), and local councils exhibit even more dismal ratios (IFES, 2022; von Kameke, 2023). The implementation of the quota tends to be tokenistic (interviews, 2023).

Governments in Ethiopia, Poland, and Nigeria have also failed to represent the interests and concerns of young people. In these countries, governments are perceived as serving the interests of a select few rather than the wider population (De Schryver

et al., 2019; Curran et al., 2020; Raven et al., 2021). Interviewees from Nigeria raised concerns over the country's rankings on women's representation. Based on data from the 10th National Assembly, the country continues to occupy the lowest position in the African Parliaments' ranking, with just three female senators out of 109, down from seven in the previous term (PLAC, 2023; Iniobong, 2023). The scarcity of women policymakers and politicians persists, and those who do enter political parties frequently find themselves overshadowed by their male counterparts (interviews, 2023).

Youth have limited visibility of policy initiatives

Policymakers often fall short in communicating policies and laws to young people effectively, negatively impacting their political awareness and engagement. This prevents young people from being aware of vital initiatives that could support their political engagement. In Ethiopia, young people felt that they have minimal influence over important decisions due to insufficient awareness of governmental initiatives and youth policies (De Schryver et al., 2019). This dearth of awareness contributes significantly to a prevailing sense of disempowerment, restricting their active participation in political processes. In rural areas, a higher share of young women (73 per cent) relative to young men were unaware of any government policies on youth (Next Generation data). Similar shares of young women and men (45 per cent and 43 per cent, respectively) reported this issue in urban areas (ibid.); 90 per cent of young women and 82 per cent of young men claim not to be engaged in politics (ibid.). When asked what could boost their political engagement, 39 per cent of young women and 50 per cent of young men stated more accessible political information (ibid.).

In Sri Lanka, most young people lacked awareness of crucial government programmes, including the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR), Office on Missing Persons (OMP), and the National Policy on Reconciliation (NPE) (Perera et al., 2019). This not only disconnects them from critical national reconciliation efforts but also hampers their capacity to contribute meaningfully to discussions on governance and societal rebuilding. Crucially, women's engagement in reconciliation is central to sustainable peace agreements. A study conducted by the

International Peace Institute, examining 182 signed peace agreements from 1989 to 2011, revealed that the inclusion of women in peace processes correlates with a 35 per cent higher likelihood that a peace agreement will endure for 15 years or longer (Lindborg, 2017).

In Nigeria, the inaccessibility of political processes poses a notable barrier, impeding effective engagement of young Nigerians in political affairs (Curran et al., 2020). A similar challenge is evident in Viet Nam, where the lack of awareness about initiatives and youth policies compounds the overall disengagement of young people from politics (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020).

In Poland, young people have been advocating for improved education on politics and enhanced accessibility to political information, emphasising the need for a more informed and engaged youth population (Raven et al., 2021).

Restrictive gender and social norms

Gender and social norms restrict the political empowerment of women and girls. These are etched in society, interpersonal relationships, and community dynamics, and heavily shape women's behaviours and opportunities.

In Pakistan, key informants shared perspectives on entrenched patriarchal norms – such as the expectation that women should prioritise having a family over a career and be caring and submissive rather than leaders – that profoundly influence their political participation (interviews, 2023). Media campaigns that disparage successful women contribute to a broader societal reluctance towards outspoken, educated, and assertive women (ibid.). According to the interviewees, the patriarchal fabric of Pakistani society, where men control household decisions, leads to substantial opposition to women stepping outside traditional roles. The perception of politics as a male-dominated and unattractive profession further compounds the challenges faced by aspiring women leaders (ibid.).

In Sri Lanka, key informants stated that cultural expectations firmly position women in roles associated with household responsibilities and child/elderly care, significantly limiting their participation in political activities. In their view, the impact intensifies as post-puberty cultural norms reinforce patriarchal values, perpetuating the perception that women need to be protected and should not take on leadership roles (interviews,

2023). This narrative extends to media portrayals of female politicians, which tend to focus more on controversies than substantive contributions (ibid.).

In Indonesia, key informants highlighted the society's deep-seated lack of trust in women's political capabilities, reflected in preferences for male candidates, even among women voters (interviews, 2023). From their perspective, this ingrained mistrust obstructs women from pursuing leadership roles, forcing them to continually prove their worth in a society inherently sceptical of women in political arenas (ibid.). In Viet Nam, key informants stated that societal norms expect women to prioritise family over personal interests, acting as barriers to their political empowerment despite the existence of policies that encourage women's political participation (ibid.).

In Nigeria, patriarchal norms embedded in societal responses and decision-making processes significantly constrain women's potential contributions to society (interviews, 2023). In Ethiopia, key informants expressed views on how ingrained cultural norms discourage girls from assuming leadership roles, compounded by biased decision-making processes within households (ibid.). The intersection of cultural practices and traditional beliefs perpetuates a male-dominated and patriarchal system, contributing to structural social norms that disadvantage women economically and politically (ibid.).

Offline and online violence against women

Offline and online violence deters women from engaging in politics. The fear and experience of violence and objectification jeopardise women's interest in making their voices heard and engaging in politics. In Pakistan, female parliamentarians encounter objectification. This deters families from supporting their daughters or wives in pursuing political roles (interviews, 2023). The absence of safe spaces for female politicians further impedes their political growth (ibid.). In Sri Lanka, women who engage in advocacy and politics, especially online, encounter significant hate speech (ibid.). The amplified safety and security threats, particularly through social media, contribute to a hostile environment. The prevalence of fake news further affects visible women involved in political work, creating reluctance among many young women to share their opinions on various matters, not just limited to politics (ibid.).

Key informants in Nigeria say there is reluctance to address gender-based violence in policy priorities, as it is widely seen as a private rather than a public issue (interviews, 2023). The state's failure to recognise it as a broader challenge shrinks women and girls' political engagement (ibid.).

7.3.2 Meso-level barriers

Limited support from institutions

Young people do not feel supported by existing institutions. Young people in Pakistan, Indonesia, Viet Nam and Ethiopia believe that there are not many opportunities for them to participate in politics. In Ethiopia, formal and informal avenues for participation were seen as restricted (De Schryver et al., 2019). There, 24 per cent of young women and 29 per cent of young men said that they would increase their engagement with politics if students were more actively encouraged to engage with politics in schools (Next Generation data). Similar results emerged in Indonesia, where 18 per cent of young women and 15 per cent of young men expressed the same view (ibid.). Social and political institutions in Pakistan and Viet Nam were perceived as inadequate in representing the interests of the youth and in providing the support needed for their growth (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020; Babar et al., 2023).

7.3.3 Micro-level barriers

Family influence and expectations

The influence of family structures and societal expectations narrows women's political empowerment journeys. Across Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam, interviewees explained the debilitating impacts of deeply ingrained norms on women and girls. These dictate rigid gender roles and underscore familial responsibilities, often overshadowing individual pursuits. In Pakistan, family dynamics, particularly the roles of fathers, brothers, and husbands, significantly shape a woman's trajectory in politics. The reliance on

familial connections or male endorsements underscores the challenges faced by women lacking such support, illustrating the limited avenues for independent political engagement (interviews, 2023).

In Sri Lanka, the reluctance of parents or partners to send young girls to empowerment programmes has hampered their access to opportunities for political empowerment, perpetuating a cycle of restricted choices (interviews, 2023). In Viet Nam, societal expectations for women include the prioritisation of family over a career or political involvement. The reluctance of women to pursue higher education or ambitious careers stems from the pervasive fear that such pursuits may lead to marital discontent, highlighting the negative impact of societal norms on women's aspirations (ibid.).

Distrust in local political systems

Distrust in local political systems influences the political participation of young people.

In Pakistan, 39 per cent of young women and 59 per cent of young men intend to vote in the country's next elections (expected in February 2024) (Next Generation data). They expressed deep levels of distrust in the political system, which is perceived as disengaging and unrepresentative of their concerns (Babar et al., 2023).

In Sri Lanka, 73 per cent of young women and 69 per cent of young men felt that voting was their responsibility as citizens. However, the main reasons for not voting were not being registered, not knowing where or how to vote, and not liking any of the candidates (Next Generation data). Nigerian youth perceived their voices as relatively limited and insignificant compared to more dominant, older male voices (Curran et al., 2020). They lacked faith in the country's political system and feared political violence (ibid.).

Lack of access to education

The inability to access education is a pivotal obstacle to achieving political empowerment.

Education plays a crucial role in forming young people's views and providing them with the skills, networks, and opportunities needed to engage in politics. In Ethiopia, interviewees believe that women's political engagement depends on education, and that support from society, families, and schools is essential in empowering women and girls to actively engage in politics (interviews, 2023).

The lack of access to education is pervasive across countries, contributing to the disengagement of women and girls from political participation. In Nigeria, limited educational attainment restricts the number of girls who can pursue higher education, where the opportunities for leadership and political empowerment often arise (ibid.). In Sri Lanka, the reluctance of families to allow girls to participate in extracurricular activities (public speaking, debates, etc.) poses a significant challenge (ibid.). This reluctance jeopardises girls' exposure to opportunities that can help them develop essential skills and be prepared for political careers (ibid.).

Disadvantaged economic backgrounds

Economic disempowerment and disadvantaged economic backgrounds represent barriers to women's political empowerment.

Across various countries, economic empowerment was described as crucial to politically empowering women, as financial independence enables women to discover their capabilities, enhancing their confidence, social status, and trust, and to assume leadership positions.

Interviewees revealed that young women and girls are far from being economically empowered. In Viet Nam, the financial constraints associated with engaging in politics, particularly for those from middle-class families, present a significant obstacle (interviews, 2023). The perception that politics is reserved for the wealthy contributes to the reluctance of middle-class families to encourage women to enter this field (ibid.). This perception also emerged in Pakistan, where interviewees explained that because of the financial resources required to enter politics and the low stipends of parliamentarians, politics is often perceived as an exclusive arena that is not suitable for individuals from less financially stable backgrounds.

Table 10. Summary of enablers and barriers

Level	Enablers	Barriers
Macro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislative and policy changes Increased representation of young people Political alignment with young people's value systems Digitalisation's growing influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underrepresentation in government and political priorities Youth have limited visibility of policy initiatives Restrictive gender and social norms Offline and online violence against women
Meso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None reported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited support from institutions
Micro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supportive families Young people's growing interest in entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family influence on career choices Expectations to financially sustain the family early in the career

Source: Authors' analysis.

8 Conclusion and recommendations

This report presents what we know about women and girls across three main areas: education and skills, ending violence against women and girls, and socio-economic and political empowerment. Even though the social, political and economic conditions in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland are vastly different, some common enablers and barriers to progress in the different areas have emerged clearly from the data.

Overall, the report found four themes recurring across the three areas:

- Harmful societal and gender norms exert a detrimental influence on the well-being and opportunities for empowerment of young people, especially women and girls.
- A significant gap exists between the formulation of laws and policies and their implementation, resulting in a disconnect between government planning and enforcement.
- The dual nature of digital technologies unfolds new possibilities for empowerment alongside potential avenues for the perpetuation of violence and harm.
- An overwhelming volume of evidence on barriers relative to enablers, pointing to the urgent need for galvanising action on amplifying enablers and removing the reported barriers.

Theme-specific findings include the following:

Education and skills: Young women and girls positively associate education and skills development with self-empowerment. Alternative forms of learning, access to safe environments in schools and university campuses, and extra-curricular activities are major enablers. However, geographic disparities, financial constraints, lack of family support, and social norms constrain women and girls from pursuing their aspirations.

Ending violence against women and girls: Legal reforms and support to service providers are the major enablers for ending violence. However, while governments have been working towards promoting gender equality and ending violence against women and girls, there is a

difference between having laws and policies and implementing them effectively. Services available to survivors are limited and of low quality, and there is widespread social acceptance of harmful gender and social norms.

Socio-economic empowerment: Government support for entrepreneurship, access to education, and the growing digital economy are facilitating the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls. Furthermore, many young women want to become entrepreneurs. However, nepotism and favouritism and the lack of support for working mothers amplify the challenges women face in the labour market. Discrimination based on traditional gender norms also hinders their empowerment journeys.

Political empowerment: Youth-centric policies and initiatives are important enablers of political empowerment. However, young women and girls emphasise the need for better support for their rights, safety, and representation in political spaces. The lack of opportunities to engage in political activities, awareness of government initiatives, and scepticism towards governments hinder political empowerment among young people. Gender stereotypes, lack of safe spaces (offline and online) and regressive gender and social norms condition them to see their primary role as caregivers rather than leaders, although women have made substantive progress as politicians and parliamentarians.

Recommendations

The findings of this report demonstrate potential areas for key stakeholders to collaborate to empower women and girls across the different areas.

Families and friends are central to the personal development of young people, especially women and girls, and can play a major role in creating safe spaces and in debunking negative societal and gender norms.



- Greater awareness among families and communities could ensure that women and girls (including those with disabilities and from minority communities) are not undervalued but encouraged to pursue education and skills, to protect themselves from violence at home and in other social settings, and to achieve their career aspirations and financial security.
- Critical and non-judgemental discussions within the home and familiar social circles can help women and girls develop greater self-confidence and self-expression.
- Instilling respect for all family members, especially women and girls, and sharing household responsibilities more evenly can rectify power imbalances within the home.
- Educated women and girls need to be enabled to act as role models for other family and community members.

Overall, a supportive family ecosystem can allow women and girls to thrive.

Schools and higher education institutions provide the knowledge, tools, connections and facilities for young people to empower themselves and can help a smoother transition to adulthood. To support young people, especially women and girls, schools and higher education institutions could consider a range of initiatives.

- Instilling values like curiosity, honesty, integrity, fairness, and leadership among students – the qualities they most valued in their choice of leaders.
- Embedding skills development into learning agendas and rewarding critical thinking and analysis, effective persuasion and influencing, public speaking, networking, and leadership for social and political causes.
- Improving learning and teaching quality through well-designed curricula and updating the knowledge base of teachers to align with emerging labour market needs, plus an explicit focus on gender-transformative teaching methods.
- Investing in and upgrading existing educational facilities to enable access for people with disabilities.
- Providing more targeted career guidance and mentorship to break gender stereotypes and promote science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) among women and girls. Career counselling services could enhance greater collaboration with potential employers, as could apprenticeships for practical learning during academic calendars and holiday periods.
- Expanding the pool of extra-curricular activities for early soft skills development and career exploration.
- Integrating gender-sensitive education within the curriculum, emphasising mutual respect, consent, sex education, and the dignity of all individuals, irrespective of gender.
- Shifting gender and social norms and facilitating an educational environment where young people of all genders can pursue the studies and careers they aspire to.
- Ensuring safe campuses and educational facilities for all students and teachers.
- Establishing and empowering student bodies for activism with sufficient resources.
- Creating networking opportunities between young students and successful women in unconventional roles to inspire and challenge gender stereotypes.

Civil society actors and public and private service providers possess the platforms and expertise to develop programmes and initiatives to engage and support young people in their growth, especially women and girls.

- Collaborating with local communities to address contextual needs and challenges and thinking beyond projects' immediate impacts.
- Contributing to awareness campaigns to challenge patriarchal gender norms (specifically engaging men and boys as advocates for gender equality).
- Advocating supportive working environments and developing initiatives for economic opportunities (e.g. coaching, training, networking, and financial support).
- Creating avenues for students to apply for work or submit business ideas through public and private incubators.
- Promoting opportunities in activism, volunteering, and social development.

- Strengthening collaboration with government actors to address violence against women and girls comprehensively and scaling up successful programmes on women's empowerment and violence prevention and response.
- Amplifying women leaders as role models to share empowerment journeys and political experiences.
- Addressing TFGBV against women by developing monitoring and safeguarding tools that are country specific and informed by local languages and cultural norms.

Workplaces play an important role in the quality of life of young people. Organisational culture, policies, and recruitment processes may encourage or discourage youth to seek or resume employment and to derive job satisfaction and overall well-being. Workplaces can be more inclusive of young women and girls in several ways, including:

- Establishing workplace regulations on violence against women and girls and gender equality where they are absent and strengthening their implementation and oversight where they already exist.
- Ensuring fairer recruitment processes for all individuals, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, personal connections, or disability status, and addressing nepotism.
- Leveraging the pandemic-induced changes in working habits (i.e. increased flexibility and remote working) to hire a more diverse workforce (e.g. young people who live outside of urban hubs and young people with disabilities) and being more family-friendly.
- Providing mental health support to young entrepreneurs, especially young women.

Media are responsible for the representation of different social groups and in perpetuating or deflating existing societal and gender social norms. Thus, their work can actively empower the younger generation through:

- Developing online safeguarding mechanisms with technology companies to better protect young women from online harassment and violence.

- Building safer spaces for young people and women to share their political preferences and views while alleviating fear of intimidation.
- Representing the concerns of young people, especially women and girls, to hold governments accountable for their actions and catalyse changes they want to see.
- Developing respectful narratives that do not objectify women or victimise and blame survivors of violence but focus on success stories.
- Disseminating information on the resources and support available for and needed by women and girls affected by violence.

Policy and lawmakers play a critical role in enacting laws and policies that have a direct impact on young people's empowerment and wellbeing. Areas of focus would include:

- Ensuring sufficient attention to intersectionality in new policies and laws by engaging diverse social groups in planning discussions and co-creating measurable outcomes that increase public scrutiny over the implementation of policies and laws.
- Providing services closer to marginalised groups, especially in remote areas, for minorities, and those with disabilities.
- Addressing geographic disparities through long-term infrastructure development planning.
- Making education compulsory for equal opportunities and investing in digital infrastructure for online learning and employment.
- Formulating long-term policies to increase women's representation in non-traditional fields of study with measurable outcomes.
- Reforming existing policies to integrate violence prevention across sectors and addressing legal barriers and strengthening laws on TFGBV.
- Launching nationwide campaigns to raise awareness on violence against women and girls and change negative norms.
- Investing in sensitisation and training programmes for policymakers to improve

their understanding of the impacts of violence against women and girls and on societies.

- Enforcing workplace diversity quotas, mandating transparency in diversity, equity and inclusion statistics, and penalising workplace discrimination.
 - Revising maternity leave policies and implementing mandatory paternity leave for workforce inclusivity.
 - Improving access to finances and land ownership for women, which often play a central role in their economic empowerment.
 - Introducing better social protection for women and girls in the informal sector to reduce the impact of existing unregulated mechanisms.
 - Increasing political representation through targeted quotas for diverse demographics, including youth, women, and people with disabilities.
- Improving access to different types of political information, such as on political parties and their agendas, the election system, and current political debates, so that young people can make more informed decisions about their role in political change processes.
 - Amending laws and their enforcement to create a political environment that does not silence political engagement in the form of peaceful protests and activism.



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