Still We Dream:

Girls and young people living through conflict

State of the World's Girls Technical Report 2024

GH Research Team

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Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ALS	Alternative Learning Support
ASWJ	Ahlu al-Sunna wa'l Jama'a
CAAC	Children and armed conflict
CAAFAG	Children associated with armed forces and armed groups
CATI	Computer-assisted telephone interviewing
CDM	Civil disobedience movement
CEFMU	Child, early and forced marriages and unions
COALICO	Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Youth in the Colombian Armed Conflict
COMISUD	Community Initiative for Sustainable Development
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPH	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FGM/C	Female genital mutilation/cutting
GBV	Gender-based violence
GPI	Global Peace Index
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally displaced person
IHL	International humanitarian law
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IPV	Intimate partner violence
IS (ISIS)	Islamic State
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
IUD	Intrauterine device
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MRM	Monitoring and reporting mechanism
MW	Mobile Web
NAPs	National Action Plans
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA (UNOCHA)	UN Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
ONCA	Observatory on Childhood and Armed Conflict of COALICO
oPt	Occupied Palestinian Territory
PNIS	Plan for Substitution of Illicit Crops
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RDD	Random digital dial
RSF	Rapid support forces
SAC	State Administrative Council
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence

SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
SRSG-CAAC	Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
SSAR	Southern Sudan Autonomous Region
STD / STI	Sexually transmitted disease / sexually transmitted infection
TESDA	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UBJP	United Bangsamoro Justice Party
UNFPA	United Nations Sexual and Reproductive Health Agency
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSC	UN Security Council
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WCNSF	Wounded child, no surviving family
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
3BTA	Three Brotherhood Alliance

Content warning: The experiences described by participants in this study, particularly the interviewees, contain references to incidences of physical and sexual violence, as well as other sensitive and potentially distressing themes. Please read with care and at your own discretion.

Disclaimer: Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We hold the stance of being impartial and neutral in conflict, recognising our engagement in conflict contexts is towards ensuring that we can contribute positively for girls, children and young people.

Executive summary

This year, Plan International's annual *State of the World's Girls* report is based on surveys and interviews conducted across ten countries affected by conflict: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine, and one country that is unable to be named because of political and operational sensitivities. The study included more than 9,995 children, adolescents and young people aged 15 to 24 years from these ten countries as participants; this included 5,003 girls and young women and 4,992 boys and young men. A total of 104 participant interviews were also conducted with participants aged 13 to 24 across Ethiopia, Cameroon, Colombia and the Philippines. A total of 66 interviews were conducted with girls and young women, and 38 interviews with boys and young men.

The study highlights the impacts of conflict on children and young people between the ages of 13 and 24 years. It offers overarching findings and recommendations about the impact on girls, boys, and young men and women but with a particular focus on how gender plays a role in the participants' experience of and their vulnerability to conflict.

Children and young people in the study have lived through prolonged periods of conflict, with the average majority of participants having lived an average of one to three years in conflict. In Colombia

and the Philippines, this period rose to more than 15 years. The findings highlight that children and young people face significant disruptions and challenges during conflict and their lives are unavoidably shaped by the conflict in their respective countries. Experiences of displacement have severely affected the children and young people in the study, with 18 per cent of the quantitative sample having been internally displaced, and 17 per cent moving to another country as refugees or migrants. In the qualitative sample across the four countries, 60 per cent of participants identified as being either currently or previously displaced.

Girls and young women, boys and young men all had their lives affected in several different areas – education, health (including mental health), livelihoods, access to services and resources – and by their experiences of safety and violence. The impact of conflict varies significantly based on **gender** and many times these impacts manifest and are experienced in different ways between male and female participants.

Survey participants responded that they had been affected by the conflict in their country in various ways: most experienced no or very limited access to electricity (59%); no or very limited access to the internet or phone (49%); and no or very limited access to food (44%) and water (41%). Girls and young women reported frequencies of these experiences that were significantly higher than those of boys and young men, indicating that girls and young women were eating less than boys and young men and were facing more digital exclusion in times of conflict. Identification with a minority group was also found to lead to a significantly higher frequency of experiencing greater barriers to accessing the basic conditions needed for survival and quality of life. Gender sensitive and tailored approaches are required in humanitarian programming to ensure that the most marginalised groups in conflict settings are supported.

This consideration is key as aid is not reaching those who need it most – as the majority of survey participants revealed.[i] However, those who did receive aid reported it to be somewhat or extremely helpful, which shows its vital importance in countries affected by humanitarian crises. The qualitative interviewees also confirmed that they did not receive aid – or that it was very inconsistent with long gaps in between receiving assistance across many humanitarian contexts.

The research underlines how conflict devastates the livelihoods of families and young people – 63 per cent of survey participants had their livelihoods extremely, very or moderately affected by the conflict in their country. The qualitative interviews highlighted how the incomes of those interviewed had been reduced by job losses, as well as businesses and farms being burned down in the conflict or families being forced to flee and leave everything behind. Survey participants revealed negative coping mechanisms for survival and for dealing with income losses, such as reducing their food intake or relying on less nutritious foods (45%). Women, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) were reporting higher frequencies of these coping mechanisms. Again, the most marginalised children and young people are living with the gravest costs of conflict in their everyday lives.

The research found how children's and young people's experiences of conflict were closely tied to their limited access to quality services, which in turn impeded their ability to learn and to receive healthcare.

The survey revealed that conflict had severely disrupted educational opportunities for children and young people. Many were forced to leave school as these were closed down, further disrupting the protective environment and exacerbating risks to children especially girls. Participants were also forced to flee far from their schools, or they did not feel safe while travelling to and from school. Nearly a third of the interviewed participants in the qualitative study countries had also left school. Those who remained in education faced constant disruptions. Both genders cited safety concerns when going to school and financial challenges. The quantitative gender data notably revealed that boys and young men missed more years of education than their female counterparts. Other intersecting characteristics such as identifying as a refugee also led to missed years of education. Girls and young women

[i] 46 per cent of survey participants reported not receiving aid, while 44 per cent had received aid previously.

meanwhile reported higher frequencies of not feeling safe while travelling to and from school than boys and young men.

In relation to healthcare access, the interviewees revealed that children and young people face key health barriers. Participants in Ethiopia revealed that health infrastructure was severely affected by the conflict due to the destruction of infrastructure and a lack of medicines. In Cameroon, participants believed that early and adolescent pregnancies had increased due to the conflict, mainly due to non-school attendance or sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups. Across the differing ages and genders interviewed in Colombia, the Philippines and Cameroon, participants were uncertain or did not know where they could go to access sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services.

The psychological impacts of war had a severe impact on participants, according to the quantitative and qualitative data. High levels of emotional and psychosocial distress were experienced by the quantitative respondents, with 55 per cent reporting sleep disturbances and 49 per cent constantly worrying (exhibited in panic attacks or chronic anxiety). There were also apparent gendered effects to the experiences of emotional and psychosocial distress, with girls and young women reporting higher frequencies of having disturbed or disrupted sleep patterns (insomnia), being unable to relax, worrying constantly, being frustrated, and feeling hopeless (being stressed or developing depression). The qualitative interviews revealed a need for more structured or formalised community-based psychosocial support programmes. These were largely unavailable in the four qualitative study countries.

Violence is a constant reality for children and young people living in conflict. Of the survey respondents, 38 per cent had previously experienced or were experiencing safety concerns in their everyday lives. Participants perceived that levels of violence had increased in their community with the majority of participants reporting risks of abduction (30%), sexual assault or violence (27%), and child labour (24%). Girls and young women reported feeling significantly less safe than boys and men. Younger participants (15 to 19 years) reported fears of shootings and experiences of hunger at significantly higher frequencies compared to older participants (20 to 24 years). The qualitative interviews across the four countries also revealed that participants felt unsafe and particularly at risk from shootings.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) was a major concern, with 22 per cent of the total surveyed sample reporting feeling at risk from sexual violence – of whom 61 per cent were girls and young women. In addition, 11.5 per cent felt at risk of being forced to marry, and 62 per cent of those respondents were girls and young women. The Ethiopian interviews also revealed a number of extremely serious accounts of SGBV experienced by women and girls in Afar and Tigray perpetrated by armed groups or in IDP camps. Most participants identified armed groups (39%) and strangers (39%) as the perpetrators of this violence, including sexual assault.

Gender norms are also likely to explain why boys and young men were more likely to be asked to join or support an armed group compared with girls and young women. A considerable proportion of participants disclosed that they had joined armed groups due to being threatened or coerced (24%). The interviews revealed that boys and men often join groups for economic reasons or to avenge the death of a loved one. Interviewees in Cameroon revealed several reasons why girls and women join – or are forced to join – armed groups: lack of employment or household income; having been kidnapped; and/or to be around boys and men for protection against being killed or arrested. These interviewees also revealed different roles based on gender once within armed groups: boys and men would take on fighting roles while girls and women were used for spying and cooking. In Colombia, girls were coerced or intimidated into accepting intimate relationships, often to escape a difficult home situation or for protection reasons. There were also particular age-related risks in Colombia, with children often targeted by armed groups using manipulative tactics and grooming.

Together, these findings paint a picture of the increased deprivation and pressures put upon girls and youth in conflict. The context of crises that arise in times of conflict was cited by surveyed participants and many interviewees as being key in household decision-making towards child marriage. This study suggests therefore that conflict deepens the existing risks and constraints that lead to child marriage.

Interviewees in Ethiopia wanted life to return to how it had been before the conflict – they wished for peace and to return home and be united with their families. Those interviewed across the four

countries highly valued education and wanted to resume their studies, and for there to be increased job opportunities for young people.

Participants across the surveys and interviews recognised young people as knowledge holders in conflict, with a right to speak out about their experiences and inform peacebuilding. Quantitative data revealed that children and young people want peace talks (63%), ceasefire (59%) and conflict prevention efforts to prevent future conflict (49%). Interviewees believed that young people should be involved in peacebuilding efforts, citing their particular experience of conflict and their potential as future leaders. However, some Colombian interviewees felt disillusioned by peace talks there which they thought had failed in the past to improve their situation. Therefore, peacebuilding efforts need to be effective and inclusive to achieve a durable peace that addresses the lasting impacts of conflict on young lives.

To help girls and young people during conflict, interviewees wanted improved security, mental health and psychosocial support to assist those with trauma, as well as educational assistance so they could still attend school. Based on the responses of the participants in the study, this year's *State of the World's Girls* report recommends action, policy and programming across young people's priorities – child protection, livelihoods and economic security, education, health and nutrition, including mental health and psychosocial support, and peacebuilding – all of which must be gender and age-sensitive in its targeting and approach.

The lives of girls, young women, boys and young men are unavoidably changed by the conflict experienced. Children and young people want peace and see no future without it. The qualitative interviews demonstrated that children's and young peoples' life goals and trajectories are profoundly affected by conflict. Yet, despite the ways that conflict has added to the hardships in all areas of life, they still dream of a brighter future.

1. Introduction

The *State of the World's Girls* report is released every year for International Day of the Girl on 11 October. The report contains the annual signature research for Plan International's global campaigns for girls' gender equality and leadership. The 2024 report focuses on conflict and contains research from ten countries. Plan International's 2024–2025 global campaign will focus on driving action to address the challenges and risks faced by girls and young people living in conflict around the world. Plan International is committed to protecting children's rights and equality for girls who are living in intensifying and protracted crises, complex emergencies, armed conflict and contexts of increased fragility and threat.

Over the past 15 years the world has become less peaceful. Of the 163 countries in the Global Peace Index (GPI), 95 recorded deteriorations.[1] One in six people are estimated to have been exposed to conflict in 2023 alone, with one in five children living in or fleeing conflict.[2] In 2022 more than two-thirds of the world's children were living in a conflict-affected country.[3] The 2023 GPI report reveals a concerning surge in global conflicts. Even when excluding the war in Ukraine, there has been an increase in the level of conflict since 2019, according to the GPI report. Conflict-related deaths rose by 45 per cent in the year prior to the escalation of the war in Ukraine. Violence increased significantly in Mali, Ethiopia and Ukraine in 2022. Increased geopolitical competition has fuelled conflict in many countries. Both great and mid-sized powers are competing for influence in states or regions by supporting competing interests through the supply of troops and weapons.[4] Conflict in Sudan and Gaza in 2023 have resulted in the killing of thousands of civilians, blatant violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), and significant displacement.

This Plan International report on the *State of the World's Girls* explores ten conflict-affected countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine, and one country that is unable to be named because of political and operational sensitivities. It also spotlights Gaza where possible, given the scale of the impact of the conflict on young people and all civilians, although primary data collection was not possible this year.

The Global Humanitarian Overview 2024, released in December 2023 by the UN Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), reported that nearly 300 million people around the world in 2024 would need humanitarian assistance and protection due to conflicts, climate emergencies and other drivers.[5] As the number of conflicts increase and many become more entrenched with devastating consequences for civilians, conflict is now a major driver of humanitarian needs.

Children and youth are often targeted in situations of armed conflicts. Other risks unique to humanitarian crises emerge including the UN Security Council's six grave violations against children in conflict: the killing and maiming of children; the recruitment or use of children by armed forces and armed groups; the abduction of children; attacks on schools or hospitals; rape and other forms of sexual violence; and the denial of humanitarian access. Children are also forcibly displaced, suffer famine, and can be abused and sexually exploited. These and other violations have long-lasting, negative consequences that can often be fatal. During active hostilities, humanitarian access to ensure life-saving and basic services for children and other civilians may be severely restricted, despite requirements under international humanitarian law (IHL) for humanitarian organisations to be granted rapid and unimpeded access to the people affected. IHL demands that humanitarian relief personnel, and objects used for humanitarian relief operations, must be respected and protected.[6]

For example, OCHA reports that humanitarian operations in Gaza continue to face severe access restrictions including the ongoing closure of key crossings, denials of planned missions, and delays in movements imposed by Israeli authorities.[7] Plan International and other humanitarian peer organisations have issued numerous joint public statements and briefing notes[8,9,10] describing restrictions that prevent humanitarian aid from reaching Palestinian civilians, the killing of humanitarian workers, and concrete examples of immense obstacles to humanitarian access, all of which disregard IHL obligations as well as civilian life. As a result of the denial of humanitarian access and the bombardment of Gaza, Palestinians have experienced catastrophic levels of hunger – the highest levels recorded anywhere by the Integrated Food Security Classification (IPC) at the time. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described the IPC's findings as "an appalling indictment of conditions on the ground for civilians" and called the predicted imminent famine in northern Gaza in March 2024 an "entirely man-made disaster".[11]

Another severe example of the denial of humanitarian access is in the Sudan conflict where after 14 months of conflict, Sudanese civilians are facing an unprecedented hunger crisis that the IPC described as the world's worst hunger crisis, as of June 2024. The IPC report released in June 2024[12] found that 25.6 million people were expected to face acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3+) during the next lean season and 8.5 million people (18% of the population) were facing "Emergency" (IPC Phase 4). Some 755,000 people were in "Catastrophe" (IPC 5) in ten states, while there was a risk of "famine" in 14 areas. The IPC warned of ongoing restrictions on humanitarian access to the besieged population in critical areas and the possible escalation of conflict contributing to these restrictions and affecting people's ability to engage in farming during the upcoming agricultural season. The Sudan INGO Forum, which includes Plan International and other humanitarian organisations, released a joint statement upon the release of the IPC findings:

> The Sudan INGO Forum has regularly sounded the alarm that continued and escalating conflict and active denial of humanitarian access was driving Sudan to the brink of famine... Sudan's unprecedented hunger crisis is the direct result of the conflict and disregard for international humanitarian law and human rights law by all parties of the conflict... Access to humanitarian assistance continues to be severely restricted by administrative barriers, restrictions on civilian movement, and looting or violence targeted at humanitarians.[13]

According to UNICEF, as of April 2024, nearly 4 million children under the age of five were expected to suffer from acute malnutrition during the year, with 730,000 of them projected to experience life-threatening severe acute malnutrition meaning that they are at high risk of either dying or facing lifelong setbacks to their physical and mental health. Almost 4 million children in Sudan are projected to face malnourishment in 2024.[14] Sudan is also the world's largest child displacement crisis. Humanitarian access restrictions and ongoing violations of IHL make it even harder for humanitarians to reach these displaced children in dire need.

On 1 August 2024, the IPC's Famine Review Committee (FRC) confirmed that famine is present in parts of North Darfur, Sudan, including Zamzam Camp near El Fasher town where there are an estimated

500,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs).[15] After 15 months of conflict, the FRC stated that restrictions on humanitarian access, including impediments intentionally imposed by the active parties to the conflict, have severely restricted the capability of aid organisations to scale up their response efforts effectively. These obstructions have critically hindered the delivery of necessary aid and exacerbated the food crisis, driving some households into famine conditions. As with any famine, there has been a multisectoral collapse, and basic human needs for health services, water, food, nutrition, shelter and protection are not being met.[16] Echoing warnings from humanitarians over previous months, the FRC confirmed that

> …the main drivers of Famine in Zamzam camp are conflict and lack of humanitarian access, both of which can immediately be rectified with the necessary political will. Famine conditions will only worsen and be further prolonged if conflict continues and humanitarian and full commercial access is not made possible.[17]

Conflict robs an entire generation of their childhood or younger years. Traditional milestones such as completing education, getting a job or starting a family are disrupted due to the inability to access finance or resources, disrupted education, recruitment by armed groups, death or injury of family members, and anxiety about the future. Conflict also has long-term impacts, including living with lifelong trauma, physical injuries, stunting from malnutrition, facing unintended pregnancies or child, early or forced marriages or unions (CEFMU), and the loss of years of education during the most critical life stage. With this, it is key to recognise that adolescents and youth experiences require tailored, gender and age-sensitive support in conflicts.

Adolescence is often described as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, of intense change and of heightened risks.[18] Physical and social changes begin to take place as well as a transition marked by independence from parents or guardians. Adolescents and youth experiencing this transition during times of conflict face unique challenges that set them apart from adults and children. Adolescents are required to transition to adulthood swiftly during conflicts thus missing childhood opportunities. This, coupled with the increased risks stemming from violence, economic decline and the breakdown of community structures and services, underscores the urgency of addressing the plight of young people caught in the crossfire of persisting global conflicts.[19]

Girls and young women living in low and lower-middle-income countries are often already marginalised due to existing inequalities and discrimination. For girls and young women in conflict-affected countries, these inequalities are further exacerbated. Adolescent girls are at heightened risk of dropping out of school, being recruited by armed groups, and of suffering from gender-based violence and discrimination, CEFMU, unwanted pregnancies, sexual exploitation and loss of livelihoods during conflicts. The findings of a systematic review of quantitative literature report that key sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes among young women are affected by exposure to armed conflict; namely, sexual debut, first marriage and first birth.[20]

This *State of the World's Girls* technical research report sets out detailed findings of a study conducted in 2024 by Plan International to shed light on young people's experiences of conflict and its impact on their current lives and future aspirations. It also seeks to understand the gendered impacts of conflict and how girls and boys are affected differently by the impacts of conflict. Recognising the unique challenges and differences in needs, priorities and roles of girls, boys, young women and men is crucial for effective humanitarian preparedness and response as each group faces distinct risks and vulnerabilities. Promoting gender responsive humanitarian efforts means targeting and programming more effectively to reach all affected individuals.

1.1 Scope and aims of the research

This research aims to highlight the impacts of conflict on young people aged between 15 and 24 years, and to provide overarching findings and recommendations about the impact on girls, boys and young men and women but it will have a particular focus on how gender affects the experience of and vulnerability to conflict. The research questions are as follows:

1. How are girls' and boys' lives shaped by the crisis in their country? What key areas and services are most affected (e.g. education, wellbeing and mental health, livelihoods, protection)?

2. How do age, gender and other intersecting characteristics play a role in the impact of conflict experienced by young people?
3. What shape have girls' and boys' life trajectories taken, due to the conflict experienced? What are their hopes for the future?

1.2 Key definitions

Armed conflict	Armed force used by an organised actor against another organised actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.[21] Armed conflict(s) can be: Intrastate conflict: A conflict between a government and a non-governmental party, with no interference from other countries. Interstate conflict: A conflict between two or more governments. **In this report when we refer to conflict generally, we are referring to armed conflict unless specified otherwise.**
Children	People aged under 18 years old. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) a child is recognised as a person under 18, unless national laws recognise the age to be earlier.[22]
Adolescents/adolescence	People aged between 10 and 19 years: 10 to 14 years is defined as early adolescence and 15 to 19 years is later adolescence.[23]
Youth/young people	People aged between 15 and 24 years.[24]
Refugees	Refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, violence or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and who, as a result, require international protection.[25]
Migrants	Any person who has changed his or her country of residence. This includes all migrants, regardless of their legal status, or the nature, or motive of their movement – e.g. it can be a voluntary or involuntary movement.[26]
Internally displaced persons (IDP)	Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed a national/state border – i.e. have stayed within the state.[27]
International humanitarian law (IHL)	International humanitarian law is a set of rules that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict. These rules protect people who are not or are no longer participating in hostilities and they serve to restrict the means and methods of warfare.[28]

2. Literature review

2.1 Children and young people in conflict

The prolonged exposure to conflict and violence means that children and young people are in a continued state of stress and are exposed to heightened risks of violence, neglect, exploitation and abuse. Children and young people in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan and Ethiopia and many other conflict-affected countries share the same experiences of loss, fear and destruction which can have lifelong implications for their physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. The nature of conflict and its impact on youth, adolescents and children is evolving. Deliberate campaigns of violence against civilians are taking place including the targeting of schools and homes, the abduction and enslavement of girls and deliberate starvation.[29]

Humanitarian crises are also becoming more complex and compounded by other crises such as mass displacement, famine and disease outbreaks.[30] Children and young people are disproportionately suffering the consequences of conflict in a number of areas, including disruptions to education, physical and mental health effects, repercussions on livelihoods and economic opportunities, violence including gender-based violence as well as displacement and recruitment to armed groups.[31] Some of the ways in which children and young people are affected by conflict are outlined below.

Displacement and social cohesion

Forced displacement reached unprecedented levels in 2023. Children constitute 41 per cent of all forcibly displaced people despite accounting for only 30 per cent of the world's population.[32] The number of people forced to flee their homes is rising globally due to conflict, persecution, political violence, or economic, political and, increasingly, environmental crises.[33]

As of 2020, internally displaced persons (IDPs) comprised the majority of the global forcibly displaced population.[34] Many forcibly displaced people have experienced or are exposed to traumatic situations prior to and during their displacement, and they often experience living conditions that are harsher than their former situation.[35]

In academia, and among development and humanitarian practitioners, the definition of social cohesion is debated both as a concept and in relation to measurement matrices.[36] It is generally understood as the quality of relationships – attributes such as a shared sense of trust, purpose or willingness to cooperate – between different groups of people, and between groups of people and the institutions that govern them.[37,38] Importantly, social cohesion should always be considered as contextually specific and should recognise that labels such as “host” and “displaced” in reference to populations or communities do not denote homogeneous groups, and the composition of these groups can change over time.[39]

Although research is limited, forced displacement is considered to significantly affect social cohesion among and between displaced groups, host communities, as well as among communities that displaced people return to.[40] Displacement has the potential either to strengthen or undermine social cohesion. In some instances, it can reduce conflict, improve the quality of public and social services, increase local development, and promote diversity in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, race and other intersectional characteristics among the receiving societies.[41,42] Alternatively, it can create or exacerbate inequalities, cause economic upheaval, and provoke social tension, fragmentation and conflict, particularly in resource-constrained settings.[43,44] Resource scarcity, poverty and limited institutional capacity to adapt to changing demand and circumstance can increase pressure on both host and displaced groups, and can lead to distrust, civil unrest and xenophobia.[45,46]

Multiple factors are considered to affect social cohesion in the context of forced displacement, including pre-existing relationships between displaced and host communities, spatial arrangements, perceptions of identity, disparity between different groups, and the duration of displacement.[47]

There is very limited research into the gendered experience of social cohesion in forced displacement. However, a recent study suggested that in the experience of Ukrainian displaced persons, female participants more frequently experienced increased discrimination or unfair treatment when receiving humanitarian assistance, whereas male respondents more frequently discussed experiencing

discrimination or unfair treatment while interacting with local populations, particularly if the male respondents were IDPs.[48]

The experience of social cohesion in forced displacement has gained greater attention from humanitarian and development practitioners in recent years.[49] This has been influenced by the increase of protracted crises where displacement and social relations often become more strained, owing to what is considered to be fatigue among host communities. Another factor is the "urbanisation of displacement", with currently 60 per cent of the world's refugees living in urban areas; this heightens the proximity of communities and potential tension and competition over resources. Social cohesion has become a strategic priority and featured within responses of aid and government actors to forced displacement globally.[50] This is important as evidence suggests that solidarity and social cohesion can have positive outcomes across society, including for individual health, happiness and wellbeing, economic growth, local institutional performance, adherence to societal norms, and even living longer due to mental and physical health improvements.[51]

Disruption and barriers to education

Conflict affects children's – especially girls' – education in various ways. It often ultimately leads to schools simply shutting down or being periodically disrupted in times of conflict. For example, 19 million children were out of school in Sudan in 2023, according to OCHA.[52] As of June 2024, the Education Cluster[ii] in the Occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) reported substantial damage to Gaza's educational infrastructure. Specifically, 563 school buildings have been damaged or likely damaged and of these, 307 were directly hit.[53] From February 2022 to October 2023, 3,428 education facilities across Ukraine were damaged and 365 destroyed.[54] Almost 1 million refugees from Ukraine in neighbouring countries are not enrolled in host countries' education systems.[55] Plan International was among the first child-focused organisations to call for the return to school to be prioritised for Ukraine, where it is safe to do so.[56] Schools, children and teachers are often targeted by non-state armed groups as educational institutions represent the government in power; and attacks on education serve as a propaganda tool.

Education facilities also face some capacity challenges such as the shortage of classrooms, qualified teachers, teaching and learning materials.[57] Education facilities may be closed in order to shelter people displaced by conflict, further compounding the lack of capacity for schools to continue amid conflicts. Since 7 October 2023, more than 345 school buildings in Gaza have been used by IDPs as shelters. Among these buildings, 238 have either been directly struck or have sustained damage.[58] In Sudan, since April 2023, 10,400 schools (54% of the total 19,302 schools) have been forced to close either due to attacks or due to being used as emergency shelters.[59]

Education staff and students may fear going to school. In some cases, schools are used for military purposes which can increase the risk of the recruitment and use of children by non-state armed groups and armed forces or may leave children and youth vulnerable to sexual abuse or exploitation.[60] However, children who are out of school become more susceptible to recruitment. Recent research on children recruited by armed groups in the Sahel found that most of these children had either already dropped out of school or had never had access to the educational system before being recruited.[61] Disruption to education during conflict can have long-term implications for children, their prospects and wellbeing, and breaches their human rights.

Access to healthcare

Medical and health issues in conflict zones include traumatic injury; communicable and non-communicable diseases; mental health issues; antenatal, maternal and newborn health issues; and children's health concerns. As conflict in the 21st century increasingly involves the purposeful destruction of civilian infrastructure and a disregard for international law, IHL and human rights law including the humanitarian principles, the impact on access to healthcare can be catastrophic.[62] Armed conflict causes a breakdown of healthcare access through the destruction of hospitals, clinics and other healthcare infrastructure, and disruptions to supply chains required for medications and essential

[ii] An inter-agency coordination mechanism for agencies and organisations with expertise and a mandate for humanitarian response within the education sector in situations of internal displacement.

medical equipment.[63,64] People encounter destroyed healthcare facilities or unpassable military checkpoints on the way to facilities.[65]

In the first six months of 2024, hospitals in Sudan and Gaza have been targeted: the armed groups targeted the last operating hospital in Darfur and the Israeli military have targeted hospitals across Gaza, destroying the health infrastructure and killing doctors and other medical professionals as well as patients and other civilians in the hospitals.[66] Conflict also causes the flight, injury and death of health workers. In northeastern Nigeria, health professionals have been targeted by armed groups, with midwives and other health practitioners abducted and executed.[67] In Ukraine, the World Health Organization (WHO) documented more than 150 attacks on healthcare infrastructure in the first six months of 2024 and in July 2024 the Russian military struck Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital in Kyiv, Ukraine's largest children's hospital and a major treatment centre for children with cancer.[68,69]

Women and children account for a disproportionate morbidity burden among conflict-affected populations as they are heavily dependent on a functioning and responsive healthcare system and are vulnerable to economic and societal disruption caused by conflict.[70] Studies have found that refugee women experience more severe and frequent obstetric problems compared with local populations[71] – largely due to insufficient access to prenatal and delivery care. Women exposed to armed conflicts during pregnancy and are more likely to give birth without a skilled attendant,[72] which significantly raises the risks of complications for mothers and newborns – with higher rates of maternal and neonatal mortality, low birth weight and premature babies.[73] Research has also found that essential reproductive health services – particularly post-abortion care, long-acting and permanent contraceptive methods, and HIV treatments – are rarely made available in refugee and IDP camps.[74] Given the well-documented increases of early pregnancy during conflict,[75] this issue also critically impacts adolescent girls.

Sexual violence is an ever-prevalent characteristic of conflict. In 2023 women and girls accounted for 95 per cent of reported cases of sexual violence across 21 settings.[76] Many women and girls – as well as boys and men – who are at risk of or exposed to rape experience severe physical and mental health impacts after surviving sexual violence and they require timely tailored medical and psychosocial treatment, including for unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections. Conflict compounds the pre-existing challenge of accessing appropriate and quality medical care following rape and other acts of sexual violence.[77]

Mental health and psychosocial distress impacts

Children and young people often experience conflict differently due to their unique stage of development, vulnerabilities and particular circumstances. It is well documented that there are disparities between the psychological effects of war experienced by children, youth and adolescents and those experienced by the general adult population. In the age of modern warfare, millions of children and young people are exposed to atrocious acts of hostilities and violence (directly and indirectly), leaving lasting impacts on their mental health, social development and wellbeing.[78] Growing up in unsafe and unstable environments, children and young people may be more susceptible to psychological difficulties such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Other reported disorders include acute stress reactions, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), panic disorder, anxiety and sleep disorders.[79]

Experiencing armed conflict during childhood and adolescence poses serious immediate and future mental health risks and threatens children's development. Their brains, which are still developing, may find it more difficult to cope with the trauma of violence, displacement and witnessing atrocities. Children and young people exposed to multiple sources of violence may eventually also become desensitised and emotionally numb, which increases the possibility of them imitating the aggressive behaviour they witness and considering such violence as normal.[80]

Conflict results in the loss of family members and the breakdown of community networks, leaving children and youth without the traditional social support structures and safety nets that they rely on for guidance, protection and general wellbeing. This can further exacerbate feelings of isolation, depression or anxiety. Research carried out in 2022 by Plan International found that the absence of these support structures can drive child marriage, in the sense that a girl will seek out a husband for safety and security

if she is separated from family or not cared for.[81] The importance of family, and the nurture and support they provide, means that being separated from family members can be a significant ordeal for children and youth.

However, it is important to note that not all children and adolescent exhibit adverse mental effects in response to conflict exposure. There can be fundamental differences such as individual, family and community resilience factors which can have an effect on the association between responses to traumatic events and mental health disorders.[82]

Exposure to different types of violence, the duration of the conflict, and the nature of experienced and witnessed traumatic events are all associated with the onset and severity of mental health disorders among conflict-affected children and adolescents.[83] In later life, children and adolescents exposed to conflict-related trauma are predisposed to externalising symptoms, including regressing in age appropriate behaviours or exhibiting behavioural problems.[84] Conflict-related stigma, for example, can also be widespread in many post-conflict settings and is understood to exacerbate mental health problems.[85]

Disrupted livelihoods and access to necessities

Conflict impacts household livelihoods in many ways and can have both short- and long-term effects on parents and caregivers and on their ability to support and protect children and adolescents in their care. Conflict disrupts economic activities, leading to unemployment and inflation, affecting caregivers' capacity to support their children.[86] After eight months of conflict in Gaza, the Palestinian labour market and economy have been devastated: in June 2024, unemployment was at 79.1 per cent and GDP had shrunk by 83.5 per cent, likely due to disrupted supply chain networks and transportation routes.[87] Conflict also interrupts agricultural production, driving up food prices and causing food insecurity.[88] According to the June 2024 IPC report, approximately 25.6 million people across Sudan would likely experience high levels of acute food insecurity between June and September 2024.[89]

Conflict also exacerbates economic inequalities and vulnerabilities. The poorest households are most profoundly affected by livelihood losses as they have fewer resources with which to cope with and adapt to adversities.[90] A study in Afghanistan found that conflict is closely associated with food insecurity among the poorest households, as they have limited resilience to cope with spikes in food prices.[91]

The impact of conflicts can also be far-reaching, hitting households on the other side of the world. Plan International has noted that the conflict in Ukraine serves as an example of the reach of impacts on food security, given that Ukraine is a notable global supplier of wheat.[92] A 2022 study by Plan International found that households in the Philippines were severely impacted by the reduction in the global supply of barley and maize caused by the war in Ukraine, and that the increased costs of fertiliser had caused families to abandon agricultural practices and seek alternative income sources.[93] Studies have also shown that conflict reduces households' resilience to other shocks and stressors – such as livelihood losses caused by climate change – which can ultimately threaten a household's ability to provide basic financial support for their children and young people, or to send them to school.[94]

Households in conflict zones can resort to various negative coping strategies to survive, including altering diets and reducing food consumption, selling assets, borrowing money, seeking alternative income sources, migrating, or relying on humanitarian aid. Women and children – particularly girls – are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of household livelihood losses. This is due to the pre-existing inequalities they experience including poverty, poorer access to education, lower levels of participation in the formal economy, less spending autonomy and lower levels of household decision-making, food and nutritional insecurity, and less control of and access to water and natural resources.[95] Household livelihood losses are directly linked with a loss of education for girls, as families become unable to afford school fees and other costs associated with education (transport, books and materials etc.). Deprivation intersects with harmful gender and socioeconomic norms that prioritise education for boys over girls, causing girls to be withdrawn from school at a higher rate than boys in order to take on unpaid care work in the home or to contribute to the household income.[96]

Conflict, displacement and resultant livelihood losses also drive families to adopt extreme coping mechanisms such as child, early and forced marriages and unions (CEFMU).[97] Girls affected by conflict

are more than 20 per cent more likely to marry as children than girls living outside conflict zones. Save the Children research found that the risk of child marriage linked to conflict was especially high for girls in East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South Asia.[98] Child marriage is seen as a way to relieve economic hardship, and in contexts that practise "bride-price", it can be seen as a source of income for a family suffering the effects of livelihood losses.[99] Plan International evidence has found how food insecurity crises drive child marriage, making it a key factor of deprivation that influences household decision-making around child marriage.[100] Recruitment into armed groups is viewed as a coping mechanism for youth in conflict. With the loss of household livelihoods and little other option for income generation, children are forced to join armed groups for the guarantee of an income.[101]

Violence against children and young people

Violence is a cross-cutting issue that is prevalent across experiences of conflict, including displacement and community tensions, disrupted healthcare and education, and livelihood loss. Violence against children and young people encompasses the deliberate use of physical force or power by an individual or group that causes actual or potential harm to a child's health, survival, development or dignity. This includes all forms of physical and emotional maltreatment, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment, negligent treatment and commercial or other exploitation, particularly within contexts characterised by relationships of responsibility, trust or power.[102]

Conflict presents significant risks to children's protection, as the frontlines of war are often fought in the spaces where children live, play and learn. As previously referenced, in 1999, the UN Security Council established six recognisable ways in which grave violations against children in conflict occur: killing and maiming of children; recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups; abduction of children; attacks on schools or hospitals; rape or other sexual violence against children; and denial of humanitarian access. Recognition of such crimes against children involves ensuring that international laws and standards which protect children in armed conflict are upheld and that accountability for crimes against children in armed conflict is prioritised in both international and national agendas.[103]

Sexual violence and exploitation

Children in conflict situations are exposed to high risks of sexual violence and exploitation. UNICEF's 2022 report on children and armed conflict shows that between 2005 and 2020, more than 14,200 children in armed conflict were verified as subjected to rape and other sexual violence, with an annual average in this period of 890 child victims. The actual number of cases is believed to be even higher as sexual violence in particular is often under-reported. Sexual violence disproportionately affects girls, who were victims in 97 per cent of the verified cases between 2016 and 2020. Verified cases of sexual violence against boys were recorded in about half of conflict situations, with the highest number of cases verified for Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen. State actors were responsible for about 30 per cent of verified cases, but non-state actors were the most common perpetrators.[104]

Child marriage is a recognised manifestation of violence against girls. Child marriage is driven by conditions of poverty, breakdown of services and disruption to education – conditions that are worsened in conflict settings. Girls enter child marriages in positions of powerlessness and for reasons of basic survival; most married girls describe their first sexual experience as forced.[105]

Research shows that girls who were abducted by armed forces or armed groups are at greater risk of sexual abuse. In some cases, girls have been sexually abused by multiple fighters or have been married to a fighter or commander. These girls are a vulnerable group with specific needs, such as requiring medical and psychosocial treatment, yet they face exclusion upon returning to their home communities which makes receiving appropriate treatment, or basic services, inaccessible.[106]

Recruitment to armed forces and groups

Thousands of children and young people are engaged in conflicts across the world. UNICEF estimates that between 2005 and 2022, more than 105,000 children were recruited and used by armed forces or armed groups in relation to conflict.[107] The recruitment or use of children is one of the six grave violations against children in conflict.[108] The reasons why girls and boys become associated with armed groups and armed forces vary significantly based on the context, the armed actors involved, as well as community and family dynamics. Pathways to association can include: forced recruitment, propaganda,

economic incentives, community pressure, child marriage and the existence of family ties to an armed group.[109] Girls and boys are involved in a variety of roles. They may have directly participated in hostilities such as in combat roles in some contexts; in others, they have been indirectly involved, playing support roles, and been used for sexual purposes. In many armed forces and armed groups, support roles played by girls and boys include a variety of responsibilities such as cooking, being a porter, washing clothes, fetching water or firewood, looking after the children of the combatants or guarding other abductees. Children may also serve as spies, scouts, messengers, drug dealers, tax collectors, radio operators, recruiters, translators, weapon cleaners, medical assistants, nurses, midwives, bursars or logisticians. Children can also work on farms and fields, as well as in mines under the control of armed forces and armed groups.[110] Additionally, many girls and young women face sexual and gender-based violence while in armed groups.

Even after leaving armed groups, children and adolescents who have participated in these groups can face numerous difficulties in re-assimilating or reintegrating back into their families and communities as they often encounter community stigma and sometimes rejection or violence. The reintegration of children who have exited armed forces and armed groups is a continuing challenge that needs to be addressed holistically alongside stronger linkages between humanitarian and long-term development initiatives across the humanitarian and development nexus. Long-term reintegration programmes for children should be funded for at least three years as many donor-funded programmes are much too short to adequately meet the multisectoral needs in the cycle of a child's reintegration.

Child recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups is prohibited by international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international criminal law. The age under which recruitment is prohibited varies depending on which treaty a state is party to and domestic legislation. It generally varies between the ages of 15 and 18. Some treaties prohibit recruitment and use below the age of 15 while others raise that age. For example, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) and the African Charter expressly set the age at 18.[111] Child recruitment and engagement in conflict is a critical issue on the global peace and security agenda (particularly the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate[112]), and on development agendas. Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals notes that states are compelled to take immediate and effective measures to "secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms". Despite all this, recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups continues to seriously affect children's rights and protection in armed conflict. However, there have been some positive steps forward: in the Philippines, for example, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have taken tangible steps towards full implementation of the Action Plan to prevent and end the recruitment and use of under-18s, including the issuance of a directive towards this end and community-based awareness-raising prevention campaigns.

Children associated with armed forces and armed groups should be considered as victims by international and national jurisdictions and should not be subjected to criminal proceedings. If children are accused of crimes under national or international law, prosecution should be regarded as a measure of last resort, and the purpose of any sentence should be to rehabilitate and reintegrate the child into society. The CRC Article 40(3)(b) requires that states should seek alternatives to judicial proceedings for children at the national level such as "care, guidance and supervision orders, counselling, probation, foster care, education and vocational training programmes".[113]

2.2 Upholding children's and young people's rights in armed conflict

Protecting children and young people in armed conflict requires complex, concerted and sustained efforts by humanitarian agencies and actors to prevent and respond to child rights violations, to provide humanitarian assistance and to help to rebuild affected communities. Financial resources, political support and global awareness are also essential. International legal instruments, particularly international humanitarian law and human rights law are instrumental in upholding children's rights during conflict.

In addition to humanitarian responses from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) like Plan International, national NGOs and local organisations, and UN agencies, there are ongoing

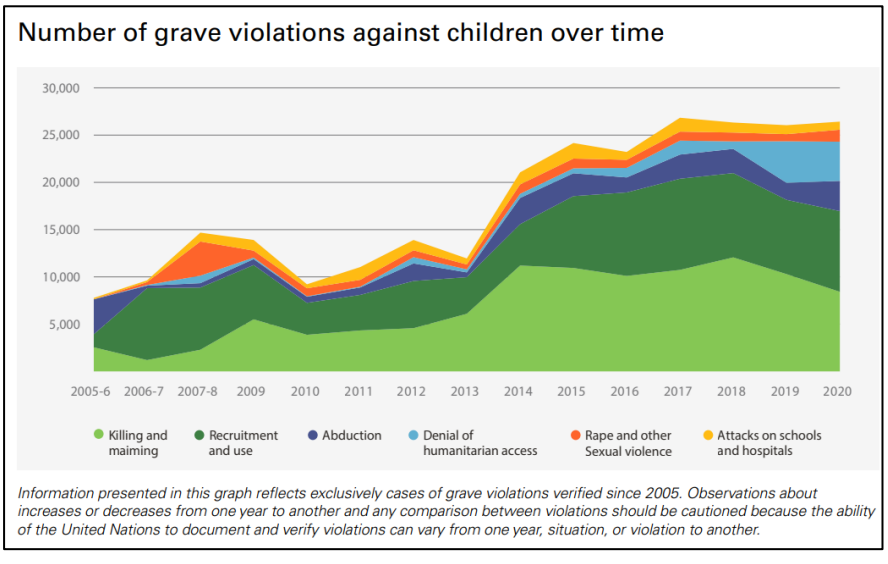
diplomatic and advocacy efforts to better protect children and young people in conflict and to work to prevent further grave violations against them. The Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda is key in efforts worldwide to protect children in armed conflict. In 1996, Graça Machel (Mozambique) presented her seminal report on the impact of armed conflict on children to the United Nations General Assembly. UNICEF's recent report *25 Years of Children and Armed Conflict: Taking Action to Protect Children in War,*[114] described the Machel report as:

> …expos[ing] what was until then the invisible impact of armed conflict on children's lives, and paint[ing] a grim picture of the scale and scope of how children's rights are violated in situations of armed conflict. For the first time, the UN General Assembly heard the full story of how children are recruited and used by armed actors, displaced, exploited, and sexually abused. The story of children deprived of their right to life, to liberty, health and education, their right to be with their family and community, to develop their personalities and to be nurtured and protected. (p.7)

In 1997, the UN General Assembly established the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC) – which UNICEF referred to as a key recommendation of the Machel report and a first step towards the development of a comprehensive agenda to improve the protection and care of children in conflict situations.

The UN Security Council in 1999 with Resolution 1261 put the protection of children in armed conflict as a fundamental peace and security concern, establishing it as one of the first thematic human rights issues to be added to the Security Council's agenda, and condemned the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups. In 2000 the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children and armed conflict (OPAC) was adopted – another major step for CAAC. Since then, 13 resolutions[iii] relating to CAAC have been adopted by the UN Security Council, including Resolution 1612 which created the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations against children in conflict.[115] The MRM is a robust UN-led mechanism to collect timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on the six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. This data, verified by a strenuous verification process, is what goes into the UN Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict (where parties to conflict may be listed as perpetrators of grave violations) as well as in country-specific CAAC reports and other important UN reporting. The UN Security Council receives this data and awaits the annual reports of the Secretary-General on CAAC every year ahead of their Annual Debate on Children and Armed Conflict.

Figure 1: Number of grave violations against children over time (UNICEF, 2022: p14)[116]



[iii] UN Security Council Resolutions 1261(1999), 1314(2000), 1379(2001), 1460(2003), 1539(2004), 1612(2005), 1882(2009), 1998(2011), 2068(2012), 2143(2014), 2225(2015), 2427(2018), and 2601 (2021).

Parties to conflict listed in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict are meant to develop action plans with the SRSG-CAAC to address grave violations against children. The Office of the SRSG-CAAC describes an action plan as:

> …a written, signed commitment between the United Nations and those parties who are listed as having committed grave violations against children in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. Each action plan is designed to address a specific party's situation, and outlines concrete, time-bound steps that lead to compliance with international law, de-listing, and a more protected future for children.[117]

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, a coalition of humanitarian and human rights organisations to which Plan International belongs, issued a paper in 2013 on action plans to prevent and end grave violations against children, identifying the three key factors contributing to action plan adoption as: (i) political interest in the action plan by the signatory party; (ii) consistent UN advocacy supported by bilateral démarches; and (iii) a UN mission structure which facilitates senior-level engagement.[118]

UN member States have a responsibility to pursue accountability for parties to conflict who commit grave violations against children in conflict and to prevent future violations from occurring. A key body that is tasked with this is the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, established in 2005, comprising all 15 Security Council members. They regularly receive reports of grave violations against children in conflict, including country-specific reports and issue "Conclusions" on country situations requesting that different actors in a country situation, including the government and parties to conflict, take specific actions for children. The Security Council's CAAC Working Group also travels to countries to meet stakeholders and speak to affected communities. The Security Council itself, not only its CAAC Working Group, however is also responsible for better protecting children in conflict around the world, and for preventing conflict. There is also the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict established shortly after Resolution 1612 by the Government of Canada in New York at UN Headquarters; that is an informal body of member States (not only UN Security Council members) which engage on CAAC and receive briefings from civil society and the UN officials engaged on CAAC. Other Groups of Friends on CAAC have been established by groups of embassies in conflict-affected countries or regions worldwide.

Humanitarian organisations like Plan International regularly engage in humanitarian policy, advocacy and diplomacy to try to uphold children's and young people's rights in conflict. As UNICEF noted in the *25 years of CAAC* report,

> …the United Nations could not have developed the children and armed conflict agenda without the critical support and contribution of civil society. International NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Plan International, Save the Children, and Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, relentlessly advocate at the UN with member States for a strong protection mandate, playing an essential role in holding the United Nations accountable to their promise to children. Their interventions include workshops in support of members of the Security Council to increase their knowledge and understanding of the children and armed conflict agenda. They also organise and facilitate briefings and issue regular reports, policy and advocacy briefs, and newsletters focusing everyone's attention on the plight of children and calling for action.[119]

Humanitarian organisations serve an important role in speaking up for children and young people, and all civilians in conflict. The Humanitarian Principles guide humanitarian responses and programming, in humanitarian advocacy, and in humanitarian communications: namely, humanity; neutrality; impartiality; and independence.[120,121]

The provision of effective protection and assistance to children affected by armed conflict is primarily the responsibility of national governments, as required by IHL and emphasised in Security Council Resolution 1612. Yet in conflicts around the world, these obligations are neglected and sometimes

disregarded completely. Worldwide, humanitarian actors and many others have been calling for a ceasefire in Gaza for children (and all civilians). Despite these efforts, the reality of the situation there shows that the fundamental rights of children in need of special protection continue to be sidelined. UNICEF, for example, has described the Gaza Strip as the most dangerous place in the world to be a child. In January 2024, UNICEF reported that "we have said this is a war on children. But these truths don't seem to be getting through". By January 2024, up to 70 per cent of those killed were reported to be women and children; in May 2024, at least 66 people including children were killed in four days of attacks on Israeli military-designated "safe zones" in Rafah.[122,123] In January 2024, Plan International, Save the Children, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), War Child Alliance, Humanity & Inclusion, the Danish Refugee Council and others – in total 16 organisations – issued a major joint statement calling on all states to immediately halt the transfer of weapons, parts and ammunition to Israel and Palestinian armed groups while there is a risk these are used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian or human rights law.[124] Since then, more than 250 humanitarian and human rights organisations have joined our call.[125]

In February 2024, the CEOs of six humanitarian organisations, including Plan International, in a joint op-ed in *The New Humanitarian* called out the "deafening silence of global indifference" for civilians in Sudan, and the failure of the UN Security Council, the African Union, and others to stop the violence. They wrote that "those with influence over the warring parties have echoed hollow calls for ceasefires and looked away as cumbersome bureaucratic requirements hinder our aid efforts".[126]

In conflict situations around the world children and young people are targeted, abused and killed. Our efforts at all levels and in all places will continue to work to change this reality for them.

As Graça Machel wrote in 1996, "It is unforgivable that children are assaulted, violated, murdered and yet our conscience is not revolted, nor our sense of dignity challenged. This represents a fundamental crisis of our civilization. The impact of armed conflict on children must be everyone's concern and is everyone's responsibility".[127]

2.3 Gender and conflict

Gender inequality and conflict

Every conflict is multidimensional, with girls and women, boys and men being vulnerable to violence and conflict in different ways. However, there is a strong evidence base concerning the ways that beliefs and values behind unequal gendered roles and power relations are instrumental in building support for and perpetuating conflict.[128] Conflict and gender inequality have a mutually reinforcing relationship: gender inequality contributes to conflict, while gender inequality is exacerbated by conflict.

There are a number of studies that find a strong correlation between levels of gender inequality and conflict:

- There are comprehensive reviews on the links between gender inequality and outbreaks of violent conflict, including a growing body of quantitative research which points to a robust relationship between gender inequality and armed conflict.[129]
- Evidence suggests that the more years that a country has had female suffrage before an international dispute erupts, the more likely the dispute will be resolved through non-violent means. Countries with fewer women in parliament are more likely to use militarism to settle disputes and are at higher risk of intrastate conflict.[130]
- The same research indicates that nations with more women in the workforce tend to experience less international violence, while improved gender equality can enhance a country's stability by boosting its GDP.[131]
- The same evidence also suggests that countries with high national levels of violence against women and girls (VAWG) have been more likely to experience armed conflict.[132]
- Ekvall (2019) found links between disapproval of gender equality and intolerance of homosexuality; both with correlations of armed conflict.[133] She found that "the countries that are the most gender unequal and the most homophobic are the ones that have the highest levels

of societal violence and also the ones that run the highest risk of having armed conflicts on their own territories".[134]

However, it is important to note that VAWG also occurs in many countries with high levels of gender equality and low levels of armed conflict.[135] While gender emerges from numerous studies as a key factor, it is also important to note that it is always interlinked with other drivers such as unemployment, resource scarcity, socioeconomic inequality, ethnic and religious differences, ideological differences, political instability and other potential external factors.

Girls' vulnerabilities in conflict

As established across this literature review, the various impacts of conflict have not only a gendered dimension but are age-specific too. Once girls enter adolescence, their world shrinks as their families restrict their mobility as a drastic measure to protect them from harm. As a result, adolescent girls are more likely to drop out of school compared to their male peers and younger girls. Girls also have fewer opportunities to engage in social activities and to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Across conflict-affected settings globally, adolescent girls report having limited access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information, supplies and services.

In many conflict-affected settings, conflict increases risks of child marriage and early pregnancy for girls, often with devastating and lifelong consequences. Child marriage is practised all over the world to some degree, and can become more widespread as a result of conflict and insecurity. The impact of a crisis can vastly accelerate the prevalence of marriage and lower the age at which it takes place.[136]

Married girls report high levels of sexual, physical and emotional violence, including marital rape and child sexual abuse. Moreover, many married and pregnant adolescent girls report feeling unsafe when accessing services due to a lack of support from their husband or family, as well as stigma from peers and the community, lack of privacy and negative attitudes of service providers towards them given their age and marital status.

Ultimately, girls are often specifically targeted in conflict to be subjected to grave violations and used as weapons of war. Plan International briefed the UN Security Council on these issues in 2021 at its Annual Debate on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC).[137]

Despite their unique and urgent needs, adolescent girls face limited access to key social support structures, skill-building development and livelihood opportunities thereby further elevating the risks that they will seek out a marriage to survive or that their parents push them into child marriages.

Given these vulnerabilities, girls have distinct needs in conflict settings, such as dedicated and safe adolescent girl-friendly spaces, peer support networks, adolescent-responsive services and safe platforms that promote girls' participation and enable them to raise their concerns. Supporting girls in conflict, and ensuring their protection, must be addressed through child- and survivor-centred and gender sensitive programming.

Gender differences with regards to association with armed forces and groups

Birchall (2019) points out that men, boys, women and girls can all become associated with armed forces and groups for similar reasons such as to support certain ideologies, avenge wrongs against them or their families, escape poverty or improve social status, but there are some clear gendered differences in motivations.[138] The reasons that girls join armed groups and armed forces vary significantly based on the context, the armed actors involved, the personal experience of the girl, as well as community and family dynamics. Abduction, child marriage, propaganda and a close relationship with an armed fighter are the typical forms of recruitment for girls.[139] Girls and boys are most often influenced by multiple risk factors which combine to increase the likelihood of their association with an armed group or armed force.

Risk factors at the individual, family, community and societal levels of the socio-ecological framework interact with one another and influence girls' association with an armed group or armed force. **At the individual level**, the need for physical protection is a key risk factor for girls' association. In many situations of armed conflict, girls are exposed to risks of violence, sexual abuse, harassment or abduction in their communities and being associated with an armed group or armed force can be perceived as a form of protection. The need for empowerment and gender equality, particularly for girls

who wish to participate in hostilities, may be another risk factor for association. **At the family level**, poor relationships with caregivers, neglect, domestic violence, sexual abuse or forced marriage can lead girls to seek protection from an armed group or armed force. In highly patriarchal societies, girls have fewer opportunities to run away and escape violence. **At the community level**, the involvement of communities in armed conflict significantly influences the recruitment of girls and boys, particularly in self-defence groups. The community can also put pressure on families to let their girls join the armed group to satisfy the request of the armed group in return for "peace" or protection for the community. **At the societal level,** the low presence of the state in remote areas, the absence of governance structure, basic services and livelihood options, and strong inequalities regarding the social distribution of wealth are key risk factors of child recruitment. The lack of access to education, economic opportunities and job prospects offered by formal institutions in remote areas also pushes girls to seek opportunities with armed groups instead.[140]

Later, when former combatants are being reintegrated into their home communities, girls and female ex-combatants have different needs than boys and male ex-combatants, mostly due to gendered expectations and social norms. Female ex-combatants may need specific services that address sexual and gender-based violence. They may also have children or caregiving responsibilities which can pose additional challenges for reintegration. While both boys and girls face stigma for being associated with an armed group, women and girls raised particular concerns about the stigma they face when they return to their home communities with children. Women and girls who did not act as combatants but who played support roles as cooks or porters for armed groups must also be included in demobilisation programmes, further denoting the need for gender sensitive programming.

Gender sensitivity in peace and security efforts

Women and girls experience conflict in particular ways, and as such women and girls must be included in humanitarian response, peacebuilding and community-led conflict prevention efforts to adequately address their needs. Women and girls are vital to build inclusive post-conflict institutions and to establish reconstruction processes that contribute to long-term stability and prosperity.

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) made an important commitment to upholding women's rights in the context of international peace and security by adopting Resolution 1325. This resolution affirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction.[141] The resolution recognised that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by armed conflict: they experience violence as a result of conflict in unique and complex ways by virtue of their gender, particularly rape and sexual abuse.[142] UNSCR 1325 called on state parties to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict,[143] and recognised that women and girls have an inherent right to participate in peace negotiation and reconstruction efforts that directly affect their lives.[144]

National Action Plans (NAPs) are a strategic tool for policy makers to institutionalise and operationalise their commitment to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda within local contexts. Studies suggest that 90 per cent of countries with an NAP have decreased their gender gaps and 60 per cent have grown more peaceful.[145] NAPs are therefore a potential indicator of a country's commitment to promoting gender transformative peace and security, and the potential for conflict-affected regions to achieve positive and enduring impact for women and girls.[146] In fact, 108 UN member States have adopted at least one NAP. Of the countries covered in this report, seven have adopted an NAP – Colombia and Ethiopia have not.[147] Details on countries' NAP status are included in the box below.

Additionally, when women participate, it enhances the stability and success of peacebuilding efforts and governance reforms more widely. Post-conflict reconstruction offers critical windows to catalyse transformative change towards gender equality and the meaningful participation of women in all sectors and at all levels.

There is deep value in using a gender lens to understand the impacts of conflict so that the needs of all people in conflict can be met both in the long term and as part of a humanitarian response. Yet, there is still a way to go for this notion to be holistically recognised and implemented. As we see a rise in global military spending, we are also seeing a plateau in the international inclusion of women and girls

in peacebuilding, with references to gender in peace agreements generally remaining at between 20 to 35 per cent each year. Furthermore, of 66 disarmament resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2022, 20 included references to gender and only one to diversity.[148] The gendered impacts of conflict are thus being left behind, which means that intersecting axes of marginality in addition to gendered vulnerabilities are further excluded.

2.4 Country contexts: background and summaries of conflicts

Some countries are harder hit by conflict than others and see higher total fatality numbers. A total of 2,985 children were killed across 24 countries in 2022. Since October 2023, the number of children killed in Gaza has surpassed the total number of children killed across the world's conflict zones in each year since 2019. [iv,149,150,151,152,153] The February 2022 escalation of the war in Ukraine dominated news headlines, but it was the war in Ethiopia that was most lethal for civilians in 2022. With more than 101,000 fatalities, the war in Ethiopia alone accounted for nearly half of all battle-related deaths during 2022. The war in Ukraine was the second most deadly war of 2022, with some 81,500 fatalities.[154] The summaries below describe some of the background and types of conflict experienced by nine of the countries in the study.

Box 1: Background and summaries of conflicts in nine of the ten study countries

Cameroon

In Cameroon, the main conflict has been what is known as the "Anglophone Crisis" in the Northwest and Southwest regions of the country. Since 2016, demonstrators have protested at the marginalisation of the Anglophone minority and the growing influence of the French system and language in English-speaking regions of Cameroon.[155] However, tensions date back decades. Present-day Cameroon comprises regions that were under French and British control during colonial times. Following independence of Eastern Cameroon on 1 January 1960 and a referendum on self-determination in Southern Cameroon, Southern Cameroon became part of Independent Cameroon on 1 October 1961, giving rise to the Federal Republic of Cameroon. This federal system initially maintained autonomy in Anglophone areas, but the arrangement did not last.[156]

Peaceful protests in 2016 soon evolved into a low-scale insurgency. Separatists called for the secession of the English-speaking regions.[157] The situation developed into a full-fledged armed conflict between separatists and Cameroonian forces, leading to the displacement of hundreds and thousands of people and the killing of thousands.[158]

According to the UN Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of June 2024, nearly 1 million individuals were internally displaced and almost half a million refugees and asylum seekers were being hosted. Regarding the IDPs, 66 per cent resided in the Northwest (231,281 individuals) and Southwest (137,461 individuals) regions, while 34 per cent fled to the West and Littoral regions.[159] Despite the severity of the violence and its effects, the Norwegian Refugee Council judged the Northwest and Southwest Cameroon conflict to be the most neglected displacement crisis in the world in 2019.[160] Plan International has also covered the conflict most recently in our *Neglected Crisis Brief* around the UN Security Council's Annual CAAC Debates in 2022, 2023 and 2024.[161,162,163]

The conflict has escalated into a protracted crisis marked by violence, human rights abuses and displacement, and into a humanitarian emergency. Both government security forces and armed separatist groups have been accused of committing atrocities, including extrajudicial killings, torture and the targeting of civilians. Separatist fighters continue to kill, torture and kidnap civilians.[164] Separatists have enforced a boycott on education and have attacked schools, students and educational professionals.[165] Security forces have responded to separatist attacks often targeting civilians in the Anglophone region.[166]

In 2019, the government granted the Northwest and Southwest a Special Status. Cameroon's Special Status was a step towards acknowledging the distinct Anglophone identity in the majority-Francophone country but it has been criticised for significant shortfalls.[167] Critics say that Anglophone figures were not consulted enough. The regional assemblies created by this status have limited power to make laws and do not have clear collaboration procedures for issues of mutual interest. According to critics, these assemblies, which are chosen indirectly, do not accurately represent the people living in those regions; women are particularly under-represented and the assemblies do not address the educational, legal and language concerns that matter most to Anglophone citizens.

[iv] The UN Secretary-General's Annual Reports on Children and Armed Conflict state that a total of 4,019 children were killed in conflicts in 2019. In the years since then, 2,674 children were killed in 2020; 2,515 children were killed in 2021; and 2,985 children were killed in conflicts in 2022. According to Save the Children, 14,000 children have been killed in Gaza since October 2023 through to August 2024.

Amid continued fighting, a Canadian-led peace initiative encountered obstacles in early 2023. Parties are now silent about where talks stand. Efforts to resolve the Anglophone crisis have faced significant challenges, including distrust between the government and Anglophone leaders, the radicalisation of some separatist factions, and the humanitarian impact of the conflict on the civilian population. International actors, including the African Union, the UN and regional organisations, have called for dialogue and peaceful resolution but a sustainable solution remains unachieved.

Cameroon adopted an NAP in 2017, with a dominant focus on the prevention of conflict and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence; and the protection of refugees and women and children.[168]

Cameroon has also experienced attacks and raids by the Islamist armed group Boko Haram in the Far North Region.

Colombia

The history of Colombia since the 1960s has been marked by armed conflict. Initially, the unequal distribution of land and lack of spaces for political participation paved the way for the use of violence and armed struggle. This method was subsequently reinforced by various influences, including the emergence of drug trafficking, narco-terrorism and the presence of new political and armed actors in a context of revolutionary struggle.

One characteristic of the conflict in Colombia is the plurality of actors that have fuelled and transformed it. Although the main actors in the conflict have mostly been traditional political parties and guerrilla movements (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo, or FARC-EP), the emergence of different revolutionary groups, paramilitaries and the influence of drug trafficking have led to an escalation of the conflict in recent decades. Furthermore, it is worth noting that, in general terms, Colombia has been characterised by a social gap between a political elite and minority groups such as indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians and poorer populations.[169]

According to OCHA, during the second half of 2023, there was a considerable increase in the number of conflict victims, especially in July and November, caused by the interest of the Non-Governmental Armed Groups (GANE) in controlling mobility corridors and the rents derived from illegal economies in strategic zones. The expansion of GANE in different regions of the country was characterised by affecting communities through continuous fighting, confrontations in their territories, threats, homicides, displacements and confinements, putting the integrity of many people at risk. The departments of the Pacific region, Putumayo, La Guajira, Cesar, Arauca, Huila, Caquetá and Amazonas have been the most affected, along with those located in the Northwestern region of the country.[170]

Between 1985 and 2024, there were 9.7 million civilian victims of the armed conflict in Colombia,[171] with a total of 1.5 million victims in Antioquia and 267,000 victims in Chocó, due to events such as massacres, assassinations of social leaders, forced disappearances, sexual and gender-based violence, selective homicides, recruitment, threats, and restrictions on community mobility (confinement), among others. Out of the total victims, 8.7 million were directly affected by forced displacement in Colombia.[172] Additionally, there were two instances of confinement or “strike days” (when communities are forced to stay at home) in Antioquia that affected 1,224 people.

According to the Annual Report of the Monitoring Observatory on Childhood and Armed Conflict of COALICO (ONCA), in 2023, out of 520 armed clashes in Colombia, 362 directly involved girls, boys and adolescents. These affected a total of at least 46,900 child and adolescent victims. Examining specific data from Antioquia, a high number of attacks and occupation of schools and hospitals are observed, as well as the use of children and adolescents in civic-military campaigns, leading to evictions. Meanwhile, in Chocó, a high number of events recorded related to the blocking of supplies and basic services, as well as the involvement and recruitment of children and adolescents.[173]

In 2016, the government of then President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC-EP signed the Peace Accords towards ending the internal armed conflict. This major agreement, often referred to by Colombians as “the” peace agreement, contains important reforms that seek to regenerate the social fabric through demobilisation, the recognition of victims, the development of reparation, restoration, and forgiveness processes, as well as levelling the distribution of land and resources in the country. However, although the issues related to the recognition of the differentiated impact of the conflict, and the special jurisdiction for peace processes have made important progress, there are major challenges and shortcomings in the implementation of the rest of the agreement.[174]

Active conflict continues throughout Colombia. Currently, President Gustavo Petro is attempting to implement his Total Peace (Paz Total) proposal, with reforms to the Armed Forces as well as peace talks and ceasefires that are under way with the National Liberation Army (ELN), dissidents of the FARC-EP, the Gulf Clan and Non-Governmental Armed Groups (GANE). Currently, violence is particularly concentrated in the departments of Cauca, Antioquia, Norte de Santander, and Valle del Cauca, where more than half of the reported fatalities occurred. Among these, Cauca was the most affected by violence in Colombia throughout 2023.[175]

Ethiopia

The conflict in northern Ethiopia has affected Tigray, its northernmost region, and also the neighbouring Amhara and Afar regions.[176] Conflicts, climatic disruptions and disease outbreaks collectively fuel humanitarian crises in Ethiopia,

with more than 21 million people urgently requiring assistance, including 4.5 million IDPs.[177] Many households are expected to face moderate to extreme difficulty in accessing food and income for purchasing food.[178]

Casualties from the conflict have resulted from a combination of direct violence, the collapse of the healthcare system, and severe hunger.[179] Since 2023, the continuous incursions by armed forces in operating in Northern Ethiopia have further exacerbated civilian casualties, rendering Tigray largely inaccessible for trade, banking services, public amenities and food aid.

A study published in July 2023 underscored the pervasive nature of sexual and gender-based violence within the conflict's context.[180] Nearly 10 per cent of surveyed women and girls had experienced sexual violence, predominantly rape, while 30 per cent had endured physical violence.[181] In 2024, more than 7 million women and girls require gender-based violence prevention and response services.

The peace agreement, referred to as the Pretoria Agreement, signed on 2 November 2022 and mediated by the African Union, aimed to cease hostilities, lift the government blockade on the Tigray region, facilitate humanitarian aid access and reinstate essential services for the populace. Less than a year after the signing of the peace agreement, fresh conflict erupted further south, further threatening the stability of the country and its government.[182]

Lebanon

Following independence in 1943, Lebanon experienced political instability due to its diverse political and religious groups and external influences.[183]

The Lebanese Civil War, from 1975 to 1990, claimed the lives of approximately 150,000 people while nearly 100,000 were severely injured, and two-thirds of the Lebanese population were displaced.[184] Limited research exists on youth death rates, although some research has found that many surviving children aged 3 to 12 years experienced physical, psychological and interpersonal problems.[185] The conflict ended with the Taif Agreement.[186]

Years later, the 2006 Israel–Lebanon war deeply affected Lebanon and further exacerbated the dangerous conditions experienced by youth and children.[187] In addition to the political and economic instabilities the country faced, since 2011 Lebanon has witnessed the largest per capita refugee influx which has strained its economy and social cohesion for more than a decade. In 2019, youth and women's rights activists led the 17 October revolution which sought national change to the ruling class; the protesting continued after the Beirut port explosion in 2020 which caused approximately 200 deaths, thousands of injuries, and about $4.6 billion in damages.[188,189]

Since the beginning of the Israeli-Gaza conflict on 7 October 2023, Lebanon has been directly impacted by recurrent Israeli airstrikes extending beyond its southern border, where the most intense bombardments occur. These strikes predominantly target civilian infrastructure, exacerbating the crisis. As of August 2024, the escalation of hostilities has resulted in at least 120 civilians killed, including 38 women and 20 children as well as three journalists and 21 health workers.[190] The Lebanese Ministry of Public Health has documented 1,686 casualties, including 414 fatalities, since 7 October 2023.[191] Furthermore, 102,523 individuals (50% females) have been internally displaced, seeking refuge across Lebanon, with 96 per cent of these people originating from Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun and Tyre districts in South Lebanon.[192]

Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita, including 1.5 million Syrian refugees[193] and 475,000 registered Palestinian refugees.[194] Children are bearing the impact of this; 38,000 children are displaced. Financial instability is prompting 16 per cent of households to send children out to work, and 38 per cent of households report their children feeling anxious, with 47 per cent of Palestinian children in South Lebanon expressing anxiety.[195]

The escalation of armed conflict has inflicted damage on civilian infrastructure and essential services that are relied upon by children and families, including ten water stations serving a population of 100,000 and the closure of approximately 70 schools, affecting some 20,000 students. Furthermore, 23 healthcare facilities, serving 4,000 people, are shuttered due to the ongoing hostilities.[196]

In 2019, the National Commission for Lebanese Women worked collaboratively with civil society and governmental entities to develop the NAP, with a focus on the participation of women and girls in prevention of conflict, peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts.[197] Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati outlined a three-step plan for the conflict in Gaza at the end of October 2023. However, tensions remain high as does the risk that conflict expands to impact more Lebanese civilians.

Mozambique

The Mozambican Civil War lasted from 1977 to 1992. This post-independence civil war was brutal, and peace agreements in 1992 and subsequent years were short-lived. In 2013, the tensions between the ruling party of FRELIMO and the primary opposition group RENAMO reached a critical level and war broke out in the centre of the country. In 2017, direct negotiations between President Nyusi (FRELIMO) and RENAMO, supported by international mediation, led to significant progress in decentralisation and in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR). The Maputo Accord, signed in August 2019, marked the official end of Mozambique's years-long conflict. In

June 2018, the government of Mozambique publicly launched its first NAP on Women, Peace and Security for the period 2018–2022. With the adoption of this plan, Mozambique joined an ever-growing community of states recognising women's important roles in preventing and resolving conflicts and in building peace.

However, since 2017, Cabo Delgado, the northernmost province of Mozambique, has been embroiled in another armed conflict. Motivations are hard to discern but according to the International Crisis Group and others, while foreign individuals have participated "under the banner of jihad", the majority of Mozambican militants are driven by feelings of socioeconomic marginalisation, especially in light of significant mineral and hydrocarbon findings in Cabo Delgado, as well as years of underdevelopment in northern Mozambique. This conflict poses a threat to the nation's stability, particularly as Mozambique works to implement a peace agreement with RENAMO in the central region. Moreover, it could evolve into a new battleground for global jihadism to exploit.[198]

Initially instigated by the relatively obscure group Ahlu al-Sunna wa'l Jama'a (ASWJ), which has since 2019 aligned itself with Islamic State (IS), the insurgency has been characterised by extreme brutality, including the frequent massacre of civilians and the forcible recruitment of children. The Mozambican government has not managed to stem the insurgency's advance and reclaim lost territory. Since mid-2021, nine African nations have dispatched military forces to aid Mozambique in combating the insurgency. While this foreign intervention facilitated the recapture of previously lost key settlements and significantly impeded large-scale offensive operations by the insurgents, it has not eradicated the insurgency entirely. Furthermore, forays into southern Cabo Delgado and neighbouring Nampula province spawned a new armed resistance movement known as Naparama, engaged in combat with IS since November 2022.[199]

Civilians are bearing the brunt of this conflict. As per findings from OCHA, the ongoing armed conflict in northern Mozambique has resulted in the displacement of more than 670,000 civilians. These displaced populations have confronted persistent violence and recurrent cycles of displacement spanning recent years, necessitating ongoing reliance on humanitarian aid for sustenance, particularly given the prevailing absence of secure land tenure. The most affected civilians have been subjected to or witnessed horrific acts of violence, encompassing instances of homicide, sexual assault, abductions, extortion and the incineration of residential settlements. Many have endured the loss of close relatives and neighbours through targeted assassinations, decapitations or fatal gunshot wounds, while some have experienced the complete annihilation of their familial support networks.[200] The UN has verified the killing and maiming of children, abduction, recruitment and use, and sexual violence in northern Mozambique, all grave violations against children in conflict.[201]

Nigeria

Social and economic conflicts in Nigeria frequently serve as catalysts for inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions. Nigeria, a nation encompassing more than 250 ethnic groups, exhibits a pronounced dichotomy between the predominantly Muslim northern region and the mainly Christian southern region. This division is further intensified by significant economic disparities, with substantial wealth concentrated in the southern economic hubs and pervasive poverty characterising the rural northern areas. Moreover, the effects of climate change pose a serious threat to the overall stability of Nigerian society.[202] Over the past three decades, northern Nigeria has experienced recurrent episodes of violence, often manifesting as urban riots.[203] These conflicts have primarily involved clashes between Muslims and Christians, as well as disputes among various Islamic sects.[204]

Since 2020, Nigeria's security situation has continually deteriorated due to the dual threats of terrorism and organised gangs. Although attacks by the armed group Boko Haram have diminished in recent years, an offshoot of that group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), has continued to expand its presence throughout northeastern Nigeria. Experts have identified a significant increase in gang/banditry crime in northwestern Nigeria, characterised by cattle theft, raids and kidnappings. The increasing infiltration of armed groups in these regions has further complicated the security landscape, increasingly blurring the lines between criminal activities and terrorism.[205]

In the Niger Delta, persistent tensions arise from militias fighting for local control over regional resources, where criminal interests have increasingly overshadowed the original political and social objectives. In southeastern Nigeria, separatist groups continue to advocate for the independence of Biafra, echoing the civil war of the late 1960s. Furthermore, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea presents a significant security challenge, as Nigeria's navy possesses limited capacity to safeguard vessels and crews from raids and kidnappings.[206]

According to OCHA,[207] Nigeria is experiencing a severe humanitarian crisis, with 8.3 million people requiring humanitarian assistance and 2.2 million IDPs. Additionally, 4.3 million people need food security assistance, and 4.24 million require nutrition assistance. The March 2024 Cadre Harmonisé (CH) analysis report identifies several key drivers of the worsening food security situation, including rising inflation, insecurity (insurgency, kidnapping and banditry), high fuel prices and climate-related shocks. These factors have led farmers across Nigeria to abandon their farms due to heightened insecurity, underscoring the extensive and multifaceted nature of the crisis and its detrimental impact on the population's basic needs and wellbeing.

Regarding women's and girls' rights, Nigeria continues to exhibit one of the highest rates of maternal mortality globally. This high mortality rate is primarily attributable to inadequate and inequitable access to maternal healthcare

and the lack of access to safe and legal abortion services. Additionally, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of child marriage. Though prohibited in the Child Rights Act, child marriage is not recognised as an offence in northern states. This is a situation exacerbated by the poor enforcement of national and state laws, the accommodation given to child marriage in the Nigerian Constitution in which a girl is seen as an adult once married, and socioeconomic driving factors such as poverty.[208]

Nigeria has published two NAPs. The first, in 2013, focused on the participation of women and girls in conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes, and on the prevention of sexual violence and trafficking during armed conflict. The second, adopted in 2017, has a broader remit, with an increased emphasis on prevention of terrorism.[209]

The Philippines

The armed conflict in southern Philippines, between the Philippine government and Moro armed groups demanding autonomy, has persisted for longer than 40 years, resulting in more than 120,000 deaths. [210]Since 1976, various peace initiatives have been undertaken, with varying degrees of success and challenges. The situation was further complicated after 11 September 2001, with the US declaration of the "Global War on Terror" and the emergence of new armed groups linked to Al Qaeda (and later IS) in the region. These external influences were due to the US' long history in the Philippines.[211]

The demand for autonomy in the islands of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago has historical roots. Before the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century, Islam was already established in the region, with Muslim sultanates governing large territories.[212] The Spanish colonizers, and later the Americans, attempted to subjugate the region, provoking a series of Muslim revolts. After the independence of the Philippines in 1946, the government promoted migration from the northern islands to Mindanao, aiming to dilute the Muslim majority and reduce the threat of insurrections. This movement culminated in the 1970s with clashes between northern immigrants and native Muslims, leading to the formation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). This group meant to achieve an independent Moro state carved out from Mindanao (Adriano & Parks, 2013). Despite agreements such as the Tripoli Agreement in 1976[213] and the Final Peace Agreement in Jakarta in 1996, peace negotiations failed due to internal opposition and the emergence of more conservative factions like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in 2014 was a significant milestone, leading to the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) under the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) in 2018.[214]

After decades of armed conflict and sporadic negotiations, achieving a definitive peace agreement remains challenging. The non-Muslim opposition is unlikely to accept an autonomy agreement that includes the territorial demands of the Moro movement, while the latter is unlikely to accept the current territorial reality. The Bangsamoro region has changed demographically due to government-promoted migrations. Additionally, the presence of groups like Abu Sayyaf, linked to Al Qaeda, and other militant factions further complicates the peace process. Since the Tripoli Agreement of 1976, while peace efforts have faced significant hurdles, they have not systematically failed. Ongoing efforts continue to address the complex dynamics.

The conflict has significantly impacted women and girls in the region. Women have faced increased vulnerabilities due to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and exposure to gender-based violence. The conflict has disrupted social structures, making women and children particularly susceptible to trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse. Despite these challenges, women have played crucial roles in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. They have been active in advocacy, community organizing, and participating in formal peace processes. The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) includes provisions for the protection and promotion of women's rights, emphasizing their role in governance and development within the BARMM.

Additionally, conflicts in Mindanao contribute to intermittent cycles of forced displacement[215]. In March 2024, armed conflict between two groups resulted in the displacement of more than 8,600 individuals (1,738 families) in the barangays of Sibuto, Dados, Kakar, and Ambolodto in Datu Odin Sinsuat town, Maguindanao del Norte. From September 2023 to February 2024, there was an increasing trend of displacement due to armed conflict and weather disturbances in Mindanao. In central Mindanao, the same areas affected by flooding have also been impacted by conflict. Over the past year in the Bangsamoro region, there have been 34 incidents of armed conflict involving known armed groups, 34 incidents involving armed non-state actors, and 274 cases of *rido* (clan feuds), of which 174 remain unresolved.[216]

The Philippines was an early adopter of National Action Plans (NAPs); it adopted its first in 2010[217] with a focus on the participation of civil society in the prevention of sexual violence and the protection of women and children. In 2017, the Philippines released a second NAP which takes a whole-of-government approach and emphasizes protection and humanitarian efforts.[218]

Sudan

Sudan's brutal conflict reached its one-year mark on 15 April 2024. Since the conflict began more than 16,000 people, including military personnel, have been killed. However, reports vary and experts have said that numbers are likely underestimated due to the difficulty in collecting accurate and real-time data in a conflict of this nature.[219]

One UN report estimates that as many as 15,000 people have been killed in one city alone – El Geneina, in Sudan's West Darfur region.[220] More than 8.8 million people have fled their homes since the conflict began, and almost 25 million people are reportedly in need of humanitarian assistance.[221]

The conflict in Sudan is the latest episode in a protracted crisis of violence and displacement that dates back to before Sudan gained independence in 1956. The first Sudanese civil war (1955–1972) was caused by a stark internal divide between the country's wealthier Arab and Muslim northern region, and the less-developed Christian and animist southern region pushing for an independent state.[222,223] The first civil war was concluded through a negotiated settlement that led to the creation of the Southern Sudan Autonomous Region (SSAR). However, in 1983, several government decisions violated key terms of the agreement, including imposing Shari'a law across the entire country and abolishing the SSAR. This led to the second civil war (1983–2005) which was characterised by violence against civilians, atrocity crimes and human rights abuses, and a famine which killed an estimated 2 million people.[224,225] In July 2011, Sudan's southern territory seceded, and successfully formed a new state: the Republic of South Sudan, which was recognised by the UN the same month.[226]

The second civil war overlapped with the Darfur war (2003–2020), during which two armed groups waged war against the government, attacking towns, government facilities, the police and civilians.[227] It is estimated that between 178,000 and 462,000 people died during the conflict, with 80 per cent of these deaths due to disease and malnutrition.[228] A systematic campaign of rape was deployed as a weapon of war during the conflict, with the intention of ethnically cleansing black Africans in the region.[229] It is believed that the victims number in the tens of thousands.[230] The Darfur war has since been labelled as a genocide, and the former President Omar Al Bashir became the first sitting president to be wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the first person to be charged by the ICC for the crime of genocide.[231] A peace deal was signed in August 2020, formally bringing an end to the Darfur conflict.

President Al Bashir, who seized power in a military coup in 1989, was ousted in April 2019, which led to a power vacuum in Sudan. Numerous regional actors have been heavily involved in Sudan, motivated by their own agenda and interests, and have provided support for warring factions: the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).[232,233] This has served to exacerbate tensions, leading to the eruption of violent clashes in April 2023. The unfolding conflict is having a catastrophic impact on civilians. More than 6.6 million people are displaced within Sudan, and a further 1.8 million have fled the country.[234] The conflict has decimated livelihoods; an estimated 65 per cent of the population lack access to healthcare;[235] and around 4.9 million people are on the brink of famine.[236] The conflict is having a disproportionate impact on women and children – 78 per cent of refugees are women and children – with allegations of rape, forced child marriages, sexual slavery and trafficking recorded across Darfur, Khartoum and Kordofan.[237] OCHA states that all forms of GBV are increasing: between April to October 2023, the number of people in need of gender-based violence (GBV) services in Sudan increased by more than 1 million to 4.2 million people.[238] Yet, there is a limitation on the availability of GBV specialised services. More than 170 school buildings are now being used to shelter displaced people, and an entire generation – more than 20 million children – risk missing out on their right to education.[239]

More than 14 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance and support. With close to 4 million children displaced, OCHA warns that Sudan is facing the largest child displacement crisis in the world.[240] As of June 2024, Sudan was projected to be facing its most severe levels of acute food insecurity ever recorded by the IPC in the country, in which more than half of the population (25.6 million people) face crisis or worse conditions between June and September 2024. The pervasive conflict and insecurity have caused mass displacement (of 10.1 million IDPs across Sudan) and sharp rises in food prices from limited food supplies and disrupted supply chains.[241]

Sudan adopted its first NAP in 2020, with an emphasis on the prevention of sexual violence in armed conflict and on the protection of refugees.[242]

Ukraine

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine began in early 2014 after Russia annexed Crimea. This followed protests in Kyiv against President Viktor Yanukovych's rejection of an EU deal, leading to his departure in February 2014. Russian troops then took Crimea in March 2014, citing protection of citizens they perceive as Russian. This escalated ethnic tensions, and by May, pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk declared independence, sparking armed conflict with Ukrainian forces. Despite Russia's denial, evidence showed Russian military involvement. Efforts to resolve the conflict through the Minsk Accords in 2015 failed. NATO responded by bolstering its presence in Eastern Europe, while the US imposed sanctions and provided Ukraine with weapons. Tensions continued with large-scale military exercises by both sides.[243]

By late 2021, intelligence indicated a potential Russian invasion, confirmed by US intelligence and satellite imagery showing Russian troop movements. Despite diplomatic efforts, Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, citing a need to protect Russian speakers and eliminate alleged threats. The invasion led to widespread destruction, significant civilian casualties and alleged war crimes. As the conflict progressed, Ukraine reclaimed significant territories in late 2022, and Russia annexed four Ukrainian regions. The war disrupted global food supplies due to Ukraine's key role in the World Food Programme, exacerbating a global food crisis. Efforts to mitigate these issues

included a grain export deal, which Russia suspended but later resumed. The fighting raised fears of a nuclear disaster at the Zaporizhzhia plant, leading to calls for a safety zone. Ukraine's counteroffensive in 2022 and Russia's partial mobilisation highlighted ongoing tensions and the potential for further escalation, including nuclear threats from Russia.[244]

In October 2023, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission stated that more than 10,000 civilians had died in the 20 months of the war and presented its latest report on the human rights situation in the war. However, it is estimated that the real number of victims is likely to be much higher than the reported figures due to the existing monitoring difficulties in the context of the conflict. Furthermore, UNHCR (the United Nations Refugee Agency),[245] currently estimates that, as of February 2024, there are 6,479,700 Ukrainian refugees displaced worldwide due to the war, which peaked at 8 million people on the first anniversary of the Ukrainian escalation.

Plan International research has found that adolescent girls and boys in Kharkiv are profoundly affected by the constant presence of danger, resulting in emotional stress, and that displaced Ukrainian girls aged 15 to 19 feel isolated and have a strong sense of longing for their previous lives now disrupted by the war. For many youth in Ukraine, online education is the only option, with the destruction of schools, schools repurposed as shelters, and the constant fear of shelling. Some 3,798 education buildings have been damaged and 365 completely destroyed, and more than 2,300 schools remain closed for safety reasons. This means this is the fourth academic year in which children and young people have experienced disruption, given two years of the Covid-19 pandemic preceding the 2022 escalation.[246] Hospitals have been targeted in violation of IHL and international human rights law. On 8 July 2024, Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital in Kyiv was hit with a missile.[247,248,249]

The three main countries hosting refugees are Russia, Germany and Poland, with figures exceeding or nearing 1 million registered refugees in each country. Additionally, UNHCR estimated the number of IDPs within Ukraine's borders at 5 million as of 2024.[250]

There have been several rounds of peace talks. The first talks between Ukraine and Russia took place shortly after February 2022. The delegations met in Belarus and then in March 2022 in Istanbul, but talks broke down. During 2022 and 2023 separate peace initiatives were announced by China, the Vatican and a group of African countries, but did not result in a deal.[251] In 2022, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy proposed a ten-point peace plan, that was taken forward to a summit in June 2024 in Switzerland. The summit aimed to build on the momentum of four previous national security-level meetings held in Copenhagen, Jeddah, Malta and Davos. Russia and China did not attend, although more than 90 countries participated following President Zelenskyy's active engagement with the BRICS+ grouping (which comprises Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates) to garner further support.[252] The summit resulted in drafting a communique to condemn Russia's war in Ukraine and set a vision for food and nuclear security.[253]

Ukraine has adopted two NAPs – one in 2016 and one in 2020. The 2016 NAP takes a whole-of-government approach to prevention, protection and participation. It also has a significant emphasis on the prevention of sexual violence. The second NAP also focuses on sexual violence, but with increased attention to the role of transitional justice for women and children.[254]

Box 2: Background and summary of the conflict in Gaza

Gaza

Gaza was not a focus for data collection for this year's *State of the World's Girls* research, as primary data collection was not possible due to the nature of the conflict there. Nonetheless, this report explores the impact of conflict on Palestinian children, young people and civilians where possible. As the violations against children, young people and all civilians have mounted and with few effective mechanisms in place to stop the violence and end the conflict, Plan International believes it is necessary to spotlight Gaza among the other study countries.

Since 2005, Gaza has been subjected to a military siege from air, land and sea, limiting the movement of people and controlling the flow of basic materials and goods. The latest escalation of conflict in Gaza follows attacks on multiple towns in southern Israel on 7 October 2023, in which more than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals were killed and 252 were taken hostage.[255] As of August 2024, the Palestinian Ministry of Health estimates that more than 40,000 Palestinians,[256] including 14,000 children, have been killed in Gaza.[257]
Since October 2023:

- More than 89,364 Palestinians have been injured and 10,000 are missing. Some 17,000 children are believed to be unaccompanied and separated from their families.[258,259]
- More than 10,000 Palestinians, including 630 children and 295 women, have been detained by Israeli authorities as of June 2024. With reports of torture and mistreatment of detainees and a lack of due process, concerns are raised about the arbitrariness and punitive nature of the detainment of Palestinians.[260]

- More than 60 per cent of all homes in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged,[261] and more than 1.9 million people are currently displaced.[262]
- More than 90 per cent of schools have been damaged or destroyed and the remainder are being used as shelters.[263] There are an estimated 625,000 children with no access to education.

The conflict in Gaza is a humanitarian crisis on a catastrophic scale. In January 2024, researchers estimated that an average of 250 Palestinians were being killed each day – a rate higher than any recent major armed conflict including Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Yemen.[264] Accompanying the Israeli military's bombardment of Gaza, is the Government of Israel's continued siege tactics and systematic restrictions on aid entering Gaza to meet the immense humanitarian needs of Palestinian civilians. This includes basic commodities and lifesaving supplies. Access constraints include the arbitrary blocking of essential items.[265] Plan International and other humanitarian peer organisations[266] have issued numerous joint public statements and briefing notes decrying the restrictions to humanitarian aid that prevent it from reaching Palestinian civilians, the killing of humanitarian workers, and the overwhelming obstacles to humanitarian access: actions that disregard international humanitarian law obligations as well as civilian life.

There are acute health concerns due to overcrowding, and a lack of clean drinking water and proper sanitation, in addition to the deliberate destruction of the majority of medical facilities and hospitals across Gaza.[267] Aid agencies have reported significant concerns about women being forced to undergo labour and delivery without medical aid, experiencing high rates of rape and sexual assault and having poor access to sexual and reproductive healthcare including contraception.[268] As of July 2024, there was an IPC warning of a high risk of famine across the whole of the Gaza Strip.[269]

By March 2024, the number of children killed in Gaza since October 2023 had already surpassed the number verified by the UN of children killed by conflict worldwide in the last four years.[270,271] The catastrophic scale of violence and the vast numbers of children who have lost their entire family have led to the introduction of a new acronym by first responders and medical teams: "WCNSF" – wounded child, no surviving family.[272] Mental health experts warn that children in Gaza – who had a 53 per cent rate of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) before the current conflict began – are now constantly exposed to extremely traumatic events, with no access to mental health care. [273]

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has had far-reaching and profound impacts not only among Palestinian civilians, but across the region, including Lebanon. There is the further risk of a wider regional war.

Plan International, together with aid agencies and human rights organisations, continues to call for an immediate, sustained ceasefire in Gaza to save and protect lives, for all states to stop arms transfers while there is the risk that these could be used to commit or facilitate violations of international humanitarian or human rights law; and for safe, consistent and unhindered routes to allow for aid to be brought into and across Gaza to meet the immense needs of Palestinian civilians.

3. Methodology

3.1 Survey

Questionnaire

A large-scale survey was conducted to explore the effects of conflict on a wider population of adolescents and youth aged 15 to 24 years across different regions of the world. The survey was divided into ten sections that included topic areas related to the effect of conflict on participants' lives. The ten sections were:

1. Experiences of conflict
2. Social connection/disconnection
3. Health (including wellbeing and mental health)
4. Protection (including gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV))
5. Early marriage
6. Access to resources and services
7. Access to education
8. Livelihoods

9. Economic security
10. Hopes for the future.

The survey included mostly closed-ended questions, such as multiple-choice, dichotomous (yes/no), Likert scale and ranking questions.

Data collection

The survey targeted ten countries – Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine, and one country that is unable to be named because of political and operational sensitivities. For each country, specific locations or regions were targeted with the main focus being on areas with conditions of conflict or war. The targeted groups for participation in the survey were inclusive of female and male gender identities, ages 15 to 24 years, and eligibility based on whether participants had reported experience of conflict.

All participants were recruited by GeoPoll. A combination of recruitment and sampling methods were used. These methods included: stratified sampling, Random Digital Dial (RDD), and samples acquired from GeoPoll's local partners. The stratified sample was drawn from previously contacted respondents who had successfully participated in GeoPoll related surveys at least once. RDD involved selecting phone numbers at random from a directory and contacting individuals to participate in the survey. RDD ensured a diverse pool of participants were selected, minimising bias.

All survey country managers, supervisors and data collectors from Geopoll were trained to have an in-depth understanding of the objective of each question in the survey, as well as the questionnaire script.

The piloting took place between 16 and 18 March 2024. A total of 417 successful pilot surveys were achieved across the ten countries. The methodology and data collection mode adopted for the pilot was the same across all countries with the exception of Ukraine (see Table 1 below).

After completing the pilot, data collection in all countries took place between 22 March and 2 May 2024.

The survey utilised two data collection methods: computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) and mobile web (MW). CATI was the primary mode, with MW serving as a backup in cases where CATI was less effective depending on the country where data was collected.

Table 1: Locations and mode for data collection for quantitative data collection, (of nine surveyed countries)

Country	Mode	Target region
Cameroon	CATI	Est, Extrême-Nord, Littoral, Northwest, Southwest, Ouest
Ethiopia	CATI	Addis Ababa (City), Afar Region, Amhara region, Benishangual Gumuz Region, Dire Dawa (City), Gambela Region, Somali Region, Tigray Region
Mozambique	CATI	Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Niassa and Zambezia
Nigeria	CATI	Abia, Adamawa, Anambra, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Borno, Gombelmo, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kogi, Niger, Plateau, Rivers, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, Zamfara
Colombia	CATI and Mobile Web	Antioquia, Arauca, Bolívar, Caquetá, Casanare, Cauca, Chocó, Córdoba, Guainía, Guaviare, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putamayo, Valle del Cauca
Philippines	CATI and Mobile Web	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) – later revised from regions to nationwide
Lebanon	CATI	Nationwide
Sudan	CATI	Nationwide
Ukraine	Mobile Web	Nationwide

Data cleaning

On completing the CATI survey, GeoPoll organised and cleaned the data, and provided cross tabulations and basic analysis as pre-determined by Plan International. In this process, the flow of questionnaire logic was carefully examined to identify any inconsistencies or errors in the responses. Outliers were detected and excluded to prevent them from skewing the results. Proportions were checked and adjusted as per the sample requirements to maintain representativeness in terms of gender identity and predetermined locations within each country. Variable names were standardised and renamed to enhance clarity and consistency.

Data analysis

For the analyses of the data collected from the survey we employed a multifaceted analytical approach. This approach included descriptive, inferential, intersectional and comparative analyses, each providing unique insights into the impact of conflict on various demographic groups.

We conducted descriptive statistical analyses to provide a detailed overview of the data. This involved examining the demographics of respondents, including age, gender, minority group membership, alongside key variables such as education, mental health, livelihoods and protection. This analysis provides foundational understanding of the sample and the primary characteristics of the population.

Following the descriptive overview of participants, we present tables for multiple and single choice questions. When relevant we present data disaggregated by gender identity that also includes total sample sizes. For multiple choice questions, the tables present count (number of participants per response within a category) and percentage for each option (percentage of participants per response within a category). Additionally, when possible, we performed inferential analyses of the most frequent responses (usually the five most chosen options, which usually represents a big enough sample for further analyses). The aim here was to delve deeper into the relationships between participants' responses and their gender identity, age group, country of residence, living status and minority status.

Inferential statistics

When inferential statistics were run, the word "significant" is used. This refers to the likelihood that the observed difference between groups is not due to random chance but instead reflects a true effect in the population studied. Results are deemed statistically significant if the p-value is less than a predetermined threshold, which for this study was 0.05. When possible, inferential analyses were performed to understand differences between participants' gender identity, age group, country of residence, living status and minority status. Only significant results are reported here, therefore missing sections reflect the lack of significance.

Any one of three types of inferential statistics would be used, depending on the question: independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA and Chi-square. For questions that included a categorical variable of two levels (e.g., gender identity) and a numerical variable, an independent sample t-test was run. For questions that included a categorical variable of more than two levels (e.g., living status) and a numerical variable (e.g., safety perceptions rating from 1 to 5), a one-way ANOVA was run. Categorical variables represent distinct groups or categories, such as gender or country of residence. For questions that included two categorical variables (e.g., living status and gender identity), a Chi-square test was run.

In the context of an independent sample t-test, the means of two groups are compared. This indicates that the difference between the group means is unlikely to have occurred by random variation alone. Similarly, in a one-way ANOVA, which compares the means of more than two groups, a significant result means that at least one group mean is statistically different from the others and indicates that the differences among the group means are unlikely to be due to chance, suggesting a real effect exists. A Chi-square test on the other hand, is used to examine the relationship between categorical variables; a significant result shows that the observed distribution of data differs from the expected distribution, suggesting a real association between the variables rather than a random occurrence.

3.1.1 Overview of survey respondents

A total of 9,995 participants were recruited from ten different countries, including a total of 5,003 girls and young women, and 4,992 boys and young men. An additional five respondents identified as non-

binary, and were not included in the analysis, due to small sample size. The split between gender identity was even for all countries, meaning that each gender was equivalent to 50 per cent of the sample. Besides Colombia and the Philippines, which recruited 998 and 997 participants respectively, all other countries recruited 1,000 participants.

Minority group membership by gender identity

When participants were asked if they identified as a minority, most participants disclosed that they did not identify with any of the minority groups listed (**49.3%**), followed by those participants who did identify as a displaced person (**21%**). The experiences of conflict, structural discrimination and poverty will vary greatly across each of the minority groups, and so a differential analysis between people who identified themselves within an ethnic, racial or religious minority or with a disability, and people who identified themselves as migrants, displaced or refugees would not be possible.

Table 2: Participants' minority group membership, by gender

Minority group membership						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
A person with a disability	211	4.4%	288	6.1%	499	5.3%
An ethnic minority	415	8.7%	450	9.5%	865	9.1%
A racial minority	245	5.2%	265	5.6%	510	5.4%
A religious minority	639	13.5%	644	13.6%	1283	13.5%
A displaced person	978	20.6%	1010	21.4%	1988	**21%**
A migrant	27	0.6%	27	0.6%	54	0.6%
A refugee	347	7.3%	445	9.4%	792	8.4%
Another minority group	176	3.7%	187	4%	363	3.8%
LGBTIQ+	154	3.2%	109	2.3%	263	2.8%
None of the above	2417	50.9%	2253	47.7%	4670	**49.3%**
Total	4749	100%	4720	100%	9469	100%

**Count refers to the number of participants who chose that option as their answer within that gender identity and % is based on the proportion of the total number of participants who chose that option within that gender identity and the total sample size.*

Table 3: Participants' minority group membership, by age group

Minority group membership by age group						
	15–19 years		20–24 years		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
A person with a disability	272	5.9%	227	4.7%	499	5.3%
An ethnic minority	446	9.6%	419	8.7%	865	9.1%
A racial minority	270	5.8%	240	5%	510	5.4%
A religious minority	638	13.8%	645	13.3%	1283	13.5%
A displaced person	1020	22%	968	20%	1988	21%
A migrant	27	0.6%	27	0.6%	54	0.6%
A refugee	400	8.6%	392	8.1%	792	8.4%
Another minority group	162	3.5%	201	4.2%	363	3.8%
LGBTIQ+	128	2.8%	135	2.8%	263	2.8%
None of the above	2223	48.1%	2447	50.5%	4670	49.3%
Total	4626	100%	4843	100%	9469	100%

**Count refers to the number of participants who chose that option as their answer within that age category and % is based on the proportion of the total number of participants who chose that option in relation to that age category and the entire dataset.*

3.2 Qualitative interviews

Qualitative interviews were conducted in four of the ten countries in the study to uncover more depth in the thematic areas of the survey. Qualitative interviews allowed further exploration of the nuances and complex issues, attitudes and behaviours in relation to living in conflict. They also enabled further understanding of the detail behind some of the gendered differences which may not be visible from the survey results alone.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 104 participants aged 13 to 24 across Ethiopia, Cameroon, Colombia and the Philippines. See Tables 4 and 5 for a full breakdown.

3.2.1 Overview of respondents

Table 4: Number of participants per country, by gender

Number of participants per country by gender			
Country	**Location**	**Girls and young women**	**Boys and young men**
Cameroon	Southwest	5	3
	Northwest	5	4
Colombia	Antioquia	11	7
	Chocó	7	8
Ethiopia	Afar	13	4
	Tigray	14	5
Philippines	Mindanao (BARMM)	11	7
Total		**66**	**38**

Table 5: Number of participants, by age and by gender

Number of participants with age breakdown			
Age	**Girls and young women**	**Boys and young men**	**Total**
13–14	11	8	19
15–16	13	7	20
17–18	14	9	23
19–20	11	3	14
21–22	12	5	17
23–24	5	5	10
Total	**66**	**38**	**104**

Given the subject of the study and the sites for data collection, a large amount of the sample (62 participants – 60%) was or had previously been displaced due to the conflict in their country. Also, 15 per cent of the qualitative research sample were young fathers or mothers. In Ethiopia, 6 per cent of the sample were unaccompanied minors.

The final sample aimed to include children and young people from a variety of backgrounds. In Colombia, 45 per cent of the sample identified as a racial or indigenous minority. In Cameroon and Ethiopia, 6 per cent of the sample included people with disabilities. Other characteristics present in the total sample were LGBTIQ+. Many intersectional characteristics were small in numbers so it is not possible to make conclusions based on these characteristics, but differences are nonetheless displayed in responses to some answers.

Interview questions

The interview questions were structured into sections according to thematic area:

1. Experiences of conflict
2. Education
3. Livelihoods
4. Access to services or resources
5. Displacement and social bonds
6. Health
7. Early marriage
8. Perceptions of safety
9. Violence
10. Armed groups
11. The future.

The interview questions were conducted in a semi-structured format, meaning that not every question was asked to all participants to allow space for an open-ended discussion with the interviewee. It also allowed the ability to be explorative in the exchange and helped to avoid overloading participants with different needs with too many questions and lengthy interviews.

Data collection

Data was collected between 5 March and 4 April 2024 across the four countries.[v] Interviews were conducted face to face and usually lasted around 30 minutes to two hours.[vi] Interviews were scheduled to fit around the commitments of participants. They were conducted in Spanish (Colombia), English and Pidgin English (Cameroon), Amharic, Tigrinya and Afarigna (Ethiopia), and Tagalog and Maguindanawon (Philippines). In the Philippines, the data collection process involved female enumerators interviewing girl respondents, while male enumerators interviewed boys with supervision of data collection by the Field Monitoring Evaluation Research and Learning Coordinator. In Ethiopia, a consultant and member of Plan International staff carried out the interviews and note taking. In Colombia, two staff members carried out the interviews, a female staff member did the female interviews, and a male staff member did the interviews with male participants. Plan International Cameroon used a pool of data collectors and note takers who had worked with their office previously and they worked in groups of two females and one male.

Interviews were recorded in all cases except Cameroon where the country office deemed it would not be appropriate and participants would not be comfortable being recorded. Therefore, in that country, each interviewer was accompanied by two note takers who then compared notes for accuracy after the interview.

Data analysis

Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and translated by consultants. In the Philippines, the country office reviewed the translation. Coding of transcripts and subsequent analysis of the data was carried out by a team of three researchers at the Plan International Global Hub. Qualitative data analysis was undertaken through thematic analysis using NVivo software to conduct the coding. The initial interview template was initially reviewed to make a qualitative codebook which considered possible themes related to the overall sections of the questionnaire. Using Dedoose software, deductive coding was applied, and transcripts were divided into key themes and interconnected sub-themes in each of the relevant categories. The initial codebook was developed

[v] In Cameroon, data collection took place over 20–23 March in the Southwest region and 27–30 March in the Northwest region. In Philippines, data collection took place in Mindanao between 5 and 8 March. In Ethiopia, data collection took place in Afar over 11–15 March and in Tigray over 18–22 March. In Colombia, data collection took place in Chocó over 18–20 March and in Antioquia over 1–4 April.

[vi] This was dependent on the age of the participant; for some younger participants interviewers focused on a smaller number of topics.

using a hierarchical coding frame to help organise and structure the data and enable key findings, themes and arguments to be identified within and across each code. This codebook was used as a guide for the researchers, then inductive coding was also applied where the codebook was developed and changed as new themes emerged, and codes were added, deleted or changed. Coders met on a weekly basis to help guide their coding and prevent any major differences in the consistency of the coding, as well as share any safeguarding concerns which the project manager then cross-checked with the relevant office. Overarching memos were written for each theme category for each country to connect and interrelate the data and allow for interpretation and create explanatory accounts.

Please note that the names of the girls and boys and the young men and women in this report have been changed to ensure anonymity.[vii]

3.3 Ethics and safeguarding

Research ethics approval was granted from the Research Ethics Committee at the UK-based global affairs think tank ODI. A full safeguarding risk assessment was conducted in collaboration with country office staff to identify potential risks and mitigation measures for all data collection methods. A key element of Plan International's ethical approach is to ensure that the experiences and contributions of participants are listened to and addressed.

Survey

Two levels of consent were required for the survey. The first level arose during the introduction, where the data collector aimed to confirm that the respondent was within the required age group (15 to 24 years) and was willing to participate. If the respondent was a minor (aged 15 to 17 years), parental consent was needed. In such cases, the minor was asked to hand the phone to their parent or guardian to obtain permission to proceed with the survey, constituting the second level of consent. Once parental or guardian approval was secured, the survey continued. Most participants were willing to take part, with an overall refusal rate of 10 per cent. Consent was documented as part of the survey for every participant.

The survey adhered to Plan International's ethics and safeguarding procedures, requiring all data collectors from GeoPoll involved in the survey to complete safeguarding courses and receive briefings on safeguarding and the sensitivity of the questions being asked.

Qualitative interviews

Informed consent and assent were obtained from all participants and from parents/guardians of all participants under the age of 18. Participants, and parents/guardians where relevant, were informed about what participation would involve, that participation was voluntary, and consent could be withdrawn and how the research would be used. Verbal consent was also given to record the interviews. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection, analysis and write-up process, and robust data security was ensured.

In line with Plan International's ethics and safeguarding procedures, all staff and consultants conducting interviews completed safeguarding courses and were briefed on safeguarding and referral processes. Country staff involved in the data collection also attended a training session which covered the interview tool, ethics and safeguarding and a security debrief relevant to the area of data collection. Plan International Cameroon used an existing pool of experienced data collectors who underwent a one-day training session on the tool and on carrying out ethical research and safeguarding. All data collectors signed the Plan International safeguarding children and young people policy.

[vii] Names were assigned to participants by the country offices to ensure they were culturally appropriate. Where necessary we also removed some place names such as towns and villages.

Participants shared a range of sensitive information, and so it was necessary to initiate safeguarding procedures. As is core to Plan International's safeguarding policy and best practice, all efforts were made to provide follow-up support based on participants' disclosures, which involved referral to relevant local Plan International safeguarding leads and local services and access to comprehensive case management services. The researcher who coded the transcripts also followed up with any identified safeguarding concerns with the relevant country office focal point to ensure safeguarding procedures were initiated.

In Colombia, some interviews were conducted in groups; in Chocó, a local adviser recommended conducting the interviews outside the community, to safeguard the participating children and young people. Therefore, to avoid lengthening participants' travel time and their stay outside the community, interviews were conducted in groups but with participants of the same gender. In the case of Antioquia, some interviews were conducted in groups due to a threat of an armed strike that led Plan International (known as Fundación Plan in Colombia), to take the data collectors out of the territory earlier than expected to guarantee their safety.

3.4 Strengths and limitations of methodology

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods used in this study offer a comprehensive approach to understanding participants' contexts by combining the strengths of both methodologies. While quantitative methods provide numerical data and statistical analyses, offering breadth and generalisability, qualitative methods offer rich, in-depth insights into the complexities of human experiences and behaviours. Survey data has therefore been triangulated against diverse qualitative data from four countries and supplemented by a broad literature review. By integrating these approaches, our aim was to enhance the validity and reliability of results. However, it is important to recognise that both methods used have several limitations.

In terms of the survey, the main limitation is that findings from the retrieved data are not representative of the contexts where data collection occurred and hence any conclusions made from them should be interpreted with caution. Additional limitations include response and recall bias. Response bias refers to participants providing socially desirable answers, whereas recall bias refers to participants under-reporting or exaggerating the occurrence of traumatic events. Furthermore, data collection reflects data at a specific point in time and may not reflect changes in attitudes or behaviours. Finally, logistical challenges in conflict-affected areas – such as limited access to technology or communication infrastructure – could have hindered data collection and resulted in under-representation of certain groups within the target population. As for an analytical limitation, the gender analyses did not look at other gender identities beyond male and female.

Due to political and operational sensitivities one of the ten study countries is unable to be named. This is a noted limitation as, in some cases, the discussions and comparative analysis of country differences cannot publicly state the highest or lowest of frequencies of ten countries. Instead, named in the report is the second highest or lowest, (i.e. the highest or lowest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only).

For the qualitative interviews conducted directly in the chosen language and translated after the point of transcription into English, the original meaning of some concepts that the participants mentioned during the interview might have been lost in translation. In Ethiopia, Colombia and the Philippines, interviews were recorded which may have made participants less inclined to fully open up. In Colombia due to safety concerns, some interviews were conducted in groups; this may have led participants to be less open in front of their peers but on the other hand it could also made them feel more comfortable and safer than in a one-to-one interview.

4. Findings from survey and interviews

Regarding the tables presented in this section of the report:

- "Count" refers to the number of participants who chose that option as their answer.
- Percentage ("%") is based on the proportion of the total number of participants who chose that option in relation to the entire dataset.
- Numbers shown in **pink** are those that relate to responses with the highest frequency.
- Numbers shown in **orange** are those that relate to responses with the lowest frequency.
- **Interpreting the findings:** Please note that if there is no mention of gender, age, living status or minority difference under a table then there were no meaningful statistical differences found for that category in relation to that question.

Please note: due to political and operational sensitivities, one of the ten countries that was surveyed is not named in this report. In the following section, discussions of overall survey findings and analysis are inclusive of data from all ten countries. However, discussions and comparative analysis of country differences are inclusive of Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Where applicable footnotes will indicate instances where, among all ten countries, the frequency of a reported phenomenon was highest/lowest in the country that cannot be named. For example, indication is given where Cameroon has the highest frequency of a reported phenomenon among the nine countries stated above; but that among all ten surveyed countries, the frequency was highest in the country that cannot be named.

Content warning: The experiences described by participants in this study, particularly by the interviewees, contain references to incidences of physical and sexual violence, as well as other sensitive and potentially distressing themes. Please read with care and at your own discretion.

4.1 Experiences of conflict

All participants in the quantitative data are young people aged 15 to 24 years old and participants in the qualitative data are young people aged 13 to 24 years old.

The tables in this section are recounting the survey participants' data.

4.1.1 Years of conflict experienced

The majority of survey participants reported having lived through between one and three years of conflict. This was evident for both participating genders.

Differences by gender

Table 6: The number of years that participants experienced conflict, by gender

How many years of conflict have you lived through in your country or region?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
< 1 year	950	19%	868	17.4%	1818	18.2%
1-3 years	**1927**	**38.5%**	**1866**	**37.4%**	**3793**	**37.9%**
4-6 years	770	15.4%	734	14.7%	1504	15%
7-10 years	475	9.5%	595	11.9%	1070	10.7%
11-15 years	181	3.6%	227	4.5%	408	4.1%
>15 years	530	10.6%	540	10.8%	1070	10.7%
Prefer not to say	170	3.4%	162	3.2%	332	3.3%
Total	5003	100%	4992	100%	9995	100%

Differences by country

Globally, the mean length of time[viii] that participants reported experiencing conflict was between "option 2" (equivalent to one to three years) and "option 3" (equivalent to four to six years) (mean = 2.76). However, participants from Colombia and the Philippines reported significantly longer times (mean = 3.57 and 3.3, equivalent to four to six years and seven to ten years) in conflict, whereas Sudan's participants reported significantly less time in conflict (mean= 1.44, equivalent to less than one year) compared to all other countries.

Table 7: Participants' average number of years experiencing conflict, by country (of nine surveyed countries)

Mean year in conflict per country			
Country	**Count**	**Equivalence to coding**	**Mean**
Cameroon	1000	4-6 years	2.96
Colombia	998	**7-10 years**	**3.57**
Ethiopia	1000	1-3 years	1.81
Lebanon	1000	4-6 years	3.24
Mozambique	1000	4-6 years	3.10
Nigeria	1000	1-3 years	2.98
Sudan	1000	< 1 year	1.44
Ukraine	1000	4-6 years	3.13
Philippines	997	**7-10 years**	**3.37**
Total	9995	4-6 years	2.76

4.1.2 Living situation due to conflict

Regardless of participants' gender identity, most participants reported still living at home (69.1%), followed by those who identified as refugees (16%) and IDPs (14.9%).

Differences by gender

Table 8: Simplified[ix] overview of participants' living situation, by gender

Living situation (at home, IDP and Refugees) by gender identity						
	Girls and young women	**%**	**Boys and young men**	**%**	**Total**	**%**
At home/ from host community	3356	**70.3%**	3230	**67.8%**	6586	**69.1%**
IDP	683	14.3%	735	15.4%	1418	14.9%
Refugee	733	15.4%	797	16.7%	1530	16%
Total	4772	100%	4762	100%	9534	100%

[viii] This refers to the average duration that participants in the study report having living through conflict.

[ix] **The living situation options presented here reflect the aggregation of the following options into each category. The "Refugee" category is an aggregation of:** 1. You live at home in a different country; 2. You had to leave your home and live elsewhere in a different country; 3. You stay in temporary housing provided by NGOs in another region in another country; 4. You have been repeatedly displaced due to conflict and have moved multiple times from your home country. **The "At home" category is an aggregation of:** 1. You live in your home in your country; 2. You moved away to a different country due to conflict but have since moved back; and 3. You moved away to a different country due to conflict in your home country, but have since moved back home. **The "IDPs" category is an aggregation of:** 1.You had to leave home and live in another region/area in your country; 2. You stay in temporary housing provided by the government in another region in your country; and 3. You have repeatedly been displaced due to conflict and have moved multiple times within your country.

Differences by country

The distribution of participants living at home, those who identified as IDPs and those who identified as refugees was significantly different by country. Sudan had higher numbers of refugees (39.2% of participants were refugees), whereas Mozambique had the highest number of IDPs (18.5% of participants were IDPs). Philippines[x] had the highest number of participants who remained at home (11.6% of participants remained at home).

4.1.3 Experiences of disrupted access to necessities

Conflicts lead to the disruption of households being able to access basic necessities needed for a decent quality of life (see section 2.1). When asked about such experiences due to conflict, most of the participants reported having experienced no or very limited access to electricity (58.6%), followed by reports of no or very limited access to the internet or phone (48.6%), and no or very limited access to food (43.7%) and water (41.3%), as well as interruption to their education (39.9%).

Differences by gender

Table 9: Participants' experiences of disruptions due to conflict, by gender

Have you experienced any of the following as a result of conflict in your country or region?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No or very limited access to electricity/gas/fuel. etc.	2910	59.4%	2825	57.9%	5735	**58.6%**
No or very limited access to food	2204	45%	2069	42.4%	4273	**43.7%**
No or very limited access to water	2141	43.7%	1897	38.9%	4038	**41.3%**
No or very limited internet or phone access	2486	50.7%	2268	46.5%	4754	**48.6%**
No or very limited access to health care	1762	36%	1734	35.5%	3496	35.8%
Had to interrupt your education	1988	40.6%	1916	39.3%	3904	**39.9%**
Lost your belongings or your property	1337	27.3%	1394	28.6%	2731	27.9%
Separated from your immediate family and currently living on my own	624	12.7%	698	14.3%	1322	13.5%
Separated from my immediate family [living with non-family members or neighbours]	432	8.8%	441	9%	873	8.9%

[x] This result is the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, the frequency was highest in the country that cannot be named.

Lost means of income [e.g. job/revenue/farm land]	1508	30.8%	1469	30.1%	2977	30.4%
None of the above	631	12.9%	630	12.9%	1261	12.9%
Total	4900	100%	4879	100%	9779	100%

Significant gender differences existed for reports of “no or very limited access” to food, water and the internet. The proportions of girls and young women reporting frequencies of these experiences were significantly higher than reports by boys and young men (45% vs 42.4%). As shown in Table 9, girls and young women are eating less than boys and young men and are facing more digital exclusion in times of conflict.

Differences by country

There were significant differences by country regarding the frequency of reports of “no or very limited access” to **electricity, food, water** and **internet**, and in the frequency of reports of **education being interrupted**.

Participants in Ethiopia (14.6%) and Lebanon (13.6%) reported significantly higher frequency of “no or very limited access” to **electricity** compared to all other countries. Participants from the Philippines (2.6%) reported significantly lower frequencies of “no or very limited access” to **electricity** compared to all other countries.

Participants in Ethiopia and Lebanon reported a significantly higher frequency of “no or very limited access” to **food** (17.1% for Ethiopia and 16.2% for Lebanon) and the **internet** (17.4% Ethiopia and 14.2% for Lebanon) compared to all other countries. Participants from Colombia and the Philippines reported significantly lower frequencies of “no or very limited access” to **food** (4.2% for Colombia and 2.8% for the Philippines) and the internet (4.2% for Colombia and 2.8% for the Philippines) compared to all other countries.

Participants in Ethiopia (17.1%) and Lebanon (15.9%) reported a significantly higher frequency of “no or very limited access” to **water** compared to all other countries. Those from Colombia (4.3%) and the Philippines (2.6%) reported significantly lower frequencies of “no or very limited access” to **water** compared to all other countries.

In terms of the frequency of reports of **education** being interrupted due to conflict, Sudan (16.4%) and Ethiopia (15.1%) reported a significantly higher frequency of this compared to all other countries. Participants from Colombia (4.3%) and the Philippines (2.1%) reported significantly lower frequencies compared to all other countries.

Difference by living situation status

There were significant differences by living situation status (comparing across “at home”, IDP and refugee participants) regarding the frequency of reports of “no or very limited access” to electricity, food, water and internet, and in the frequency of reports of education being interrupted.

When comparing refugee participants to IDPs and participants who stayed at home, refugee participants reported significantly higher frequencies of “no or limited access” to electricity (68% refugee vs 59.9% IDP vs 58% at home), food (56.2% vs 52.6% vs 40.5%), water (56.8% vs 46.4% vs 37.8%), and the internet (61.9% vs 48.2% vs 47.2%); and of education being interrupted due to conflict (57% vs 46.1% vs 35.8%).

Differences by minority

Participants were asked to identify themselves with any of the minority groups listed. The options included identifying as a person with a disability, belonging to an ethnic, racial, or religious minority, identifying as a displaced person, migrant, refugee, part of another minority group, or as an LGBTIQ+ member. Participants could also choose not to identify with any of these groups.

When analysing participants' experiences due to conflict in relation to their minority group membership, all participants who identified as a minority were grouped together (according to the above-listed identifiers) and were compared to those who did not identify with any of the minority groups listed.

There were significant differences by minority group membership on the frequency of reports of "no or very limited access" to electricity, food, water and internet, and in the frequency of reports of education being interrupted.

Participants identifying as part of a minority group showed a significantly higher frequency of reports of "no or very limited access" to electricity, food, water and internet, and in the frequency of reports of education being interrupted compared to participants who did not identify as a listed minority group.[xi]

Overall, these findings indicate that identification with a minority group likely shapes an individual's experiences of conflict. They are likely to experience greater barriers to accessing the basic conditions needed for survival and quality of life. There are several intersecting social, economic and political reasons for such barriers affecting various minority groups which are beyond the scope of this study. Notwithstanding, this key learning reinforces the need for tailored and specific approaches for supporting youth in conflict.

4.1.4 Insights from qualitative interviews

Across all four countries the conflicts have had multiple personal impacts on the young people who participated in the qualitative interviews. More than half of the participants in the study were currently displaced or had been previously displaced and had returned home. Many had lost livelihoods, had experienced violence and some had lost loved ones.

Cameroon

Participants described how conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon is affecting the young people there in multiple areas of life, compounding the difficulties they face.

Participants mentioned that the two genders are equally affected, but some participants recognise that the impacts of conflict differ across genders.

Qualitative interviews in Cameroon focused on Northwest and Southwest Cameroon. Participants said that the Northwest and Southwest conflict had affected them personally and that their lives had significantly changed because of the crisis. Yong[xii] (male, 23) had to move from the Southwest region to a village in the Northwest and lamented that he had to separate from his sisters. Tossam (male, 22) noted that he and his family had to leave and that their livelihoods were destroyed when their place of business was burned down. Nain (female, 15) shared a similar experience:

> ***"It has affected me a lot. We lost everything we have, our house and business was burned to ashes."***

The impacts on education had a major effect on participants. A number of participants commented that they were at a lower educational stage than they should be. Kimbi (male, 13) shared that he should be

[xi] Frequency in numbers of reports of "no or very limited access" to:
(1) Electricity (minority group membership frequency 60.5% vs not a minority listed frequency 57.2%);
(2) Food (minority group membership frequency 50.7% vs not a minority listed frequency 36.9%);
(3) Water (minority group membership frequency 46.1% vs not a minority listed frequency 36.7%);
(4) Internet (minority group membership frequency 49.9% vs not a minority listed frequency 47.9%);
(5) Education being interrupted (minority group membership frequency 44.9% vs not a minority listed frequency 35.3%).

[xii] To ensure anonymity, all names of the girls and boys, and the young men and women in this report are pseudonyms and specific location names have been removed.

in secondary school but was in primary school. Other participants had to stop attending school altogether. Makola (male, 19) noted the biggest change in his life was having to stop school and stay at home all the time:

> ***"The crisis has affected me and my family a lot because I had to stop school because my parents could not make enough money to sponsor me. I needed care while going to school. My school was far away, and I could not use only my wheelchair to go, so I had to pay for extra transport. This was expensive for my parents. I could not also continue school during this crisis because it was very insecure for me going to and from school due to gunshots at times and I could not run like the others, so I was forced to stay home most of the time."***

Makola noted that this change had an emotional impact on him:

> ***"I am very sad because I cannot continue school. Places are not secured for people like me, I cannot run to hide or save myself. I depend on people."***

Ikome (male, 16) who also uses a wheelchair noted that he could no longer attend school due to the conflict making school attendance too risky for someone with a disability. Instead, he stays at home all the time. Tabe (female, 14) said her sister could no longer go to school as her mum no longer had the money to send her. Both Akungha (female, 19) and Yisah (female, 17) had dropped out of school and Yisah had since had a baby.

More than half of the sample from the Southwest region were internally displaced. Participants said that people had moved towns to find peace. Ikome shared how his friend was sleeping at his house because there was no space at his own home as so many people had moved to the area.

Across Cameroon, participants are dealing with the looming threat of violence. Akungha and Tossam – both in the Northwest – shared that family members had been killed. Tossam said that gunshots now frighten him and his family. Dalma (female, 13) shared some of the hardships that displacement and violence had brought to her life:

> ***"The crisis has affected me and my family, having to move away from home and getting adapted with a different kind of lifestyle that we are not used to as things are no longer the way they used to be while back home. We get to buy nearly everything here in*** *[city in the Southwest Region]* ***and we have no farmland to farm on. In addition to this, my father is no longer with us due to the crisis because he was being targeted by both parties involved in the conflict. The most important change is moving from my hometown to a strange place where I have never been before."***

When participants were asked how they coped with the challenges they were facing, several said they were not coping and still face difficulties. Akungha also said that she manages with the few resources available to her.

> ***"We have adapted to the situation because we don't have any choice."*** *Tateh (female, 20)*

> ***"I am not really coping because life is very, very hard. I go around doing odd jobs like this*** **chantier** *[construction site] […]* ***so that I can feed, and I have to send money to my parents back in the village, so that they can eat and buy medicines."*** *Bate (male, 22)*

> ***"I try to make new friends."*** *Tossam (male, 22)*

The majority of participants in Cameroon thought that girls and boys were equally affected by the conflict. Participants highlighted that both genders faced violence and harassment, have experienced loved ones being killed, have been victims of displacement and have been forced to join armed groups.

> ***"The crisis is hard on both boys and girls because many of the youths have been forced to leave school out of their wish, due to poverty and hard life. Both boys and girls are affected."*** *Makola (male, 19)*

Bih (female, 24) felt that both genders were affected by armed groups in different ways:

> ***"I think it has affected both boys and girls because some boys have joined the armed groups while some girls are forced to do so."***

However, three female participants felt that boys were worse affected, although Egbe (female, 16) did note later that girls are more likely to have to deal with sexual harassment. Akungha thought the conflict was harder for boys because the military hunt them down.

> ***"Due to the crisis boys are faced with** [more] **hardship than girls because they are the most targeted since the crisis began and some are killed and is rare to hear that girls are faced with such hardship."** Egbe (female, 16)*

> ***"It is hard on boys a lot because it is the boys that are being killed a lot than girls. The boys are more exposed to violence. Boys have to do hard work to survive."** Bessong (female, 24)*

Colombia

Participants in Colombia have either experienced displacement themselves or know someone who has – generally due to the threat of violence.

Young people reported that their movements in public spaces were controlled by armed groups.

> ***"All of us have been victims** [of the conflict] **directly or indirectly."** Andrés (male, 21)*

The biggest personal impact on participants living in the Antioquia region was displacement. Nearly a third of participants in this area were currently or had been displaced at some point in their lives. Others had relatives, friends and neighbours who had been displaced. Raquel (female, 22) spoke about fleeing after receiving threats against her father as a social leader:

> ***"Then we had to start from scratch because my father was a social leader, and at that time, they were killing social leaders. So, we had to leave. Then the land started to be taken over, and we could not live where he lived, so they forced us to leave."** Raquel (female, 22)*

Raquel had to move in with her aunt, but she and her family found it difficult to adapt to life in the city. As a child she often felt excluded in the new community. Many shared personal stories about their own experience of displacement or those of friends and relatives. In 2009, when Daniel (male, 19) was five years old, he remembers his mother being involved in sex work and getting involved with "someone she shouldn't have"; the person's wife contacted "the group" and the whole family was forced to flee. They fled to another city and were in hiding; he was only able to go to school and back and they had groceries delivered or relied on what his grandmother was able to send. Yet the grandmother could not send enough, and his baby brother became malnourished, while Daniel survived on one to two meals per day. Their displacement, he said, caused lots of family rifts and his father left.

Martha (female, 22) was displaced in 2005 and again in 2015. She describes being left with scars from the armed conflict and was almost a victim of rape by the armed group when a man entered her house in the village, but she managed to scream and her mother entered, and the man ran away:

> ***"Because of that, I'm also afraid to sleep in a house where there are a lot of men because I say that from that past, I've been left with those after-effects."***

Martha also disclosed she had a sister who was raped several times:[xiii]

[xiii] It is unclear if this is the same sister who had to flee or a different sister.

> ***"They used to give her drinks, adulterated. They would take her away and she would arrive home without knowledge, because she was drugged and it's by force."***

Displacement also affected the wider community with participants describing entire neighbourhoods as being evicted and communities becoming ghost towns.

The main personal impact that participants in Chocó raised was violence. Wilson (male, 13) shared that his aunt was shot at while at home and had to move to another city. Isabel and Andrea (females, 22 and 17) described that someone entered their house while chasing someone else and started shooting in the air,[xiv] and now they keep their doors always locked. Jonás (male, 16) described entire neighbourhoods having to leave due to violence.

Participants in Antioquia also described constant violence, where family members had been killed or disappeared at the hands of armed groups. Many described living in a prolonged state of fear. Valentina (female, 18) said her whole family had been affected by violence from the conflict; her neighbours and friends had been killed and her cousin was shot on a street corner:

> ***"I was on the other corner, when I saw him pass by, he was already on the motorcycle, they were taking him away."***

They rushed the cousin to hospital, but he had already died.

Tori (female, 16) said that her 19-year-old brother had to leave after armed groups threatened to kill him in 2023. Ana (female, 24) said that her father and uncle had both been killed. She also had another uncle who got hit by a bullet when having a coffee in a café and could no longer work due to the injury. Frijolito (male, 24) also shared that he had many friends who had joined armed groups who were now all dead.

Daniel and Frijolito also highlighted that those from the LGBTIQ+ community are targeted by armed groups. Daniel noted that many trans women are murdered or displaced:

> ***"Sometimes in certain murders of trans people, specifically of trans women, there have been links to the conflict […] For example, you are the leader of a group, and you like to have sex with a trans woman but obviously the trans woman has to be very reserved, very quiet because you're the leader. If she puts out word making public what she does with the leader, then the problems begin. We even deduce several murders have occurred because of that kind of thing, that sometimes people from the armed groups have sexual relations with people, trans women or even with homosexual people, and then people find out or gossip or something happens to them."***

Participants also said that violence and murders are normalised across communities. They highlighted that shootouts were commonplace when gangs move into the neighbourhoods. Calle (male, 21) said that there had been a recent war between two armed groups disputing land for cocaine and mining. David (male, 17) shared that in 2017 and 2018 gangs had engaged in a shooting on the street which since caused children to become afraid to play outside, turning the neighbourhood into a ghost town. Terra (female, 22) noted a family massacre that happened in 2022 or 2021 where the gang wiped out an entire family as the child had been involved in running errands for the gang. Daniel said it was easier to know which group is in charge in rural areas compared to urban areas but most violence in the urban areas was usually over micro-trafficking.[xv] Some participants also highlighted that mining strikes are particularly marred with violence. Drugs were also noted as an issue throughout the community. Valentina shared that drugs were everywhere, especially marijuana and cocaine, and that young people begin to get involved in drugs from the age of 15. Others shared that many of those involved in gangs were drug addicts.

Another big impact of violence was less freedom of movement – outlaw groups prevented participants from seeing friends or family or from playing football in certain areas, by creating rules that restricted entry to some neighbourhoods.

[xiv] Isabel and Andrea are sisters from same household.
[xv] Micro-trafficking in relation to drugs refers to the small-scale distribution and sale of illegal substances.

Participants described having to stay at home all the time and how they could no longer visit friends and do the activities they enjoyed. Some young males said that they travelled in groups for safety reasons.

> ***"Before, we used to play soccer, like that, playing and things like that, but now we can't play…"*** *Tecachi (male, 14)*

> ***"That was last year, it was a time of war, especially in the northern zone, a time of war in which there were armed groups. We boys could not leave the house, nor walk around…"*** *Elías (male, 14)*

Wilson (male, 13) had to drop out of soccer school when he could not leave home due to the conflict.

Andrés (male, 21) shared that when he goes to see his mother in another neighbourhood, he must answer questions to enter the area. Calle also highlighted that when relatives come to visit, they need to get permission from one of the gang leaders. Raquel said that her family chose not to visit her town as they think it is too dangerous. Terra's mum teaches in a "difficult" area of their municipality where people have to give notice to go there. When her mum began working there, the armed groups already knew:

> ***"…who she was, where she lived, who her children were – they already knew everything about her."***

Many participants described "invisible barriers or borders", where dangerous restrictions were in place, and where it was not possible to visit other neighbourhoods. Isabel (female, 22) said that she could not go to see her mother as she lived in a "red zone".[xvi]

> ***"It affects us so much that we can no longer share in our neighbourhood as children and young people that we are, it really affects us..."*** *Andrea (female, 17)*

Curfews were either enforced by the groups (where fines were administered if broken) or self-enforced by participants themselves or by their family for safety reasons.

Many gang members dress a certain way to show those around them that they are part of a gang. Participants described oversized clothes, caps, long hair; gang members sometimes intimidate older people to show they have the power or expose their chest to show they have a weapon. Participants commonly described strike days or armed strikes, where people are told to stay off the streets and everything shuts.[xvii] Some participants described being notified by leaflets, social media and on WhatsApp about upcoming strike days or curfews.

> ***"Last year there was a strike here in March. It lasted a month and, well, they closed the roads, started to remove trees and all that. They*** *[strikers]* ***started to look for gasoline to burn up all they could see."*** *David (male, 17)*

David said that it was necessary to pay a fine (*vacunas*) to the armed group to be able to go out and buy food and that sometimes they had to protest at the strikes. Participants noted that strikes often affected food supplies and disrupted education. Edil (female, 16) described an armed strike that lasted for a week which affected her grades so much that she went down a grade.

It was clear that gangs and armed groups held a significant amount of control, through enacting a number of rules and regulations that participants had to comply with. For example, participants noted that groups extort but do not allow stealing. Participants described parents as having to pay *vacunas* to

[xvi] In Colombia, the term "red zone" (*zona roja*) refers to areas that are considered highly dangerous due to the presence of armed groups, such as guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug cartels. These zones are typically characterised by high levels of violence, including kidnappings, extortion, illegal roadblocks and armed confrontations.

[xvii] Armed strikes are when illegal armed groups such as guerrillas, paramilitaries or drug traffickers attack civilian life and official armed forces, by blocking roads, restricting mobility, issuing threats that force the closure of commercial establishments and the suspension of classes in schools and universities.

armed groups and gangs to keep their businesses open. Miners also had to pay a percentage of their gold mining income to gangs. Daniel said that in rural areas, if a person got involved in a fight or damaged something, that person could be made to clean a field or sweep the streets. Acts of social cleanings were also mentioned by participants. Participants noted that groups often kill thieves. Valentina shared that sometimes they hang a sign on that person saying he was a thief.

In Antioquia, Raquel said that gangs ordered children to get haircuts and removed their earrings before the social cleanings. She quoted the gangs as referring to women who dye their hair as "prostitutes", so girls and women were not permitted to do this.

> ***"Sometimes in the same stores they pay the groups for security. For example, if someone steals, the same stores send the security videos and put up pamphlets with recordings of the security camera and 'if we see him we'll kill him for stealing, something'. In that sense, here stealing is not allowed, there are already several cases where people who start stealing end up dead."*** *Daniel (male, 19)*

> ***"I was wearing a, a baggy pair of pants here […] So they thought that I was a bad guy […] so when I had a** [ponytail]**, then they stopped me. I was walking normally and they told me that if I didn't take off my tail in 24 hours they were going to look for me..."*** *Nicolás (male, 14)*

Participants in Chocó also mentioned how the groups exercise control over certain areas. As in Antioquia, in certain zones stealing or fighting were prohibited; people had to pay a fine if they did, or if they could not pay, they would be sent to do manual labour such as pruning or sweeping. Jonás (male, 16) said that groups in the area even warned children not to wear their hair tied up or dyed certain colours.[xviii]

> ***"Because there is also a group here in** [name of area] **who paint their hair in colours and others who have tall hair. So we couldn't do that because if they saw us in the street with painted hair or some weird haircut, we could be victims of those murders."*** *Elias (male, 14)*

Some participants shared how they survived living in this way. Elias said he would stick to going to school and doing nothing else. Eli (female, 14) described staying with family and relying on their support.

Terra and Camila (female, 15) also mentioned that armed groups organise compulsory "get togethers" such as community clean-ups about every eight days or once a month.[xix] Their father would not let his daughters attend so he pays the fine or their grandmother goes instead; at least one family member is permitted to attend, not many young people go, as older family members try not to expose younger ones to these events. Calle pointed out that public order had been irreparably damaged by the gangs. Participants noted that the police could not be relied upon, and that they had no control over armed groups or gangs:

> ***"It's no lie that many officers know who the bad people are and don't do anything about it. So, looking for help from them is like stepping on your own hose. People will always find out that it was you, so it is like exposing yourself. So, you better solve your problems quietly, but never with public force."*** *Terra (female, 22)*

Both Daniel and Ana reflected on how they had coped with some of these personal and community experiences of conflict. Daniel said that it was important to be resilient and continue to move forward and to practise self-care and self-protection:

> ***"I do feel that perhaps the factor of displacement leads us to rethink many things in the family, to look at other perspectives of life, to look at other economic alternatives and all this, but we did suffer a lot at the time."***

[xviii] Gangs do this as a way of exercising social control.
[xix] Terra and Camila are sisters.

Ana became involved with an association which worked with victims on building peace. She said that the trainings they had organised had helped her:

> ***"We are trying to ensure that those of us who have been victims do not have our rights violated more than we have."***

Ethiopia

Many participants in Ethiopia discussed fleeing their homes and towns due to heavy artillery, witnessing death, being separated from family members, hearing about sexual and gender-based violence, seeing buildings such as health facilities destroyed, and the difficulty of their subsequent journey to escape conflict.

Female participants in the Tigray region described experiencing extreme sexual and gender-based violence.

In Afar and Tigray, regions in northern Ethiopia, nearly all participants were IDPs or returnees, meaning that at some point most had been forced to leave their homes, with the majority not having returned. This was a common experience discussed in terms of both a personal and a community impact. Journeys were often depicted as unexpected and hazardous: having to cross difficult terrain; having no access to water, food or shelter; and seeing people who did not survive the journey.

> ***"We were forced to leave our living area… We have fled on foot … We have gone through difficult terrains for many kilometres on foot, and on our way, we have buried those who didn't make it. There were pregnant women who were dead because of starvation while we fled."*** *Barri (male, 24)*

> ***"…we ended up running for our life by leaving our home behind. That is when big artilleries were fired and some of the weapons hit homes in our living area and we were forced to leave the town… we don't have any clue where our parents went or what happened to them."*** *Adbidora (male, 16)*

> ***"First, this war was unexpected for us. We all were terrified. When they first came here, situations were very confusing. There were people looking for the missing family members. Mothers were looking for their children, and kids were looking for their mothers. Many people wandered looking for the lost family members. Some people were hurt; we had neither food nor water. On our ways, there were people who died of hunger, and thirst."*** *Aculle (female, 18)*

Nearly half of the participants interviewed in Afar had lost close or immediate family. Many had lost mothers and siblings. For example, two participants lost newborn infants due to the conditions of their journey where harsh weather, lack of water, food, shelter and medical care led to their deaths. Barahle (female, 14) lost her newborn twin siblings on the journey; Adolay (female, 20) saw her newborn son die on the journey after 25 days of not being able to breastfeed him.

> ***"When we were on our way to flee the war, the newborn twins suffered from a cold because we were walking in the rain. And then after a while both of them started breathing heavily, and then both of them died."*** *Barahle (female, 14)*

> ***"…At that time, we changed direction and went to another place, and we kept hiding when we heard the sound of weapons from all sides. After a while I gave birth to my baby […] We faced with a wind and rain alternating above and flowing water below. I gave birth to my child without a midwife… The other three pregnant women's children are alive, only my son died... At that time, my child had not been breastfed for 25 days."*** *Adolay (female, 20)*

Like the participants in Afar, just over half of the participants in Tigray had lost close or immediate family due to the conflict. For example, Adigrat (female, 14) described how she did not know where her parents

went as she became separated from them; she described herself as feeling depressed by this. Most participants had lost male relatives, predominantly fathers, brothers and male cousins.

> ***"My father was killed in front of me. They dragged him out of our house and he was begging them not to kill him by explaining to them he is a civilian, but they killed him."*** *Sheraro (female, 17)*

Most participants were aware of, had witnessed or experienced violence. Many participants discussed seeing dead bodies. Two participants, Aba-Ala (female, 18) and Barri (male, 24), were shot. Etafar (female, 24) lost her leg in a car accident while searching for her kidnapped husband.

> ***"We also saw many bullets and weapons which were left on the road as well as dead bodies."*** *Baraulo (female, 20)*

> ***"I was shot by a gun; and I was bleeding. The situations were very scary."*** *Aba-Ala (female, 18)*

> ***"As we are just living our normal life a heavy artillery hits our home. As a result, I got hit on my arm and suffered a serious injury which led to the insertion of a metal in my arm."*** *Addi (male, 13)*

All participants from Ethiopia who had direct experiences of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) were from Tigray. Three female participants had experienced rape or gang-rape by armed groups; a fourth participant had witnessed soldiers gang-rape a woman who had hidden her and who later died due to the severity of her injuries.[xx]

A final difference between the regions was that of the participants who mentioned they were living in IDP camps – all of these participants were from Tigray. The majority shared negative views around the conditions of the camps relating to cramped conditions, the potential for disease to spread, not receiving necessary support or access to basic requirements, a general sense of being worse off, and safety concerns including around SGBV.

> ***"I live in a worse situation because I am living in IDP camp. I live in small tent and there is nobody here to help me or support to me."*** *Axum (female, 20)*

> ***"In the** [camp] **I live alone, and we totally rely on aid we get to survive. Sometimes we don't get the aid monthly and when failed to get the aid we beg for food... Here, ten people live in a single room and it's difficult to survive in here."*** *Tigray[xxi] (female, 18)*

Four female participants in Afar mentioned having additional care responsibilities due to the conflict. This was primarily from taking on care responsibilities for younger siblings, or supporting other relatives with children, due to family members being killed, separated or becoming sick.

> ***"I lost my mother because of the war. I have one brother and four sisters. They all are my responsibility now."*** *Awash (female, 22)*

> ***"During this difficult time, my mother got sick and my sister has kids so she has to look after them. So, the burden was all upon me."*** *Abroborifaghe (female, 18)*

Similarly to Afar, participants in Tigray mentioned care responsibilities due to the conflict. Mekelle (male, 18) discussed looking after his grandparents in an IDP camp and trying to support them. Hawzen (female, 19) discussed becoming responsible for her one-year-old brother after her mother died. Of the participants from Tigray who discussed gender differences, many similarly suggested that women and

[xx] These testimonies were followed up by the research team with the Ethiopia Country Office to see what kind of psychosocial support could be offered to these participants.
[xxi] The participant (female, 18) chose "Tigray" as her pseudonym, which should not be confused with the region in Ethiopia of the same name or with the participant with the pseudonym "Etigray" (female, 16).

girls suffered more in the conflict due to the severity and scale of SGBV, as well as additional responsibilities.

> ***"The impact of the war is harsher on young females, and we have experienced so many challenges during those moments. Many girls were raped during the war. In addition, compared to boys, we spend most of our time working in the house. This means there is a lot of burden on girls. Therefore, all these challenges bring depression among many young girls and most of these young girls have some sort of mental illness."*** *Dansha (female, 17)*

Similarly, Aculle (female, 18) shared this sentiment in relation to the gang-rape of women and girls by armed groups if they did not flee, if they fell behind during their journeys, or were otherwise captured.

> ***"When the war broke out, there was an effort to take women out of this area. Those who were unable to leave, their fate was being raped. The women left behind were raped."*** *Aculle (female, 18)*

One participant, Addodas (female, 19) believed that the suffering of the genders was equal but experienced in different ways, suggesting that men and boys were more often direct victims of being killed in conflict, while women and girls were subjected to SGBV:

> ***"With regard to the impacts of the war I can say both male and females were affected equally. Boys were also affected by the war indeed, many of them were killed and there are others who have never been found after the war. So, I can say everyone was affected by the war in different ways."*** *Addodas (female, 19)*

Sheraro (female, 17) acknowledged the plight and suffering of women and girls but she believed that overall boys suffered more in the conflict:

> ***"During the war women have experienced many worse attacks and harassment. They have also*** *[been]* ***forced to make wrong decisions in their life like child marriage. I can say the most horrific incidents happened to young boys. That is because enemy soldiers have killed so many innocent teenagers by assuming that they will join the struggle and fight them back… Thus, we women have experienced incidents like being raped and harassed, but majority of young boys were dead due to the war."***

Philippines

Participants interviewed in the Philippines were living amid violence, and losing their livelihoods due to displacement. Some cited violence stemming from instability following elections and political clashes.

Participants discussed gendered experiences of the conflict through traditional gender norms: men were seen as protectors and providers in conflict and women were seen as timid and fearful.

The majority of the participants from Mindanao, Philippines had been displaced, some even multiple times.

> ***"The number of times we evacuated is countless, even during elections, which usually happen at noon. Some of us would be cooking, and we'd have to leave our food behind when armed individuals arrived, forcing us to flee to the crossing*** *[the entrance to their village].* ***It's especially difficult when those evacuating are already struggling financially. It's even harder for them to seek refuge in other people's places, let alone in their own area..."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

> ***"Every time war erupts here, people, including us, have to move from one place to another. We gather all our belongings to go to a safer place."*** *Tariq (male, 13)*

Rasheed (male, 17) said that enemies had destroyed their home alongside their neighbours and they all had to flee. Dalia (female, 14) remembered how they had escaped by boat; one boat had their belongings and the other had her family. Samir (male, 15) was forced to flee and had now been living in his new home for five months; he remarked that his situation had improved, and he was making new friends. In contrast, Youssef (male, 17) described feeling "disorientated" after fleeing because he did not know anyone and had no friends in the new area.

Participants described living amid gunshots and violence. Mariam (female, 21) noted the double impact of conflict and natural disasters on her community, describing it as "full of conflicts, floods and clan feuds". Zahra (female, 19) said that in 2015, soldiers would crawl under her house during the 44 Special Action Forces era[xxii] and that "her father trembled in fear."

> ***"I was about to collapse due to that gunfire; I was already nervous. When the gunfire was happening,*** *[my spouse's siblings]* ***pulled me to walk because I couldn't walk anymore."*** *Zahra (female, 19)*

> ***"There was a sudden outbreak of war and armed men arrived in our area. The armed men stayed at our house because it's cool. I would carry my younger siblings to leave the house and hide whenever there's gunfire."*** *Fatima (female, 15)*

Amira (female, 24) lived in area where shootings frequently occurred:

> ***"When we were still young, our mother took us to the cornfields to hide because there were always shootings, and we would hurry home early because of the constant gunfire, and we were very scared there."***

Eventually their home was hit, and they had to leave:

> ***"There were no vehicles to help us whenever we evacuated; there were only carabaos*** *[water buffalos]* ***and makeshift carts. The helicopters were dropping bombs and explosions, and we were scared. We left our belongings and ran."***

Amira's mother moved to another town supported by her brother's wife's family. She placed Amira in an orphanage where she studied so her mother could work. Many said that the most recent mayoral election period in 2023 had been tumultuous and some had to flee due to shootings around this time. Fatima (female, 15) had also been repeatedly displaced recently because of clashes between the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) and their political opponents. Some noted that 2024 had calmed down after the elections.

With so many participants in Mindanao having been displaced, most had had their incomes severely affected by the crisis. Participants' parents had lost work, abandoned farms and other places of business such as stores and stalls.

> ***"There are times when we have no breakfast because there's no food, so we just wait for lunch or when Dad brings home food in the afternoon. He spends the whole day looking for food, leaving early in the morning and coming home in the afternoon. He strives to bring home food for us. Dad wakes up early at home and comes home late due to his efforts to provide for us. We're struggling in our house because it's already dilapidated, and Dad's siblings won't allow us to stay with them."*** *Fatima (female, 15)*

Other participants also noted an impact on their education or on the education of other young people in the community. Mahid (male, 18) remarked that parents in the community were no longer sending their children to school due to fears of being hit by a stray bullet. Fatima had to stop studying at 10 years old because of the war. Dalia was also no longer studying. She described her education as disrupted because of shootouts that affected her and her sibling. Youssef also described his parents trying to scramble together their earnings to keep their children in school:

[xxii] The 44 Special Action Forces era in the Philippines refers to the period surrounding the events of 25 January 2015, when 44 members of the Philippine National Police Special Action Force (SAF) were killed during an anti-terrorism operation known as Oplan Exodus in Mamasapano (municipality), Maguindanao (province).

> ***"When we were still displaced, we relied on my father's earnings from driving because all of us siblings were studying except for one. Meanwhile, my mother made cooking oil, which served as our source of support for school expenses. Currently, only four of us are still studying."***

Some had settled into their new areas. Mariam said the safety of her new village provided stability while Amira had built a new house next to her mother's in her new town.

When participants were asked how they coped with the challenges they face, many said that they relied on the support of others or tried to support each other. Khalid (male, 21) had to flee to another town with his family because his father was accused of shooting someone; they relied on his father's family for help until they were able to return once the case was resolved.

> ***"So, what everyone does in the evacuation is help each other out. Those who have share with those who don't, just to alleviate hunger. And the Kamal*** *[community or political leader]* ***also think about how to get supplies to us. Sometimes they arrange for a little rice to be delivered, and that's what we depend on."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

Rasheed noted that when they left, some people fed them, and soldiers gave them rice. Tariq said that when the conflict flares up, people cannot go to market because the police block it so they ask people outside the town to buy food and leave it at the checkpoint where they can collect it. Others described helping their family. Rasheed helped to take care of his grandmother's grandchildren and also looks after his siblings' children. Youssef helped his father with driving and his mother with making cooking oil.

Three of the girls who were married mothers described trying to support themselves by making extra items to sell on top of their earnings. Other participants were more despondent, saying there was nothing they could do or they just had to accept it.

> ***"I'll just accept that we're poor and struggling, and I won't be able to go back to school. I'll just work to have something to eat. I'll help Dad because he's old."*** *Fatima (female, 15)*

Aisha and Zahra turned to their faith in Allah to help them through and prayed to be lifted out of hardships. Mariam shared that it was important to try to build resilience and just hope the situation improves.

In Mindanao, the majority of respondents felt that girls and women suffered more during conflict. This was largely due to women having the responsibility of childcare, managing the household chores and worrying about the children. Tariq felt that women are more often left at home while men assess the situation, so they have to deal with more worry about their partners as well as taking care of the household. Amira also felt it was harder for women as they are left at home and worry there is not enough food for the children. In war time, she noted, it was difficult to find the money for milk.

> ***"Women are more affected. Men are affected too, but women even more so, because they are given the responsibility of taking care of small children, and they don't have anyone to help them take care of and carry the children whenever they evacuate due to conflict. Perhaps because they're thinking about how to meet their daily needs. I know they're struggling, but women are struggling even more."*** *Fatima (female, 15)*

Mahid noted that women face additional struggles if they are pregnant or looking after children and that they are usually the ones who pack all the belongings. He also mentioned the difficulties women faced in communal areas like the evacuation centres.

> ***"Firstly, when it comes to women bathing, they tend to be shy, and even in changing clothes, they really struggle in the evacuation centre. Unlike men who can walk around without clothes and have no problem […] It's not that men don't struggle, but that's what I see, that women struggle more."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

Clear gender roles and stereotypes were also cited by participants in that men were seen as protectors and providers in conflict and women were seen as timid and fearful. For example, Samir (male, 15) said that girls faced more difficulties and women tend to be more easily scared, while men and boys knew

how to survive and where to run. Some participants also noted some physical differences such as men being stronger and women weaker. Rasheed said that women run more slowly because of carrying children.

Other participants felt that both genders suffered equally. Rania (female, 21) felt that both genders suffer in conflict as they both stop education, get married and struggle with money. Mariam echoed this, saying that although women are not involved in fighting, they have to protect their children, while men need to resolve clan feuds.

4.2 Social cohesion

4.2.1 Participants' perceptions of tensions between displaced and host communities

In the survey, participants were asked about tensions between people who had moved into a new community (due to being displaced) and the local inhabitants (of the host community). Most participants reported no tensions, either because both communities were said to actively support each other on all accounts (32.6%) or because both communities tried to co-exist as best they could (24.6%). Yet, some participants reported tensions over access to resources such as food and basic needs (15.6%) and tensions over access to jobs and economic benefits (15.3%).

Differences by gender

Table 10: Participants' perceptions of tensions between displaced and host communities, by gender

In the community in which you live, are there tensions between people who have moved there (displaced community) and the local inhabitants (the host community)?	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No tensions - both communities actively support each on all accounts	1478	32.6%	1478	32.6%	2956	**32.6%**
No tensions - both communities try to co-exist as best they can	1138	25.1%	1096	24.2%	2234	**24.6%**
Tension over access to resources such as food and basic needs	702	15.5%	713	15.7%	1415	**15.6%**
Tension over access to jobs and economic benefits	669	14.8%	718	15.8%	1387	**15.3%**
Tension over overstretched public services [e.g. education/healthcare/administrative services. etc.]	489	10.8%	480	10.6%	969	10.7%
Tension over availability of accommodation and over-crowdedness	654	14.4%	613	13.5%	1267	**14%**
Tension over anti-social or criminal behaviour committed by either or both communities	394	8.7%	400	8.8%	794	8.8%
Tension over cultural differences and stereotypes between both communities	467	10.3%	456	10.1%	923	10.2%
Tension over political differences and stereotypes between both communities	434	9.6%	429	9.5%	863	9.5%
There are no displaced communities living in your area	528	11.6%	508	11.2%	1036	11.4%
Total	4533	100%	4532	100%	9065	100%

Differences by country

There were significant differences by country regarding participants' perceptions of whether or not there had been tensions between displaced and host communities.

Participants in Nigeria (20.6%) and Lebanon (18.7%) reported significantly higher frequencies of **tension over access to resources such as food and basic needs**, compared to all other countries.

Participants in Sudan (23.2%) reported significantly higher frequencies of **tension over the availability of accommodation and overcrowding** compared to all other countries.

Compared with other countries in the study, significantly fewer participants from Sudan (7.4%) and Colombia (8.8%) reported experiencing **no tensions wherein both communities were actively supporting each other on all accounts**.[xxiii] Similarly, significantly fewer participants from Colombia (6.4%), Nigeria (6%) and Mozambique (5.1%) reported **no tensions (in which both communities were trying to co-exist as best they could)**, compared to all other countries. Across these five countries, there is a prevalence of tensions to some degree. In addition, participants from Ukraine (5.2%) and the Philippines (4.1%) reported significantly lower frequencies of **no tensions over access to jobs and economic benefits**.[xxiv]

Difference by living status

Comparing refugees and IDPs together to participants who remained at home, refugee participants and IDPs reported significantly higher frequencies of tension over access to resources such as food and basic needs (23.6% refugees and IDPs vs 16.6% participants at home). When comparing across the three groups (refugees, IDPs, participants who remained at home), the frequency of reports of tensions over access to jobs and economic benefits was significantly higher for refugees (23.7% vs 22.1% vs 16.6%) and over availability of accommodation and overcrowding (29.4% vs 16.4% vs 13.8%).

Differences by minority

There are significant differences in the perception of levels of tensions between host and displaced communities, based on minority group membership.

Participants who identified as part of a minority group showed a significantly higher frequency of reports of no tensions in terms of both communities supporting each other, compared to participants who did not identify with any of the minority groups listed (32.9% vs 31.7%). The minority group participants also had significantly higher frequencies of reports of tension over access to resources such as food and basic needs (19.6% vs 11.4%), over access to jobs and economic benefits (18.5% vs 11.9%) and over availability of accommodation and overcrowding (17.5% vs 10.3%).

Regarding reports of no tensions in terms of both communities trying to co-exist as best as they can, participants who identified as part of a minority group had a significantly lower frequency of reports compared to participants who did not identify with any of the minority groups listed (22.6% vs 27.2%). With this, it can be inferred that participants who identify as part of a minority group would perceive general community tensions more than those who are not part of a minority group.

4.2.2 Insights from qualitative interviews

Participants in the qualitative interviews were read out a vignette or story about a displaced girl who had to leave her home due to conflict and was staying in another town in her country in a UN camp. This story was used to understand their judgements in relation to displacement and to explore a

[xxiii] These results are the lowest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, one of the lowest frequencies was in the country that cannot be named.
[xxiv] These results are the lowest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, one of the lowest frequencies was in the country that cannot be named.

sensitive topic in a less personal way. The findings in this section relate to their responses and reactions to the story. To see the story used see Annex 1.

Cameroon

Participants were sympathetic to the plight of a fictional girl who had to leave her home. They generally reported strong bonds between IDPs and host communities in the areas where they live. Yet, two participants noted that host communities feared losing opportunities to IDPs.

All the participants in both the Southwest and Northwest regions of Cameroon thought the story was sad as the girl had to leave her hometown due to the conflict and was getting used to the new area. Bih (female, 14) commented that it was difficult to live in a new area without friends.

> ***"The story is so touching, because I know what it means for someone to be rejected in the community."*** *Yisah (female, 17)*

Many participants identified with the story through their own experiences of displacement or because their community had received displaced persons. For example, Tateh (female, 20) thought the story was similar to that of her community from where people had to flee due to gunshots.

Unlike the experience of the girl in the story, the majority of the Southwest participants said that social bonds between IDPs and those in the host community were strong.

Most of the participants in the Northwest also thought their community had similar experiences to those in the story as the participants' community had also received IDPs or as the participants themselves were IDPs who identified with leaving. However, many said that, unlike the story, there was a good relationship between IDPs and the host community. Nain (female, 15) believed that their community was different to that of the story as new arrivals were integrated into the community. Many said that they were welcoming, friendly and aimed to help each other. Yong (male, 23), who was an IDP, said the community was trying to assist them with food items.

Ikome (male, 16) said that he could see that many in the community were facing difficult issues, having moved from another town and Makola (male, 19) also shared his sympathies with IDPs in his community.

> ***"We have a lot of IDPs staying in our community with us, people who have left their homes due to war and fear… We treat the IDPs around us as family. We pity them because it can be us tomorrow."*** *Makola (male, 19)*

Participants who were IDPs and those who were not both said that generally the relationship between both parties was positive and friendly, and that they tried to help each other where possible. However, it is important to note that social bonds may be stronger among IDPs and host communities, as most IDPs come from similar areas (the Anglophone parts of Cameroon) and therefore have similar cultural and social values.

> ***"I will say** [it] **is friendly and welcoming even though some people might not be, but I must say they are lovely people even to the new people who comes into the community."*** *Dalma (female, 13)*

However, two participants from the Southwest did notice that there were some tensions between new arrivals and the host community. Egbe (female, 16) who was from the host community believed that some people were not welcoming unless the arrivals had family relations in the area. Dalma, who was an IDP, highlighted tensions over opportunities; she said that on the whole, the community was friendly, but some were not so welcoming because they believed opportunities should be reserved for local people whereas sometimes IDPs were more considered for these than the host community. As a result, the community feared strangers arriving because they may lose opportunities.

Colombia

Participants shared their distress at experiencing displacement, particularly their longing for home and encountering cultural clashes and stigmatisation in the host community.

In the Antioquia region, participants noted that displaced Venezuelans faced mistrust and stigmatisation, leading to cultural separation from IDPs. Social class differences and cultural clashes exacerbate this divide, with some Afro-Colombian or Black participants also distrusting indigenous populations.

Participants in Colombia felt sadness in relation to the story on displacement, highlighting the pain of leaving their homes and the challenges of adjusting to new environments where they lack a sense of belonging and face potential stigmatisation.

All the participants in the Antioquia region shared their personal experiences and reflections on displacement, resonating with the story about a girl who had to leave her hometown due to armed conflict.

> ***"There was a change of group, and that was a war. There were many deaths and so on, and also many of those who were in the municipality left."*** *Maria (female, 20)*

A third of participants identified with the story due to their own experience as an IDP. For example, Daniel (male, 19) shared his own feelings of being out of place, missing familiar things and experiencing the loss of a sense of belonging and love for his hometown. He highlighted the frustration and pain associated with displacement:

> ***"I think this is the reality of many people in the territory, especially in*** *[name of town and area]****, which is a territory that has a huge number of displaced people, people declared victims of the conflict."***

Across their narratives, a common thread emerged: the emotional and social upheaval caused by displacement, coupled with a lingering desire to return to a place that feels like home. In Chocó**,** Andrea and Isabel (females, 17 and 22) mentioned that over time, all IDPs begin to cause discomfort, suggesting that prolonged presence can lead to tension and unease. Andrea expressed that although she was welcomed warmly at first, she later sensed that she was no longer wanted, leading to a feeling of displacement:

> ***"I was reminded of the saying: 'Uno después de tres días, huele feo*** *[After three days, it smells bad]****'. Honestly that happens a lot and more than all people."*** *Andrea (female, 17)*

Chocó participants highlighted a common theme of sadness, guilt and the challenge of adjusting to new and unwelcoming environments, mirroring the emotional turmoil experienced by the girl in the story. Wilson (male, 13) identified with the feeling of strangeness, noting that everything felt new and unfamiliar, and he initially avoided leaving his house due to the way people looked at him. Tecachi (male, 14) expressed sadness at having to move to a place that did not feel like his own.

Frijolito and Calle (males, 24 and 21) pointed out the systemic issues and stigmatisation faced by displaced individuals due to their association with armed groups, further complicating their integration into new communities. Martha (female, 22) reflected on her welcoming experience at a school in Antioquia, and urged support for displaced individuals who often end up in segregated neighbourhoods.

> ***"Many people denigrate those who live in rural areas, especially those from the city – they think they are superior, or they think they are smarter."*** *Frijolito (male, 24)*

Many recounted their abrupt displacement experiences. Two participants, Terra and Edil (females, 22 and 16), touched on the constant fear and trauma experienced by those left behind, always worrying about the safety of loved ones.

> ***"Literally the only thing we took out was clothes, they didn't warn us or give us a time, for example say: 'you have 15 days to leave', but they immediately arrived and said 'leave with what you can'. Then we took what we could, in an eagerness of those we were not going to take beds or anything. Then we had a hard time, my brothers left, at that time my mom got sick."*** *Raquel (female, 22)*

> ***"I think traumatic. For example, I'm very afraid when my dad leaves for the farm or is delayed, because you're left wondering if something happened to him."*** *Terra (female, 22)*

In the Antioquia region, many participants however still showed a mistrust and stigmatisation towards Venezuelans who had been displaced. In rural areas, there are fewer Venezuelans compared to the cities, where their presence is more significant. Participants shared that Venezuelans – particularly men – faced substantial stigmatisation due to perceived associations with armed groups. This stigma is compounded by Venezuelan women's perceived involvement in sex work. Despite participants describing a decrease in the number of Venezuelans coming to the area, the differential treatment between IDPs and Venezuelan migrants remains pronounced, highlighting the ongoing economic and social challenges faced by these migrants. One participant, Andrés (male, 21), also emphasised that this stigmatisation can come from the media. Daniel described that, on top of his community's stereotyping of Venezuelan men and women, Venezuelans were generally not trusted as they were seen as susceptible to joining armed groups because the groups offered them payment, but that view was changing.

> ***"We know that there are many Venezuelans who are linked to the armed groups, but the truth is that it has decreased a lot."*** *Daniel (male, 19)*

In Chocó, Raúl and Rodolfo (males, both 17) discussed the impact of violence, conflict and threats that force many family members and community members to leave. While most people in their community leave and very few arrive, they noted the presence of many Venezuelans. The cultural issues between IDPs and Venezuelans were emphasised, with Venezuelans often living separately. This separation is influenced by social class differences and a general distrust of Venezuelans, especially due to cultural clashes.

> ***"Sometimes it is different with Venezuelans than with people from the same department, because it is like a clash of cultures and sometimes people do not understand each other well."*** *Rodolfo (male, 17)*

A few participants who identified as Afro-Colombian or Black also distrusted indigenous populations. Andrea (female, 15), Johana (female, 17) and Yirlesa (female, 18) shared that there were tensions with indigenous populations, as these indigenous communities were given priority in many areas such as schooling and handouts, which the participants regarded as unfair.

> ***"What happens is that also the Indians, the indigenous, are abusive. First, they receive income, they receive before us."*** *Andrea (female, 15)*

Ethiopia

Participants in Ethiopia shared that there was generally a sense of unease and suspicion between host communities and IDPs. However, some shared their experiences (or the stories of others) who have been supported in a host community.

Participants from Ethiopia did not discuss the short story. However, a few participants from both regions provided insights on social cohesion. Two participants in Tigray discussed struggling to make social connections within IDP camps:

> ***"When we came here, this camp is a new place and it's difficult to build the usual social bond in a such overloaded camp with people."*** *Mekelle (male, 18)*

> ***"We were trying to build our social bond in here, but when it becomes with someone you don't know or close to you, it is a little bit frightening."*** *Adigrat (female, 14)*

In Afar, Baraulo (female, 20) and Adoeio (male, 24), shared stories that indicated a level of social tension and unease. The former discussed people within the town being killed under suspicion of being spies, while the latter described a new distrust between communities since the outbreak of war:

> ***"…we** [are] **afraid** [of] **each other because of the consequence of the war, there may be** [some who] **lost their relatives, or they face some other damage, so we** [are] **afraid that they may think revenge. So, we don't trust each other at all."*** *Adoeio (male, 24)*

Host communities' support for IDPs was limited, particularly in relation to offering help with accessing necessities. Bagado (female, 17) discussed not being able to access water due to the danger of local thieves:

> ***"After we get here there are so many problems: there is no water and other necessities, even we don't have a bucket for water, and we have to fetch the water from the river. Above all the problems we have, village thieves try to steal** [from] **us by using some weapons."***

Another participant, Addodas (female, 19), shared her struggle of fleeing with her two-week-old newborn and bringing nothing with her, hoping but failing to find support within the community where she arrived.

> ***"When we fled the war, we didn't carry anything with us except some clothing because it was a rush time and we thought people would help us. However, when we get there, we didn't able to find any cloth to wear and it has been a big challenge for us. I don't have any money to buy a diaper for my child, even if I want clothes for me and my child, I was not able to find anything. It was the most difficult time in my life. My child has been sick of fever and also, I also felt sick because I didn't get the necessary care when I gave birth and after I gave birth."***

However, there were some positive stories shared in relation to receiving support from acquaintances, friends or relatives. This seemed to suggest support and social connection on a more personal basis than at community level. Addodas, for example, spoke of support of two relatives who helped to provide food, clothes and encouragement which she accredits to helping them survive. Mille (female, 13) also discussed receiving support from her sister's friend, and later her aunt, when she arrived in a new community not knowing anyone, having been separated from her mother and sisters, after fleeing from conflict.

> ***"…he was willing to leave his house for us so that we can stay there. He said that it's better for us to stay at his place instead of hotel rooms because we have been nine in total; and he was helping us not to spend money on hotel rent. Then he gave us some food and milk to drink, and we spent the night there."***

Atsbi (female, 14) in Tigray, who is an unaccompanied minor, shared that she has limited social connections but manages to get by with some support from her relative and other "kind people":

> ***"I live alone, my relative… sometimes helps me when she got some income because she is married and have her own family to look after. Even though I came alone here, and I don't have any fixed income, some kind people always help me. I don't have any connection with people, including boys."***

Philippines

The majority of participants identified with the story as more than half of them were displaced or had been displaced in the past but had since returned home.
There was a mix of experiences across participants as to how well they have adjusted and integrated into a host community, with those who have adjusted well having moved in with relatives.

Most participants in the Philippines felt sorry for the girl in the story and said that she would always miss her old home. Dalia related to the story as one day she would also like to return home:

> ***"I also miss our old place because I have many friends and acquaintances there."*** *Dalia (female, 14)*

> ***"That's true for us as well. When we evacuate and leave our place, no matter how beautiful the destination may be, we're still not truly free or at ease because we're not in our own familiar surroundings. In the evacuation, we encounter different people gathered there, whom we may not know yet."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

Many younger participants identified with the difficulty of making friends after fleeing. Fatima (female, 15) remembers moving in with relatives and not knowing anyone. She was embarrassed to make new friends in case they thought she was befriending them for help. Youssef (male, 17) also related to this:

> ***"It was difficult adjusting to the new place. When we evacuated, it was easier for us to adjust because we went to relatives. I also feel regretful about leaving behind our previous home, especially because I had no friends in the new place."***

Like Fatima, Khalid (male, 21) also spoke about feeling embarrassment when they had to flee:

> ***"We also experienced difficulties because it would have been better to stay at home; it's embarrassing. Finding solutions for livelihood and sleeping are challenging. Also, women face difficulties, whether in terms of food or sleep. When we evacuated, it took us about a year. Here in our place, we feel sad when we evacuate. Sometimes we sleep well, sometimes not because we have a lot on our minds. We struggle, and what I see is my wife worrying about sanitation and bathing."***

Samir (male, 15) shared that it was at first strange moving in with relatives in a new community but he was eventually able to make friends.

Participants (both who had been displaced and those who had not) described positive relationships with IDPs and host communities.

> ***"The place we stayed at when we evacuated was good because they knew we were evacuees, so they helped us and fed us. They didn't think of us as enemies either."*** *Rasheed (male, 17)*

> ***"What we do is we visit them to ask why there was turmoil in their area. During their evacuation, they had nowhere to stay, so we let them stay in our house temporarily until they were able to build their own homes."*** *Tariq (male, 13)*

> ***"People should treat all evacuees with respect because they are also human beings and all evacuees are the same. If there are evacuees who arrive, even if they are not relatives, we will accept them because they also need help."*** *Youssef (male, 17)*

However, the majority of those who had been displaced had moved in with relatives, making the acceptance potentially easier. Mariam (female, 21) had welcomed her uncle and cousins into her home and was happy to help them to get a better life. Both Mahid and Amira also said that it was easy to accept those who had been displaced as they also had gone through similar experiences.

> ***"I can relate to the story because it happened to us. But their situation won't be like that forever, so they should wait even for a long time. Their homes will eventually be in good condition."*** *Amira (female, 24)*

However, even though Fatima noted that relations were good with the new community, she still had feelings of embarrassment and shame. Karim (male, 14) and Mahid said that IDPs were welcome in the community but they thought that generally IDPs wish to return to their homes eventually. For example, Rania (female, 21) had been displaced but had since returned home. She described the difficulties encountered at both ends of the adjustment.

> ***"When we've been away for a long time, we really want to go home because we miss how we were with our friends before. But when we return to our place, there's a feeling of awkwardness because we've been away for so long*** *[due to displacement].* ***When I'm alone, I can't help but think that if we didn't leave our place, things wouldn't be like this. Before, I was close to my friends, but now it seems like we've become distant and awkward with each other."***

4.3 Education

4.3.1 Missed education due to conflict

Most survey participants (52.2%) reported having missed some education due to the conflict in their countries.

Differences by gender

Table 11: Missed education due to conflict, by gender

Have you missed any of your education because of conflict?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
Have you missed any of your education because of conflict?	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	2557	51.7%	2593	52.7%	5150	52.2%
No	2390	48.3%	2328	47.3%	4718	47.8%
Total	4947	100%	4921	100%	9868	100%

Differences by age group

The percentage of younger participants aged 15 to 19 who reported having missed education (54%) was significantly higher than that for participants aged 20 to 24 (51%).

Differences by country

There were significant differences across countries regarding participants' missed education due to conflict.

Participants in Sudan (14.8%) experienced the greatest frequency of missed education compared to all other countries.

Participants from Colombia (5.9%) and the Philippines (5.2%) reported significantly lower frequency of missed education due to conflict compared to all other countries.

Differences by living status

There were significant differences between different living situations – whether refugee, IDP or participants still at home – in reference to missed education due to conflict.

Missed education was significantly more reported by refugee participants (70.3%) than those who identified as IDP (64.3%), and by participants from host communities (46.7%).

Differences by minority

There was a significant association between minority group membership and the likelihood of having missed education due to conflict. Participants who identified as a minority group showed a significantly higher frequency of missing education due to conflict (60.2%) compared to participants who did not identify as any of the minority groups listed (45.4%).

4.3.2 Number of years of education missed

Survey participants were asked about the time in years of having missed education due to conflict.

The following analyses focused on examining the differences in the length of time of missed education due to conflict between genders, age group, country and minority group, treating the responses as ordinal data. Participants reported their missed education in terms of discrete intervals on a scale of categories from 1 to 4, where 1 represented one year or less, and 4 represented six to ten years.

The majority of participants, regardless of their gender identity, experienced less than a year of missed education due to conflict.

Differences by gender

Slightly more girls and young women missed one year or less of education (42.9%) compared to boys and young men (39.5%). For the longer durations, slightly more boys and young men reported missing three to five years (24.3%) and six to ten years (5.6%) than girls and young women (21.9% and 4.5%, respectively).

Table 12: Number of years of missed education, by gender

How many years of education did you miss?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
Years of missed education (coding)	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
1 year or below (1)	1097	42.9%	1023	39.5%	2120	41.2%
1-2 years (2)	786	30.7%	795	30.7%	1581	30.7%
3-5 years (3)	559	21.9%	629	24.3%	1188	23.1%
6-10 years (4)	115	4.5%	146	5.6%	261	5.1%
Total	2557	100%	2593	100%	5150	100%

The length of time of missed education due to conflict was significantly different depending on participants' gender. Girls and young women missed fewer years of education (mean response = 1.88; an equivalence between 1 and 2 in the response scale, from one year or less to one to two years) than boys and young men (mean response = 1.96; equivalent to 2 on the response scale, one to two years).

Differences by age group

Older participants (aged 20 to 24) reported significantly lengthier periods of time of missed education due to conflict (mean response = 1.97; equivalent to 2 on the response scale) compared to younger participants (aged 15 to 19; mean response = 1.87).

Differences by country

There were significant differences regarding years of missed of education depending on participants' country of residence.

When compared to all other countries, participants from Ukraine and Sudan reported on average one year or less of missed education due to conflict, according to the response scale (Ukraine mean response = 1.27; Sudan mean response = 1.29). This was significantly lower compared to all other countries.

At the other extreme, participants from Lebanon reported significantly more years of missed education due to conflict (mean response = 2.84; equivalent to three to five years), compared to all other countries.

Difference by living status

More refugee participants were found to have reported missing education overall. However, IDPs reported significantly lengthier periods of missed education due to conflict (mean response = 2.05; equivalent to one to two years) when compared to refugees (mean response = 1.92) and to people from host communities (mean response = 1.88).

Differences by minority

There were significant differences regarding years of missed of education depending on participants' minority group membership.

Participants who identified as a minority group reported significantly more years of missed education (mean response = 1.98; equivalent to one to two years of missed education), compared to participants who did not identify as any of the listed minority groups (mean response = 1.86).

4.3.3 Reasons for missed education due to conflict

The reasons most reported by participants for having missed education during conflict were school being closed (56.6%), being forced to flee home and hence being unable to access school (29.9%), feeling unsafe travelling to and from school (24.6%), the school being destroyed or damaged (24.2%), and needing to find employment/income instead (21%).

Differences by gender

Table 13: Participants' reasons for missed education due to conflict, by gender

Why did you have to miss parts of your education because of conflict?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
You had to flee your home and couldn't access school anymore	749	30%	748	29.7%	1497	**29.9%**
Your school was closed in the conflict	1452	**58.2%**	1386	**55%**	2838	**56.6%***
Your school was destroyed/damaged in the conflict	629	25.2%	584	23.2%	1213	**24.2%**
Your school was used as a shelter	414	16.6%	402	16%	816	16.3%
You needed to find employment/ income instead	490	19.7%	564	22.4%	1054	**21%**
You needed to support other family members at home	445	17.8%	462	18.3%	907	18.1%
There was no teacher anymore	390	15.6%	339	13.5%	729	14.5%
You faced a language barrier	129	5.2%	95	3.8%	224	4.5%
You didn't know how to register at a new school	149	6%	121	4.8%	270	5.4%
You were sick or wounded so could not attend school	147	5.9%	116	4.6%	263	5.2%
You had to stay home for household chores or caring for family members	303	12.2%	255	10.1%	558	11.1%

Your school was occupied by armed forces groups	252	10.1%	247	9.8%	499	10%
You did not feel safe travelling to or from school	666	26.7%	566	22.5%	1232	**24.6%***
You could not return to school because of forced marriage	84	3.4%	54	2.1%	138	2.8%
None of the above	83	3.3%	103	4.1%	186	3.7%
Total	2493	100%	2520	100%	5013	100%

**Denotes a significant difference due to gender identity.*

Girls and young women reported significantly higher frequencies of schools being closed than boys and young men (58.2% vs 55%).

Boys reported that they were missing school due to needing to earn money through child labour more so than girls (22.4% for boys vs 19.7% for girls); however, this cannot be confirmed by inferential statistics due to the small sample size. More girls reported staying at home to take up domestic care work (12.2% for girls vs 10.1% for boys) – again, this cannot be confirmed by inferential statistics due to the small sample size. It can be inferred that girls and boys in conflict may be subject to heightened traditional gender norms, which are leading them to missing education for differing reasons.

Differences by age group

When compared to younger participants (aged 15 to 19), older participants (aged 20 to 24) reported significantly lower frequencies (21.9% vs 25.1%) of their school being destroyed or damaged as a reason for their missed education.

Differences by country

There were significant country differences regarding the frequency of the most reported reasons for having missed education.

Compared to all other countries, participants in Mozambique (17.1%) reported a significantly higher frequency of **having had to flee their home** as a reason for their missed education, whereas participants in Lebanon (5.1%) reported the lowest frequency of this.

Participants from Sudan (20.6%) reported a significantly higher frequency of their school **being closed due to conflict** than all other countries, whereas Lebanon (3.2%) and the Philippines (1.7%) reported a significantly lower frequency of this occurring.

Compared to responses from all other countries, participants from Sudan (21.4%), Ethiopia (18.1%), Mozambique (15.7%), Nigeria (14.3%) and Cameroon (12%) reported a significantly higher frequency of their **school being destroyed** as a reason for missing education.

Participants from Lebanon (17.4%) and Mozambique (13.5%) reported a significantly higher frequency of **needing to find employment/income**, than all other countries[xxv], whereas those in Sudan (4.3%) showed the lowest frequency.

Participants from Ethiopia (23.5%) and Lebanon (11.7%) showed a significantly higher frequency of reporting **feeling unsafe when travelling to or from school** than any of the other countries sampled.[xxvi] Participants from Ukraine (5.5%), Sudan (5%) and the Philippines (1.1%) reported significantly lower frequencies of that as a reason for their missed education than participants in all other countries.

[xxv] These results are the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, one of the highest frequencies was in the country that cannot be named.
[xxvi] These results are the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, one of the highest frequencies was in the country that cannot be named.

Difference by living status

For participants who identified as IDPs, there was a significantly higher frequency of reporting having missed education due to having to flee their home (52.3%) when compared to participants who identified as refugees (43.9%) and those from host communities (24.2%)

Refugee participants and those who remained at home showed significantly higher frequencies of reporting missing education due to their school being closed, compared to participants who identified as IDPs (65.7% and 66.6% vs 54.5%).

Participants who lived in host communities reported significantly lower frequencies of their school being damaged or destroyed as a reason for their missed education (21.6%), compared to IDPs (31.5%) and refugee participants (38.4%).

Participants who lived in host communities reported a significantly higher frequency of not feeling safe travelling to and from school as a reason to have missed school (31.2%), compared to IDPs (24.9%) and refugees (20%).

Differences by minority

There were significant differences between participants who identified as part of a minority group and participants who did not identify as a listed minority group regarding all the most frequent reasons to have missed school.

In terms of having to flee their home, and their school being destroyed, participants who identified as a minority group showed a significantly higher frequency of reporting these reasons (38.6% for fleeing their home and 30.2% for their school being destroyed) compared to participants who did not identify as a listed minority (17.2% for fleeing their home and 15.9% for their school being destroyed).

4.3.4 Insights from qualitative interviews

Cameroon

Participants in Cameroon were not in school due to safety issues and financial challenges. Most of those who were still attending felt unsafe travelling to school or while at school, citing fear of shootings or kidnappings.

According to participants, more girls no longer attended school, for reasons such as unplanned pregnancy, poverty or because they were more likely to be asked to stay at home to assist with housework.

Many participants across Cameroon were not in school: in the Southwest, half of the participants were not in school. All the male participants in the Southwest including two who had disabilities were currently not attending school due to the conflict; and in the Northwest, two-thirds of participants were currently not attending school.

Tabe (female, 14) had to stop school when it was burned down, her mother tried to teach her at home while her education was disrupted. Makola and Ikome (males, 19 and 16) both have had to stop school due to their disabilities, and both shared that they now sit at home doing nothing:

> ***"I am disabled and cannot go to school because of my condition. I would like to go to school and feel free like others in the community… It is due to the conflict and my condition too, before I used to go to school but now I can't, reason being that if they start running, I won't be able to run, so it is better to stay at home."*** *Ikome (male, 16)*

Yisah (female, 17) said her education was terminated because of insecurity and safety issues as a result of the conflict. She now helps on the farm and takes care of her child. Tossam (male, 22) had

recently returned to school after a long hiatus which had left him behind. He shared that he should be at university now but was still in secondary school.

> ***"Schools were not going on and our only source of income – the business place – was burnt down."*** *Tossam (male, 22)*

Of those who did still attend school, nearly all said that they did not feel safe travelling to school or while at school. Reasons for this were fear of a shooting starting and fear of kidnapping. Only Dalma (female, 13) said that she felt safe both going to school and in school as her route to school and her school have lots of security and military who patrol around. Akungha and Bih (females, 19 and 14) described hearing gunshots on the way to school. Yong (male, 23) said that he has to pass military barracks on the way to school where there can be attacks.

Participants who did not feel safe at school had different reasons. For two participants, their school had been attacked previously which made them fearful. For Egbe (female, 16) it was because there was not enough security at her school. The two participants who did feel safe at school shared that it was because their school had good security – for example, it was gated or had a good fence.

The main educational challenges in the time of conflict were financial, like paying school fees and buying school materials. For some participants, the financial challenges were related to conflict and for others not. For example, Bessong (female, 24) had stopped attending school prior to the conflict because there was no money to sponsor her. Makola explained that conflict had reduced his parents' income and they no longer had enough money to keep all their children in school. Although Tabe was still in school, she said that "ghost town days" were challenging for her education because they disrupted school attendance.[xxvii] Participants said that both boys and girls faced the same challenges in relation to their education – except for Kimbi (male, 13) who believed that girls faced additional risks to safety as they could be raped.

Nearly all participants said that there were many adolescents and youth who were no longer attending school in their area and named a variety of groups who were affected. The most cited reason for adolescents and youths leaving school in the Southwest was those who could not afford the fees anymore or who could not get sponsorship to attend school, girls who had become pregnant and those who were displaced – especially children who had been separated from their parents. In the Northwest, the main group cited who were no longer in school were those adolescents and youth who were unaccompanied and separated from their families, followed closely by girls and boys who had joined armed groups.

Participants in the Southwest region thought that more girls were no longer attending school, but different reasons were cited by participants such as teenage pregnancy, poverty or because they were more likely to be asked to stay at home to help with housework. Some participants thought that more adolescent boys were unlikely to be in school; one said this was because boys are more likely to be chased by the military and another felt it was because boys are more often engaged in working for survival.

> ***"I think the number is about equal because girls are get[ting] pregnant and drop out of school while some boys have join the armed groups."*** *Yong (male, 23)*

> ***"I think they are almost equal, this is because a good number of boys have joined the armed groups while most of the girls who have delayed starting school are not willing to go as they feel they are too old to get back to school."*** *Bih (female, 14)*

The main activity that participants thought could help to keep youth and adolescents in school was to sponsor their education or support them to pay school fees and materials. Other highly cited reasons

[xxvii] Ghost town days are days when everyone is expected to stay at home. Markets and schools are closed, offices locked, and the streets deserted.

were better safety and security measures in and around school. Participants also recommended more opportunities for distance learning and having flexible learning times.

When asked what should be done specifically to support girls and boys in school, suggestions for both genders were for free education and support for school fees. For girls and young women, some participants felt that it was important to protect girls from being "fooled" by boys and men.

> ***"I think if they can provide them with sanitary paths** [sic]**, money, create a learning programme for them to occupy them and that they should not be easily fooled by men."** Ikome (male, 16)*

> ***"Give them free education and keep them away from the bad boys and military who fool them and get them pregnant."** Bate (male, 22)*

They also suggested that it was important to advise parents on the importance of educating girls. Suggestions related only to boys and young men were improved security and educating them on the consequences of drug abuse.

Colombia

Participants who were still in schooling or in higher education reported feeling unsafe travelling to school or while in school, due to the threat of armed groups.

Girls reported feeling particularly at risk of harassment and sexual violence. There were notable gender differences in school dropout rates: girls often leave school due to unintended pregnancies, while boys are more likely to drop out to join armed groups, because money is easier to earn.

Most participants in Colombia have completed or are currently engaged in secondary education, with a majority enrolled in undergraduate education or programmes. A subset of participants has left their schooling, having experienced educational disruptions due to conflict. The quantitative data on educational disruption in Colombia found that education had been missed due to conflict but at a significantly lower rate than in other study countries. The interviews spotlight stories of those participants who had experienced educational disruption.

Adriana (female, 20) had to drop out before finishing 10th and 11th grades[xxviii] due to pregnancy. Mille (female, 13) dropped out because she did not like school and lacked financial resources. Nicolas and Diomedes (males, 14 and 15) also stopped studying after 4th and 6th grades respectively due to financial constraints and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Daniel (male, 19) says that access to education is difficult, as he lives in an area in which a lot of migrants settle to seek opportunities, and so there were not enough public resources for all.

> ***"Now, the issue is also that access to education here is a bit difficult, because we are in a territory, let's say a receiving territory, a receiving municipality because we receive people […] who come to study, to live here, to seek opportunities here, so the number of people who apply is too many for the number of places that are assigned."** Daniel (male, 19)*

How safe it is to attend school varies significantly on the time of day and the region. In Antioquia, morning attendance is generally safer compared to afternoons, particularly for students residing in high-risk neighbourhoods. In Chocó, travelling to school early in the morning or late at night is particularly dangerous due to the potential presence of armed groups. It is common for students to travel in groups to enhance their safety. Daniel (male, 19) mentioned the need for safe transportation and highlighted that certain communities, like LGBTIQ+, need to be particularly careful.

[xxviii] In Colombia, 10th grade involves ages 15 to 16 and 11th grade involves ages 16 to 17.

> ***"It is a double schedule. For those who studied on the first schedule, which was in the morning, it was safe; that is, nothing happened. But it was a problem in the afternoon because we left at 6.15pm*** *[sic]* ***... Many students live in the most dangerous neighbourhoods up there. So, that was the problem."*** *Frijolito (male, 24)*

> ***"So, let's say, if they don't have enough money for the motorcycle ride or if they do, but only for the way back from the house and the road, there are some who have to get up early or come back … at 6 o'clock in the afternoon*** *[sic]*, ***so going there is a danger, a risk."*** *Ana (female, 24)*

Some participants also mentioned experiences of violent confrontations near their school which made school feel unsafe for them.

> ***"It was a little bit more disturbing, and there was a shooting, a confrontation, and we were there. One of them got into the school, and when they got there, they didn't care that there were children and*** *[the children]* ***had to hide so they wouldn't be seen."*** *Raquel (female, 22)*

Additionally, the presence of armed groups in the area can lead to periods where schools are closed, disrupting education. Schools in Antioquia are sometimes closed or suspended because of mining or armed strikes.

> ***"Classes are closed, because, for example: there is the strike, and one cannot go to study, because one goes out and something happens and one is left there. So the classes are closed until the strike is over."*** *Edil (female, 16)*

> ***"They take advantage of the armed groups, the opponents of the people here, and they take advantage of them to do things like rob you or do you any harm, that's where they take advantage because at night, the people here are more confident."*** *Jonas (male, 16)*

Safe transportation to and from school is paramount to ensure student safety. As Elías (male, 14) noted, "If you go on foot, it would be more risky".

There are notable gender differences in safety concerns related to attending school. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to harassment and violence, including being targeted by armed groups. This threat of violence leads to higher dropout rates among female students, who are then vulnerable to early pregnancy.

> ***"Well, some withdrew, they left, and others who continued to such an extent that they reached that point and withdrew, that is when they had their baby, they withdrew and did not come back."*** *Martha (female, 22)*

In contrast, boys are more likely to drop out due to recruitment by armed groups.

> ***"Some leave school to join the armed conflict."*** *Tecachi (male, 14)*

> ***"There were some because of violence and others who were bored and said they didn't like to study anymore and got into, for example, armed groups."*** *Elías (male, 14)*

Additional barriers to attending school or university include financial constraints and the need to commute to pursue desired studies. Daniel pointed to the need to commute to other cities for certain studies which posed challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic also forced some participants to halt their education. Although a less commonly cited barrier for school attendance, some families refrain from sending their children to school out of fear of facing violence.

To facilitate school attendance, participants suggested several strategies to tackle the barriers faced. Providing safe transportation to and from school was widely suggested, so that students could travel without fear. Enhancing school security measures and resources could also create a safer environment. Offering psychological support and accompaniment could help to address emotional and mental health needs, reducing dropout rates. Additionally, engaging students with projects and providing psychological support could prevent them from dropping out and joining armed groups. Motivational

talks and workshops could inspire students to continue their education. Addressing financial barriers by offering resources and support could help to keep students in school. By addressing these areas, participants thought the likelihood of consistent school attendance could be significantly improved.

> ***"Provide them with quality education, accompaniment** [and] **more than anything psychological protection…"** Martha (female, 22)*

> ***"Most of them lack motivation. Well, from the coordination, I am trying to implement talks and workshops to motivate them and encourage them to continue studying."** Maria (female, 20)*

Ethiopia

Around half of participants were not attending school due to threat of violence, destroyed infrastructure, displacement away from school, serious injury and child marriage.

Girls were said to leave school due to economic burdens, to help with household chores or care responsibilities, or to protect them once they reach puberty. Some girls interviewed in Tigray faced severe sexual violence by armed groups, leading them to leave school. Boys were said to drop out to become soldiers.

In Ethiopia, about half of the participants were not in school. Some said that this was due to the conflict while others highlighted child marriage as the reason.

In Afar, the impact of conflict on infrastructure and resources was discussed as a key reason for making learning difficult. In some cases, this was because the quality of educational resources was different in the host community. In others, schools, classrooms, libraries and materials such as exercise books and stationery had been destroyed during the conflict. Adola (female, 15), commented that this had an impact on the quality of teaching and the learning environment:

> ***"In this school, there is no library and there is also shortage of books, and many classes were destroyed by the war. We are just learning outside as all classes were destroyed and only the fence was left intact. On the other hand, we are not being taught as we used to be before and I think maybe the teacher become desperate. Most teachers have morale and energy before the war, however I think at the moment they gave up on everything because most of the school infrastructure was destroyed by the war, as a result the teaching and learning situation is not pleasing."***

> ***"Before the war, education was very important. Every young person had motivation for education. But now because of the destruction of our school, our desire to learn has decreased… now we have no computers and no library."** Barudi (male, 19)*

Similarly to participants in Afar, all participants in education in Tigray discussed difficulties faced by themselves and peers. These also related to destruction of schools, equipment and resources, decreased quality of education as well as the impact of injuries. Addi (female, 13) was hit by artillery in her arm and is now learning to write left-handed. Many discussed the impact that the war and displacement have had on their ability to focus; as a result, they have seen a decline in how well they are doing.

> ***"I am a clever student in my school before the war, but now my education result is decreased… before the war I get 1st or 2nd rank from my class, but now I am not doing well like before. There are a lot of things going in my head, I missed my mother and I have got a depression. I am depressed because I am worried about what I can eat and drink, and I feel like I become a burden upon my aunt. Hence, these things drag away my attention on education and so that is why my results decreased."** Tsebri (female, 18)*

> ***"We can't … focus on our education and we are unhappy… When you live being separated from your own family it has its own challenges. Hence, we have experienced***

bad time during the war and now we are in another difficult situation." *Humera (female, 22)*

"At the moment we are attending our education, but I am not in the mood like before. Before the war I have been good at my education, but at the present we just go to school for the sake of going. We are not able to focus on our education because we worry about many things. We think about how we can get out [of] this difficult situation and settle our life as before. We don't see any future for us." *Sheraro (female, 17)*

Tekeze (female, 16) explained that some students had quit education because of a lack of food. Addodas (female, 19) left education when she was in high school when her father arranged her marriage. Other reasons included losing interest in education due to the toll of the war, being prevented from re-entering education in host communities due to not having the right paperwork or fees, and classrooms and educational materials being destroyed. Abroborifaghe (female, 18) shared:

"I had great interest in learning. But when the war broke out, we stopped learning. We didn't attend class even for year. Due to the continued war, many of the children lost their parents… The high school we were learning at, its classrooms were burnt. The school was almost empty, no books and chairs. We shared one book for 12 students. Many students had no exercise books and uniforms."

In Tigray, of the participants who were out of education due to the conflict, this was primarily because of displacement, schools in host communities being full, and not having the necessary educational credentials or paperwork due to fleeing.

"Due to the war, I am forced to be displaced from my home and quit my education… the schools were full and they don't have the capacity to enrol students like me who were displaced." *Adigrat (female, 14)*

"I had quit school when the war broke out in 2013, and that is the moment Eritrean soldiers invade our living area and we were forced to flee our homes. After that I never got the chance to resume my education, but I want to continue my education." *Mekelle (male, 18)*

Due to her family being separated during displacement, including her father travelling to Sudan, Etigray (female, 16) gave up education when aged 12 to 13 to support her mother who had only a small income. Etigray goes door to door to wash clothes to earn money to help support her sister's education.

"Even though I am expected to be in school at this age, I have no choice but to work and support my family… I feel miserable because I want to attend my education and become productive person in the future."

Aba-Ala (female, 18) shared that she had left education because she was shot in the back during the conflict, and due to the pain she faces when sitting for long periods of time, she had to leave education. Motivation or interest to learn, or inability to concentrate due to the conflict was another key challenge discussed by participants from Afar.

"Before the war, I was very much interested in my education but now I lost my interest on it." *Bagado (female, 17)*

"I have started my education, but at the beginning I have been disturbed with the horrific memories of the war. It took me a while to focus on my education." *Baraulo (female, 20)*

Mille (female, 13) shared that she lost interest in education through fears around safety:

"The reason why I lost my interest in my education before was because I thought that the soldiers may came back again. We heard they have been raping girls and I have been worried a lot." *Mille (female, 13)*

Differing from Afar, participants in Tigray mentioned the impact of SGBV as a reason they no longer accessed education.

Tigray (female, 18) was raped after she was taken off a bus when fleeing her home and separated from her family. After falling pregnant, she is now raising her child and is unable to access education:

> ***"I was a successful grade ten student. However, I can't continue my education because of the war and also, I am raising a child at the moment. All these problems were the reasons that are pushing me away from my education."***

Other participants in Tigray also discussed depression and addiction due to experiences of war being a reason why young people were not attending school.

> ***"Many youngsters were in depression and even some of them were in mental disorder because they lost their parents, siblings, friends or relatives. I know some others who were unable to bear the impacts of the war and dropped out of school. The youths were the most affected ones because many were killed, and some others who survived were addicted to drugs."*** *Adbidora (male, 16)*

Barahle (female, 14) discussed the difficulty of juggling her education, alongside other responsibilities. Her mother became partially paralysed after giving birth to twins in a difficult situation while they fled conflict. Barahle now helps her mother and grandmother with household responsibilities and income generation.

> ***"Before the war I don't do any physical work but at the moment as my mother is not feeling healthy, I am taking care of the housework. I am in a big pressure. In the past, I go to school as soon as I get up, but now I have to cook a breakfast and I am always worried about not to be late for school."***

Some participants shared other reasons why youth or adolescents were not attending school. These included friends leaving education to become soldiers, or leaving the country altogether, or not being able to re-enter education due to the expenses.

> ***"There were students who didn't continue their education due to the war. They faced a lot of challenges. They even didn't have a school uniform. They had no money to cover the cost. Due to this, there are many students who dropped out of school."*** *Aculle (female, 18)*

> ***"When they were trying to resume their education, they were asked a lot** [of] **money to pay for their education. As a result, they gave up on their education because they can't afford the huge amount of money they were asked to pay."*** *Barri (male, 24)*

Barri also discussed youth, including his brother, facing challenges to continuing education due to being harassed by soldiers. He said that better reconciliation efforts were needed by the government to ensure ease of travel between the regions of Afar and Tigray.

Some participants also shared gendered barriers to education. Mille and Afambo (male, 15) discussed parents being less inclined to send girls to school due to the economic burden, the need for them to help with household chores or care responsibilities, or to prevent them being harmed by men once they reach puberty. Aculle and Aba-Ala discussed child marriage as a barrier to girls' education.

> ***"After the war, all the girls got married and they have children now. They also stopped learning."*** *Aculle (female, 18)*

> ***"There are factors that hinder them from continuing class.** [Child] **marriage is also another reason for them to stop going to school."*** *Aba-Ala (female, 18)*

> ***"Women have different burdens because they have jobs to carry out both in the house and outside. There are girls who were forced to drop out of school because** [of] **such burden and lack of educational materials."*** *Tezeke (female, 16)*

Adolay (female, 20) discussed the recovery from childbirth and healing as a barrier to education. Aculle also indicated a level of social stigma towards survivors of SGBV acting as a barrier to education:

> ***"The girls who were raped still feel that others talk about them, and they feel ashamed. But some of them continued learning. It would be better if you approach them, keep their secrets and help them. Some people point their finger at and talk about them. Identifying those ladies and helping them in any possible way is still recommended."***

Activities that were suggested to help youth attend school were the government and NGOs providing support for education to empower youth, awareness-raising activities around the importance of education especially among parents, and financial support towards school fees and necessities like food. Gudom (female, 22) discussed the possibility of loans to set up small businesses so she could afford to send her children to school. Moral support, advice and encouragement were mentioned by Tekeze and Adbidora (male, 16). Finally, Dansha (female, 17) shared that IDPs should receive additional support to help access and concentrate when in education. Participants also put forward the need for additional assistance for young women who have dropped out of school (because of pregnancy) to re-enter education, such as reducing stigma and improved support from teachers.

> ***"I think it would support women if the school entrance day is increased and given a break. I think it would be good if teachers help when they are sick and provide educational support. As long as we are women, pregnancy is inevitable. If both male and female students are careful not to hurt pregnant students with bad words."*** *Adolay (female, 20)*

Philippines

Financial constraints in the context of conflict have caused a number of participants to leave school. More than a third cited feeling unsafe when going to school. Displacement was also a factor.

Boys and young men were thought more likely to be no longer in school than girls, mainly because they had to find jobs or do farmwork to contribute to their families' incomes.

More than half of the participants in the Philippines were not in school, although many still attended Arabic schools for memorising the Qur'an.[xxix] Many of the girls and young women who were no longer in school are now working or selling items such as cooking oil instead. Fatima (female, 15) shared that she had to stop studying a long time ago (when she was 10 years old) due to the war. She doesn't attend any other Alternative Learning Support (ALS) programmes due to the shootings in the area. She also shared that her siblings have only gone as far as kindergarten.

> ***"I want them to learn even just a little. But they say that from grades 10 to 12,[xxx] the expenses are higher, and Dad won't be able to afford my education even more. I didn't attend my elementary graduation because we didn't have money."*** *Fatima (female, 15)*

Dalia (female, 14) had also stopped formal education due to the conflict and now assisted her mother at home with washing, laundry and other household chores. Khalid (male, 21) had reached grade 6 but dropped out due to conflict.[xxxi] Samir (male, 15) and Rania (female, 21) mentioned that while they were still in school it was difficult to study properly with all the disruptions the conflict brought.

[xxix] Amira (female, 24) mentioned that parents usually manage to keep children in the Arabic schools as they are free, unlike formal education.
[xxx] Grades 10 to 12 in the Philiippines would usually involve pupils aged 15 to 18 years.
[xxxi] Grade 6 in the Philippines would be usually for pupils aged 11 to 12 years.

> ***"Here in our area… because of the (gun) shootings, I've entered many schools, transferring from one to another. It's been changing since kindergarten. From grades 1 to 3, I attended a different school."*** *Rania (female, 21)*

Many others shared that their reason for dropping out was affordability rather than conflict. However, the conflict has a related indirect effect as a majority of participants mentioned livelihoods being affected directly by the conflict. Mahid (male, 18) now teaches at the Madrasah but explains that he had to stop formal education because of the costs:

> ***"I stopped studying, no matter how much I wanted to, I couldn't do anything. I only reached grade 6 but I didn't graduate. Instead, I studied Arabic here[xxxii] because the expenses were more manageable compared to English.[xxxiii] It's now interrupted because looking for a job and taking care of my study expenses without seeing my parents, it's difficult."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

> ***"I stopped studying English*** *[formal education]* ***because my mother couldn't afford to send me to school anymore due to her many commitments […] It's better to study at Tahfeedz[xxxiv] because they provide better resources. That's why I study there instead."*** *Rasheed (male, 17)*

Zahra (female, 19) and her four brothers and seven sisters all stopped studying because they lacked financial support in order to continue. She shared that she wanted to pursue education to find a good job and aims to finish her studies in the future. However, she now prioritises helping her family by harvesting mung beans. Aisha (female, 24) had studied last year in an ALS programme but was forced to stop during the conflict and because she could no longer afford it. Amira (female, 24) also studied through the ALS programme and would like to go to high school if she had the money:

> ***"My spouse said not to prioritise it yet and to focus on the children's education in formal school first. Because of the crisis, they come first."***

More than a third of participants said they did not feel safe travelling to school,[xxxv] mainly due to gunfire or the risk of stray bullets. Mariam (female, 21) said that she did not feel safe as women are also targeted. Fatima shared that there were rumours of child abductions, and the gunfire made them afraid to go out – this was why she and so many other young people had stopped attending. Samir said his road to school was too dangerous:

> ***"To keep our education progressing, we now only go to school occasionally and are given modules to study on our own."***

A third of participants did feel safe when travelling to school. For example, Khalid shared that this was because in his municipality a truck picks them up to take them to school. Youssef (male, 17) also shared that he felt safe as his school was close by and accessible. Most participants felt safe at school. Dalia shared that while there can be shootouts, she had not experienced any while at school as classes are normally suspended in such instances. Aisha and Amira said that they were nervous at school or the learning centre.

> ***"We will not go to school if there is an ongoing conflict. We are afraid that we might be left behind if there is an evacuation and we have to flee."*** *Aisha (female, 24)*

The main other educational challenge raised by participants was having no money for school fees. Amira shared that there was no rice at home and her children have no allowance for school. Dalia noted the conflict was the main reason she stopped school; she also noted the expense of school had contributed:

[xxxii] The participant is referring to the Arabic school.
[xxxiii] "English" is the term used by participants to mean western or formal education.
[xxxiv] An Arabic school where someone studies the Qur'an in order to memorise it.
[xxxv] This includes those who travel to formal education and those who travel to Arabic school.

> ***"What I desire is to continue my studies. I long to return to school, but I lack the necessary funds at present. My mother remains silent, only saying, 'We can't do anything', as our financial situation has yet to improve."***

Fatima also noted that she went to school before the conflict but did not attend for long as her father was struggling:

> ***"When we stopped schooling, both of us entered the Madrasah, but I also had to stop that because we couldn't afford it. My friend continued her studies because her mother works abroad. I told my father that I didn't want to stop studying because I wanted to learn and memorise the entire Qur'an. My father replied that he couldn't afford the expenses and fees […] He also mentioned the daily food expenses. The uniform costs 300 pesos, which is expensive. He added that no matter how much I want to study English or Arabic, we really can't afford it because we don't have money."***

Some participants had to stop school to support their parents financially or to support their parents with childcare.

> ***"Maybe I shouldn't be taking care of the children, and these siblings of mine shouldn't be my responsibility yet. I should just be studying, but I end up taking care of my siblings because our parents are out earning a living. Days and weeks pass by, and I'm just watching over my siblings. Until I can't go to school anymore."*** *Rania (female, 21)*

Other challenges raised were floods which impact school attendance, COVID-19 and child marriage. Participants felt that both genders faced the same obstacles in relation to education. More than half the participants shared that there were many adolescents and youth who were no longer in education in Mindanao. Many had friends who had stopped attending school.

> ***"…since I'm also a youth advocate, sometimes we conduct surveys, and there are youths who are no longer studying."*** *Mariam (female, 21)*

Most again cited the lack of funds as the issue. Tariq said that many parents could no longer work and therefore could not support education, so many youth were instead helping with farming or household chores.

> ***"That's usually the reason they stop studying because here in our place, livelihood opportunities are really scarce. There are quite a lot of them. What I know is that firstly, it's due to the lack of funds, and secondly, they feel embarrassed because they're already grown up. Some are embarrassed to return to school because they might end up having younger classmates. Also, the conflicts happening here affect them because the children are still afraid, to some extent. But there are still some who continue with their studies."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

Most participants felt that more boys and young men were no longer in school in comparison with girls, mainly because boys and young men had to find jobs or farm to help their families.

> ***"Because when they stop schooling, they tend to contribute more to their families by selling goods or working. Because of this, they often do not return to school."*** *Rania (female, 21)*

> ***"More boys are seeking*** *[odd]* ***jobs while girls are attending school because girls can find employment more quickly*** *[when they graduate]."* *Aisha (female, 24)*

Other reasons cited were that boys tend to cut class to play basketball or hang out with friends. Rasheed thought boys also prioritise Arabic school more. Four participants thought boys and girls were equally affected by non-school attendance with two saying it was because both enter child marriages.

> ***"Both boys and girls are affected because many are engaging in child marriage nowadays… Both boys and girls are affected because there are many cases of child marriage nowadays. For boys, I'm not sure if it can be considered child marriage because their parents don't necessarily force them into it."*** *Mariam (female, 21)*

Only two participants thought that girls were more affected. Mahid said that this was because girls in this area leave to do domestic work abroad.[xxxvi] Displacement was another reason cited for adolescents leaving education.

The main ways that participants thought adolescents and youth could be supported to stay in school was through financial support or providing scholarship. They also suggested supporting out-of-school children and youth to gain access to ALS programmes or TESDA (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority) training.[xxxvii] Khalid previously attended an Alternative Education Technical and Vocational training and self-employment training with Plan International and suggested this was a good option.

When asked what should be done to support girls and boys specifically in school, suggestions for both genders included support for school materials and uniforms, as well as expenses and food. For girls and young women, two participants recommended ALS modules or TESDA training. Mariam suggested that these would be particularly useful for married girls and young mothers. Amira said that boys should be enrolled in ALS modules.

4.4 Health

4.4.1 Emotional changes due to conflict

When quantitative participants were asked about emotional changes in their wellbeing that were due to the conflict they had experienced, most participants reported being unable to sleep (55.1%), feeling tense (being unable to relax) (53.8%), constantly worrying (53.6%), feeling frustrated (43.3%) and feeling hopeless (41.4%).

Differences by gender

Table 14: Participants' experiences of emotional changes due to conflict, by gender

Have you experienced any of the following emotional changes in relation to your wellbeing due to the conflict that you have experienced over the past year?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Unable to sleep	2643	**58.4%**	2226	51.7%	4869	**55.1%**
Feeling tense - being unable to relax	2601	**57.4%**	2158	50.1%	4759	**53.8%**
Continuous worrying	2610	**57.7%**	2131	49.3%	4741	**53.6%**
Difficulty concentrating	1927	42.5%	1596	37%	3523	39.8%
Feeling lonely	1679	37.1%	1420	33%	3099	35.1%
Frustration	2105	**46.5%**	1724	39.9%	3829	**43.3%**
Feeling continuously sad	1859	41%	1447	33.5%	3306	37.3%
Feeling hopeless	2010	**44.3%**	1659	38.3%	3669	**41.4%**
Feeling guilty	968	21.4%	809	18.7%	1777	20.1%
Feeling irritable	1557	34.4%	1258	29.1%	2815	31.8%
Having no motivation or interest in things	1695	37.4%	1353	31.4%	3048	34.5%
Having suicidal thoughts	582	12.9%	457	10.6%	1039	11.8%

[xxxvi] In Mindanao it is common for families to send girls and young women abroad to various parts of the Middle East to work as domestic helpers.
[xxxvii] The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority is a government agency in the Philippines responsible for overseeing and managing technical and vocational education and skills development.

Other emotional change	623	13.8%	482	11.2%	1105	12.5%
Total	4511	100%	4302	100%	8813	100%

For the emotional changes that were most reported, there were significant gender differences in reference to participants' being unable to sleep, being unable to relax, worrying constantly, being frustrated, and feeling hopeless**.**

In all cases girls and young women reported significantly higher frequencies of these emotional changes than boys and young men.

Differences by age group

Older participants (aged 20 to 24) reported significantly higher frequencies of feeling unable to relax when compared to younger participants (55.1% vs 52.5%), of worrying constantly (55.7% vs 51.4%) and of being frustrated (44.7% vs 41.9%).

Differences by country

There were significant country differences in the frequency of the most reported emotional changes due to conflict.

In Ethiopia, the frequency of reports of being unable to sleep (15.1%) and being unable to relax (16.8%) were significantly higher compared to all other countries. Participants from Colombia and Mozambique reported the lowest frequency for being unable to sleep (6.6% and 5.3% respectively) and being unable to relax (6.2% and 7.3%) compared to all other countries.

The frequency of reports of continuous worrying was significantly higher for participants in Lebanon (12.7%), Nigeria (12.4%), Cameroon (11.5%) and Sudan (11.4%) compared to all other countries.

In reference to being frustrated, participants from Sudan (13.7%), Ethiopia (13.3%) and Lebanon (12.6%) reported significantly higher frequencies of this emotional change compared to all other countries.

When participants reported feeling hopeless, reporting frequencies for Ethiopia and Lebanon were significantly higher (16.9% and 14.4%) than all other countries.[xxxviii] Participants from Colombia and the Philippines reported a significantly lower frequency of feeling hopeless (3.4% and 2.4%).

Difference by living status

For participants who remained at home there was a significantly higher frequency of reporting being unable to sleep compared to participants who identified as IDPs (63.4% vs 58.5%).

Refugee participants reported a significantly higher frequency of being unable to relax (68%) when compared to participants who remained at home (59.9%) and IDPs (59.2%). Similarly, refugee participants reported a significantly higher frequency of feeling frustrated (55.2%) when compared to IDPs (49.3%) and to participants who remained at home (47.5%).

Participants who stayed at home reported a significantly lower frequency of worrying constantly (59.4%) compared to refugees (63.8%) and IDPs (64.4%).

Refugee participants reported a significantly higher frequency of feeling hopeless (49.9%) compared to IDPs (44.6%) and participants who remained at home (47.1%).

Differences by minority

Participants identifying as minority groups reported significantly higher frequencies of emotional changes due to conflict compared to participants who did not identify as a listed minority group. These

[xxxviii] These results are the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, one of the highest frequencies was in the country that cannot be named.

changes included trouble sleeping (52.1% vs 47.7%), feeling tense (50.6% vs 47.5%), continuous worrying (53.6% vs 43.9%), frustration (42.7% vs 35.8%), and feeling hopeless (39.2% vs 36.6%).

4.4.2 Insights from qualitative interviews

Cameroon

Participants described the negative emotional impact of conflict, including constant worrying and inability to sleep. Across regions, there were discrepancies regarding the accessibility of support services for emotional distress or SRH services.

Participants thought that more girls were becoming pregnant during conflict for various reasons, including not being at school and sexual violence by armed groups.

Most participants in Cameroon said that the conflict had an emotional impact on them or on others around them. Participants in the Southwest mentioned living in fear or feeling sad, while most participants in the Northwest said the conflict affected their ability to sleep because of the gunshots. Bessong (female, 24) missed her father, family and friends. Her grandmother also cried because she missed her family but they knew that they could not go back which made them feel "bad" all the time. Dalma (female, 13) shared that her mum worries without her husband, which in turn worries Dalma. Kimbi (male, 13) noted that he was not motivated to do anything.

> ***"When we lost our dad, my mom almost died because of it."*** *Yisah (female, 17)*

Some participants noted that peoples' behaviours had changed as a result of the emotional toll of the conflict. Makola (male, 19) said that people were now more distrustful.

> ***"Some IDPs I used to discuss with tell me that they are afraid any time they hear a loud sound. They think it's a gun and some have problem sleeping because they see dead bodies and blood."*** *Makola (male, 19)*

> ***"Sometimes my mom acts isolated and stays alone without communicating to us and it got me worried at times."*** *Dalma (female, 13)*

Responses were mixed on whether there was support available to help with these types of experiences. Some participants said there was support but it was clear it was not formalised support – rather it was friends or family whom participants said they could talk to. Dalma noted there was a stronger need for support from friends and relatives as people were traumatised from the experiences they faced due to the crisis. Unlike the Southwest, the majority of participants in the Northwest said that there was formalised support available such as counselling. But many noted the availability of this service had decreased. About one-third mentioned non-formal support such as having someone they could talk to when they need support.

In relation to youth access to SRH services, responses were again split: about half of participants said that there were no SRH services in the area but also noted that this was the case before the conflict. The other half said that services were available but mostly in relation to sex education which you could attend. Tabe (female, 14) noted that she only started learning about SRHR education when she moved to the area. Again, there were differences across regions. More than half of the participants in the Northwest said that there was youth access to SRH services and this was more available since the conflict began. Only Yisah and Akungha noted that it had been available before the conflict, but Akungha referred to parents and teachers teaching about SRHR education rather than actual services.

Most participants thought the number of girls in the area who were pregnant had increased because of the conflict. Participants thought this was due to girls no longer attending school or that some girls had moved in with boys or young men to escape a bad home situation. Rape was also cited as a reason for the increase in teenage pregnancies.

> ***"Most girls are school dropout[s] so they become pregnant so they can have someone to look after them."*** *Tateh (female, 20)*

> ***"More girls are getting married, more are leaving school, sexual violence, forced to have a baby, and they do it to gain protection from their partner."*** *Ikome (male, 16)*

In the Northwest, participants generally cited sexual violence as the predominant cause of early pregnancy. Yisah shared that this was mostly perpetrated by the military or the armed groups. Other reasons given were girls not attending school and poverty.

> ***"This is because they don't go to school and they walk up and down in the community and at the end they are been deceived by either the military or the non-state armed groups, some are even raped."*** *Yong (male, 23)*

Colombia

Participants shared that the emotional distress they felt was due to displacement or from hearing about acts of violence.

Participants were generally aware of available mental and sexual health support services, although this seems to be reported mainly by participants in Chocó.

Participants across Colombia believed that more girls aged 12 to 14 were becoming pregnant.

The participants in Colombia said that the armed conflict was having psychological and emotional impacts on them.

They mentioned experiencing feelings of anguish, fear, depression, insomnia and anxiety. Daniel (male, 19) said that he experienced psychological impacts around the time of his displacement. Adriana (female, 20) said that she sometimes experienced anxiety and feared hearing of acts of violence which made her worry and not want to leave home. Valentina (female, 18) feels anguish from past experiences of the conflict but thought that it was necessary just to learn to deal with it.

> ***"We ourselves are too affected by stress and it gives us anxiety, it gives us headaches, it gives us everything."*** *Yirlesa (female, 18)*

Martha (female, 22) said that she and her mother had been affected a lot and were left with post-traumatic effects from the conflict. Tori (female, 16) also said that her mother had been affected and was constantly worrying or having nightmares but she was improving. Ana (female, 24) said that her grandmother had been affected emotionally after her uncle was shot.

Rodolfo (male, 17) and Isabel (female, 22) said that both males and females suffered from the emotional impact, but Andrea felt that women were more affected by mental health issues. Only Raúl (male, 17) and Tecachi (male, 14) said that they had not noticed any emotional impacts.

Most participants said there was some form of mental health services available for people experiencing psychological or emotional impacts. Raquel (female, 22) had received psychological help which she found helpful especially when she hears gunshots which can take her back to bad experiences:

> ***"We were put in the group of displaced people, then at a time I received psychological help. I went to a psychologist every week. I left her when the pandemic started. Even so she called me sometimes and we had sessions. She told me what to do, to lie down in the room and I started talking to her. She told me what to do then sometimes to calm my anxiety."***

Isabel knew of services through a course she was accessing through a foundation. Johana (female, 17) had previously attended some services for family problems. Andrea had also attended previously but did not find it helpful. Raúl said his sister worked for an organisation that provided mental health services, but the programme no longer exists, and no permanent support exists – they just had to rely on friends.

Ana mentioned that people often did not trust institutions. She thought that some people with knowledge may go for help, but many people did not know where to go. She shared that she used to cry a lot in the past, but this has improved with the support from the association that teaches her about self-care, self-protection and resilience:

> ***"They helped me in my emotional life, my self-esteem […] For example, the Red Cross came here. Last year I participated in a psychological, psychosocial talk, they gave us psychosocial talks about emotions. So, well, when I listened, I heard new words, or, for example, aptitudes that sometimes you have, but you don't know, that you develop."***

Other participants preferred to rely on themselves, or their family. Martha said that she has not been offered any formal support but prefers to talk to family and relatives anyway. She said that she is distrustful and fearful of psychologists but acknowledged that it could be linked to her confidence because of the things she has experienced in the conflict.

Some participants noted being able to get referrals at hospitals, but others pointed to flaws or gaps in mental health support. Calle and Daniel (males, 21 and 19) said there were not enough people working in mental health services given the population it needed to serve. Valentina also noted that services were available at school but things became more difficult once a student was no longer at school. Daniel shared that access was very complicated and getting an appointment was difficult. It took him more than three months to access the service. His sister also accessed support after being abused but he noted the institutional response was short and only lasted three months. This experience led him to advocate with the mayor's office to set up a psychological helpline, such as those in other big cities like Medellín. He was also critical of campaigns carried out by the government which he believed do the bare minimum with flyers saying "if you feel lonely, talk to someone". He believed that a helpline would be a lot more beneficial. David (male, 17) noted that there was a psychologist in town, but most people go to another town as the one in town did not have a good reputation:

> ***"Supposedly because when people express themselves, he acts as if he were scolding, so people don't like that because some psychologists usually give good advice. And this one here in this institution is supposedly very rude, so people don't like to talk to the psychologist there."***

Calle also shared that there could be a stigma around seeking mental health support:

> ***"When people go, they are afraid to talk about it, because they start pointing fingers. So, if they tell you, let's go to psychology, you say, that's for crazy people. Instead of making you calm down, they make you feel more fear. I want to, I feel alone, I feel bad, I need help from someone, but I don't see anyone helping me... and there are people who just want to talk to someone and that's it."***

In relation to youth access to SRH services, a third of participants in Antioquia mentioned that SRH services were available, mainly family planning services from hospitals where it was possible to get an intrauterine device (IUD) or condoms. Martha shared that clinics sometimes call adolescents to tell them to come and make an appointment and give out condoms and SRH education. Ana said that it was also possible to go for menstrual hygiene products. Andrés (male, 21) and Calle shared that people could access medication for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as well as HIV tests. Daniel criticised the services for not performing well, adding that sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and STDs were common in the area and HIV rates were rising. He shared that many women find out they have HIV when pregnant and that for HIV services, people often need to go to the capital city of the regional department which is 5.5 hours away, as the specialist only comes once a month or every two months.

Valentina said that schools have campaigns or a special week where they have stands and give out menstrual hygiene products and condoms. Frijolito (male, 24) also mentioned campaigns at school and received talks about SRHR education where they were given condoms and taught how to put them on. Several other participants in Antioquia said that they wouldn't know where to go for SRH services.

In Chocó, most participants knew where youth could access SRHR services. Isabel said that many foundations mainly cater for women and girls. She believed this was because women are more vulnerable to pregnancy and STDs and women have more to lose:

> ***"Responsibility falls on the woman, exactly, you are the one who wants to plan, you are the one who doesn't want to have children, you are the one who has to plan*** *[contraception methods]."* *Isabel (female, 22)*

Johana, Andrea and Yirlesa were also involved with a foundation where it was possible to access condoms; there was a woman who worked there whom they felt comfortable talking to about SRH. Rodrigo and Raúl said that sometimes there are campaigns where they give talks and give away condoms, but they are not helpful. Others in Chocó spoke less about services, but a number of participants had received talks or SRH lessons at school.

Most participants across regions thought that the number of girls becoming pregnant in the area had increased but this was not linked to the conflict. Some participants said that adolescent pregnancy was normalised in their community due to a lack of SRHR education. Participants saw girls who were pregnant from about 12 to 14 years.

Yirlesa said that sometimes girls have children to escape problems at home. Isabel said that it was mostly due to girls not having economic opportunities or being in a bad home environment; but she also said that girls were not taking care of themselves as contraceptive methods and condoms were available – however, she acknowledged that sometimes family support was lacking. Johana also thought that increased pregnancy was due to a lack of care by girls as they get involved with "bad guys".

Some participants shared that young girls are usually impregnated by older men in their mid-20s and 30s. Martha said that girls aged 12 to 14 years from her village who got pregnant were generally with men from armed groups, but she still thought the main reason was a lack of education.

> ***"About contraceptives, planning methods, because they don't know that the hospital gives them the contraceptive, or they get the implant so they can plan. Most of them don't know..."*** *Martha (female, 22)*

Andrea had seen girls aged from 11 to 14 years who were pregnant. She said that sometimes they had the child by choice but sometimes they were forced to have the child, or other times they were forced to have an abortion. Elías said that he saw girls pregnant from the age of 13 all over Chocó and that they would drop out of school. Jonás shared that sometimes they would return to school to go to night courses so they could work during the day. However, Yirlesa noted that some partners would forbid girls from studying.

Only Ana thought that early pregnancy among girls had increased directly due to the conflict. Calle did however note that the conflict can have an indirect impact as the government could not reach certain communities to give talks or provide opportunities:

> ***"But the conflict also comes in because the greater the conflict, I believe that the state as such, cannot enter a township to provide training to young people."***

Abortion was also raised by Daniel and Calle. Daniel shared that sometimes men force girls to get abortions which were not medically assisted and took place after the recommended timeline which meant girls end up being hospitalised. Calle also shared that if girls become pregnant by someone in an armed group, they are sometimes forced to have an abortion as the member already has a wife or girlfriend.

Ethiopia

Nearly all participants discussed the emotional impact of conflict on mental health, whether in relation to themselves, loved ones, or others. Many participants wanted mental and physical healthcare support, such as counselling, psychological support and training, and help for addiction, for themselves, family or youth – who were considered most affected by the war.

Some participants discussed pregnancies in relation to SGBV and shared the social stigma associated with such experiences.

Participants in Ethiopia spoke of grief over losing loved ones, the loss of their former lives or separation from families. They also discussed the fear they experienced while fleeing, their shock from witnessing dead bodies, and of having a sense of hopelessness, depression, difficulty sleeping and addiction issues.

Participants from Tigray emphasised that overall youth were most affected by the conflict.

> ***"Many youngsters were in depression and even some of them were in mental disorder because they lost their parents, siblings, friends or relatives. I know some others who were unable to bear the impacts of the war and dropped out of school... The youths were the most affected ones because many were killed, and some others who survived were addicted to drugs. The youths were addicted to drugs because the war have changed their mindset and they became hopeless or depressed. Many youngsters whom you don't expect that they will take a drug, now they were chewing khat."***[xxxix] *Abdibora (male, 16)*

Several participants were experiencing grief over the death of a parent which had led to depression. Hawzen (female, 19) shared that the depression from losing her mother had led to effects such as stopping menstruation for a year and not being able to communicate with people. Tsebri (female, 18) witnessed her mother being killed in front of her, and as a result experienced frequent headaches, depression and had tried to commit suicide.[xl]

> ***"This war took away my father and other people whom I know, and because of these incidents I live with a depression. I am still grieving over the death of my father."*** *Korem (male, 18)*

Adolay (female, 20) who lost her newborn son spoke of being "very disturbed" from her grief. Barahle (female, 14), whose mother lost newborn twins, said her mother now cries a lot and she feels that her mother is suicidal.

Almost half the participants noted that young people were experiencing emotional struggles and depression, and were seen to be particularly affected.

About a third of the participants shared that young people were using drugs as a coping mechanism.

> ***"The other teenagers who were there were depressed, and they started to use benzine as a drug to forget the horror they have seen and their starvation. They were just between eight and nine years of age and there were even some children who were dead with the use of drugs."*** *Baraulo (female, 20)*

> ***"I know some people who chew chat and use benzine as an addictive drug because of their mental status or the trauma."*** *Adola (female, 15)*

Physical health impacts were also discussed by participants in Afar. Etafar (female, 24) and Barri (male, 24) had experienced serious leg injuries. The latter was hit by artillery and broke his leg fleeing which later became infected. Other participants spoke more generically of youth being injured and disabled during the war. Some participants discussed treatment being available for these conditions. Etafar

[xxxix] Khat, also known as chat, is a herbal stimulant.
[xl] This was followed up with the safeguarding country officer.

shared that there were challenges regarding the expense of medical bills. Aba-Ala (female, 18) was shot in the back and said that the treatment received was not enough; she remained in pain which has led to her dropping out of school. She discussed her desire for more physical treatment as well as psychological support. The majority of participants in Afar cited a lack of access to healthcare support due to a scarcity of medicines and equipment or due to facilities having been destroyed during the war. Long journeys to clinics were also mentioned.

In Tigray, there were also problems with access to general healthcare due to a lack of medicines and equipment within facilities – particularly in IDP camps – or due to facilities being destroyed and medicines being too expensive.

> ***"…even if I want that metal to be removed out of my arm, we don't afford the medical cost. We don't have any money, but I am sick …health facilities were destroyed and looted. Therefore, currently I am not able to get any medical service because there are no optional health service centres equipped with medicine and other health instruments."*** *Addi (male, 13)*

> ***"…even if you try to go to a health centre to be treated there is no medicine. The health practitioners will examine you and then tell you they don't have a medicine in the health centre and we are advised to buy the medicine outside the compound of the health centre."*** *Gudom (female, 22)*

As a result, participants discussed people simply having to go without, turning to traditional medicine, or using holy water.

> ***"The solution we are using at the moment is taking traditional medicine, even if we don't know the dose or if it's approved scientifically. We are using every type of traditional medicines to survive."*** *Shire (female, 21)*

Some participants noted that people are dying from preventable illnesses and from giving birth:

> ***"…Due to the poor health facilities in here we have witnessed many people are dying from illnesses that can be treated. There were even women who have died when giving birth, and it's a difficult situation."*** *Afambo (male, 15)*

Two participants also discussed the prevalence of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Addodas (female, 19) explained that due to this practice, girls were experiencing very painful births or risked dying in childbirth. Bagado (female, 17) emphasised that the practice must be stopped.

> ***"Moreover, as many girls pass through circumcision in Afar, when they give a birth, they experience either painful time or sometimes they die. Thus, after the child marriage, giving birth is also the biggest challenge for girls."*** *Addodas (female, 19)*

Most participants requested psychological support or improved health treatment for themselves or a loved one. This was particularly noted when discussing SGBV. Many pointed to a lack of mental wellbeing support for the many women who had been raped during war, as well as a lack of follow-up physical medical care including for pregnancies, or other related treatments, and similarly the lack of medicine or equipment available. Shire (female, 21) discussed suffering from depression and addiction to cope with her experience of SGBV while she was held captive by armed groups. She stated that she was not able to access physical or mental healthcare:

> ***"You can't … find a health service in here because they don't have the capacity at all. For instance, I frequently went to health centres to get a mental and psychological treatment, but I never had the chance to get any kind of help or treatment in these health centres. In addition, they don't have medicines and medical equipment."*** *Shire (female, 21)*

Axum (female, 20), a survivor of SGBV, was able to access healthcare. She discussed receiving tests for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. However, she described ongoing physical complications four years on, suggesting a lack of effective aftercare, as well as the difficulties she faced when giving birth due to lack of medicine and medical equipment:

> ***"…after the rape I become pregnant and gave a birth to this child when I get here… The health service is also poor and for instance, when I gave birth, the doctors and nurses don't even have basic materials like gloves. The nurses treated me with their bare hands. We also don't have access to medicines, and I gave birth in a very difficult situation... If you go to health centres to get a service, most of the time you can't find medicines and if you go outside to find one it's very expensive."***

Some female participants also mentioned the lack of services to support menstrual hygiene management, including being forced to use unsafe materials.

> ***"I don't have access to a medical service. We don't even be able to get some basic materials like sanitary pads and we were forced to use unsafe materials."*** *Tigray (female, 18)*

> ***"The third problem that young girls are facing is related to hygiene and sanitary materials. Young girls like me don't have access to basic hygiene materials like sanitary pad, pants, soap and other wash materials."*** *Etigray (female, 16)*

Participants in Tigray discussed pregnancies in relation to SGBV, including the social stigma associated with having such experiences. An example was given of a woman who was raped in front of many people; she subsequently appeared to be pregnant, but her husband and family ostracised her, leaving her with no one to help. As a consequence, she was described as having given up, not having received any medical treatment, and was spending all day sleeping. Shire (female, 21) was herself mocked as a survivor of SGBV and discussed not wanting to return to her home because of this:

> ***"… after the war when those people try to mock you for what you have gone through, it poses another challenge which leads to depression. For example, I love my home where I was born and raised, but I don't want to get back or live there anymore. That is because I don't want to live with such kind of society who mocks over your pain."***

Philippines

Participants shared their sadness and fear around the conflict, including how these emotional impacts lead to physical effects.

Generally, participants said that support services were not available to them for their mental or sexual health, although two said a health centre provides SRHR services.

There was a mix across participants as to whether the number of girls becoming pregnant had increased or stayed the same.

Half the participants in the Philippines felt that the conflict had an emotional impact on them or on those around them. Participants mentioned feelings of sadness and feeling scared that there would be more turmoil. Tariq (male, 13) said his father worried that there would be more shootings and so they try to tell him stories to keep his mind off the worry:

> ***"When we chat, he becomes happy, but when we leave, he seems to return to worrying again."***

Mahid and Youssef noted the physical effects combined with emotional ones in relation to the experience of displacement:

> ***"One effect it has on me personally is feeling tired in the body. Secondly, our mind struggles to think about what's good and where to stay. And we don't sleep well, and it's tiring."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

> ***"One of my siblings was surprised and asked why we evacuated, and my mother said it's because our place has become scary. I experienced extreme coldness during***

> ***evacuation, especially during rainy seasons, so I used a malong to protect myself from the cold."*** [xli] *Youssef (male, 17)*

Farhana (female, 21) noted changes in people's behaviours due to the emotional trauma. But two young female participants said that they were not aware of anyone experiencing emotional impacts from the conflict. Participants said that there were no support services available for those experiencing emotional trauma. Mariam (female, 21) said that they had to face their problems alone. Two participants mentioned relying on family, whom they could speak to when experiencing emotional trauma.

Most participants did not know if there was youth access to SRHR services and instead spoke about where they could access general health services such as vaccines and medications. Fatima (female, 15) said that her family had nowhere to access medicine or soap because there were none in the *barangay.*[xlii] A small number of participants (both male and female) noted that SRHR services could be accessed through the local health centre. However, Dalia (female, 13) stated that she relied on her mother's sibling for menstrual health supplies and did not know about any SRHR services in the *barangay*.

Fewer than half the participants said that the number of pregnant girls in the community had not increased. The main reason given was that child marriage was not allowed, or that men and boys could not go to girls' houses. Youssef (male, 17) felt the conflict had decreased the number of cases as people had other things to focus on:

> *"[the number of]* ***…pregnant women here don't increase much, probably because people are more focused on finding a safe place to go during times of war."***

In contrast, a quarter of participants felt that the number of pregnancies had increased because of child marriages in relation to the conflict.

> ***"We can't deny that after a prolonged evacuation or displacement, some people might start considering other options, especially if it's been a long time. For instance, in an evacuation where you stay for several months, people might start thinking of other arrangements and find ways to cope."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

4.5 Livelihoods and economic security

4.5.1 Effect of conflict on participants' livelihoods/household income

In the survey, participants were asked about how much conflict had affected their livelihood or household income on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being not affected at all, to 5 being extremely affected. The majority of participants reported that their income had been at least moderately affected by conflict (63.2%). Child and adolescent participants responded based on their caregivers' livelihood/household income, while young adult participants either reported on their own livelihood or that of their caregivers' livelihood/household income.

Most participants reported their livelihood/household income being moderately, very or extremely affected by conflict (63.2%).

[xli] The *malong* is a traditional Filipino-Bangsamoro rectangular or tube-like wraparound skirt bearing a variety of geometric or okir designs. The *malong* is traditionally used as a garment by both men and women of the numerous ethnic groups in mainland Mindanao.

[xlii] In the Philippines, a *barangay* is the smallest administrative unit.

Differences by gender

Table 15: Conflict effect on participants' livelihoods, by gender

In what ways has the conflict in your country or region affected you or your household's livelihood/household income?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
Scale	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Not affected at all (1)	748	15.6%	844	17.6%	1592	16.6%
Slightly affected (2)	951	19.8%	1001	20.8%	1952	20.3%
Moderately affected (3)	1084	22.5%	975	20.3%	2059	**21.4%**
Very affected (4)	1191	24.8%	1074	22.4%	2265	**23.6%**
Extremely affected (5)	836	17.4%	910	18.9%	1746	**18.2%**
Total	4810	100%	4804	100%	9614	100%

The following analyses focused on examining the differences in how much conflict had affected their livelihood/income between genders, age group, country and minority group, treating the responses as ordinal data. Participants reported the effect of conflict on their livelihoods in terms of discrete intervals on a scale where 1 represented not affected at all and 5 represented extremely affected.

Differences by age group

Older participants (aged 20 to 24) reported that their livelihood/household income was significantly more affected than younger participants (15 to 19). In fact, 65 per cent of older participants reported their livelihood as being at least moderately affected by conflict compared to 61.4 per cent for younger participants.

Table 16: Conflict effect on participants' livelihoods, by age

Conflict affect on participants' livelihood/household income						
	15-19		20-24		Total	
Scale (1-5)	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Not affected at all (1)	795	16.9%	797	16.2%	1592	16.6%
Slightly affected (2)	1028	**21.9%**	924	**18.8%**	1952	20.3%
Moderately affected (3)	966	**20.6%**	1093	**22.2%**	2059	21.4%
Very affected (4)	1075	**22.9%**	1190	**24.2%**	2265	23.6%
Extremely affected (5)	828	17.6%	918	18.7%	1746	18.2%
Total	4692	100%	4922	100%	9614	100%

Differences by country

There were significant country differences on the effect of conflict on livelihood/household income.

Participants in Sudan reported their livelihoods/household income as being significantly more affected compared to participants in any other country.

Participants from the Philippines were the least affected compared to participants from all other countries.

Difference by living status

Refugee participants reported their livelihoods as being significantly more affected by the conflict (average response = 3.81) than IDPs (average response = 3.39) and than participants in host communities (average response = 3.81).

Differences by minority

Participants who identified as a minority group reported being significantly more affected (average response = 3.35; equivalent to moderately affected) compared to participants who did not identify with any of the listed minority groups (average response = 2.82; equivalent to slightly affected).

4.5.2 Strategies to cope with unmet needs

Participants were asked about the different strategies they had used to cope with not being able to meet basic needs. Most participants reported reducing the amount of food they ate (45.5%), spending their savings (45.5%), relying on less nutritious foods (45.3%), borrowing from friends or relatives (35.4%), selling goods or assets (28.9%), having an adult family member seek work elsewhere (26.3%), and having a household member start to work who had not previously done so (24.6%).

Differences by gender

Table 17: Participants' coping strategies when basic needs are unmet, by gender

What strategies have you or your household used to cope with not being able to meet basic needs due to the conflict?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
You relied on less nutritious food because it cost less	2277	46.8%	2113	43.8%	4390	**45.3%**
You spent your savings	2237	46%	2172	45%	4409	**45.5%**
You reduced the amount of food you eat	2274	46.8%	2134	44.2%	4408	**45.5%**
You borrowed from friends or relatives	1704	35%	1722	35.7%	3426	**35.4%**
You sold good or assets [jewellery/household goods/land/property. etc.]	1442	29.7%	1359	28.2%	2801	**28.9%**
You had an adult family member seek work elsewhere [not related to usual seasonal migration]	1349	27.7%	1195	24.8%	2544	**26.3%**
You had a household member that was not previously working start work	1262	26%	1116	23.1%	2378	**24.6%**
You relied on children [under 18] to contribute to family income	554	11.4%	606	12.6%	1160	12%
You accepted unusual/high risk or socially degrading jobs	439	9%	503	10.4%	942	9.7%
You withdrew children or yourself from school	727	15%	716	14.8%	1443	14.9%
You allowed children [under 18] to marry	170	3.5%	171	3.5%	341	3.5%
You took on new household care or chore responsibilities to allow others to work	932	19.2%	716	14.8%	1648	17%

A member of the household had to resort to selling or exchanging sex for goods or money	168	3.5%	157	3.3%	325	3.4%
None of the above	615	12.6%	699	14.5%	1314	13.6%
Total	4862	100%	4824	100%	9686	100%

There were significant gender differences regarding relying on less nutritious foods and reducing the amount of food eaten, having an adult family member seek work elsewhere and having a household member start work who had not previously done so. Girls and young women reported significantly higher frequencies of these strategies than boys and young men. Ultimately, as noted in girls' experiences of disrupted access to necessities, girls are eating the least and are less prioritised for food.

Although, not confirmed by inferential statistics due to small sample size, it is important to note that girls are taking on care responsibilities more than boys in times of conflict to allow for other household members to source income (19.2% vs 14.8%). This suggests that girls are subject to traditional gender norms in which they are required to undertake a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work.

Differences by country

There were significant country differences regarding the frequency of reported coping mechanisms on unmet basic needs.

Participants from Lebanon reported a significantly higher frequency (16.4%) of **relying on less nutritious foods**.

Further, participants from Nigeria reported a significantly higher frequency (16.6%) of **reducing the amount of food they ate** compared to all other countries.

Participants in Lebanon (14.5%) and Ethiopia (16.2%) reported a significantly higher frequency of **borrowing from friends and relatives**, compared to participants from all other countries.

Participants in Lebanon (14%) and Ethiopia (14.4%) also showed a significantly higher frequency of reports of **selling goods/assets**, compared to all other countries.

In terms of **having an adult family member seek work elsewhere**, participants in Lebanon (17.8%) showed a significantly higher frequency of this strategy to cope with unmet needs, compared to all other countries.

Participants in Lebanon (15.3%) had a significantly higher frequency of having **a family member start to work who had not previously done so** compared to all other countries.

As for countries with lower significant frequencies on coping mechanisms: compared to all other participants, those from Colombia (5.4%) and the Philippines (4.7%) reported a significantly lower frequency of **spending their savings** as a coping strategy when they could not meet their basic needs.

Difference by living status

Participants who remained at home reported significantly lower frequencies than IDPs and refugees on most frequent coping strategies for unmet needs – i.e. relying on less nutritious foods, reducing the amount of food they ate, borrowing money from friends or family and selling their goods/assets. However, in terms of spending their savings, refugee participants reported a significantly higher frequency of this compared to both IDPs and participants who remained at home.

Table 18: Participants' coping strategies when basic needs are unmet, by living status

		At home	IDP	Refugee	Total
You relied on less nutritious food because it cost less	Count	2729	702	866	4297
	%	52.6%*	55.6%	61%*	54.5%
You spent your savings	Count	2829	725	775	4329
	%	54.5%	57.4%*	54.6%	54.9%
You reduced the amount of food you eat	Count	2751	738	831	4320
	%	53%*	58.4%	58.5%	54.8%
You borrowed from friends or relatives	Count	2147	558	668	3373
	%	41.4%*	44.2%	47%*	42.8%
You sold good or assets [jewellery/household goods/land/property. etc.]	Count	1736	445	578	2759
	%	33.4%*	35.2%	40.7%*	35%
You had an adult family member seek work elsewhere [not related to usual seasonal migration]	Count	1566	399	528	2493
	%	30.2%*	31.6%	37.2%*	31.6%
You had a household member that was not previously working start work	Count	1482	331	520	2333
	%	28.5%	26.2%	36.6%*	29.6%
Total	Count	5192	1263	1420	7875
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*Highlighted in pink are the living situation (e.g., at home, IDP and Refugee) with significantly higher frequencies of reports and highlighted in orange are participants' living situation on the other end of the spectrum, with the lowest frequencies of reports. * Denotes that these are significant differences.*

Differences by minority

There were significant minority group membership differences among participants regarding the frequency of reported coping mechanisms for unmet basic needs.

Comparing participants who identified as a minority group to those who do not identify as a listed minority group, these participants reported significantly higher frequencies of relying on less nutritious food (50.7% vs 39.2%), spending their savings (49.8% vs 40.7%), reducing the amount of food they ate (52.1% vs 38.5%), borrowing from friends (39.9% vs 30.4%), selling goods or assets (33% vs 24.9%), having an adult family member seek work elsewhere (28.9% vs 23.2%) and having a household member start work who had not previously done so (26.4% vs 22.9%).

4.5.3 Insights from qualitative interviews

Cameroon

All participants' household incomes had fallen in the conflict, due to a loss of farming land, the inability to buy products to sell, or diminished demand.

Participants were taking on additional responsibilities in their households, particularly unpaid household chores and care work; the responsibilities are noted as being gendered in terms of tasks assigned to boys and girls.

For the majority of participants in the Southwest of Cameroon, their current main household income was from informal work of selling food or doing odd jobs. Egbe and Dalma (females, 16 and 13) also received remittances from family abroad. In the Northwest, the main household income was from farming and informal work such as selling farm produce like koki beans.

> ***"My parents are petty traders; they do buy and sell for us to survive."*** *Makola (male, 19)*

All participants had their income reduced due to the conflict. In the Northwest, the main reason for this loss was due to losing their farmland or because they had difficulty in accessing produce or products to sell. Specifically in the Southwest, participants' families could not afford to buy products to sell or fewer people were attending markets to buy items. The other main reason was that they had lost their place of business such as a shop or store which had been abandoned or burned down in the conflict.

> ***"It has changed drastically because we use[d] to own a shopping mall before it was burnt down."*** *Bih (female, 14)*

Others had lost their jobs. Yong (male, 23) said that he was doing odd jobs to survive as his grandmother was too weak to work and his uncle had lost his job:

> ***"My uncle used to work in*** *[name of agro-industrial company]* ***and send my grandma money for us to feed but now he no longer works due to the crisis."***

Tateh (female, 20) explained that they were now forced to rent land instead of farming their own land which means lower profits from what they produce.

> ***"It has reduced because my father and grandmum use to work farms even to support our lives but now we have run away, and I am struggling*** *[…]* ***We cannot work on farms again. Some people have been killed and their children suffer."*** *Bessong (female, 24)*

> ***"People cannot go to the farm again because of fear, and the*** *[armed group has]* ***colonised some farms and peoples' shops have been burnt and a lot of people have run away."*** *Bate (female, 22)*

Nearly all participants (both male and female) took on additional responsibilities due to conflict, the main one being additional household chores. This was due to participants being at home more or because more family had arrived to live with them. Tateh helped her mother to prepare food to sell. Tateh and Dalma said that they had taken on childcare responsibilities. Dalma also helped to care for sick family and providing them with medication.

> ***"Yes. My burden has increased. I am the one who provides for my grandma and child through the help of my boyfriend… because I am the old one available to hustle."*** *Bessong (female, 24)*

> ***"My father had a store and provided for us. Now we depend only on the farm, so I go for odd jobs to have something for myself."*** *Tossam (male, 22)*

Participants were asked about gendered differences in responsibilities. Girls and women were mainly seen to engage in farming and selling food. Other responsibilities mentioned were cooking and childcare. In the Southwest, boys and men were said to engage in farming as well but were thought to engage more in "odd jobs", and in the Northwest, the main activity that boys engaged in was carrying water and fetching firewood (although Yong and Bih said that since the conflict began, boys can no longer go to the bush for firewood).

Egbe shared that these roles had changed in the conflict because boys and men now engage in illegal activities to raise money quickly. Boys and were described as "protectors" and "providers" for their family. Makola said that both genders work in a variety of things such as selling, working in offices, hospitals and doing odd jobs. Similarly, Akungha (female, 24) said that both girls and boys learn trades while women and men farm. Yisah (female, 17) said it was men's and boys' job to protect and provide for the family.

Colombia

Participants' experiences of changes to their livelihoods differed based on their region: in Antioquia, incomes were reported as unaffected by conflict or participants took on additional household responsibilities due to conflict; in Chocó, family income was said to be down due to the conflict and participants took on more care work and chores when parents left for the conflict.
Across participants in both regions, the distribution of household work was not recognised to be gendered.

Nearly all the participants in Colombia were not yet working and relied on their parents or other family members to support them. However, some took on odd jobs to cover some personal expenses.

> ***"As a young person, you mostly work to buy your own things and anything else you want."*** *Raúl (male, 17)*

Income sources and jobs of family members varied widely – such as teachers, a cleaner, a security guard, motorcycle cab driver and working in a store and in agri-business. Usually there were multiple family members contributing to the income of a household. Ana (female, 24) lived with her grandmother who did not work but was sent money from her uncle (who works on a farm) and from her aunts. Only Daniel (male, 19) worked, doing administrative work and coordinating projects. Frijolito (male, 24) had previously worked in a nightclub, Andrés (male, 21) had worked in a hospital and David (male, 17) in a store but all were currently unemployed. Nicolás (male, 14) helped his mother with her motor cab business and Calle (male, 21) supported his father in selling:

> ***"My father never had an education. He never graduated, but, nevertheless, he always worked in cattle raising, so he lives off of that. Off of pigs, from the sale of cattle bones, and such. I also sell hides and skins, so I collaborate with him and that's how we do."***

In Antioquia, participants said that their incomes were unaffected by conflict unless they had been displaced. María (female, 20) said that her parents' jobs had been unaffected by the conflict as they were both teachers, a profession that María refers to as being respected by the armed groups.[xliii] Displacement had resulted in parents having to change occupations, having to start a new life from scratch or having to rely solely on relatives sending remittances. For Martha (female, 22), her family had a juice kiosk in their old village and her mother also used to take on odd jobs of cooking and cleaning but in their new home they relied on the support of her mother's family. She also said that rents were more expensive in their new area.

Most of the participants in Chocó thought that their income had decreased due to the conflict. Luís said that there were fewer job opportunities because of the conflict. Others had been affected in more direct ways. For example, Wilson (male, 13) said his father had a cabinet-making shop, but the armed groups made him close it down, so he went to work in a mine. Raúl (male, 17) said that his mother's restaurant was unaffected by the conflict, but he knows other places of business such as stores and supermarkets whose income had been affected by extortion from the groups.

The other way in which the conflict affected incomes was due to strikes. Some family incomes were affected by the strikes while others just noted that neighbourhood businesses were affected. Andrés and Calle also noted that people had become more involved in gold mining as their area is rich in minerals and farmers were moving away from cocaine cultivation. The Plan for Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS) programme had also provided incentives for farmers to trade in their illicit crops for legal alternatives:

> ***"The thing is there are many people who were dedicated to coca*** *[cocaine]****. Because, for example, my father, he was a coca grower, because he had his land and he lived off of it. And when all that land was returned to him, I don't know if you have heard of that programme, the PNIS. The PNIS told him, 'Look, we are going to give you a certain amount of money, for a certain period of time, we are going to give you some animals, we are going to give you this', but they don't do what they tell these people, so what are they doing? Well,***

[xliii] María's view cannot be confirmed by this study or applied to all armed groups in all territories.

they are returning again to coca, or they are returning to their farms, to their territory, to exploit the mine." *Calle (male, 21)*

Most participants in Antioquia did not have to take on additional responsibilities due to the conflict unless they had been displaced. Daniel took care of his brother while his mother was in hiding but once she returned, his responsibility decreased. David said that since his mother left, he was doing the washing up and cooking but rotates these responsibilities with his brother. Since their displacement, Martha was helping her mother with housework while the mother of Raquel (female, 22) had got sick with cancer, increasing her daughter's responsibilities:

"I am the youngest and the only child, so when my mother got sick, I had to do everything around the house. She was walking, she couldn't sweep, so I had to do everything, until my father or some of my aunt[s] would come to help us, to cook."

In Chocó, some of the participants had to look after their siblings when their parents had to leave due to the conflict. Andrea (female, 15) moved in with her grandmother and learned how to cook and was helping with washing. Others helped with childcare and chores, not due to the conflict but so that their parents or relatives could go out to work or church.

"My aunt goes to work, and she is gone all day, so I have to stay at home doing the chores when my aunt is not there... And then I take care of my aunt's grandson, a little one. Sometimes I have to stay with him, because she goes to work and there is no one to stay with him." *Cata (female, 16)*

Participants did not note any gendered differences in responsibilities. Rodrigo (male, 18) said that both men and women do housework as they all need to help. Wilson also shared that he does cleaning and housework and accompanies his mum to get groceries.

Andrés said that he and his sister helped his dad sweeping and washing, and when he or his sister are studying his dad will take care of the chores. Daniel also shared that both he and his sister do housework:

"Regardless of the fact that you are a man, you have to learn how to do things […] in my house we were always taught that we all had a responsibility, one swept, another mopped, another helped in the kitchen, and so on."

Only Martha thought that women had more responsibilities at home, but the man had to contribute more with the income.

Ethiopia

Conflict has led to shortages in farming yields and raised the price of essential goods. Participants described how male relatives, who would normally be the family breadwinner, have been killed or separated in the conflict.

Participants were trying to source additional incomes to offset affected household livelihoods, but this was difficult. Some female participants in Afar mentioned having additional household responsibilities due to the effects of the conflict on their livelihoods.

Many participants in Ethiopia had their livelihoods affected by the conflict, mainly due to changes in income as well as economic factors such as inflation caused by war. Some participants commented that the conflict had brought about a significant rise in the price of essential goods.

"The price of things now and then is totally different. So, a father in a community worries too much for his family." *Aculle (female, 18)*

"Before the war, the cost of living was good because goods were cheap. After, the cost of living becomes too much expensive, people are suffering from gastrointestinal and

mental problems… Some days there will be water, but if not, I send my son after school to bring water from far away." *Adolay (female, 20)*

Awash (female, 22) and Barudi (male, 19) said that the conflict had caused food shortages, as farmers were unable to move freely and work and many young men who would harvest the crops had been killed. Participants from Tigray discussed income challenges due to the loss of "male breadwinners", who were either killed or separated due to the war. Sheraro (female, 17) shared that since her father's death, they now rely solely on the money her younger brother gets as a labourer. Etigray (female, 16) similarly lost her father in the war. This led to her mother taking on a low-paid job and to Etigray dropping out of education in grade 6 to help financially support her sisters to attend school by going door to door washing people's clothes.

"Before the death of my father our family lived a comfortable life. We were happy, we attended school, and everything was peaceful. But now we are displaced from our home and we live here in a camp. I lost my father and things became difficult out here." *Dansha (female, 17)*

"Before the war we have been living a decent life and our father has been the provider of the family because he has a job. My mother is a housewife but with income of our father we have been living happily. However, due to the war our family separated into two and we lost our love and harmony as a family. My brothers went to Sudan, and our father was dead, and we are here now." *Etigray (female, 16)*

Participants shared that they struggled to raise small amounts of money to cover rising prices. Aba-Ala (female, 18) discussed her mother being the "breadwinner" and struggling to make ends meet. This was echoed by Awash who relied solely on the inheritance from her mother. Addodas (female, 19) similarly commented on receiving her salary less frequently and having difficulty affording the rising prices.

"But it's not enough to cover all the necessities; everything is very expensive now the time. As you know the value of the Ethiopian birr is very low. After the war, life is very much difficult." *Awash (female, 22)*

"We are in a difficult living situation at the moment because we are not given our salary every month, we are getting it once in three months… On the other hand, basic items like teff [xliv] ***and other food items have become expensive, and as a result we are living in difficult situation. It becomes impossible to survive..."*** *Addodas (female, 19)*

Aba-Ala also shared that bank accounts were inaccessible even when there was money in the account. Barri (male, 24) suggested that the government should be responsible for creating job opportunities to empower youth and return to normal lives. About a quarter of participants in Tigray discussed the issue of looting and losing cattle or livestock as impacting on their livelihood. Two participants also mentioned that youth were migrating to other countries for job opportunities.

Some female participants in Afar noted having additional household responsibilities due to the conflict. This primarily included care work either for sick parents or siblings, collecting water, household chores, or taking on paid work at an early age.

"I tried my best to help my family. In addition to the house chores, I look after the kids too… I do the cooking and wash clothes for the family. The biggest challenge is shortage of water… We are forced to travel long to fetch water and carrying that water itself is a very difficult work." *Abroborifaghe (female, 18)*

Similarly to Afar, female participants described additional responsibilities related to care work and household responsibilities.

[xliv] Teff is a grain harvested in the Horn of Africa that is often used for flour.

> ***"Compared to boys, we spend most of our time working in the house. This means there is a lot of burden on girls."*** *Dansha (female, 17)*

Philippines

Generally, Philippines participants' incomes were negatively affected in the conflict, owing to the loss of farmland or lower customer demand for goods.

Participants took up additional responsibilities, particularly childcare and household chores. These additional responsibilities were gendered: girls and young women took up chores and care responsibilities in the home, boys and young men took up jobs outside the home.

The majority of participants' main household income was from farming, fishing or selling different items. Mung beans were mentioned as the main item for harvesting. Participants also sold food items such as cooking oil and other items like charcoal. Many fathers and husbands worked as motorcycle taxi drivers or in construction and carpentry. Only the mother of Mariam (female, 21) had a professional qualification and worked as a teacher.

Participants mostly reported that their income had been affected by the conflict. Khalid (male, 21) noted that during times of conflict it was difficult to earn "because [our] attention is diverted elsewhere". Displacement meant that many participants had lost their land or livelihoods. Amira (female, 24) had a general store which she lost in the conflict.

> ***"Because before, when there were no shootings yet, my father had a farm, and when the conflict started, he left it behind. That was his source of income."*** *Rania (female, 21)*

> ***"During our evacuation, we struggled a bit to make a living because our parents no longer work together like they used to. We relied only on father's driving because none of us had jobs."*** *Youssef (male, 17)*

Other effects of the conflict were delays in payments for odd jobs, having stores looted and sales decreasing because fewer people were in the area to buy goods. Only three participants felt that the conflict had not affected their incomes. Mariam shared that her mother's job as a teacher was stable, while others shared that they always struggled.

> ***"Nothing has changed; before, we were struggling, and now we're still struggling. Our motorcycle doesn't work anymore, so we just commute, borrowing motorcycles. My husband's job hasn't changed either. Before, we had a hard time making ends meet, and now it's still difficult."*** *Zahra (female, 19)*

Amira and Farhana (females, both 21) said that their livelihoods were now improving since the conflict in their area had abated. Participants noted having to take on additional responsibilities during times of conflict, the main one being childcare or caring for older or sick people and household chores. This was mainly because more time was spent at home because they had dropped out of school due to the conflict or had stayed indoors for safety reasons. Youssef (male, 17) shared that he also supported his parents with their livelihoods, by helping his father with driving or producing cooking oil for his mother. Mariam' s family also had planned out responsibilities if they had to flee, for example, who would be responsible for taking certain items. Mahid (male, 18) discussed that during conflict times the focus was on keeping safe, but the post-conflict period would increase workloads because there were additional clean-ups and damage to fix:

> ***"Firstly, during the conflict, we didn't focus much on our responsibilities inside the house, and we weren't able to pay much attention to our family because our focus was on safety, on finding places where we could go without much difficulty, because we might end up in places where we wouldn't know how to earn a living. After the conflict, the workload increased because we were thinking about how to tidy up and clean what we left behind, and how to fix what was damaged…"***

Just under a third of the participants did not think that they had taken on more responsibility in the conflict but shared other reasons for additional responsibilities such as their parents ageing, the fact of being now married or having children, or the need to look after nieces, nephews or siblings because their parents were working, or siblings worked abroad, leaving the participants to take on more work.

> ***"I have a sibling who's abroad; one got married in Lebanon, and the child next to me is hers. […] They send help, but not that often. They also check on us if we've evacuated or fled, and they send money if there's no fighting anymore, but it's not much. […] Only our mother is left. She's the one who supports us, she works abroad."*** *Rasheed (male, 17)*

Participants noted gendered differences in responsibilities. They perceived that girls and women were more responsible for activities within the home such as childcare and household chores such as laundry, cleaning and cooking.

> ***"Women in this area even at young age are married so their responsibility is taking care of children and the whole family in war times."*** *Mariam (female, 21)*

Boys and men were seen as responsible for activities outside the home that contributed to providing for their families, mainly through farming and harvesting. However, some participants noted that these responsibilities could overlap and that girls also helped to harvest, while boys could also do household chores, and both made cooking oil. Mariam perceived this gendered divide on responsibilities was the same before the conflict.

4.6 Access to services or resources

4.6.1 Inaccessible resources or services due to conflict

When survey participants were asked about services that they wanted to access but could not due to the conflict, the most frequent responses were financial support (47%), employment assistance (39%) and education (37%).

Differences by gender

Table 19: Resources or services that participants could not access due to conflict, by gender

Are there any resources or services that you wanted to access but were unable to due to the conflict?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Financial support [e.g. cash assistance]	2307	47.3%	2262	46.7%	4569	**47%**
Employment assistance [including job trainings/skills-trainings/job placement services/entrepreneurship trainings. etc.]	1891	38.8%	1874	38.7%	3765	**38.7%**
Emotional and social wellbeing services [e.g. mental health/psycho-social support services. etc.]	1341	27.5%	1179	24.3%	2520	25.9%
Food-based aid [including cash transfers/vouchers. etc.]	1558	32%	1437	29.6%	2995	**30.8%**
Food	1633	33.5%	1588	32.8%	3221	**33.1%**
Legal services and aid [immigration/refugee status assistance/other]	864	17.7%	844	17.4%	1708	17.6%
Transportation	1411	29%	1423	29.4%	2834	**29.2%**
Healthcare/medical treatment	1581	32.4%	1536	31.7%	3117	**32.1%**

Education	1825	37.5%	1748	36.1%	3573	**36.8%**
Safe access to water	1238	25.4%	1152	23.8%	2390	24.6%
Sanitation [access to facilities]	823	16.9%	713	14.7%	1536	15.8%
Sexual and reproductive health services	679	13.9%	579	11.9%	1258	12.9%
Security or protection services	1119	23%	1077	22.2%	2196	22.6%
Items for the home [furniture/kitchen equipment. etc.]	936	19.2%	838	17.3%	1774	18.3%
Clothing	1045	21.4%	964	19.9%	2009	20.7%
You were able to access the services or resources you needed to	255	5.2%	235	4.8%	490	5%
None of the above	598	12.3%	628	13%	1226	12.6%
Total	4873	100%	4847	100%	9720	100%

Of the most reported inaccessible services, food-based aid was the only one that showed a significant gender difference, with young girls and women reporting this at a higher frequency (31.1%) than boys and young men (28.8%).

Differences by age group

There were significant differences depending on participants' age regarding being unable to access **employment assistance** and **education services**. In reference to not being able to access **employment assistance services**, older participants (20 to 24 years) reported this at a significantly higher frequency (40.1%) compared to younger participants (35.2%). The reverse was true for not being able to access **education services**, with younger participants reporting this at a significantly higher frequency (36.8%) compared to older participants (34.7%).

Differences by country

There were significant country differences regarding the services that participants were not able to access due to conflict.

Compared to other countries, participants in Sudan reported the highest frequency of being unable to access **education services** (16.6%).

Participants reported in Nigeria (13.8%) and Lebanon (13.1%) that they were not able to access **financial support**, which was at a higher frequency than other countries. Participants in the Philippines and Ukraine were less likely to report the inaccessibility of **employment assistance**, **food-based aid (cash transfers/vouchers)**, **food services**, access to **transport** and **healthcare**.

Difference by living status

Refugee participants reported at significantly lower frequencies being unable to access most frequent service types in conflict compared to IDPs and participants who remained at home: financial support (57.1% refugees vs 63.7% IDPs vs 60.9% participants at home), and employment assistance (47.3% vs 53.1% vs 50.4%).

In terms of receiving food as aid, participants who remained at home reported this at significantly lower frequency compared to IDPs and refugees (food-based aid: 37.6% participants at home vs 43.6% IDPs vs 45.7% refugees; and food: 41.4% vs 44% vs 49.2%).

Participants who identified as IDPs showed a significantly lower frequency of reports of being unable to access transport (36%) compared to refugees (38.4%) and participants who remained at home (38.3%). Similarly, participants who identified as IDPs showed a significantly lower frequency of reports of being unable to access healthcare (38.5%) compared to refugees (50.2%) and participants who remained at home (40.3%).

In terms of access to education, refugee participants reported at a significantly higher frequency (57.8%) being unable to access education compared to both IDPs (45.2%) and participants who stayed at home (45.8%).

Difference by minority

There were significant minority group membership differences regarding resources that people were unable to access due to conflict between participants who identified as a minority and those who did not identify as a listed minority. In all cases, participants who identified as part of a minority group reported significantly less access to financial support (52.4% listed minority vs 41.4% not listed minority), employment assistance (43.1% vs 35.3%), food (39.3% vs 28.1%), healthcare/medical treatment (36.3% vs 29%), education (42.5% vs 32%).

4.6.2 Effectiveness of aid received by participants

In the survey, participants were asked about any aid they may receive – this question concerned aid in general and was not specific to aid provided by Plan International.

The majority of participants reported not having received any help from aid organisations (45.7%). Of those who had received aid, most of them reported it as being at somewhat helpful (45.3%).

When assessing the effectiveness according to gender identity, age group, by country, living status and minority group inferential differences, these results were based only on those participants who had received aid and hence could judge the effectiveness of the aid provided. The responses are treated as ordinal data points, meaning that participants reported the effectiveness in terms of discrete intervals on a scale where 1 represented the aid received as not being helpful at all, and 4 as extremely helpful.

Differences by gender

Table 20: Effectiveness of aid received, by gender

When you have received aid/relief from an aid organisation, how helpful were they in responding to your immediate needs?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
Scale from 1 to 5	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Not helpful at all (1)	153	6.0%	208	7.7%	361	6.9%
Not very helpful (2)	296	11.6%	334	12.3%	630	12.0%
Somewhat helpful (3)	1154	45.1%	1230	45.5%	2384	**45.3%**
Extremely helpful (4)	954	37.3%	934	34.5%	1888	**35.9%**
Total	2557	100%	2706	100%	5263	100%

When girls and young women had received aid from an organisation, the effectiveness of this aid was significantly higher (mean response = 3.14), compared to when boys and young men received such aid (mean response = 3.07).

Differences by age group

There were no significant differences in terms of participants' age for how helpful aid organisations were in responding to participants' immediate needs.

Differences by country

There were significant country differences in how helpful aid organisations were in responding to participants' immediate needs.

The count below demonstrates how many people from each country responded to this question while the mean shows the average rate of helpfulness given on the 1 to 4 scale. Lebanon (average response = 2.66) had the lowest average ratings, meaning that people in this country generally found the aid less helpful. The Philippines (average response = 3.42), Nigeria (average response = 3.26) and Sudan (average response = 3.39) had the highest average ratings, indicating people in these countries found the aid more helpful.

Difference by living status

Participants who identified as IDPs showed significantly lower perceptions of the effectiveness of aid provided by organisations (average response = 3.02) compared to refugees (average response = 3.11) and participants who remained at home (average response = 3.13).

Differences by minority

There were significant minority group membership differences in the effectiveness of aid received due to conflict between participants who identified as a minority and those who did not identify as a listed minority. Participants who identified as part of a minority group reported significantly greater effectiveness of the aid received (average response = 3.15) compared to participants who did not identify as a listed minority group (average response = 3.02).

4.6.3 Localities' greatest needs due to conflict

The majority of participants reported their locality's greatest needs were: ensuring food security and access to basic necessities (39.2%), enhancing security and law enforcement (29.7%), fostering economic recovery and employment opportunities (28.5%), rebuilding infrastructure (28.2%), and re-establishing education and learning programmes (28%).

Differences by gender

Table 21: Participants' perceptions of their locality's greatest needs, by gender

What are your locality's greatest immediate needs as a result of the conflict?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Rebuilding infrastructure [e.g. schools/hospitals and roads]	1262	26.9%	1365	29.4%	2627	**28.2%**
Ensuring food security and access to basic necessities	1797	38.3%	1856	**40%**	3653	39.2%
Fixing power/electricity facilities	1174	25%	1121	24.2%	2295	24.6%
Providing Emotional and Social Wellbeing Support and Counselling [e.g. mental health or psychosocial support]	592	12.6%	516	11.1%	1108	11.9%
Establishing peace and social harmony initiatives	882	18.8%	854	18.4%	1736	18.6%
Ensuring access to water and sanitation	1043	22.2%	1069	23.1%	2112	22.6%
Reestablishing Education and Learning Programs	1323	28.2%	1291	27.9%	2614	**28%**

Reintegrating Displaced Individuals and Families	582	12.4%	531	11.5%	1113	11.9%
Fostering Economic Recovery and Employment Opportunities	1315	28%	1345	29%	2660	**28.5%**
Strengthening Healthcare Services and Facilities	1328	28.3%	1267	27.3%	2595	27.8%
Enhancing Security and Law Enforcement	1317	28.1%	1452	31.3%	2769	**29.7%**
Supporting Vulnerable Populations [women/children/elderly]	808	17.2%	696	15%	1504	16.1%
Addressing Trauma and Post-conflict Healing	408	8.7%	342	7.4%	750	8%
Total	4692	100%	4635	100%	9327	100%

There were significant gender differences for what participants considered their locality's greatest immediate needs as a result of the conflict. Boys and young men reported the need for ensuring food security at significantly higher frequencies compared to girls and young women.

Differences by age group

There were no significant differences by participants' age group for the most frequently reported local need due to conflict.

Differences by country

There were significant country differences of what participants considered their locality's greatest immediate needs as a result of the conflict.

When compared to participants from all other countries, participants from Nigeria (14.7%) and Lebanon (11.9%) reported **ensuring food security and access to basic necessities** at a significantly higher frequency.[xlv] Participants in Ukraine (3.8%) reported this at a significantly lower frequency compared to all other countries.

In terms of considering **re-establishing education and learning programmes** as their locality's greatest needs, Philippines[xlvi] participants (12.3%) showed a significantly higher frequency for this consideration compared to all other participants.

When compared to all other countries, the frequency of considering **fostering economic recovery and employment opportunities** as their locality's greatest immediate needs was significantly higher for Lebanon (16.6%) and Colombia (11.1%) and significantly lower for Sudan (5.5%) and Ukraine (5.6%), compared to all other countries.

Compared to all participants, those from Sudan (17.5%) reported a significantly higher frequency when considering **enhancing security and law enforcement** as their locality's greatest needs.

Participants considered **rebuilding infrastructure** as their locality's greatest immediate need at a significantly lower frequency in Ukraine (7.4%) and Colombia (6.4%) compared to all other countries.

Difference by living status

[xlv] These results are the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, one of the highest frequencies was in the country that cannot be named.
[xlvi] This result is the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, the highest frequency was in the country that cannot be named.

In terms of considering ensuring food security and access to basic necessities as their locality's greatest need, refugee participants reported this at a significantly higher frequency (46.4%) compared to both IDPs (41.7%) and participants who stayed at home (42.5%).

Participants who remained at home reported fostering economic recovery at a significantly higher frequency (32.9%) compared to IDPs (29%) and refugees (28%), when considering their locality's greatest need.

Refugee participants reported enhancing security and law enforcement as their locality's greatest need at a significantly higher frequency (36.8%), compared to IDPs (32.9%) and participants who remained at home (31.6%).

Differences by minority

When comparing participants who identified as a listed minority group and those who did not, the former showed significantly higher frequencies of reporting their locality's greatest needs as rebuilding infrastructure (31.5% listed minority vs 30.2% not listed minority), ensuring food security and access to basic needs (43.6% vs 42.4%), and re-establishing education and learning programmes (30.8% vs 30.2%).

4.6.4 Insights from qualitative interviews

Cameroon

Participants noted difficulties in accessing medical treatment, food and water, forcing them to rely on traditional medicines, reduce food consumption and resort to begging.
Participants had received food aid and household items as aid, but noted that the aid delivery was decreasing or had not been received in a long time.

The main service or item that participants in the Southwest of Cameroon had difficulty accessing was hospital care and medicines. Participants shared that they relied on traditional medicines when they could not access healthcare.

> ***"…There was one day my sister was sick and we could not take her to the hospital because it was not secured on the streets. My father had to carry her to a local drug vendor's house for help."*** *Makola (male, 19)*

Participants in the Northwest said the main resources they could not access due to the conflict were food and water. They attributed the shortages to the security situation but Yong (male, 24) also noted that drinking water was difficult to access in the dry season. Participants relied on several coping mechanisms to deal with the scarcity of food. The main one was reducing the amount of food consumed per day; for example, Nain (female, 15) said that sometimes only younger children will eat in her household. The other common strategy was relying on less expensive or less preferred food items.

> ***"We rely on less expensive food, reduce the quantity of food eaten per day, and use less water for chores."*** *Yong (male, 23)*

Participants in the Southwest also spoke about having difficulty in accessing food due to the security situation. Some respondents shared that when they run into the bush for safety, they are then forced to beg for food:

> ***"When we run to the bush to hide we burn plantains or cocoyam to eat. We beg from others, we drink herbs when we are sick because we cannot go and buy medicines. We sleep in bush houses."*** *Bate (male, 22)*

> ***"At times we run with little food and manage it till places are safe to return to our houses. At times we beg food and medicine from the owner of the bush we run to."*** *Bessong (female, 24)*

The other reason given was that food was sometimes difficult during periods of "ghost town" days. Dalma and Egbe (females, 13 and 16) shared that they try to stock the house as best they can before the "ghost town" period starts. Dalma's household also reduced the number of meals eaten per day. Makola tried to eat what was available but said they sometimes go hungry.

> ***"I think we eat less now, change food type and eat twice a day, borrow from friends and family."*** *Ikome (male, 16)*

There was a difference across regions around awareness of aid delivery. Most of the participants in the Southwest had received aid but were unsure of or could not remember the name of the relevant organisation. Makola and Dalma had received aid from Plan International. Makola also mentioned the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as aid providers. Types of aid received were mainly household items (mattresses, blankets, torches, mosquito nets and pots) and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) kits.

> ***"During the cholera outbreak they gave us jugs and buckets. They have also given me food and soap, also mosquito nets from the government."*** *Makola (male, 19)*

Some participants also mentioned receiving food items such as rice and oil.

> ***"This assistance can come in various forms, including food, water, shelter, medical supplies, clothing, and other essentials needed for survival and recovery."*** *Egbe (female, 16)*

Participants in the Northwest were aware of many aid organisations operating in the area such as the Community Initiative for Sustainable Development (COMISUD), Plan International, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Akungha (female, 24) shared that there was a mix of foreign NGOs, government support and religious groups operating in the area. Participants had largely received food aid but some also mentioned cash vouchers, both of which had been provided by COMISUD. NRC and Plan international were mentioned for providing water or WASH items.

All participants in the Southwest thought the aid received was helpful, but many mentioned that they had received it once and the organisation had not come back since or that they had not received aid in a very long time.

Similarly, all participants in the Northwest thought the aid received was helpful but said the availability of aid had been decreasing. Others said it was helpful but often was received later than when they needed it. Yisah (female, 17) observed that it was sometimes late because of roadblocks.

> ***"I really thank God for them*** *[aid items]."* *Kimbi (male, 13)*

> ***"Whenever it comes, it's always of great need… It*** *[the availability of aid]* ***has changed but I'm happy with the little I receive."*** *Akungha (female, 24)*

Colombia

Participants described difficulties in accessing food, wherein food shortages were sometimes brought on by armed strikes. Few participants have had direct contact with aid organisations during the conflict, but most had received aid following natural disasters.

The main resource that participants in Antioquia sometimes had difficulty accessing was food. This was mainly due to when stores were closed due to armed strikes or because stores were low on stock when they could not open for deliveries during a strike.

> ***"Once, there was a strike that lasted almost a week. Sometimes, the stores were open, but they were too crowded, and you couldn't buy anything. When you could go shopping, there was almost nothing, like food."*** *María (female, 20)*

Participants in Chocó said that they had not encountered any barriers in accessing resources or services, although they recounted the various ways in which accessing food and healthcare were limited. Wilson and Rodolfo (males, 13 and 17) said that sometimes the cost of food increased when there were armed strikes. When that happened, Wilson described making do with what they had, while Tecachi (male, 14) mentioned buying things in smaller amounts.

When food was in short supply participants mentioned several ways to try to get by. Frijolito (male, 24) said that sometimes they tried to rely on what was already at home. However, he and Calle (male, 21) also shared that sometimes it was possible to ask the store to sell something secretly or "under the table". Terra and Edil (females, 22 and 16) said that since they usually announce a strike a few days beforehand, they tried to stock up on food as much as possible. Others said that they relied on family living in other areas to help when they did not have food. Ana (female, 23) and David (male, 17) also shared that they sometimes had difficulty accessing healthcare when it was too risky to leave the house. Andrés also noted that sometimes gas was in short supply.

Most participants in Antioquia were aware of some aid organisations operating in the area but had not had direct aid or contact with them in light of the conflict. The main ones mentioned were the UN (including UNICEF) and the Red Cross. For example, Calle shared that he had seen UN cars frequently but had no direct aid from them. Frijolito noted that the Red Cross mostly operates in the villages and not in the cities. Only Ana shared that the UN and Red Cross had supported her directly. Johana (female, 17) was only aware of the foundation she was involved with. Other organisations mentioned were healthcare organisations and the civil defence for natural disasters. Only Daniel (male, 19) was aware of many NGOs operating in the area as he worked with local NGOs and USAID through different projects:

> ***"Caucasia is one of the territories in Colombia that has more presence of USAID programmes. I have benefited from many of them like Somos Comunidad, now with Generando Equidad and the Corporation, mostly in the area of my leadership, my activism, strengthening activism …those kinds of things."***

Daniel highlighted that he believed the strongest local NGOs in the area were the ones run by women.

Most participants apart from Ana, who received groceries during the armed strikes, had not received aid due to the conflict. Martha (female, 22) had never received aid despite having been displaced; she said her family were frustrated by the lack of support:

> ***"We don't even have housing and so on, so I ask my mom this question, but if we are victims of the conflict twice, why haven't we been able to have a house or a subsidy like that? […] They have called her, yes, to give her the compensation, but that was a while ago and nothing. […] They say that she is waiting for compensation, but she has been doing that for a while and nothing, and she gets discouraged and everything."***

However, many participants in Antioquia had received aid in relation to natural disasters such as floods and landslides. Terra and Edil had received clothes, tents and blankets. Terra explained that the mayor's office also gave food to families affected by the flood. Valentina (female, 18) said that the groceries received during the floods were very useful and arrived when lots of people were in need and had had their belongings and houses damaged.

In Chocó, only Isabel (female, 22) and Jonás (male, 16) had received aid previously. Isabel said this was handed out for a natural disaster; she had received a WASH kit with reusable sanitary pads, toothpaste, hand sanitiser and cotton wool as well as a torch. She said this was helpful, especially the reusable sanitary pads which she had not seen before. Jonas had received food and snacks from an organisation that rented a soccer field for recreational activities; they also gave out kits for children and newborn babies.

The populations that participants live among are experiencing multiple impacts of armed conflict, migration and natural disasters. Participants could list aid received in disasters and emergencies but not to help with long-term crises such as conflict, which underlines how needs arising from long-term conflict are being relatively unmet.

Frijolito and David also mentioned “health days” where it was possible to access health support. David said this was helpful because dentistry was so costly.

> ***“There is a doctor, a dentist, there are several types of doctors. And it's kind of free, you go for a checkup, and you tell the doctor what you have and then he gives you the pills, they give them to you themselves. If you want to go to a dentist, he cleans your teeth and gives you your kit*** *[dental-care kit].”*

Both Isabel and Andrea had been involved in a workshop run by a foundation which worked with women on violence which they found was a great experience:

> ***“I once went to one where we are talking about [...] reliving those things [...] You look at it and there are people who have lived through worse things than you [...] It's like so much weight to see that you are not the only one, so all these things are useful to you.”*** *Isabel (female, 22)*

Ethiopia

Food and water were the key necessities that participants had experienced as shortages, an issue that was acutely severe for girls and young women who were pregnant and who were menstruating.
Aid delivery was minimal. Participants felt that there was not enough aid and their needs were not being met, including for adequate menstrual hygiene support.

Participants from across Ethiopia primarily spoke about barriers in accessing water and food. This was discussed both in the context of fleeing and when arriving in host communities, or after returning to their homes. Those who discussed having no access to food or water while fleeing shared that this was often for long periods of time.

> ***“For seven days, with no foods and drinks, we kept on moving in a desert so as to save our lives… On our ways, there were people who died of hunger, and thirst.”*** *Aculle (female, 18)*

> ***“We were walking on foot for seven days without food and drink… The biggest challenge is shortage of water. In our village, we didn’t get water for about two weeks most of the time.”*** *Abroborifaghe (female, 18)*

Participants mentioned an increase in costs of water, making it difficult to access or that areas to get water were now further away. Addi (female, 13) discussed how her family borrowed money to buy essentials, however these essential supplies were destroyed in an artillery strike by Eritrean forces, leaving them with nothing. Participants had also experienced problems with accessing water including water contamination or having to travel far to find water supplies.

> ***“…Water is our biggest problem. For example, last time we don’t have a water for a month and we were forced to drink*** *[water from a hole].* ***As a result of the unsafe water we have used, we were exposed to different diseases.”*** *Tezeke (female, 16)*

> ***“After we get here there are so many problems: there is no water and other necessities, even we don’t have a bucket for water, and we have to fetch the water from the river.”*** *Bagado (female, 17)*

> ***“If we want to buy water, per one jerry can we pay 30 birr. These all is due to the war. We used to have enough water before the war, almost every day. If we don’t get, we fetch water from a river*** *[…]* ***We are forced to travel long to fetch water and carrying that water itself is a very difficult work.”*** *Abroborifaghe (female, 18)*

The impact of not being able to access food and water was especially acute for pregnant or nursing women. Addodas (female, 19) shared how during her journey fleeing conflict she had not been able to

access food or water. This had led to her not being able to breastfeed and her child becoming malnourished:

> ***"We were suffered from hunger and thirst and as a result, breastfeeding has been the most difficult job because unless we eat well the children were not able to feed... When we failed to breastfeed our children and hear their cries, and we were unable to find anything to eat or drink, I always thought that it is better to die at home than suffering like this… My child's health problem gets complicated after I took him with me on the difficult journey of fleeing the war. He mostly cries, he lost weight because he was malnourished, and his behaviour totally changed."***

The lack of water also created challenges for menstrual hygiene management. Aculle (female, 18) spoke of the difficulty of having no access to sanitary products while fleeing conflict:

> ***"We suffered a lot. We had no sanitation pads. When women have menstruation, you can imagine what they feel without sanitation pads and water. Women try to hide their blood during menstruation. Things were beyond our ability."*** *Aculle (female, 18)*

When discussing lack of access to food and water, participants mentioned that they were reliant on informal support from "others", relatives, or support from organisations. Many however stated that this was minimal and infrequent. Participants discussed that they were not getting necessary assistance from humanitarian organisations or the government. Gudom (female, 22) stated that there was a need for urgent humanitarian assistance.

> ***"In the IDP** [camp] **I live alone, and we totally rely on aid we get to survive. Sometimes we don't get the aid monthly and when failed to get the aid we beg for food."*** *Tigray (female, 18)*

> ***"If there is an aid [organisation], we will get food from them and if they didn't make it, some generous people will provide us with a meal. Except this we don't have any access to food and there is nothing we can do at this time… Life is difficult here and we are not getting what is necessary to survive."*** *Atsbi (female, 14)*

Few participants from Afar in particular mentioned access to aid. Only two participants discussed aid and they declared that aid either was not arriving on time, or that no organisations were helping.

> ***"There are no organisations to help us, no NGOs. Our brother was fetching us water from far. We helped tired people to take rest under a shade. Once, we slaughtered a goat and cook the meat on a wooden fire. We only ate that, nothing else."*** *Aculle (female, 18)*

Of those who gave their views on aid provided, these were overwhelmingly negative. Reasons for this included: there not being enough services for the amount of people; aid being infrequent; and not enough aid being provided. Etigray and Tekeze (females, both 16) mentioned wanting support for women and girls to access sanitary products or materials to support menstrual hygiene management. Other participants said aid organisations were not listening to the needs of the people, that services were unsafe to access due to harassment from soldiers. Two participants mentioned being denied access to essentials due to registration errors.

> ***"We ask the government and NGOs to come and talk to us physically, but most of the time they meet and discuss with officials or representatives. They have never come to meet us or discuss with us. At the moment we are receiving aid and support from different bodies, however, it is not enough compared to the number of people."*** *Tezeke (female, 16)*

> ***"We don't get humanitarian aid properly; it has been a long time since we get an aid. So, all these problems together have made our life worse than ever."*** *Dansha (female, 17)*

Philippines

The threat of violence had made it difficult for participants to access food and water. Most participants were aware of aid organisations acting locally and had received food aid.

However, a few participants said the aid was not reaching them and was too infrequent.

The main items that participants in the Philippines noted were difficult to access during times of conflict were drinking water and food (mainly rice). This was due to the presence of gunshots and fear of stray bullets. Farhana (female, 21) said that sometimes she tried to sneak out at night to the well for water when there was less of a possibility of armed men seeing her. Amira (female, 24) also said she had difficulty accessing medicines. Mariam (female, 21) noted challenges to accessing farming and fishing as rebels have taken over some areas – nothing could be done about this but those with relatives in the rebel groups sometimes manage to ask permission to fish or farm. Participants dealt with these limitations by eating less preferred food. Dalia (female, 14) said they ate no meat and just had water spinach with salt or soy sauce. Mahid and Tariq (males, 18 and 13) said that sometimes they borrowed from others:

> ***"What we do instead is ask people outside our area to buy rice and other food for us, and they deliver it to us at the checkpoint for us to pick up."*** *Tariq*

Most of the participants were aware of government agencies and NGOs working in the area to provide relief, mainly the local government or other government social welfare agencies. [xlvii] However, some participants also mentioned NGOs operating in the area such as Plan International, the Red Cross, WFP, UNICEF and Oxfam alongside some local NGOs. Most had received aid, mainly food items (chiefly rice and noodles).[xlviii]

> ***"Red Cross provided equipment like blankets, mosquito nets, oil; they really provided everything needed for the house."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

Other frequently mentioned items were those for the household (mosquito nets, blankets and towels) and WASH items (soap, toothpaste and shampoo):

> ***"Plan International provided us with women's kits, MSSD*** *[the Ministry of Social Services]* ***and the DSWD*** *[Department of Social Welfare and Development]* ***also gave relief goods."*** *Mariam (female, 21)*

> ***"Our life changed when we evacuated. During our evacuation, we were able to get supplies from the Red Cross or sometimes from the World Food Programme, household items like basins, mats, blankets, bathing essentials, towels – yes, we were able to get those."*** *Amira (female, 24)*

Other items mentioned by individuals were medicines and cash (from local government) as well as clothing items. Amira had received cash from a social protection programme run by the national government which enabled her to build a house in her new area.[xlix]

A few participants said that aid supplies had significantly helped but a larger number of participants said that aid had not reached them, or only comes occasionally. Dalia said that she had not received aid in her new location but had previously received rice at a time when her family was in need. Khalid (male, 21) noted that aid was limited, and that they had to queue:

[xlvii] Namely the Ministry of Social Services (MSSD) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).
[xlviii] Other items mentioned were sardines, coffee, salt, soy sauce, eggs, vegetables, sugar and cooking oil.
[xlix] The 4Ps Programme.

"There are some, but they're limited. We queue up when getting them. Usually, they consist of rice, (instant) noodles, and canned sardines. Also, the leaders here treat us fairly and distribute them very well."

***"Sardines and rice. I'm not sure because we didn't get any; it was just shared with us by our companions because we were separated. Some got sardines and noodles. We need rice. We moved because our previous place was already full** [of people], **so we didn't get any** [relief] **supply. We were away for several days, then we were able to come back."** Rasheed (male, 17)*

4.7 Perceptions of safety

4.7.1 Safety in everyday life

From the survey, the following analyses focused on exploring the differences between gender identities, age group, country of residence and minority group membership regarding participants' perceptions of safety.

Participants were asked about their perceptions of safety in their everyday life, in order to deepen the understanding of the threat of violence they may be living under. The question was asked on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being very unsafe and 5 being very safe. These responses were treated as ordinal data.

Generally, participants reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe in their everyday lives (38%), compared to safe or very safe (37.4%), as well as neutral (24.6%).

Differences by gender

Table 22: Participants' perceptions of safety, by gender

How safe do you feel in your everyday life?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
Scale from 1-5	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very unsafe (1)	704	14.3%	734	15%	1438	14.6%
Unsafe (2)	1232	**25.1%**	1062	21.7%	2294	23.4%
Neutral (3)	1284	26.1%	1135	23.2%	2419	24.6%
Safe (4)	1245	25.3%	1287	26.3%	2532	25.8%
Very safe (5)	452	9.2%	684	14%	1136	11.6%
Total	4917	100%	4902	100%	9819	100%

There were significant gender differences regarding perceptions of safety in everyday life. Girls and young women reported feeling significantly less safe (average response = 2.9) than boys and young men (average response = 3.03).

Differences by country

There were significant country differences regarding participants' safety perceptions in everyday life.

Participants from Mozambique (average response = 2.46) and Ethiopia (average response = 2.76) reported significantly lower safety perceptions than participants from all other countries.[l] By contrast,

[l] These results are the lowest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, one of the lowest frequencies was in the country that cannot be named.

participants from the Philippines reported the highest safety perception compared to all other countries (average response = 3.82). Average response across all countries was 2.96.

Difference by living status

There were significant differences in perceptions of safety in everyday life depending on participants' living status. Participants who identified as IDPs reported significantly lower safety perceptions (average response = 2.68) than refugees (average response = 2.92) and participants who remained at home (average response = 3.02).

Differences by minority

Participants who identified as a minority group showed significantly lower safety perceptions (average response = 2.89), compared to participants who did not identify as a listed minority group (average response = 2.98).

4.7.2 Participants' perceptions of what they are most at risk of due to conflict

When participants were asked what they felt most at risk from as a result of conflict, the majority of participants reported feeling most at risk of shootings (46.1%), lootings (34%), disruption to employment (33.9%), hunger (31.5%) and airstrikes/bombs (30.2%).

Differences by gender

Table 23: Participants' perceptions of what are they most at risk due to conflict, by gender

What do you feel most at risk from as a result of the conflict in the region or country where you currently live?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Landmines	904	18.5%	768	15.7%	1672	17.1%
Airstrikes/bombs	1509	30.8%	1451	29.7%	2960	**30.2%**
Shootings	2339	**47.8%**	2170	**44.4%**	4509	**46.1%**
Lootings	1749	**35.7%**	1579	**32.3%**	3328	**34%**
Being taken hostage	1299	**26.5%**	1185	**24.2%**	2484	25.4%
Being forced to fight or join the army	898	18.3%	953	19.5%	1851	18.9%
Not being able to go to school	1350	**27.6%**	1161	**23.7%**	2511	25.7%
Not being able to go to hospitals/clinics	1189	24.3%	1044	21.4%	2233	22.8%
Sexual violence	1336	27.3%	852	17.4%	2188	22.4%
Physical violence	1257	**25.7%**	1041	**21.3%**	2298	23.5%
Being forced to marry	703	14.4%	426	8.7%	1129	11.5%
Hunger	1642	**33.5%**	1438	**29.4%**	3080	**31.5%**
Disruption to employment	1727	**35.3%**	1587	**32.5%**	3314	**33.9%**
None of the above	609	12.4%	625	12.8%	1234	12.6%
Total	4897	100%	4889	100%	9786	100%

Of the most frequently chosen options, there were significant gender differences regarding what participants felt most at risk from as a result of conflict. This was the case for shootings, lootings, being taken hostage, not being able to go to school, physical violence, being forced to marry, disruption to employment and hunger.

Girls and young women reported at significantly higher frequencies than boys and young men in relation to feelings of being at risk of shootings (47.8% vs 44.4%), lootings (35.7% vs 32.3%), being taken hostage (26.5% vs 24.2%), not being able to go to school (27.6% vs 23.7%), physical violence (25.7% vs 21.3%), disruptions to employment (35.3% vs 32.5%) and hunger (33.5% vs 29.4%).

Notably, it is possible to see that girls and young women reported more frequently being forced to marry than boys and young men (14.4% vs 8.7%), however this study did not have a big enough sample size to test if this was significantly different.

Differences by age group

There were significant differences due to the participants' age regarding what they felt most at risk from as a result of conflict. This was the case for shootings, hostage taking, not being able to go to school, disruption to employment and hunger. Younger participants (aged 15 to 19) reported significantly higher frequencies than older participants (20 to 24 years) on the following: shooting (46.4% vs 43.9%), hostage taking (26.8% vs 23.0%), not being able to go to school (26.7% vs. 23.6%) and hunger (31.7% vs 29.9%). However, in terms of disruption to employment, the opposite was found, with older participants reporting higher frequencies than younger ones (34.3% vs 32%).

Differences by country

There were significant country differences regarding the frequency of what participants felt most at risk from as a result of conflict.

In terms of **airstrikes/bombs**, participants from Colombia (2.6%) and the Philippines (1.8%) reported this at significantly lower frequencies than participants compared to all other countries. Participants from Ukraine[li] (18%) had the highest frequency of reporting this, compared to all other countries.

When compared to all other countries, participants from the Philippines had significantly lower frequencies for reporting **shootings** (3.9%) and **disruption of employment** (2.8%).

In terms of **lootings**, participants from Ethiopia (17.3%) reported this at significantly higher frequencies than anyone else.

Regarding **physical violence**, Nigeria (16.3%) and Cameroon (14.6%) had significantly higher reporting frequencies when compared to all other countries.

Participants from Nigeria (21.5%) reported a significantly higher frequency of considering **hunger** as what they were most at risk of, when compared to all other participants.

Participants from Ethiopia[lii] (17%) had a significantly higher frequency of reporting **disruption of employment**, compared to all other participants.

Difference by living status

There were significant differences regarding what participants considered they were most at risk of depending on participants' living status.

In terms of feeling most at risk of airstrike/bombs, refugee participants reported this at significantly lower frequencies compared to IDPs and participants who remained at home (25.3% refugees vs 30.7% IDPs vs 32.5% participants at home).

[li] This result is the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, the frequency was highest in the country that cannot be named.
[lii] This result is the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, the frequency was highest in the country that cannot be named.

IDP participants had a significantly higher frequency for considering shootings as being what they were most at risk from due to conflict compared to participants who remained at home and refugees (51.1% IDPs vs 46.9% participants at home vs 51.1% refugees).

In terms of hostage taking, IDPs had significantly higher frequency of reporting compared to participants who remained at home and refugees (31% IDPs vs 25.8% participants at home vs 22.6% refugees).

Participants who remained at home had a significantly lower frequency of reporting not being able to go to school compared to IDPs and refugees (23.6% at home vs 31.2% IDPs vs 33.1% refugees).

IDPs had a significantly higher frequency of reporting being at risk of physical violence due to conflict compared to participants who remained at home and refugees (29.3% IDPs vs 24.1% at home vs 17.9% refugees).

Participants who identified as IDPs reported feeling at risk of hunger at a significantly lower frequency compared to participants who remained at home and refugees (35.4% IDPs vs 31.6% at home vs 30.9% refugees).

However, such significant differences were not the case for frequencies of disruption of employment across the different groups.

Differences by minority

Participants who identified as a minority group reported certain risks at significantly lower frequencies, compared to participants who did not identify as a listed minority group, in terms of airstrikes (28% minority group vs 33.8% not listed minority), shootings (45.8% vs 48%), and lootings (32.9% vs 37%). For the frequency of hunger, participants who identified as a minority group showed significantly higher frequencies (34.5%), compared to participants who did not identify as a listed minority group (30%).

4.7.3 Insights from qualitative interviews

Cameroon

Across Cameroon, participants felt unsafe due to the presence of armed groups, which limited their movements around their communities.

Girls were recognised to be at risk of sexual violence from the armed groups, while boys were at risk of physical violence through police harassment or being forced to join the armed groups.

All participants in Cameroon thought that people in their community felt unsafe in their everyday lives, due to the presence of the military and armed groups – that presence, they felt, could mean an attack or military operation at any time. Generally, participants felt that it was unsafe to move around their communities, especially at night and that they would be vulnerable to attacks. Some participants also noted the presence of gunshots made them feel unsafe while carrying out activities. Tossam (male, 22) shared that it was impossible to know when the shootings could start. Bih and Akungha (females, 14 and 19) noted that people were afraid to walk around especially at night. Other individuals noted that non-state armed groups could kidnap people.

Bessong (female, 24) felt unsafe but still noted that the situation was better than where she had been displaced from.

Participants observed clear gendered differences in safety and perceived girls and women to be more at risk from sexual violence such as rape. Others thought that girls were also at risk from kidnappings, illegal arrests and physical violence. Bessong had experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) by the father of her child, and she feared being raped or murdered by a man.[liii]

[liii] This incident of intimate partner violence was reported and followed up by the Plan International Safeguarding adviser.

Boys and men were seen to be more at risk from harassment, arbitrary arrests and being killed by the military or armed groups. In the Northwest, participants cited a danger for boys of being tortured by these groups or being kidnapped or forced to join them.

Makola (male, 19) and Egbe (female, 16) said that both genders were at risk from harassment and gunshots.

> ***"Boys are also afraid because the military can mistake them for the Amba boys."***[liv]
> *Tabe (female, 14)*

Participants were asked what their community, family or friends feel most at risk from due to conflict, to which many participants replied harassment. Many also reported gunshots, killings and police arrests. Other individuals reported beating and bombs. A few mentioned torture, abductions, rape and landmines being the biggest risks.

Colombia

Participants in Chocó did not feel safe in their everyday lives, unlike participants in Antioquia who felt generally safe except for going out at night. Across regions, there was a fear of encountering a confrontation between armed groups.

Participants noted some gender differences in safety with some saying that girls were more vulnerable than boys or men.

There were differences regarding perceptions of safety between participants in Antioquia and Chocó: the majority of participants in Antioquia felt safe in their everyday lives, whereas participants in Chocó did not feel safe in their everyday lives.

For most in Antioquia these feelings of safety had arisen only in recent years as violence had decreased since one single armed group had taken full control of selected municipalities of the region. David (male, 15) noted there was a big dispute between armed groups in 2021. Frijolito (male, 24) also noticed that the municipality had calmed down; he shared that it was now possible to walk home at 11pm – but that had not been possible in 2016 or 2017, when "you would not have arrived home":

> ***"I don't know if the police or the army captured them or something, or those people moved to another area, or they are no longer interested in the municipality, or something like that, but everything calmed down thank God."***

Participants were asked what they felt most at risk from due to conflict. Most participants in Antioquia felt most at risk when there was confrontation between armed groups which made them more at risk from being killed in the crossfire. Mille (female, 13) said that she feared being threatened while Edil and Terra (females, 16 and 22) felt more worried about kidnapping.

In Antioquia, although participants felt generally safe, they often added a caveat relating to the ways they had to be careful. Most participants noted that even though they felt safe in their lives, they would still avoid going out after nightfall.

Terra, Edil and Camila (females, 15) also noted that they felt safe but would not walk outside when it was too quiet. Camila said that on holidays or special days she also avoided going out as there were too many drunk people around. David said the town was generally safe but not for strangers visiting. Daniel (male, 19) noted that he can go out late at night without any issues, and that the "Zona Rosa" or nightclub zone is safe with restaurants, clubs and bars open until the early hours:

> ***"I know nothing will happen to me, even my motorcycle is outside at dawn, and nothing has ever happened to it, nothing has ever really."***

[liv] "Amba boys" is a collective term used by communities to refer to the non-state armed groups in Northwest and Southwest Cameroon.

Adriana (female, 20) acknowledged that she used to be afraid as there were more shootings in previous years, but it was necessary to be attentive still in case it happens. Tori (female, 16) said that last year she felt unsafe when gangs would come to the house looking for her brother but this year, she felt safe, although she caveated that her neighbourhood was still dangerous.

Other participants only felt partly safe. Mille said that sometimes she gets scared. One night people outside were throwing stones and the power went out and she hid under bed. Calle and Andrés (males, both 21) shared that murders are still normalised. Martha (female, 22) did not feel safe in her everyday life as a lot of people from armed groups were present in the community; she mentioned an open lot near her house which was dark and where armed men hang out. Raquel (female, 22) said that the town scared her due to confrontations between armed groups, who were using unoccupied houses near her home. She worried about a shootout between groups occurring and being hit by a stray bullet. Raquel also noted that she would not stay out much past 5pm due to safety concerns and was careful when speaking about armed groups outside in case informants were listening.

Frijolito noted that even organisations that are supposed to provide safety such as the police do not have the capacity to provide security for the entire municipality. Therefore, safety is never guaranteed.

> ***"A few days ago, I was riding with my mom and there were three of them on a motorcycle. I recognised one of them, and they turned around and pointed at me and said: that's her, that's her, and I was scared to death. I even started to cry, and I told my mom. She told me that it was, well, as if I knew them. They told me that maybe they just wanted to annoy me. I mean, then I went into the house, but I was very scared that it would happen again."*** *Terra (female, 22)*

Raquel said that when new groups arrive in the area, they are often looking for girls, so she avoids leaving the house:

> ***"I have a friend who says she doesn't go out because one of them has it in for her […] when she goes out […] she says 'I hope I won't run into him because he keeps looking at me'. He has sent her messages, he tells her that if she doesn't have a cell phone he will give her one, he asks her when can they talk about this and that."*** *Raquel (female, 22)*

> ***"Because it is very rare for a woman to rape a boy. Well, at least here it is very rare that a woman is going to mess with a child. But it is not rare, for example, for a man to take advantage of a girl."*** *Terra (female, 22)*

Martha also shared that girls were at risk of sexual violence and kidnapping and boys and men were at risk of being taken to armed groups and killed.

Participants in Chocó mostly felt most at risk from robberies. Andrea noted that a person could die for their cell phone. Many other participants felt at risk from conflicts between groups and the risk of stray bullets, including Raúl (male, 17) who did not feel safe in his neighbourhood due to warring groups.

> ***"You even have to hide under the bed. Because, for example, a bullet: the houses in Chocó are usually made of wood and sometimes there have been cases where people have been hit by a bullet inside their house."*** *Rodrigo (male, 18)*

Rodolfo (male, 17) shared that families in the neighbourhood were most at risk from extortion because if they refused to pay, the armed group would shoot at the family's house. Elías and Jonas (males, 14 and 16) felt most at risk from walking in other neighbourhoods for fear of being stopped and questioned by gangs.

Participants mentioned some gendered differences in safety, with Luís and Tecachi (males, 14) saying that girls and women were more at risk from kidnapping. In Chocó, many female participants mentioned being afraid and avoiding going out at night or dawn. Andrea (female, 15) thought that women and girls were more at risk from rape and abuse. However, Cata and Johana (females, 16 and 17) believed that instances of rape had decreased since women had "made their commands" (Johana) possibly indicating that women speaking up against sexual violence was decreasing its incidence. However, Yirlesa

(female, 18) caveated that it was incorrect to assume that incidents of sexual violence have fully stopped.

Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the threat of violence from conflict framed participants' perception of everyday safety, with many participants discussing being at risk from heavy artillery and gunfire.

Discussions on safety among participants in Ethiopia tended to include mention of violence experienced or witnessed when not experiencing active conflict. Answers therefore aligned more with risks related to conflict than perceptions of safety in everyday life. However, some did discuss issues related to fear and safety. Adolay and Aba-Ala (females, 20 and 18) discussed being scared that war would return. Many participants discussed being at risk from heavy artillery and gunfire being used in towns.

> ***"People still feel unsafe. It is said that the war could start again. This by itself disturbs people. When we think of another war, we imagine what would happen to us again. It is very scary."*** *Aba-Ala (female, 18)*

> ***"Right now, we don't worry about safety or security issues as before."*** *Addi (male, 13)*

One participant described an example of targeted killing of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in their village. They shared that previously everyone had lived harmoniously but since this incident they no longer felt safe.

> ***"In*** *[name of town]* ***we have witnessed the killings of innocent*** *[Ethiopian]* ***Orthodox Christians. They were killed with stones and weapons door to door, and we have seen many horrific incidents. We have lived in harmony, we ate and drink together, however during the war some bad people among us have killed innocent people. As a result, when we saw people with a weapon, we don't feel safe, and we will be frightened because we don't trust them anymore."*** *Baraulo (female, 20)*

Philippines

There were mixed responses among the Philippines participants regarding whether they generally felt safe or not, although the risk of shootings was still widely recognised to potentially occur in their communities.

Participants' responses in the Philippines were split on safety. Some said that they felt unsafe in everyday life because of the presence of gunfire in the area and the risk of getting hit by a stray bullet. However, others said that they felt safe in their area – Mahid and Youssef (males, 18 and 17) thought that it was also safe to go out at night. A few participants gave mixed responses. Zahra (female, 19) said that she largely felt safe but during election periods it was unsafe. Khalid (male, 21) shared that his own area was safe but other nearby areas were more unsafe due to shootings. Participants did not note any gendered differences in safety; only Dalia (female, 14) thought that girls and women were more afraid than boys.

Participants said that their community, family and friends were most at risk from gunfire and shootings. Farhana (female, 21) shared that military operations would take place when soldiers would search for rebels. Mariam (female, 21) said that there were often conflicts over land with the government which could sometimes escalate.

> ***"Livelihood is affected because houses are hit by gunfire and bombs. During the bombing in*** *[town name]*, ***shrapnel fell near us. Although we weren't directly affected, we evacuated because it was too dangerous. A child also died from being hit by shrapnel.***

The family brought the child to a hospital, but unfortunately, the child didn't make it, so they brought the body home. Houses hit by these incidents are really destroyed." *Youssef (male, 17)*

"Then that night, we were at home, and all the gunfire hit our house; the walls of our house were full of holes, bullet holes, but by God's grace, none of us were hit." *Amira (female, 24)*

4.8 Violence against children and young people

4.8.1 Perceptions of types of violence that have increased in the community due to conflict

In the survey, when participants were asked about types of violence that had increased in their community due to the conflict, of the options provided, the majority of participants reported kidnapping (30.4%,) sexual assault or violence (27.3%), child labour (24.8%), exploitation (23.7%) and sexual harassment (23.2%).

Differences by gender

For the most frequent types of violence that have increased in participants' communities, there were significant gender differences seen regarding sexual assault, sexual harassment and child labour.

In terms of sexual assault, girls and young women showed a significantly higher frequency of reports (28.8%) compared to boys and young men (24%). Similarly, girls and young women also had a significantly higher frequency of reporting sexual assaults (24.6%) than boys (20.2%). Girls had a significantly higher frequency of reporting child labour (25.1%) than boys and young men (22.9%).

Differences by age group

Table 24: Participants' perceptions of types of violence that have increased in their community, by age group

Have any of the following types of violence increased in your community due to the conflict situation in the region or country where you currently live?						
	15-19		20-24		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sexual assault or violence	1281	27.1%	1359	27.5%	2640	**27.3%**
Sexual harassment	1091	23.1%	1149	23.3%	2240	**23.2%**
Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting [FGM/C]	366	7.7%	333	6.8%	699	7.2%
Forced early marriage	686	14.5%	747	15.1%	1433	14.8%
Child marriage	976	20.6%	926	18.8%	1902	19.7%
Trafficking	1023	21.6%	1015	20.6%	2038	21.1%
Kidnapping	1464	30.9%	1472	29.8%	2936	**30.4%**
Exploitation[40]	1138	24%	1153	23.4%	2291	**23.7%**
Child labour	1248	**26.4%**	1153	23.4%	2401	**24.8%**
None of the above	1601	33.8%	1733	35.1%	3334	34.5%
Total	4732	100%	4933	100%	9665	100%

When participants were asked what types of violence and forms of exploitation had increased in their community due to the conflict, a key significant difference depending on age group was found for child labour. Younger participants (15 to 19 years) had a significantly higher frequency (26.4%) of considering

child labour as a form of exploitation that had increased in their community compared to older participants (20 to 24 years) (23.4%).

Differences by country

There were significant country differences regarding the frequency of type of violence that participants considered had increased in their community.

Compared to other countries, participants from Mozambique (16.7%) and Cameroon (15.1%) had significantly higher frequencies of reporting **sexual assault** as a type of violence that had increased in their community.

For reports of **sexual harassment**, participants from Nigeria (16.4%) and Mozambique (16%) had significantly higher frequencies of considering that this type of violence had increased in their community, when compared to all other countries. For **kidnapping**, participants from Nigeria (23%) had significantly higher frequencies of reporting this than all other countries.

For **exploitation**, participants from Nigeria (16%) had significantly higher frequencies for reporting this type of violence compared to all other countries.

In terms of **child labour** being considered a type of violence that had increased in the community, participants from Nigeria[lv] (17.7%) reported this at a significantly higher frequency than any other participants.

Difference by living status

Among participants identifying as IDPs, 34.2 per cent reported sexual assault, compared to 25.8 per cent of refugees and 25.5 per cent of participants who remained at home. Regarding sexual harassment, 29.2 per cent of IDPs, 22.2 per cent of refugees and 20.2 per cent of home participants reported an increase in their communities. Kidnapping as an increased form of violence was reported by 35.8 per cent of participants identifying as IDPs, compared to 29.8 per cent of refugees and 25.2 per cent of participants who remained at home. Child labour was reported to have increased after conflict by 29.5 per cent of IDPs, 24.5 per cent of refugees, and 21.3 per cent of at home participants.

In terms of exploitation, IDPs had a significantly higher frequency (27.4%) of reporting this compared to participants who remained at home (22.6%).

Differences by minority

Participants who identified as a minority group showed significantly higher frequencies than participants who did not identify as such for reporting sexual assault or violence (32% vs 21.9%), sexual harassment (26.5% vs 19%), kidnapping (32.2% vs 28.3), exploitation (25.4% vs 21.9), and child labour (26.2% vs 23.1%).

4.8.2 Perpetrators of violence

When asked who were the perpetrators of the violence that had increased in their communities, most participants identified armed groups (35%) and strangers (34.1%), with fewer participants considering attributing it to gang violence (30.6%) and the state/government (21.6%).[lvi]

Differences by age group

[lv] This result is the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, the frequency was highest in the country that cannot be named.

[lvi] Gender and minority group analyses have not been conducted regarding this question as it was deemed there was no significant reason across genders and minorities to have different perceptions for this question.

Table 25: Participants' perceptions of who are the perpetrators of the violence that has increased in their community, by age group

Who are the perpetrators of the violence that has increased in your community due to the conflict situation?						
	15-19		20-24		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Gang violence	1411	30.1%	1498	31.1%	2909	**30.6%**
Violence from armed groups	1612	34.4%	1713	35.6%	3325	**35%**
Violence from the state/government	931	19.9%	1123	23.3%	2054	**21.6%**
Family violence/violence in the home	579	12.4%	616	12.8%	1195	12.6%
Violence from strangers	1569	33.5%	1673	34.8%	3242	**34.1%**
None of the above	1101	23.5%	1057	22%	2158	22.7%
Total	4682	100%	4812	100%	8539	100%

When participants were asked about who were the perpetrators of the violence that had increased in their communities, significant differences were found depending on participants' age. Older participants (20 to 24 years) reported at a significantly higher frequency that the state/government was a perpetrator of the increased violence in their community, compared to younger participants (22.1% vs 19%).

Younger participants had a significantly higher frequency of reporting that the perpetrators were not listed within the response options presented to participants, compared to older participants (22.4% vs 20.8%).

Differences by country

There were significant differences across countries regarding who the participants identified as the perpetrators of increased violence in their communities.[lvii]

Participants from Nigeria had a significantly higher frequency (18.4%) of reporting **gangs** as the perpetrators of increased violence in the conflict, compared to all other countries, with Colombia coming second (14.7%). It is important to note that participants in Cameroon were not given this among their answer options due to possible sensitivities in the operational context.

Regarding **armed groups** being the perpetrators of the increased violence, participants from Nigeria (16.2%), Mozambique (15%) and Colombia (14.4%) all reported this at a higher frequency, which was significantly different from all other countries.

Strangers being considered as the perpetrators of the increased violence was significantly higher for participants from Mozambique (18%) than for all other countries.

Participants from Ukraine (25.3%) reported the highest frequency for considering **none** of the options relevant for the perpetrators of the increased violence, compared to all other countries. This is due to the nature of the war in Ukraine and it being an interstate conflict.

Difference by living status

IDP participants had significantly higher frequencies of considering armed groups as the perpetrators of increased violence in their communities (44.9%) when compared to refugees (39%) and participants who remained at home (32.7%).

[lvii] In Sudan, violence is linked to state and non-state actors who are often indistinguishable, e.g. armed groups funded by the state. Participants' responses were thereby based on participants' perceptions of who visibly appears to represent the state, such as people in uniform.

IDPs also showed a significantly higher frequency of reports of gangs as the perpetrators of increased violence (33.4%) in their communities compared to participants who remained at home (30.5%) and refugees (30.8%).

IDP participants and those who remained at home had significantly higher frequencies of considering the state/government (23.1% and 23.9%) as the perpetrators of increased violence in their communities, compared to refugees (16.7%).

Refugee participants and those who remained at home showed significantly lower frequencies of considering strangers as the perpetrators of increased violence in their communities (33% and 33.7%), than participants who identified as IDPs (40%).

4.8.3 Insights from qualitative interviews

Cameroon

Violence was recognised as a threat across participating communities.

Girls were recognised to be particularly at risk of sexual violence, owing to the traditional framing of girls as weaker or being easy to deceive.

Participants listed a range of actors responsible for preventing violence, from the police, to armed group leaders, to NGOs and the UN.

Nearly all participants in Cameroon thought that violence was an issue in their community. In the Southwest, participants said that people were vulnerable to beatings and harassment, and there were cases of rape. Some participants described cases of domestic violence; Makola (male, 19) said that parents were mistreating their children. Some thought that violence in the community had increased because of the conflict.

> ***"It has increased because both parties feel they have power over all and can do what they like and nobody will question their acts."*** *Ikome (male, 16)*

> ***"Men have tension due to poverty and beat the woman out of frustration."*** *Bessong (female, 24)*

In the Northwest, young people were thought to be most at risk from sexual violence (mostly rape but molestation was also mentioned) and forced early marriages. Other types of violence raised included kidnapping and physical violence such as torture and robbery. Most of the participants in the Northwest thought that levels of violence had increased since the conflict had begun, but three participants thought there had been a decrease in levels.

When asked which groups were most at risk from violence, most of the female participants responded that women or girls were most at risk. They thought that this was because women and girls were "weaker" if they have to run or fight and could be "violated".

> ***"The girls are mostly attacked because they can't fight."*** *Tabe (female, 14)*

Yong (male, 23) believed that girls are more "easily deceived". Others thought it was because girls were most at risk of sexual violence from armed groups. Tossam (male, 22) and Yisah (female, 17) reckoned that young people in general were at risk. In the Southwest in particular, some of the male participants responded that everyone was at risk as anyone can be killed by gunshots. Bate (male, 22) thought that both boys and girls could be raped, harassed, beaten or killed.

> ***"The youths [are at risk] because the military feels they are spies same as the armed groups."*** *Yisah (female, 17)*

However, Akungha (female, 19) believed that community and religious leaders and elders were most at risk from violence.

When asked who is most responsible for preventing violence in times of conflict, responses varied across the police, the government or president and the military and armed group leaders. The UN, NGOs and the community were also mentioned as entities that could prevent conflict.

Colombia

Violence against children, adolescents and young people was seen as a continuous risk in Colombia, and considered as a way to force children to participate in armed groups.

Intimate partner violence against women and girls was also seen to have worsened.

Various actors were thought by participants to have a role in preventing violence against children and young people, particularly parents, governments and police.

Participants in Colombia thought that violence against children, adolescents and young people was a prevalent issue; this sentiment was strongly shared by participants in Chocó and less so by participants in Antioquia.

In Chocó, Isabel (female, 22) thought that since the COVID-19 lockdowns, violence against children and intimate partner violence (IPV) against girls and women had worsened. Participants felt that children were subject to what they called "psychological violence" and bullying. Yirlesa (female, 18) noted that children are exposed to physical, verbal and psychological violence and this had increased with conflict. She also said that since the conflict began, it was now more common to see young children aged 13 or 14 with guns for robbing people.

More participants in Antioquia thought that IPV against women and girls was a bigger issue in the community, but most felt that young people and children faced particular risks from violence. Nicolás and Diomedes (males, 14 and 15) shared that violence sometimes was directed at children, citing a recent incident with a man attacking girls aged six or seven a few months ago. Valentina (female, 18) did not think violence against children was seen in the community, but added that it was best to not look for problems to avoid trouble. Martha (female, 22) shared that young people were particularly at risk because lately groups have been attacking youth more often:

> ***"Because every day you see that they killed a young person, 22 years old, 17 years old, so and so, that is mostly** [always] **a young person."***

Others shared that children and young people were particularly at risk of being recruited into armed groups and were sometimes killed in these groups. Andrés and Calle (males, 21) shared that boys and girls who were youth leaders were often threatened and hunted by armed groups. Frijolito (male, 24) shared that girls were at particular risk of harassment.

Participants were asked who was most responsible for preventing violence against children, adolescents and young people. Many believed the responsibility started at home with parents. Valentina added that school should also be a support. Other responses in Antioquia called on the government and those in power to do more.

David (male, 17) thought that armed group commanders were responsible for preventing violence against children as they had more control than the police. Although not in relation to children or young people specifically, Frijolito believed that the police played the main role in preventing violence generally as he thought an improvement in policing and the army had helped with a recent de-escalation of the conflict.

In Chocó, Isabel and Andrea (females, 22 and 17) also believed the community and the government played a role. Wilson, Luis and Elías (males, 13, 13 and 14) thought the police could do more:

> ***"The police, they, many of them, know where the bad guys are hiding but they don't go."*** *Elías (male, 14)*

Ethiopia[lviii]

Participants across Ethiopia described the intense and brutal acts of violence they had directly experienced or witnessed.

Boys have been killed by armed groups to stop them becoming a potential threat to them, and many girls and women, including some participants, had experienced sexual violence.

Most participants in Ethiopia thought that violence was an issue in Afar and many had direct experiences of it. They had witnessed many people die including family members, neighbours and villagers. Participants also discussed witnessing heavy artillery and many dead bodies.

> ***"We learned that Eritrean and other soldiers get into the town, and then as they get into the town, my father aged 74 was assassinated in his own house."*** *Addi (male, 23)*

Youth were discussed as having been particularly impacted by violence during conflict:

> ***"There are many people who were dead from heavy artilleries fired during the war. Others were killed with bombs dropped by drones and planes. Many young people were killed during the war including many of my friends. Many youths joined the war because they were left without any option. As a result, most of them lost their lives."*** *Arbeti (female, 15)*

> ***"During the war heavy artilleries has been fired into the town and it left many casualties on the people who has been living in their homes […] Many of the people on board have been youngsters, and they were all dead from the accident… After the accident, we have counted the body of around 60 people whom were mostly youngsters, and we buried them. We buried ten bodies in one hole at a time because it is difficult for us to dig and prepare individual burial place."*** *Barri (male, 24)*

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) was a major type of violence for women and girls. Participants knew women and girls who had been raped (some had become pregnant as a result). Sometimes it was even discussed as if it were an inevitable part of war.

> ***"When the war broke out, there was an effort to take women out of this area. Those who were unable to leave, their fate was being raped. The women left behind were raped."*** *Aculle (female, 18)*

Men and boys were also targeted by direct violence, often being killed. This was discussed by Addodas (female, 19):

> ***"With regard to the impacts of the war I can say both male and females were affected equally, but [for] women it is more serious because they were raped... Boys were also affected by the war indeed, many of them were killed and there are others who have never been founded after the war. So, I can say everyone was affected by the war in different ways."***

Sheraro (female, 17) shared this:

> ***"During the war women have experienced many worse attacks and harassment. They have also [been] forced to make wrong decisions in their life like a child marriage. I can say the most horrific incidents were happened on young boys. That is because enemy soldiers have killed so many innocent teenagers by assuming that they will join the struggle and fight them back… Thus, we women have experienced incidents like being***

[lviii] Interviewees in Ethiopia discussed the acts of violence they had witnessed or experienced themselves. These incidences were reported and followed up by the Plan International Ethiopia safeguarding team.

raped and harassed, but majority of young boys were dead due to the war."

Three participants from Tigray were survivors of SGBV – of rape and gang rapes – committed by armed groups; two of them had been held captive. SGBV was discussed as widespread, common and targeted against all women and girls.

> ***"In that house they raped me in a group for five days."*** *Axum (female, 20)*
>
> ***"There were … soldiers have committed immoral activities on us. They have done everything they wanted on us, I can say. Among girls who were held captives in the camp they chose anyone they want at any time and then do whatever they wanted to do."*** *Shire (female, 21)*
>
> ***"There are many girls who were attacked like me during the war, and even mothers who were raped in front of their children and husband."*** *Shire*

Finally, SGBV was also discussed in the context of IDP camps. Shire discussed men and women sharing shelters with no curtains and the danger of going out after dark – including to the toilet – as "suicidal". She also shared a story of a seven-year-old girl being raped by drunken men in an IDP camp.

Philippines

Community leaders were recognised as being responsible for preventing violence in times of conflict.

In Mindanao, very few respondents were asked questions in relation to violence. The participants who discussed the topic were generally unsure about violence. Other responses suggested that issues of violence against children, adolescents and youth were not a problem in the area. Only Amira (female, 14) responded that it was an issue but she said that it was mainly an issue for children who got mixed up with alcohol or drugs. Fatima (female, 15) thought that children could be most at risk from violence as they did not have knowledge of what was happening; Yasmin (female, 17) believed that everyone in the community was at risk of violence. When asked who was most responsible for preventing violence in times of conflict, the majority thought the community leaders or mayor were chiefly responsible.

4.9 Armed groups or armed forces

4.9.1 Joining or supporting armed groups or armed forces

Within the sampled participants in the survey, 18 per cent had been asked to join or support an armed group or armed force.

Differences by gender

Table 26: Incidence of being asked to join or support an armed group or armed force, by gender

Have you ever been asked to join or support an armed group or armed force?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	689	14.2%	1063	22.1%	1752	18.1%
No	4165	85.8%	3746	**77.9%**	7911	**81.9%**
Total	4854	100%	4809	100%	9663	100%

There was a significant association between gender identity and the likelihood of having been asked to join an armed group or armed force. Boys and young men were more likely to be asked to join an armed group or armed force than girls and young women (22% vs 14%), accounting for more than one in five boys having been asked to join an armed group.

Differences by age group

There was a significant association between participants' age group (15 to 18 years and 19 to 24 years) and being asked to join or support an armed group, with older participants being more likely to have been asked to join than younger ones (18.7% vs 16.5%).

Table 27: Incidence of being asked to join or support an armed group or armed force, by age group (15–18, 19–24)

Have you ever been asked to join or support an armed force or group?						
	15-18		19-24		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	428	**16.5%**	1324	**18.7%**	1752	18.1%
No	2171	83.5%	5740	81.3%	7911	81.9%
Total	2599	100%	7064	100%	9663	100%

In the younger age group, 17 per cent aged 15 to 17 were asked to join an armed group, of which 10.8 per cent were girls and 23 per cent were boys. This is key to note, given the recruitment of children by armed groups accounts for one of the six grave violations against children in conflict.

Differences by country

There were significant country differences regarding the likelihood of being asked to join an armed group or armed force.

Table 28: Incidence of being asked to join or support an armed group or armed force, by country (of nine surveyed countries)

Have you ever been asked to join or support an armed group or armed force?		
	Count	%
Cameroon	106	10.7%
Colombia	164	17.3%
Ethiopia	193	20.9%
Lebanon	60	6.1%
Mozambique	258	26.5%
Nigeria	88	8.8%
Sudan	439	44.3%
Ukraine	261	29.8%
Philippines	111	11.4%

Sudan has a significantly higher proportion of participants (44.3%) who were asked to join an armed group compared to all other countries. This was followed closely by Mozambique (26.5%), Ukraine (29.8%) and Colombia (17.3%).

Difference by living status

There was a significant association between participants being asked to join armed groups and their living status. Refugee participants were significantly more likely to be asked to join an armed group (30.9%), than IDPs (22.9%) and participants who remained at home (14.6%).

Differences by minority

There was a significant association between participants being asked to join armed groups and their minority group membership status. Participants who identified as a minority group were significantly more likely to be asked to join an armed group (23.4%), than participants who did not identify as a listed minority group (13.1%).

4.9.2 Ways that participants were asked to join armed groups or armed forces

Most participants reported that when they had joined an armed group, they had done so voluntarily, they had wanted to join or support the group (30.7%).[lix] However, a considerable proportion of participants disclosed that they had joined armed groups after being threatened or coerced (23.7%). The questionnaire makes a distinction as to whether the participants recognised that joining an armed group or armed force had occurred through voluntary means or through coercion. Yet, it must be noted that the child protection in humanitarian action community and international law consider that child recruitment is never voluntary but is always coerced by a context or a child experience.

It is important to note that a total of 1,752 responses were recorded for this question, which means that disaggregation into the different answer choices leads to very small sample sizes and hence any further inferential statistics are not possible. However, we present below the frequencies of participants' responses within different groups.

Differences by gender

Table 29: Ways in which participants were asked to join armed groups, by gender

In what way were you asked to join in or support this armed force or group?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
You wanted to join or support [Voluntary]	191	27.7%	346	32.5%	537	**30.7%**
You were kidnapped/abducted into the armed group or armed force [Abduction]	68	9.9%	86	8.1%	154	8.8%
You were threatened or coerced [Under threats]	182	26.4%	233	21.9%	415	**23.7%**
You were forced to marry a member of the armed group or armed force [Forced marriage]	14	2%	17	1.6%	31	1.8%
You were convinced or persuaded by information/ideas and messaging used by the armed group or armed force to recruit members	70	10.2%	98	9.2%	168	9.6%
You were promised money/notoriety or power [Promises]	112	16.3%	176	16.6%	288	**16.4%**
Other	30	4.4%	59	5.6%	89	5.1%
Prefer not to say	22	3.2%	48	4.5%	70	4%

[lix] A country analysis was not conducted as this would mask the complex and differing ways that an armed group or armed force would operate across countries.

Total	689	100%	1063	100%	1752	100%

Differences by age group

Joining an armed group voluntarily, joining due to being threatened or coerced, and joining due to having married a member of the armed group, were the three answer options that attracted the most responses among younger participants (15 to 19 years), compared to older participants (20 to 24 years). For all other responses, it was older participants who reported at higher frequencies than younger participants.

Table 30: Ways in which participants were asked to join armed groups, by age group

In what way were you asked to join in or support this armed force or group?				
	15-19		20-24	
	Count	%	Count	%
You wanted to join or support [Voluntary]	282	32.8%	255	28.6%
You were kidnapped/abducted into the armed group or armed force [Abduction]	71	8.3%	83	9.3%
You were threatened or coerced [Under threats]	212	24.7%	203	22.8%
You were forced to marry a member of the armed group or armed force [Forced marriage][45]	17	2%	14	1.6%
You were convinced or persuaded by information/ideas and messaging used by the armed group or armed force to recruit members	64	7.4%	104	11.7%
You were promised money/notoriety or power [Promises]	138	16%	150	16.8%
Other	42	4.9%	47	5.3%
Prefer not to say	34	4%	36	4%
Total	860	100%	892	100%

Difference by living status

Participants who remained at home more frequently said that they had joined an armed group voluntarily or after having been threatened, compared to participants who identified as IDPs and those who identified as refugees.

Table 31: Ways in which participants were asked to join armed groups, by living status

In what way were you asked to join in or support this armed force or group?						
	At home		IDP		Refugee	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
You wanted to join or support [Voluntary]	336	32.8%	75	28.6%	116	30.9%
You were kidnapped/abducted into the armed group or armed force [Abduction]	72	8.3%	40	9.3%	40	8.9%
You were threatened or coerced [Under threats]	177	24.7%	82	22.8%	141	23.5%
You were forced to marry a member of the armed group or armed force [Forced marriage]	9	2%	9	1.6%	12	1.8%
You were convinced or persuaded by information/ideas and messaging used by the armed group or armed force to recruit members	106	7.4%	29	11.7%	28	9.6%
You were promised money/notoriety or power [Promises]	122	16%	50	16.8%	111	16.6%
Other	61	4.9%	13	5.3%	11	5%

Prefer not to say	44	4%	14	4%	5	3.7%
Total	927	100%	312	100%	464	100%

Differences by minority group

When compared to participants who did not identify as any of the listed minority groups, participants who did so identify reported at a higher frequency for responses that included joining an armed group voluntarily and joining an armed group due to being threatened or coerced.

Table 32: Ways in which participants were asked to join armed groups, by minority group

In what way were you asked to join in or support this armed force or group?				
	Minority group		Not a minority group listed	
	Count	%	Count	%
You wanted to join or support [Voluntary]	300	**27.3%***	215	**36.4%***
You were kidnapped/abducted into the armed group or armed force [Abduction]	131	11.9%	21	3.6%
You were threatened or coerced [Under threats]	286	**26%***	125	**21.2%***
You were forced to marry a member of the armed group or armed force [Forced marriage]	26	2.4%	4	0.7%
You were convinced or persuaded by information/ideas and messaging used by the armed group or armed force to recruit members	91	8.3%	71	12%
You were promised money/notoriety or power [Promises]	189	17.2%	89	15.1%
Other	40	3.6%	42	7.1%
Prefer not to say	35	3.2%	24	4.1%
Total	1098	100%	591	100%

*Highlighted in pink are the responses with significantly higher frequencies of reports. * Denotes that these are significant differences between participants who did not identify as a minority group listed and those who considered themselves a minority.*

4.9.3 Insights from qualitative interviews

Cameroon

Lack of employment opportunities and the ability to earn money were key motivations for all ages and genders to join armed groups.

Traditional gender norms were also cited around boys' and girls' inclusion in armed groups: boys were joining due to their physical attributes and girls were taking up caring roles in the groups.

Participants in Cameroon shared that there was a lack of employment opportunities for boys, girls, women and men which meant that they get recruited more easily or they grow hungry or frustrated and join. Participants believed that men and boys joined armed groups mainly because they wanted to earn a living and make money to care for themselves or their families, while girls and women were also motivated to join due to a lack of employment.

In the Southwest, another reason given for boys joining was to protect themselves from being arrested or killed; for girls and women, it was due to a fear of being kidnapped. Reasons only attributed to men and boys in the Northwest was to have a sense of belonging, protecting their family or joining due to bad influences. Other reasons given for girls and women joining in the Northwest was to seek protection from the armed groups by dating them and due to peer pressure. Akungha (female, 24) also said that if a girl was getting continually arrested (it was unclear whether this was arrest by armed groups or government authorities), she would decide to be a member.

Other reasons given for both genders was to avenge the death of a loved one. Bessong (female, 24) believed that both boys and girls joined because they wanted to fight the government. Other reasons given for both genders joining were power and prestige.

However, all respondents answered that more boys and men had joined armed groups overall. Participants thought that boys had less fear, were stronger and could easily learn to shoot and fight.

> ***"Boys join armed groups more than girls because they think they will be respected and think they would have more power."*** *Dalma (female, 13)*

Once in armed groups, most participants in the Southwest said that boys and girls were tasked to fight or kill people or to protect the population and keep peace. Somewhat differing, participants in the Northwest believed that boys mainly acted in armed combat and girls and women functioned as spies. However, Tateh (female, 20) claimed that girls were more often nurses and cooks while Dalma believed that girls acted as spies for both sides.

Colombia

Many participants knew someone – including family members – who had joined an armed group or who had received offers to join.

Boys and men were thought most likely to join armed groups while girls and women were said to join to seek protection by dating someone in an armed group.

Once recruited, the roles were generally the same for both genders, such as drug running or collecting fines.

In Colombia, a number of participants knew someone who had joined an armed group or who had received offers to join. Some had seen classmates or friends from their neighbourhood join. Most participants said that young people mainly joined for economic reasons as gangs and armed groups offer money, a salary or gifts such as cars, motorcycles and weapons. Participants said that gangs and armed groups used manipulation tactics; they may start by buying a young person a pair of tennis shoes for a small favour and then the favours increase. Some participants also blamed young people for wanting a "bad life" or hanging out with the wrong people as reasons for them joining. Some male participants in Chocó had been asked to join armed groups but had refused. Isabel (female, 22) knew male classmates who had joined such groups.

> ***"Some of these groups come and tell you to join, because*** *[they]* ***pass by a lot, they told me to join once. Even my family was about to take me out of here to avoid more problems and they talked about it. I had an uncle who knows the people in my neighbourhood, and they talked about it, that they should leave me alone."*** *Rodolfo (male, 17)*

> ***"It's hard, because you say, 'but didn't he study with me? Oh my God, now that he's the boss of I don't know what neighbourhood'. You're like, 'he's the scariest', and you're like, 'oh how so, when he studied with me he was…', you never think how that thing was going to happen."*** *Isabel (female, 22)*

Andrés (male, 21) has an older brother who joined a gang when he did not have opportunities to progress. The gang lured his brother in with a gift of a motorcycle and money. Andrés also had an uncle who joined for revenge:

> ***"It also happened with an uncle of mine, who unfortunately was kidnapped, and for that reason, he also joined the armed group, supposedly because he wanted revenge."***

Frijolito (male, 24) shared that in the municipality, armed groups attract children as young as 11 or 12 years old to join them with promises of wealth:

> ***"Young people, adolescents and** [children] **join their ranks and they paid them. And most of the children, that is, who do not have a vision, a clear vision, were lost in the money."***

Some participants also thought that young people join for power. Andrés shared that young men want to impress their friends as well as girls, and that girls and women also like the power and want to be around those who have money. Many of the participants also described how gangs and armed groups were clever in their approach to recruitment and children were at a particular risk of their tactics. For example, Ana (female, 24) shared how gangs look out for children or young people whom they see have a "weakness" such as a child in poverty or with a bad home life. They also target children or young people who loiter or have stopped going to school and attend bars or pool halls to see who could potentially join. Participants said they pick on those who are not studying and offer money or drugs. Ana said girls in the rural villages often end up with armed actors as they do not have the means to study, and the groups take advantage of this. Calle (male, 21) explained how they entice children:

> ***"…if they tell you, 'Here you are going to earn a considerable amount of money that you can help your family', then they have a way, there is an easy path, then that dazzles the young person's mind: 'Wow! I want to join'. Without knowing first what risks they face."***

Girls or women were said to join armed groups for protection. Edil (female, 16) and David (male, 17) also thought that girls get attracted by the power and feel they were "untouchable". Elías (male, 14) shared that girls could also be forced to join if a man in a group decides he wants a particular girl to be his girlfriend. Andrea (female, 15) believed that sometimes girls joined for notoriety reasons or to try and be "tough". Cata (female, 16) said that girls could also join for revenge. Terra and Camila (females, 22 and 15) thought that girls joined by choice as they were attracted to "these types of men" – men in gangs or armed groups. Terra also thought that those who join armed groups were given too much freedom by their parents. Raquel (female, 22) believed that girls joined gangs to escape a bad life.

There was also a mixed response as to whether more girls or boys joined armed groups; generally, both were targets for recruitment but in different ways. Elías shared that women were used as bait sometimes to reach a desired target or that women generally dated older men from armed groups and that was how they became involved. Johana believed there had been an increase in the number of women joining armed groups.

Frijolito said that women and young boys were frequently recruited, with the recruitment of young girls being less common. Raquel also shared that women were being recruited; in her old village the armed group commander was a woman and Raquel had been previously approached by a male armed member to join:

> ***"One day one of them gave me a little piece of paper and told me that if one day I felt bored he would come for me to call him, and they would come for me."***

However, most participants agreed that it was more common for boys and men to join armed groups. Once enrolled in the armed groups, the roles and responsibilities for both genders were largely similar. Participants said that children and adolescents of both genders were mostly used to run errands such as collecting fines.

> ***"But sometimes the children say there is nothing else to do, so they offer them money, and in exchange for money, they do favours. The minors are always the minors. They always take children who do nothing."*** *Raquel (female, 22)*

Johana (female, 17) said that children could often be seen hanging out on street corners keeping watch as a "lookout" on behalf of the armed group. She and Yirlesa (female, 22) shared that it was possible to see the children recording videos on their cell phones to report back to the armed groups.

> ***"That's his job: he has to record, and he has to send evidence of what is going on, who is coming in and who is going out. Anyone he sees as strange he has to report it. If they are going to do a search, he has to tell them."*** *Johana (female, 17)*

A frequently discussed task was distributing and selling drugs (especially in schools) or acting as informants or bell ringers, which is when the recruits are asked to keep watch and ring when they see a certain person pass by. Only Daniel (male, 19) said that boys act as bell ringers while most other participants thought it was both boys and girls. Nicolás (male, 14) also said that women were now being used more frequently as pretty women get information by "flirting". Terra also shared that little boys and women provide intelligence as they were not as likely to be suspected. Some participants said that children act as "*sapos*" or snitches where they inform the police about the gangs' or armed groups' activities. Calle said that women in particular were useful drug mules or transporters for distribution, when going into nightclubs to sell drugs because they get searched less by police. He said that women have to be searched by a female police officer which means they get searched less in comparison to men.

> ***"Then they come, that's why I tell you, they'll check a young man with a small hat, making a scandal, and the woman who is pretty and sexy, they kind of let her go."*** *Calle (male, 21)*

Terra shared that "*pelados*" have the hardest roles in the armed groups as they are usually the ones who have to summon people out of their houses.[lx] Frijolito, Johana and Eli (female, 13) also shared that sometimes a test or initiation was used where a recruit would have to kill someone after joining to be accepted. Eli said that if the recruit did not do the killing, the gang or group would threaten to kill their family; also, once a recruit had killed someone it was even more difficult for them to leave the groups.

Ethiopia

Participants in Tigray discussed youth recruitment into armed groups more than those in Afar. Various reasons were given for joining armed groups, including as a means of fighting back following violence experienced by family or being left without any other option.

Some girls discussed wanting to join armed groups, but being unable to do so .

Participants in Tigray said that young people primarily joined armed groups to fight back or defend themselves, their families and communities, after witnessing atrocities such as people or family members being killed or raped. Most commented that many young people who had joined these groups has subsequently themselves been killed.

> ***"… many youths have joined the TPLF [****Tigray People's Liberation Front****] militia and fought in the war. As a result, many of them lost their lives and they were forced to join the fight and lose their life because of the worst situations they have experienced due to the war… I believe no one loves war unless they run out of options. Thus, when someone sees women being raped, his sisters being raped, his mother's being raped; his parents being killed and finally for his own safety he joined the struggle. Nothing else, because no one forced them to join the war or it is not about a war being heaven. Hence, most of the youth participated in the war because they want to save their family and society as well as to keep their own safety."*** *Mekelle (male, 18)*

> ***"…when they look at their family members and innocents being killed, they felt miserable and joined the war. Therefore, the youth paid the heavy price of the war because many of them lost their life in the war and others were wounded…"*** *Addi (male, 23)*

[lx] *Pelados* is Colombian slang for a "kid" or "young person" who is not a small child but usually an adolescent or older adolescent.

> ***"The participation of the youth in the war have been enormous, and that was because the youth witnessed different atrocities committed on their family members. Some of them witnessed the rape of their sisters or mother, some other the killings of their brothers and other forcing factors. I can say that the youth haven't chosen to go to war but rather they were forced by incidents mentioned above that forced them to join the war."*** *Korem (male, 18)*

Not many participants in Afar discussed armed groups and of those who did, none discussed roles and responsibilities within armed forces or armed groups. Barri (male, 24) shared his experience of being trained and fighting in the militia alongside many other youths. He discussed that some youths were leaving for other countries and others had been killed, including his brother.

> ***"Around 5,000 youngsters were recruited and trained as a militia, and we have been here for 40 days fighting back the TPLF fighters. And after 40 days we left the place and when we come back here after years, we come to learn that most of the militias have sold their weapon and they have gone to Saudi Arabia. Among 30 of them that I have known in here, I heard five of them were dead while trying to cross to Yemen."***

Mille (female, 13) similarly mentioned being worried about the welfare of her brother who had left to fight in the conflict.

> ***"One of our brothers have participated in the fight and we have been worried about his wellbeing because he has not been picking*** *[up]* ***his phone when we called him."*** *Mille (female, 13)*

Arbeti (female, 15) was the only participant from Afar to suggest a reason for joining armed groups – namely, that youth were being left without an option, after the destruction and death caused by the conflict:

> ***"There are many people who were dead from heavy artilleries fired during the war, others were killed with bombs dropped by drones and planes. Many young people were killed during the war including many of my friends. Many youths joined the war because they were left without any option. As a result, most of them lost their lives."***

Gender dimensions of recruitment or roles and responsibilities within armed groups were not commonly discussed. However, three female participants mentioned seeing other women or wanting to join the fight themselves. Tigray (female, 18) discussed seeing other girls leaving IDP camps to join the TPLF militia, because "they wanted to fight back". Adigrat (female, 14) wanted to join the TPLF militia due to seeing the destruction the war had caused. She and her friends were unable to join as they were too young. Aculle (female, 18) said there were gender and age barriers to joining armed groups despite she herself having wanted to join:

> ***"We are girls and young women; we felt that we could join the men to defend ourselves. But we couldn't do that. Even some of the men were too young to face the challenges."***

Philippines

Various reasons were given for joining armed groups: boys were thought to join the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) for religious reasons or in retaliation against government soldiers. Participants did not have a strong idea on the recruitment of girls and young women into armed groups.

In the Philippines, participants shared that only males joined armed groups. Only Rania said that she heard sometimes of girls and women joining for money.

> ***"Men are stronger. Their role is to defend if there are enemies in Islam that could cause harm, to provide security if there are threats […] Here in our area, there are no women*** *[joining armed groups]* ***because they are afraid of that."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

Most said that men and boys joined armed groups for religious reasons or because they wanted to join the jihad or holy war. Zahra (female, 19) shared that men and boys joined MILF because they were studying the Qur'an and believed in the Muslim separatist movement in the southern part of the Philippines.

> ***"The reason for this is because they are following the orders of the [MILF] group or of Islam, due to their obedience and faith in Allah."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

Youssef (male, 17) said that sometimes boys and men joined MILF because they were being attacked by the government soldiers. He said that some joined of their own accordance while others were persuaded to do so. Farhana and Rania (females, both 21) said that boys and men sometimes joined armed groups as they could be persuaded to do so by ISIS. Other reasons given were to earn a salary, make friends or get a chance to handle firearms. Youssef also shared that family tried to discourage young people from getting involved in fighting:

> ***"The only reminder from our parents is not to get involved in such activities because that's not the solution. You might just end up being targeted by the enemy, and it might worsen the situation. My grandfather also said that we should just focus on studying because that's the most effective weapon that can help us."***

4.10 Child marriage

Child marriage is a formal marriage or informal union in which at least one of the parties is under the age of 18 and therefore cannot be said to have fully consented.[274] The vast majority of child marriages are officially recognised as being forced, as the child has a limited power of consent due to age, power dynamics, a lack of alternative options to survive and other determining factors. Many child marriages have no legal basis or recognition, and are thereby considered to be an informal, cohabiting union.

4.10.1 Perceptions of increases in child marriage due to conflict

Child marriage arises out of a number of complex, intersecting social, economic, political and legal influences at household, community and national levels. Survey participants were asked about their agreement with the statement: "It is now more common than before the conflict for young girls (girls up to 18) to get married in my community". This question was based on survey participants' perceptions of child marriage – it is not intended to be a measure of verified cases. Survey responses therefore are subjective, and will be affected by how informed the participant is regarding the prevalence of child marriage before the conflict. It is possible that participants' responses are not reflective of the incidence of child marriage around them, either because the participants do not recognise child marriage as such, or because they know it is illegal and therefore do not want to reveal it in the survey.

When asked about their agreement with the statement "It is now more common than before the conflict for young girls (girls up to 18) to get married in my community", most participants responded that they disagreed or strongly disagreed (47.9%). This response is interesting because earlier studies[275,276] point to child marriage being likely to rise in crisis situations. However, the responses in the sample did not bear this out. At the same time, the responses showed that 39 per cent of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed that child marriage was more common than before the conflict. Aspects of life impacted by conflict such as affected livelihoods, disrupted education, threats of violence are the typical key components of a crisis context in which child marriage typically arises (see section 2.3 Gender and conflict). Yet, it is not possible to directly link these aspects – found in this study – to the 39 per cent of survey participants who perceived there to have been a rise of child marriage following conflict.

It is worth considering that participants may not see a direct link between conflict and child marriage rates – particularly where they may not be aware of child marriage rates from before a conflict. The participants can, however, describe how conflict has led to the additional risks and constraints that typically influence child marriage, as they have shown throughout the study regarding the aspects of life impacted by conflict.

When asked about their agreements with the statement “It is now more common than before the conflict for young girls (girls up to 18 years) to get married in my community”, participants were asked to rate their agreement on a scale of 1 (strong disagreement) to 5 (strong agreement).

Differences by gender

Table 33: Participants’ perceptions on the increase in child marriages due to the conflict, by gender

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is now more common than before the conflict for young girls (girls up to 18 years) to get married in my community"?						
	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
Scale from 1-5	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly disagree (1)	858	17.5%	793	16.4%	1651	17%
Disagree (2)	1499	30.6%	1512	31.2%	3011	**30.9%**
Neither agree nor disagree (3)	604	12.3%	678	14%	1282	13.2%
Agree (4)	1219	24.9%	1278	26.4%	2497	**25.7%**
Strongly agree (5)	711	14.5%	581	12%	1292	**13.3%**
Total	4891	100%	4842	100%	9733	100%

Differences by country

When participants were asked how much they agreed with the statement “It is now more common than before the conflict for young girls (girls up to 18 years) to get married in my community”, there were significant country differences across the 1 to 5 scale on agreement to disagreement.

Participants in Lebanon showed lower agreement levels (an average rating of 2.05) with the statement than participants from all other countries, meaning that the average response to the statement was to **disagree**. Nigeria[lxi] had highest agreement levels (an average rating of 3.31) of the countries, meaning that the average response to the statement was to **neither agree nor disagree**.

Difference by living status

When participants were asked how much they agreed with the statement, there were significant differences depending on participants’ living status.

When compared to refugee participants (average rating of 2.83) and those remaining at home/from the host community (average rating of 2.87), participants who identified as IDPs showed significantly higher levels of agreement with the statement (average rating of 2.97).

Differences by minority

Participants who identified as a listed minority group showed significantly greater agreement with the statement than participants who did not identify as such (average rating of 2.97 vs 2.77). There is an association between minority group status and perceiving the increased prevalence of child marriage, further underlining the context of crises in which child marriage arises; a context that is often experienced more gravely by minority groups given the structural barriers they must navigate.

4.10.2 Insights from qualitative interviews

As with the survey question above, interviewees were also asked about their perceptions of child marriage prevalence since the conflict period. Although some interviewed participants may have been unable to recognise child marriage as a factor of conflict (for the same reasons as suggested for the survey participants), they nonetheless provide further insights into how their communities are now

[lxi] This result is the highest out of nine countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine only. Among all ten surveyed countries, the agreement levels were highest in the country that cannot be named.

experiencing – at scale – issues of poverty, financial instability, educational disruption and traditional gender norms that constrain girls' agency. Such factors are part of the context of crises in which child marriage is recognised typically to arise.

Cameroon

There were mixed responses about whether boys under 18 got married, but most participants across Cameroon recognised that girls under 18 often married. Motivations for marrying early were linked to dropping out of school or to seeking financial security in light of poverty.

Although participants did not strongly perceive that conflict was driving rates of child marriage, two participants reported that displacement was a key influence on child marriage decision-making among girls and their parents.

In the Northwest of Cameroon, about half the participants thought that boys did marry before 18 in the community although they caveated that this was not a legal marriage but cohabitation before the age of 18. About two-thirds of the Northwest participants said that girls did marry before 18 because parents forced them to, or they were afraid to be pregnant without a husband, or because they were escaping a bad home situation. Only Kimbi (male, 14) in the Northwest thought that child marriage had increased due to the conflict, whereas others in the region thought there was no change because of the conflict – for example, Akungha said that child marriage had existed before the conflict.

In the Southwest, participants thought boys or men did not marry in their community under the age of 18 years. Dalma and Bessong (females, 13 and 24) said that boys would not marry under 18 because they had no means to take care of women or girls, while many other participants thought that boys' parents would not allow it. Egbe (female, 16) said that boys under 18 were still considered children and were afraid of the responsibilities.

However, half of participants in the Southwest thought that girls under 18 did marry in their community. Various reasons were given for girls marrying early: girls not attending school; caregivers' unemployment; and hardships in the household such as poverty and hunger. When they were out of school, girls were seen to become pregnant and then to need to marry early. Other reasons given for girls marrying early was for financial gain, love or protection.

> ***"Some get married because of hardship so they think getting married is the best option so their husbands can be taking care of them."*** *Tateh (female, 20)*

> ***"I think they do so to be protected, escape from poverty, and that the man can provide for her needs."*** *Ikome (male, 16)*

The other half of participants who thought that girls did not marry before 18 years said this was because they still consider themselves children or could not afford to raise or take care of a family.

Compared with the Northwest, more participants in the Southwest thought that the practice of child marriages had become more prevalent due to the conflict. Both Ikome and Tateh said the change was due to displacement and to minors living away from parents. Bessong also thought that it was because more girls were staying with boys and men to have money to eat and survive since the conflict began.

Colombia

It was highly common for girls to live with older boys and men in Colombia, while boys and young men were less commonly seen to marry.

Some participants said parents allowed child marriage and there was an expectation of marriage if an unmarried girl became pregnant.

Various motivating factors for entering child marriages were cited across regions, including financial security and escaping home life, while conflict alone was perceived by the participants to be a direct factor.

Participants in Colombia said that the prevalence of young girls cohabiting with older boys and men in their community was very high. It was common to see girls from about 15 years old living with men in their 20s or 30s, and in Chocó in particular girls as young as 11 to 13 years were also going to live with men in their 20s. Edil, Maria and Camila (females, 16, 20 and 15) said that many girls end up pregnant. Elías (male, 14) shared that it could be sometimes temporary; they move in for a while and then if they break up or become unhappy they leave – but leaving is more difficult for girls who get involved with men in armed groups. They would then need to pretend to visit their mothers and then leave for another city or neighbourhood.

Andrés said that sometimes when girls got involved with men in their 20s or 30s from armed groups, they are known as a "side piece" and are showered with gifts. Diomedes (male, 15) knew of a 14-year-old girl who already lives with an older guy who is in a gang. Martha's own sisters had got married at 13, 14 and 15 to older men:

> ***"I am the only one in my family who studied and** [is] **still currently studying, because my other sisters got married at a young age."** Martha (female, 22)*

> ***"I have a cousin who was with an older guy, 20 or 22 years old. They were together when she was 12 or 13 years old. They were together and used to live in front of the house. Now they have a baby together. They were together since they were young, she was 12 and he was around 20 years old."** David (male, 17)*

However, it was not seen as common for young boys or men to marry young.

> ***"Boys are different. To go live with someone, financially, a boy doesn't have enough to leave."** Frijolito (male, 24)*

Sometimes these informal marriages (i.e. they have no legal basis) also involved couples who were around the same age, but this was less commonly discussed. Andrés (male, 21) knew a girl of 14 who had entered a cohabitational relationship with a boy of about 17 – he was invited to their baby shower. He noted that this was also down to culture in that boys and men were expected to provide for a girl or a woman whom they had got pregnant. Frijolito had a cousin who moved in with his girlfriend when both were 16 but they were supported financially by their parents. Diomedes shared that he himself was "almost married" as he and his girlfriend practically live together as she stays sometimes for several days.

Different motivations for girls' entering informal marriages were cited across the regions. For participants in Antioquia, the most common reason for girls entering these cohabitational relationships was for financial reasons or for necessities like food and clothes. Martha said that her sisters had married due to a lack of opportunities and to gain an income. Terra, Camila and Edil pointed to a case of a 12-year-old girl with a 40-year-old man who had taken advantage of the deprivation she had experienced to marry her. In that case, the community got involved to take her away and threatened him. Some participants said that the parents allowed or encouraged early marriage. In the case of the 12-year-old girl, Camila shared that the girl's family had allowed it:

> ***"The girl didn't want to. She accepted, because of the need, because the girl worked, she had to work very hard. This is a very poor family and she had to work very hard. Then, the man started to get into them with food, with groceries."***
>
> ***"If the mother has nothing to give them, then a man comes and offers them... Or, for example, they use the help to aid the mothers, and the mother, due to lack of knowledge or...not knowing the harm she is doing to her daughter, accepts that help…"*** *Ana (female, 24)*

Other reasons commonly cited in Antioquia were pregnancy or to escape a bad home situation.

In Chocó, informal child marriages (i.e. those with no legal basis) were thought to commonly occur because going to live with a partner was a way to "escape reality". Andrea (female, 15) said that this was often the case if there was violence at home or if their own mother did not pay attention or support the girl, then they would go to live with a boyfriend. Isabel (female, 22) shared that sometimes girls fall for "the illusion":

> ***"Sometimes I think we are so young, sometimes you want to experience, to live, to try to be as happy as possible, to be in those parts that still satisfy you, that feel good, because I think that at the beginning everything is rosy*** *[…]* ***So that's what happens, I think these are some of the things, that like everything is painted so pretty, like 'Oh my husband loves me, my boyfriend loves me, now I'm going to live with him, with him I would be the happiest woman in the world', so on one hand that's why they take that path."***

Yirlesa (female, 18) said that sometimes girls entered child marriages because they had no other choice – for example, if a girl is thrown out of her house after becoming pregnant and she had nowhere else to go but her boyfriend's home.

Very few participants thought that cases of child marriage were particularly influenced by the armed conflict or groups although they noted that girls did sometimes date or get involved with those in groups. They also got involved with older men outside the groups. Therefore, participants saw child marriage more as being caused by a lack of knowledge coupled with the opportunity to improve their life situation.

Ethiopia

Participants in Ethiopia said that child marriage occurred in their communities due to financial difficulties, the need to protect girls from harmful situations, and through a belief that marriage should be prioritised for girls over schooling. This indicates the prevalence of traditional gender norms, in which girls are expected to remain only in the private sphere of the home in order to curtail the potential for experiencing violence.

Several participants in Afar had directly experienced child marriage or at least knew someone who had experienced it. The reasons that participants had given for child marriage in their communities included financial burdens on families, the need to protect girls from behavioural risks or harmful relationships, and a belief that girls belong in marriage and at home, not in education or work. Such socioeconomic factors behind child marriage have become intensified in light of conflict, as the quantitative results suggest, showing educational attendance and livelihoods to have been negatively affected in Ethiopia; conflict has led to additional risks and constraints that could influence the prevalence of child marriage.

Etafar (female, 24) was married when she was in grade 4, and she now has four children, while Addodas (female, 19) got married in grade 9.[lxii] Both left education due to marriage. Addodas particularly spoke about the impact and troubles she has faced since being married:

> ***"Child marriage has impacts from the moment you get married, because it has a big psychological impact as we were forced by our parents to get into this misery, we start blaming them for it. Then after you got married you will be forced to give a birth to children, and in Afar people don't use contraceptive treatments, as a result at a young age we will suffer from a burden of raising children."*** *Addodas (female, 19)*

The negative impacts discussed by Addodas were echoed by other participants particularly in relation to marriage being a barrier to education, overcoming birth complications and issues such as fistula, not having access to their own income and therefore lacking agency in decision-making.

Fewer participants in Tigray discussed child marriage, and none had experienced it personally. Etigray (female, 16) said she heard people talk of it in the IDP camp, and Adigrat (female, 14) knew of a neighbour who was forced into a child marriage. The reasons given for the practice similarly related to families' economic pressures, as well as a survival mechanism.

> ***"Many young girls married*** *[at]* ***their early age because they have nowhere to go and able to survive… They don't have a shelter, food and economical capacity to survive alone and so they have chosen*** *[child]* ***marriage as way to get through this hardship."*** *Sheraro (female, 17)*

Several participants also pointed to the need to protect girls from child marriage and raise more awareness around its impact. Addodas said that despite awareness-raising activities, the practice continued:

> ***"There has been awareness-raising campaign about the impacts of child marriage, but the society was not willing to accept it... Many people don't believe in girls attending school and graduating from university like boys – rather they believe girls were meant to stay in a marriage."***

Two participants thought that the practice had increased due to the conflict:

> ***"Before the war, there had been*** *[child]* ***marriage, but the war intensified the practice*** *[more]* ***than ever. Many girls were afraid of being raped and having a child, consequently they were forced to get into marriage at their young age because having a child before marriage is a taboo in the society. Others were married for economic reasons because they thought they would be able to fulfil their needs."*** *Addodas (female, 19)*

> ***"After the war, all the girls got married and they have children now. They also stopped learning."*** *Aba-Ala (female, 18)*

Philippines

Responses were mixed regarding whether girls and boys married before the age of 18.

There were also mixed responses as to whether child marriage had increased due to the conflict. Those who thought conflict had increased rates of child marriage believed that displacement and dropping out of school were influencing factors.

Almost half the sample in the Philippines thought that boys and girls did not marry before 18 or that it was extremely rare. Fatima (female, 15) said that, from her perspective, child marriage was not a permitted social norm in their community, and Mahid (male, 18) shared that authorities would get

[lxii] Primary school education in Ethiopia has two cycles from age 7 to 10 years (grades 1 to 4) and from age 11 to 14 years (grades 5 to 8). Secondary education has two cycles from age 15 to 16 years (grades 9 and 10).

involved if a person married early, and parents and leaders would encourage children to finish education instead.

About a quarter of respondents did believe that girls married before the age of 18 in their community. Mariam said that in recent times many girls had married at about 16 or 17 years. Karim (male, 21) said that he had a female classmate who was already married. Zahra (female, 19) said that girls got married early because they did not put effort into their studies and were influenced by their peers. Samir (male, 15) shared that parents did not let their children out at night to try to avoid cases of child marriage.

> ***"Girls nowadays marry early because of poverty or intense love. They no longer think about their studies; they cannot imagine what they can achieve in life if they are already married. They also no longer think about the hardships their parents endure in sending them to school."*** *Amira (female, 24)*

A few respondents said that boys also marry before the age of 18. Mariam said that boys were engaging in child marriage by choice and not by force. Youssef shared that his male cousin had got married before 18 and his family had noticed that he was frequently visiting his partner's house. He said that other boys got married because they had got a girl pregnant and then had to stop school and find a way to make a living.

> ***"The minimum age to get married is about 13–14 years old (in our customary law), whether it's a girl or a boy. They got married early because of the early pregnancy which made their parents angry at first but later they accepted it. They can't really be stopped even if their parents reprimand them."*** *Samir (male, 15)*

> ***"My nephew and brother got married before they even turned 16. Many young men marry before reaching the appropriate age for marriage. Because even if they're just seen together*** *[with a girl]****, they*** *[people]* ***think negatively about them. My brother, who only finished fifth grade, got married back then."*** *Zahra (female, 19)*

About a quarter of respondents thought that cases of child marriage had increased due to the conflict. The main reason given was that children and young people had to stop schooling because of the conflict and then they ended up getting married earlier, or because of the frequent displacements.

> ***"The girls. There are more cases like that –*** *[child]* ***marriages increased during the conflict because they couldn't attend their schooling, so they opted to get married since it's almost the same situation anyway."*** *Mariam (female, 21)*

However, Tariq (male, 13) said that child marriage had not increased because it was not possible to leave the house as much during conflicts, leaving fewer chances for boys and girls to meet each other.

A small sample of male participants noted that adolescents were now in closer communication with each other due to the use of social media and smartphones. They attributed some child marriages to this new phenomenon which bypasses typical social rules of interaction.

4.11 The future

4.11.1 Participants' suggestions for peacebuilding actions

In the quantitative data, when asked about what peacebuilding actions participants believed should happen in their country to help to end the conflict, most participants chose peace talks (63%), followed by ceasefire (58.6%), conflict prevention efforts to prevent future conflict (48.7%) and addressing the root causes of conflict (44.4%).

Differences by gender

Table 34: Participants' suggestions for peacebuilding actions, by gender

What peacebuilding actions do you believe should happen in your country or region to help end the conflict?	Girls and young women		Boys and young men		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Ceasefire [an agreed stop in the fighting]	2936	60.4%	2758	56.9%	5694	**58.6%**
Peace talks	3136	64.5%	2983	61.5%	6119	**63%**
Involve adults in communities/including those who are displaced/in peace talks	2080	42.8%	1805	37.2%	3885	40%
Involve youth in communities/including those who are displaced/in peace talks	2168	44.6%	1914	39.5%	4082	42%
Involve girls and young women/including those who are displaced/in peace talks	1894	39%	1602	33%	3496	36%
Community peacebuilding efforts	2162	44.5%	2041	42.1%	4203	43.3%
Addressing the root causes of the conflict [why the conflict started]	2214	45.6%	2098	43.2%	4312	**44.4%**
Conflict prevention efforts to prevent future conflict	2478	51%	2256	46.5%	4734	**48.7%**
None of the above	163	3.4%	238	4.9%	401	4.1%
Total	4860	100%	4851	100%	9711	100%

For all of the chosen peacebuilding actions (peace talks, ceasefire, conflict prevention efforts to prevent future conflict, addressing the root causes of conflict, and community peacebuilding efforts), significant gender identity differences existed.

In every case, the frequency for each peacebuilding action was significantly higher for girls and young women compared to boys and young men: peace talks (64.5% vs 61.5%), ceasefire (60.4% vs 56.9%), conflict prevention efforts to prevent future conflict (51% vs 46.5%), addressing the root causes of conflict (45.6% vs 43.2%), and community peacebuilding efforts (44.5% vs 42.1%).

Differences by age group

Older participants (20 to 24 years) opted for peace talks (62.3%) as a peacebuilding action at a significantly higher frequency than younger participants (60.1%).

Differences by country

When participants were asked about what peacebuilding actions participants believed should happen in their country to help end the conflict, significant country differences were found.

Compared to participants from all other countries, those from Sudan (13%) and Lebanon (12.9%) selected **ceasefire** as a peacebuilding strategy at a significantly higher frequency.

By contrast, participants from the Philippines (3.3%) had the lowest frequency for **ceasefire** as a peacebuilding strategy.

Participants from the Philippines (8.3%), Sudan (7.4%), Ukraine (7.4%), and Colombia (7.3%) had significantly lower frequencies for choosing **peace talks** as a peacebuilding strategy, compared to all other countries. Participants in Ethiopia (14.2%), on the other hand, had the highest frequency for this peacebuilding action.

In terms of community peacebuilding efforts, participants from Ethiopia (15.8%) showed a significantly higher frequency for this action, compared to all other countries. Participants from Sudan (4.4%), the Philippines (3.9%) and Ukraine (3.3%) had significantly lower frequencies for choosing **community peacebuilding efforts**, compared to all other participants.

Addressing the root cause of the conflict had a significantly higher frequency among Ethiopian participants (17.3%) than those of all other countries.

Difference by living status

When asked what peacebuilding actions participants believed should happen in their country to help end the conflict, significant differences arose due to participants' living status.

Refugee participants reported at significantly lower frequencies the following peacebuilding actions compared to IDPs and participants who remained at home: peace talks (57.9% refugees vs 63.4% IDPs and 62.9% at home), community peacebuilding efforts (35.9% vs 45.6% and 44.2%), and conflict prevention efforts to prevent future conflict (44.1% vs 50.3% and 49.3%).

By contrast, refugee participants had a significantly higher frequency than IDPs and participants who remained at home in favour of ceasefire (63.7% vs 56.5% and 57.2%) as a peacebuilding strategy.

Differences by minority

Participants who identified as a listed minority group showed significantly higher frequencies in terms of peacebuilding actions compared to participants who did not identify as a listed minority group: ceasefire (59.2% vs 57.4%) and peace talks (60.2% vs 59.1%). By contrast, participants who identified as a minority group showed significantly lower frequencies compared to participants who did not identify as such in terms of community peacebuilding efforts (43% vs 43.9%), addressing the root causes of conflict (44% vs 45.4%) and conflict prevention efforts to prevent future conflict (47.8% vs 49.8%).

4.11.2 Insights from qualitative interviews

Cameroon

In Cameroon, interviewees were despondent about their futures in light of the conflict, although many shared their dream careers. Participants asked for financial assistance to support them in the future and called for a ceasefire and peace dialogues, with youth to be included as future leaders.

Participants in Cameroon were asked to reflect on where they saw themselves in five to ten years and what the future they envisioned looked like. Most participants in the Southwest talked about what they had wanted to be in the past tense as if this were no longer possible, and in the Northwest region participants were similarly despondent. All Northwest participants said that they did not foresee any future if the conflict continued. Bih (female, 14) feared that if nothing was done to stop the war then things would only get worse.

Many confirmed that their goals had to change due to the ongoing conflict. Many said that they had to adjust their goals since they could no longer attend school. Egbe (female, 16) said that she would have loved to be a journalist and Dalma (female, 13) wanted to be a footballer. Dalma said that her goals had to change since her father had passed away, and she now needed to help her mum and focus on business. Ikome (male, 16) wanted to go to school and be an electrical technician where he would learn

to fix electrical appliances. Makola (male, 19) believed the future did not look bright and shared that he once wanted to be an accountant or lawyer but has now stopped school.

> ***"Right now, even with my disability, I still have hopes that after the conflict I will go back to school and I wish, Plan International can help us the disabled to meet up with our goals."*** *Ikome (male, 16)*

> ***"My mind has changed because I was forced to stop school in form two. I wanted to be a pilot of a plane, but here I am working 'bambe'*** *[labouring]* ***at a construction site. I now mix cement and carry blocks and cement. My dreams have failed me because of this conflict."*** *Bate (male, 22)*

Tateh (female, 20) wanted to move away but did not have enough money; she still believed that her future was bright and she wanted to be a hairdresser. Nain (female, 15) had previously wanted to be a nurse. Yong (male, 23) and Bih had wanted to be medical doctors, but Bih shared that these goals had changed when she had to stop school four years ago.

> ***"My goals have changed because I don't*** *[go to]* ***school again because of my child, and I can't tell how tomorrow will look like."*** *Yisah (female, 17)*

Yet Tossam (male, 22) said that his goals had not changed as he was now back at school. Similarly Tabe (female, 14) said her goals of wanting to be a nurse had not changed because of the conflict.

Participants were asked what needs to be done to help people like them during conflict times. Most of the participants asked for financial assistance or sponsorship. Bessong (female, 24) wished for someone to support her in her business. Two participants also noted that improved security would help.

> ***"Provide food, shelter, security measures for us to move about, learning programmes for abled and disabled so that we all should be busy."*** *Ikome (male, 16)*

Participants were also asked what solutions were needed to help end the conflict or bring about peace. A few participants in the Northwest in particular gave suggestions: Akungha (female, 24) said that improved protection was needed and Bih wanted advice to be given on keeping safe during times of attacks. Yisah (female, 17) and Tossam also suggested a ceasefire was a key solution while Yong suggested community peacebuilding was needed. Akungha also believed that the root causes of the conflict needed to be addressed to move forward.

In the Southwest, about a third of the participants thought a ceasefire was the solution. Tateh believed that a dialogue involving the services of a mediator could help to bring about peace:

> ***"Both parties – that is the separatist fighter[s] and the government – should come to a dialogue. Educate us about peace."***

Many participants thought that dialogue and peace talks were the way forward. Both Ikome and Dalma believed the root causes of the conflict also needed to be addressed for peace to prevail. Dalma believed that people needed to be sensitised on the need for peace. Nain believed that peace talks were the only solution:

> ***"The two parties should sit and dialogue for peace to return back to our region. We have suffered a lot."***

> ***"I think they should call both parties to cease fire then solve the root cause of the conflict."*** *Ikome (male, 16)*

Many participants thought that youth should be involved in bringing about peace because they are the future leaders.

> ***"Youths know more about the story of the crises, and we are the ones going through the suffering more and we can help bring a solution."*** *Bate (male, 22)*

> ***"Yes ohh!!! Because tomorrow is in their hands and they are the leaders."*** *Yisah (female, 17)*

Colombia

There were mixed responses in Colombia regarding whether the conflict had affected youth ambitions. Some felt that educational disruption and displacement had either shaped their desire to be in advocacy or dampened their opportunities.

Many participants supported the idea of including youth in peacebuilding consultations and dialogues.

When reflecting on their futures, many participants in Colombia wanted to have successful and stable careers, homes and families in the next five to ten years. Some participants mentioned wanting to be able to help or support their parents in the future.

> ***"I imagine myself working a lot, working, having my family, my home, my children. In ten years, yes, that's how I pictured it. Doing a specialisation, maybe in Brazil, I would really like to go to Brazil."*** *Frijolito (male, 24)*

> ***"I see myself as a successful person, who has, who must have a positive mentality. Obviously, I want to help my family progress and give them what they deserve. What they actually deserve. Many other things. To have my own home, my family, my personal things and that. To have a studio. Improve myself. And to have my own business."*** *Andrés (male, 21)*

Participants mentioned becoming a rapper or singer, a civil engineer, a farmer, a vet, a boxer, a doctor, a psychologist, an accountant, and a lawyer or entrepreneur. Johana (female, 17) wanted to be a "great teacher", clarifying that she wanted to be tough but in a good way. Raúl (male, 17) wanted to become a family lawyer or systems engineer with dreams of having his own little house in another city.

> ***"I hope to have finished my studies. I hope to specialise as an administrative lawyer. I also want to live in a rural area with trees and all that, in nature. I want to repay my mom for everything she did for me. I also want to have my partner, live with my partner and have a big, big house and have a good, stable job."*** *Rodrigo (male, 18)*

Some participants wanted to work in improving their communities and in politics, in social work, for NGOs like the Red Cross or for foundations or associations. When asked what he imagined for himself in the future, Daniel discussed the altruistic skills and knowledge he hopes to use in his professional life:

> ***"I think the same social dynamics, activism, mobilisation, advocacy and all that. But already as a professional person who can apply that knowledge, those skills, to what I do. Also, perhaps a political projection. I believe that this territory can be changed in other ways using politics, as with new dynamics in politics, from the spaces of power and decision-making."*** *Daniel (male, 19)*

Some participants mentioned wanting to travel or move to another country. Isabel (female, 22) wanted to do a course on early childhood and also travel and become a tour guide:

> ***"…to know other places, other cultures, what are they like? Experiencing new things, with other people."***

Some simply wanted to be more economically stable and earn more money. Mille (female, 13) wanted to earn money doing chores and babysitting, and Adriana (female, 20) hoped to earn more money through cleaning. Adriana said her child was her driving force:

"…I do not lose hope, a mother never loses hope with her child. That is my driving force, my strength. That I had that little kid. He's a sweetheart."

Some imagined different futures away from the towns they lived in and to live in peace and tranquillity. For example, Ana wanted the municipality to have more education and employment opportunities. Valentina liked to think of a future where there were no dangers, and without the worry of a group causing trouble and being forced to leave town. Others wanted to move away from where they currently lived, to live to a bigger city like Medellín or move back to where they lived previously, or to settle in the countryside. Edil, Terra and Camila (females, 16, 22 and 15) shared that they did not see themselves staying in their area because there were no opportunities and it was too hot. Edil wanted to live in a small town outside the city with cold weather and to do military service and become a second lieutenant or lieutenant – if that didn't work out, she would start to study international business.

A number of participants thought their ambitions had been affected by the conflict. Daniel said his ambitions of working in politics and advocacy had been shaped by his experience of displacement. Yirlesa (female, 18) and Raúl felt that their goals had been affected by the conflict because of not being able to go to school when the conflict flares up sometimes. David shared that he sometimes got distracted from studying due to his past experiences. Tori (female, 18) said that when she was younger, she had bigger dreams but now she sees the reality of how difficult things are, her mum had been affected by the conflict and had to drop out of studying which ultimately affected the family and their ambitions. Calle (male, 21) said that his dreams had been postponed from living in a territory with few opportunities due to the conflict. Nicolás (male, 14) shared that he originally wanted to join the military but now did not want to deal with violence and conflict.

Others meanwhile felt that their dreams were unaffected by the conflict or said it was down to other reasons such as poverty.

"I would say that... the main reason why you get into that is because of poverty. Sometimes you don't have the means to study what you want... so you decide not to study and that's where you go." *Rodolfo (male, 17)*

Some participants were asked what needs to be done to help people like them during conflict times. Valentina (female, 18) recommended improved mental health support:

"I think encouraging them to have emotional support. They should go to a psychologist, one thinks it's not necessary, but there are really things that need to be talked about and that they need to let go of. Encourage them to go to a psychologist or to have support."

Participants felt that a key support would be educational programmes to help youth like them during times of conflict. María and Martha thought that raising awareness about educational opportunities and livelihood opportunities for young people would help to support them to avoid getting involved in armed groups and the conflict. Raúl suggested economic and military support was needed from the government, while Andrea (female, 15) said that governments should carry out a "cleansing" or "killing" of those in armed groups. Yirlesa disagreed with this approach as she had a cousin in a group and did not accept that killing was the answer. Johana and Cata (females, 17 and 16) suggested a clean-up along the lines of investigations and putting group or gang members in jail rather than killing. Isabel and Andrea (females, 22 and 17) shared that they felt the conflict would never end.

"I would think that welcoming *[children living in conflict]****, talking to them, and letting them know that there are other ways, there are more opportunities, that they can study, they can fulfil themselves, and that in the future they will have a good job if they want it, they will be able to move forward."*** *María (female, 20)*

Participants were asked what solutions were needed to help end the conflict or bring about peace. Most participants suggested different types of dialogues and peace agreements with the armed groups. However, some felt that this was a difficult issue to resolve and in the past those solutions have not worked.

"That's something very difficult because what I have seen in the past context, they were, in the peace dialogue, and that, well they demobilised and so on, but nowadays it's still the

same – that is, those groups have disappeared and other new groups have arrived, so there is no plan, we are still in a very bad situation." *Martha (female, 22)*

"The truth is a little difficult. For example, they say that supposedly peace, but how many times in that peace is there more war? They say we are going to make a peace agreement, and in that peace agreement, they always disagree on something, and that generates more war. It always ends up the same." *Raquel (female, 22)*

Others suggested that the government needs to do more in several different areas such as creating more educational opportunities and jobs for young people. Valentina said that the government needed to give armed groups something to incentivise them to leave the areas they are controlling. Others wanted the government to take more control of the municipality through stronger policing or regulating the mines:

"Police that serve, that one knows that they are not going to get involved in those things *[corruption with groups]* ***but that they are here for what they are supposed to: to defend us."*** *Edil (female, 16)*

"Mining is affecting the municipality. It is affecting all of us, and if they are going to regulate it, they should bring some business to this town." *Andrés (male, 21)*

Frijolito and Andrés said that it was important to encourage sports and cultural and recreational activities as these have a lot of influence on young people not getting involved in gangs and armed groups. María also suggested the sensitisation of children and young people about crimes and avoiding things that lead to jail.

"The best way is to rescue those young people who want to join these groups, and to promote culture and sports, theatre, education." *Andrés (male, 21)*

Many participants thought that youth should be involved in building peace in their area, through activities such as peacebuilding workshops or campaigns. Ana (female, 24) said that youth should be involved from school age and children from rural areas, not just urban areas, needed to be part of these initiatives. Andrea and Isabel said that youth should be involved in peacebuilding efforts to stop them taking the wrong paths and to make them see that there were other opportunities such as education. Elías shared that it was important to include youth in dialogues.

Daniel suggested conducting a survey with young people on how peace can be built in the context of their town and municipality:

"But I believe that peace can also be built from the youth sector in the area of political and social incidence, citizen activism and that kind of thing, civic. But I think that we also have to train young people in rights, advocacy mechanisms, citizen oversight, also in self-protection mechanisms, but also in some way or another, like... those small initiatives that young people themselves can develop to build peace, in the ways they want, from the culture of sports..."

Ethiopia

In their discussions on the future and their goals, participants talked about returning to education, the importance of peace and being reunited with families, and returning to their homes. They discussed career goals, and the need for women, girls and people who have experienced trauma to be helped.

Just under half the participants in Ethiopia discussed their desire for themselves, family members (siblings or children), or youth to return to education. This desire was often spoken about as leading to a career, or to help support their family or community. Of the participants who shared career goals, three wanted to become doctors, while others mentioned working in finance, becoming a pilot, an engineer, a beautician, and two participants mentioned becoming teachers.

> ***"I want to resume my education and become successful… For the future, I want to continue my education, open my own business and help my family."*** *Tsebri (female, 18)*

> ***"I want to continue my daily life and start my education. After I finish my education, I want to be a teacher and a role model for others."*** *Korem (male, 18)*

Barudi (male, 19) shared that at the age of 25 he hopes to have his own family and property.

> ***"I want to start my education and I have a dream to have my own job for the future."*** *Arbeti (female, 15)*

> ***"Now the expectations from me and my plans are continuing my education, helping my family and contributing to my country in any way I can."*** *Aculle (female, 18)*

Nearly all the participants discussed peace, stability and a return to their former lives, including reuniting with families and returning to their homes, as their main goal for the future. This including living in a cohesive society and to enable educational and livelihood opportunities.

> ***"I wish there could be peace both in Tigray and Afar. If there is peace, women would have no problems. Peace and stability matter for women… Girls should feel free, learn and relax as of their interest."*** *Aba-Ala (female, 18)*

> ***"Reconciliation will bring happiness and unity, but if we failed to do that nothing will get improved."*** *Adola (female, 16)*

> ***"If the peace continued like this for the future, I believe we can work and lead our normal life as usual... war has got no value except destruction and suffering… so peace is the greatest thing in the world, and I want to say let us preserve it together."*** *Addi (male, 23)*

> ***"…peace is the primary important thing in life because everything thrives only if there is peace."*** *Korem (male, 18)*

Within these answers participants also shared the need for support to rebuild their lives given that their homes may have been looted or destroyed, as well as to ensure access to electricity, water, food, education and health facilities.

> ***"I want to stress here is that our home doesn't have anything. I went there one time after the war and our home is totally destroyed. Hence, what I can say is that we want to get back home with electricity and water services resumed."*** *Tsebri (female, 18)*

Mille and Aculle (females, 13 and 18) both discussed hopes that in the future women and girls would receive additional help and protection – this was particularly in relation to SGBV experienced by many during the conflict. Mille shared that she would like to help by raising awareness around legal processes and hoped that perpetrators would be held accountable.

Tigray (female, 18), who is a survivor of SGBV, felt that her dreams had been shattered by the conflict:

> ***"I had a dream that one day I would marry and made my parents proud, but now I am raising a child whom I didn't know even the father. I also dreamed of finishing my education and after I graduate from a university, I want to get a job and lead a successful life. However, right now all those dreams are crippled…"*** *Tigray (female, 18)*

Aculle stated that she would like to study health and work on issues related to women. She believed that protecting women and girls from abuse should be a top priority and that people should be educated on protecting women which should be everyone's responsibility.

Some participants discussed that their goals for the future had been affected by the conflict. This related to not being able to finish education, follow the career path they wanted, or there being a sense that they or others had given up.

> ***"…we have been a college student at that moment, to be graduated in the year 2013/2014. We left only one semester to get graduated at that time… So, because of the war our dream had become destroyed and lost… Our education that we spent all our valuable time and life become meaningless…"*** *Adoeio (male, 24)*

Some participants also shared that youth should be involved in peacebuilding activities. This included being involved in decision-making processes to be properly represented and listened to, as well as participating in the development of the country moving forward. In Afar, only Barri (male, 24) discussed youth being involved in peacebuilding, and other participants discussed the importance of youth learning and developing a culture of helping one another.

Philippines

Participants who were not in school all wished to finish their studies.

The conflict had not changed most participants' dreams for their own futures.

As for addressing the future of the conflict, participants wished for educational and financial assistance. Some participants called for youth inclusion in peace efforts while others called for a stronger authoritative presence to resolve the conflict.

When reflecting on their futures, every participant in the Philippines who was not in school said that they dreamed of returning and finishing their studies. Fatima (female, 15) dreamed of both she and her siblings finishing their education and said that she wanted to broaden her knowledge of the outside world. Nour (female, 19) was also no longer in school but wished to return and become a nurse. Khalid (male, 21) said that even though he was already married, finishing his studies was still his dream. Some participants said that they had previously dreamed of being teachers, but now Dalia (female, 14) wants to support her siblings to study:

> ***"What was my dream? I wanted to finish my studies. As for me, I didn't want to get married early because I was still young, and even if I'm of age, I still don't want to get married. What I want is to first help my mother and raise my siblings. I want to help them study and support them. That's what I want, to help them."***

Zahra (female, 19) wanted to return to her studies and find a job; when she was studying previously, she was taking criminology. Others who were still in school also dreamed of finishing their education. Rania (female, 21) wanted to be successful in her profession and finish her studies so she could help her parents and siblings. Yasmin (female, 17) was still in school and wanted to continue and eventually become a midwife. Tariq and Samir (males, 13 and 15) were also attending school and wanted to be government soldiers; Samir said he would be a soldier to help his family and he also liked guns. Amira (female, 24) said that she would appreciate any job because her education was limited. Amira's daughter wants to be a social worker and she once dreamed of doing the same, but it didn't pan out for her. Amira now wants to be a chef one day. Youssef (male, 17) also dreamed of being a social worker or a firefighter.

Most participants said that their goals had not changed because of the conflict. Only Karim (male, 13) and Zahra said they had changed their goals due to the conflict.

> ***"My dream remains the same*** *[to finish my studies]* ***even before I got married. Because I only got married during a time when my parents were struggling financially, and my sibling who is abroad advised me to take advantage of the opportunity while they're still abroad because if I wait longer, there might not be anyone else abroad to help financially. That's what my parents and my spouse's parents decided. But I'm still studying, although sometimes I have to pause due to extreme hardship."*** *Mahid (male, 18)*

> ***"A lot has changed. Unfortunately, I don't know anymore. I even got married."*** *Zahra (female, 19)*

Participants were asked what needs to be done to help people like them during conflict. The main support that participants wanted during conflict was assistance to complete their education – some mentioned specifically scholarship programmes or help with fees. Farhana (female, 21) suggested building a new school. The other main way that participants asked for support was through financial assistance or income-generating projects and livelihood generation. A few participants also mentioned getting food or necessities such as rice.

Participants were also asked what solutions were needed to help end the conflict or bring about peace. Responses were mixed but the main ideas were around dialogue and peace talks with both sides and resolving land disputes as well as reconciliation and cooperation.

> ***"Settle the disputes between those who are fighting. If they have disagreements, they shouldn't resort to violence. Instead, they should compromise and give in to each other's wishes, even if it's difficult, as long as it doesn't lead to killing each other."*** *Fatima (female, 15)*

> ***"For those who don't understand each other, they should talk. For land disputes, they should stop fighting and divide it equally. Unite. As for the ISIS, they should just surrender to end the conflict."*** *Mariam (female, 21)*

Many participants also suggested to stop the fighting or shooting. Dalia shared that they needed to stop fighting as people were tired of being displaced. Mahid wanted people to support the MILF and not oppose the commands of Islam. Youssef said non-state actors and the government should unite as "we are one nation"; he also said that the authorities should be involved in resolving the conflict. Tariq suggested that both sides should avoid escalation and compromise instead:

> ***"It seems that the beginning of that chaos was due to the attack of armed groups on soldiers; we can't easily stop that because they started the trouble, and their target is the soldiers. To put a stop to it, it's necessary to restrain the soldiers because the people who are the instigators of the war are just provoking them, so it won't end. The soldiers' enemies should also be warned not to escalate what happened because civilians are being affected."*** *Tariq (male, 13)*

Half the participants believed that elders or community leaders should handle peace efforts. Others believed that youth should be focused on their studying and not get involved with conflict issues. Samir also believed that those responsible for the conflict should be involved in peacebuilding:

> ***"We shouldn't get involved in that so that our dreams won't be hindered. Those who are responsible should be the ones to participate in that. The only thing we can do is to study hard to achieve our dreams and just focus on what's being discussed."***

> ***"People like us shouldn't be involved because we don't desire conflict. We also don't want war."*** *Zahra (female, 19)*

Yet the other half of the participants wanted youth involvement in bringing peace because they felt that youth were affected by what was happening in relation to the conflict.

> ***"The adolescents and youth are empowered now. They have experienced the hardships of war, so they won't join those groups."*** *Mariam (female, 21)*

5. Concluding insights

Conflict is affecting the lives of girls, young women, boys and young men across the multiple areas that are needed for a child or young person to thrive and grow up happy and healthy. Livelihoods, education, health, access to key services and resources, levels of safety, and exposure to violence – these were all influenced by the conflicts in the different countries in the study.

Girls feel the impacts of conflict more intensely

During conflict, gender inequalities become sharpened. From the research, it is evident that gender plays a key role in how children and young people experience conflict with significant differences found in many key areas. In terms of the resources to meet basic needs, girls and young women are often reporting higher frequencies of:

- experiencing disrupted access to food, water and the internet;
- reducing their food intake or relying on less nutritious foods to cope with income losses;
- being unable to access food-based aid.

Girls are eating the least and are being less prioritised for food. At the same time, there are clear gendered differences in relation to the mental health effects of conflict, with girls and young women reporting higher frequencies of emotional and psychosocial distress. The disruption to education in conflict is manifested in different ways, according to gender. On average, boys and young men missed more years of education than girls and young women; however, girls and young women reported higher frequencies of not feeling safe while travelling to and from school than boys and young men. Besides school closure, it can be inferred that gender norms have a role to play in missing education; more male participants had left schooling due to engaging with child labour to source an income while female participants reported staying at home to take up domestic care work.[lxiii] Given the financial instability brought by conflict, qualitative participants in Cameroon, Ethiopia and the Philippines recalled how girls were relied upon for additional household responsibilities and unpaid care work, as a means for families to cope.

Across the study, participants described the threat of violence and encounters with armed groups. Their responses demonstrated how experiences of violence manifest differently according to social and gender norms that determine who faces additional risks. Girls and young women reported feeling significantly less safe than boys and young men in their everyday lives, reporting feeling at risk of shootings, lootings, disruptions to employment and hunger, and when travelling to and from school.

The children and young people who were interviewed spoke at length about the various methods of violence that are ever-present in their lives. Where 30 per cent of surveyed respondents feared airstrikes, the interviewees in Cameroon, Ethiopia and the Philippines repeatedly discussed experiences of bombs, airstrikes and landmines in their communities. Interviewed participants in Cameroon, Colombia and the Philippines spoke of frequent incidences of shootings, particularly in relation to education disruption, indicating how the violence of conflict weaves itself into the lives of children and youth. Surveyed participants who feared sexual violence were in the majority female. Interviewees in Ethiopia described that many girls and women, including themselves in some cases, had experienced sexual violence in the conflict. These findings alone demonstrate that children and young people living in conflict are too familiar with violence.

Notably, boys were also more likely to join an armed group than girls and young women, as the quantitative and qualitative data showed. Girls were found to participate in armed groups too, and the qualitative data suggests how gender norms dictate the reasons for boys' and girls' participation and the roles they take up. Boys join due to their physical attributes and because of the expectation for them to be protectors and providers, whereas girls seek to join armed groups as a means of empowerment or protection, which can be through a relationship with a group member, and generally taking up caring roles. Because of the gendered threats to girls' safety in the context of conflicts – as well as economic factors, lack of opportunities, violence and threats to the family home – girls are pushed into armed groups as a possible route out. In the same way, boys and young men are pushed towards armed groups as a means of claiming power and agency due to the gender norm that requires them to physically and financially protect their families and communities.

[lxiii] Neither finding is significantly different due to sample size.

The impacts of conflict vary across girls and young people

The impacts of conflict are felt differently across the different populations of girls and young people due to a complex interplay of gender and social norms, alongside legal, political and economic influences.

This study sought to understand participant experiences of conflict in relation to various factors of identity – asking them if they identified as a listed minority group: as a person with a disability, as belonging to an ethnic, racial or religious minority, as a displaced person, migrant, refugee, as being from another non-specific minority group, or as an LGBTIQ+ member. In conflict settings, these youth participants experience greater barriers to accessing the basic necessities needed for quality of life. Across social services, participants who identified as part of a minority group showed that they had significantly less access to financial support, employment assistance, food, healthcare/medical treatment, and education. Though minority group membership covers such broad demographics, this identity characteristic paints a picture of how the challenges of conflict are intensified for children and youth who have one or more axes of marginality.

Participants who identified as minorities were significantly more likely to be asked to join an armed group than those who did not identify as such (30.7% vs 23.4%); it could be suggested that this is due to their additional vulnerabilities underlined by the precarity of their financial and social security. Again, the qualitative data illuminates these findings. Participants shared motivations for joining armed groups, particularly: lack of employment opportunities elsewhere and the ability to earn an income; the chance to have power and to seem tough; and in retaliation against other armed groups. (Many participants in Colombia were aware of someone who had joined or been invited to an armed group.) Although there is a complex web of reasons for which a young person may join an armed group – beyond those that this study can explore – the motivations suggested are an attempt to provide stability and meaning for a disenfranchised and marginalised member of a minority group.

Participants' living status – as IDPs, refugees and those in host communities – is also key in shaping the experience of the violence of conflict, revealing significant disparities across living statuses. Refugees who were surveyed faced unique emotional and safety challenges, feeling less safe, more frustrated, and unable to relax compared to IDPs and those in host communities. It is a finding that is given context by interviewees in Colombia, who describe refugees facing substantial stigmatisation and tension in host communities. Surveyed IDPs experienced a heightened risk of physical violence, and were more likely to perceive armed groups and the state as perpetrators of violence. That finding was illuminated by participants in Cameroon who believed that unaccompanied children who were IDPs faced considerable risks in relation to violence from armed groups and armed group recruitment.The disaggregation of data into older and younger participants across the study also reveals numerous additional barriers and vulnerabilities based on age, particularly around violence. For example, in Colombia and Cameroon, interviewed participants thought that younger children were subject to violence in their communities, with the Colombia qualitative interviews revealing that young children were particularly at risk of recruitment to armed groups through various manipulation tactics. Joining an armed group voluntarily, joining due to being threatened or coerced, and joining due to having married a member of the armed group, were the three answer options that younger participants (aged 15 to 19 years) selected the most.

Girls and young people are living through conflict

Across the ten countries studied, it is evident that girls in conflict are living with disrupted education, emotional distress, financial insecurity in the home, limited access to services and support, and the threat of violence. Girls are living in a context of crises that increases the likelihood of them making the decision to pursue child marriage in the hope of bettering their opportunities, or even as a means to survive. Given that child marriage leads to incidences of sexual violence and powerlessness, child marriage cannot be the answer for girls in conflict.

The lives of both girls and boys, and young women and young men, are unavoidably shaped by conflict. The experiences of young people in conflict can be varied; the challenges can be grave for some, and the support may be more inaccessible for others. It is vital to recognise the complex ways in which conflict has effects according to gender identity, age, living and/or minority statuses, so that targeted and tailored gender and age-sensitive approaches can be made in humanitarian assistance and long-term conflict resolution efforts. Addressing the deep-rooted gender inequalities and power dynamics is

crucial for fostering more equitable and peaceful societies. Minority youth face a significantly higher frequency of experiencing the challenges of conflicts, from disrupted access to services to feeling unsafe. This indicates that both humanitarian assistance and long-term programming must make special provisions to cater for the complex, distinct needs that are often associated with the identities in this group. Aid was not reaching those who needed it most, as was found among most of the survey participants. Yet, when aid does reach girls and minority youth, it was for these groups significantly more effective.

In this study, the stories are varied but they are also telling one narrative: girls and young people are continuously facing the catastrophic force of conflict in their everyday lives; harmful gender norms are being strengthened in an increasingly unpeaceful world; and young people are demanding a voice in ending conflict.

Still girls and young people dream

The involvement of girls and young people in peacebuilding efforts was seen as crucial for ensuring durable peace and community engagement, especially as girls felt that they were among some of those worst impacted by the crises.

> ***"Because there are young people who have lived** [through conflict] **in their town, they know what the conflict is and they can provide a different perspective to the older people or to those who are not involved."** Valentina (female, 18, Colombia)*

> ***"The youths are future builders and need to be involved in peace talks."** Akungha (female, 24, Cameroon)*

With girls experiencing many of the challenges of conflict at higher frequencies, they are also investing more hope in each kind of peacebuilding action – peace talks, ceasefires and conflict prevention efforts – than boys and young men. Girls' views and experiences are thereby key to developing peacebuilding measures, so that the most severe effects of conflicts can be addressed and to support the resilience and future aspirations of children and young people in conflict-affected areas.

Children and young people want peace and see no future without it. Hopefulness is a recurring theme across the countries when asked about the future. The qualitative interviews revealed children's and young people's life goals and trajectories to be profoundly affected by conflict, with those who faced disrupted education wishing for support to return to learning. Despite the hardships of living in conflict, girls and young people still dream.

> ***"I want to go back to school to broaden my knowledge about what's happening outside** [in the world]**. To learn** [more] **as well."** Fatima (female, 15, Philippines)*

> ***"I believe it is the youth that can build a country and to achieve this the youth must be given an opportunity to play a role in the development of their country. Starting from myself, I want to play my own role in the development of my country."** Abdidora (female, 16, Ethiopia)*

6. Recommendations

To parties to conflict, including armed forces and non-state armed groups:

Protect children and civilians. Stop targeting, killing and abusing children and civilians. End all grave violations against children: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions and the denial of humanitarian access. Girls and boys recruited by armed forces and armed groups must be recognised as victims, and swiftly identified and released to child protection actors for care and rehabilitation.

Respect international humanitarian law. Ensure that civilians in need receive humanitarian assistance and protection without obstruction. Adhere to international humanitarian law (IHL) and protect aid workers and guarantee rapid access to those in need. Humanitarian workers are protected under IHL. They also abide strictly by the Humanitarian Principles of Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence. Humanitarians are not a target.

Stop using and attacking schools. Cease attacks on schools, students and teachers. Stop using schools for any military purpose and respect the Safe Schools Declaration, obligations under IHL and UN Security Council Resolutions including SCR 2601 condemning attacks and threats of attack against schools, safeguarding the right to education. The safety and wellbeing of children and teachers must also be central to decisions regarding school reopening.

Achieve ceasefires and peace. Implement immediate and sustained ceasefires. Commence meaningful peace talks aimed at lasting peace. Engage communities in dialogue to understand their grievances and incorporate their feedback into peace initiatives to rebuild trust.

Place the needs and voices of children and young people at the centre of peace talks. Ensure the active participation of affected children and young people, including girls and young women, in peacebuilding efforts. Their needs and voices must be at the centre of any peace negotiation process. Critical issues like child recruitment and use should be elevated to the top of the negotiation priority list in peace talks with immediate actions to prevent and end conflict.

To the UN Security Council, African Union (AU), European Union (EU) and all member states:

Unequivocally condemn all violations and abuses against civilians, especially children.

The UN Security Council should take concrete actions to prevent and end all violations and abuses committed against civilians, particularly the grave violations against children. The Council should engage closely and regularly with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, focusing on specific country situations to ensure that child protection is a crucial aspect of its deliberations. The Council should call on all parties to fully and swiftly implement their action plans and other concrete commitments to end and prevent grave violations against children, and it should ensure that those responsible for committing grave violations against children are held accountable. Additionally, the Council should develop mechanisms to stop armed groups recruiting children, as well as improving mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable.

The UN Security Council should call on all parties to implement urgently specific measures to end and prevent all forms of sexual and gender-based violence against children and young people, particularly girls and young women, and all civilians. The UN Security Council should also ensure that survivors receive comprehensive, gender sensitive and age-appropriate support and protection. Children affected by armed conflict, including child survivors and children recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups, should be treated first and foremost as victims.

The African Union (AU) and sub-regional organisations should strengthen their dedicated child protection capacities and assist in developing tools aimed at preventing grave violations. This includes enhancing training programmes for personnel, improving monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and fostering collaboration with local communities and international agencies. By building robust frameworks for child protection, these organisations can play a pivotal role in protecting children from harm and ensuring their rights are upheld in all circumstances.

The European Union (EU) should ensure the availability of financial resources to achieve the established objectives outlined in the revised EU guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) and coordinate approaches with EU member states and other donors involved in funding CAAC initiatives. A dedicated provision for funding CAAC actions should be established under Heading 6 of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) in the next MFF cycle. These increased flexible

resources should be made available at country level to increase their effectiveness such as using unearmarked pooled funds which provide greater adaptability in addressing local needs by local actors. Political action and urgent funding should be provided by all donors in response to conflict and humanitarian need, especially to address the severe global hunger crisis and to save millions from the brink of famine. The EU and other international donors need to recognise the escalating humanitarian threat posed by food insecurity and increase their funding for emergency response efforts and humanitarian organisations to assist affected populations. Food security is a critical issue for maintaining peace and stability.

The international community should appeal to governments to look for opportunities that facilitate honest and inclusive dialogues to address the root causes of the socioeconomic and political situations in these countries and regions. This approach should focus on the underlying causes of the conflicts so that these populations can live in dignity and peace and have access to opportunities, quality education, livelihoods and a place in their nation's future.

To the humanitarian sector:

General. Provide emergency relief and essential services for children, including food, water, shelter, health, education and psychosocial support. Assist hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups with dignity, such as unaccompanied children, forcibly displaced people, those who have survived abuse, and young mothers. Ensure that humanitarian needs assessments and response plans are informed by sex- and age-disaggregated data and promote gender sensitive and age-appropriate interventions and services, with special attention to adolescent girls and young women.

Meaningfully include children and young people in peacebuilding, negotiations and humanitarian efforts. Support and complement the efforts of governments and authorities to address root causes related to conflict and violence. Humanitarian actors should advocate actively and collaborate with other organisations to promote an effective humanitarian response oriented towards achieving durable solutions in the medium and long term, aiming to alleviate conditions of poverty, marginalisation and structural discrimination. Create platforms and opportunities for children and young people, particularly girls and young women, to take active roles in peacebuilding initiatives, including training and development programmes to equip young people with the skills necessary for effective participation in peacebuilding and community development.

Child protection. Ensure that the protection of children is a strategic objective and collective outcome in humanitarian responses, under the Centrality of Protection. This should be reflected in humanitarian response plans, and both sector-specific and multisectoral strategies.

Prioritise the prevention of and response to conflict-related child protection risks, in particular child recruitment and sexual and gender-based violence including child marriage. Advocate for child and adolescent girl-responsive case management, mental health and psychosocial support services, and holistic reintegration support as part of the minimum service package.

Assess and include prevalent child protection risks such as sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage and children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) in joint needs assessments and in Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans (HNRPs). Involve at-risk groups, such as (ever-)married adolescents and young mothers in context analyses to understand the specific experiences and needs of these groups, in order to better tailor programming to the most vulnerable children and young people.

Prevent child recruitment by armed forces and armed groups in collaboration with other sectors by collectively addressing context-specific risk factors such as limited access to education, health, WASH and safe job opportunities for adolescent girls and boys. Respond to child recruitment through long-term and holistic reintegration programmes that provide tailored, community-level and multisectoral support that address all child wellbeing domains (health, economic recovery, education, life skills, safety and care, justice and social wellbeing).

Education. Prioritise conflict-sensitive and gender responsive education during crises. Advocate for the Safe School Declaration to protect education from attacks. Provide flexible, non-formal education for out-of-school adolescents and youth, IDPs, refugees and vulnerable groups. Ensure the safety and wellbeing of learners and teachers including through the provision of safe transportation to and from school, psychosocial support and school meals.

Health, nutrition and psychosocial assistance. Provide mobile health and nutrition services, including primary care, rights-based and youth-centred sexual and reproductive health services, and mental health and psychosocial support, in underserved areas. Prioritise malnutrition prevention activities and severe acute malnutrition treatment for children under five, pregnant and breastfeeding girls and women. Pre-position and ensure consistent nutrition supplies for infants aged 6 to 12 months in conflict zones and camps for refugees and IDPs, including Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF), Super Cereal Plus, Ready-to Use Supplementary Food (RUSF), F-100 and F-75 therapeutic milk, micronutrient supplementations, and essential medications.

Cash and voucher assistance/food/livelihoods. Use cash and voucher assistance (CVA) strategically in multisector response plans to address the food insecurity and economic drivers of child protection risks such as for children associated with armed forces and armed groups and sexual and gender-based violence against children and young people.

To national governments and local governments:

Access. Adhere to international humanitarian law. Promote national legal mechanisms and policies to ensure conflict-affected people have access to appropriate and timely humanitarian assistance and essential services. Allow the unimpeded movement of humanitarian workers and aid.

Address mobility barriers and restrictions for children and young people who are differently abled or with special needs, girls and young women, and transgender and other LGBTIQ+ children and young people.

Child protection. Collaborate with humanitarian actors and support efforts to prevent, protect, report and respond to the six grave violations against children, including sexual violence and the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups.

Protect children and civilians from sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by state actors (including police and military forces), with specific attention to the risks that girls and young women face. Incorporate protocols, policies and legislation, and allocate funds available to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. Enable legal and judicial action.

Scale up social services and strengthen the technical capacity of social workers and other local actors to deliver gender and age-responsive, survivor-centred social services to conflict-affected children including children on the move, separated children, children associated with armed forces and armed groups, and child survivors of SGBV and child marriage. Strengthen coordination between government and humanitarian actors to maintain, adapt and/or expand social services in times of conflict and recovery.

Education. Prioritise certified education including accelerated education, secondary education and vocational training pathways for conflict-affected adolescents and young people, including child survivors and other at-risk groups. Ensure access without barriers. Develop national policies to protect education from attack, incorporating peace education to promote social cohesion and resilience. Enable displaced children and young people to continue their education to build a better future.

Health, nutrition and psychosocial support services. Scale up primary health, nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, and mental health and psychosocial support for children and young people, with specific attention to adolescent girls and young women. Use mobile teams for hard-to-reach areas. Prioritise funding for nutrition, health system strengthening, training, safe passage, and integrating age-specific and gender equality initiatives.

Prioritise the integration of crisis response into national health policies and plans to ensure effective crisis management. This involves establishing comprehensive strategies that allocate resources for rapid deployment in emergency situations, ensuring that all necessary measures are in place to address crises promptly and efficiently.

Prioritise the development and implementation of efficient supply chains that ensure the prompt delivery of medical supplies during emergencies. Recognising the specific medication and services that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence may require, such as post-rape treatment kits, is vital. Ensure that essential medicines and supplies are adequately stocked, and that medical staff are trained in compassionate, survivor-centred care with a particular focus on meeting the needs of girls and young women, and on providing care and support for those affected by sexual and gender-based violence. This proactive approach not only guarantees that healthcare facilities are equipped to respond swiftly and appropriately to crises but also underscores the importance of investing in robust health infrastructure that is capable of withstanding emergencies.

Prioritise nutrition investment and strengthen health systems, including through combining increased funding for proven health and nutrition programmes with investments in healthcare worker training, nutrition preventive interventions, and robust monitoring systems, integrating age-specific and gender equality initiatives into all nutrition programmes.

Cash and voucher assistance/food/livelihoods. Use cash and voucher assistance in integrated programmes of child protection, education, food security, nutrition, livelihood and social safety nets to meet the priority needs of children and young people. Prioritise girls and women while applying protection risk mitigation measures to prevent unintended harm. Promote and protect the local food and nutrition supply chain and local food producers to ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered in a timely and cost-effective way.

To donors:

Education. Recognise education as being vital during conflict. Make funding available to meet the Global Education First Initiative target of 4 per cent of humanitarian aid. Allocate sufficient funding for adolescents' and young people's education, with specific attention to excluded groups, and for the implementation of the Safe School Declaration and measures to protect education from attack.

Prioritise education in peace and reconciliation efforts. Support conflict-sensitive investments that promote gender equality, social cohesion, peace and tolerance.

Child protection. Fund flexible, multi-year programmes that use gender and age-responsive strategies to prevent and respond to child protection risks that are worsened by conflict, such as child recruitment, and sexual and gender-based violence, including child marriage.

Develop and fund the implementation of joint operational frameworks and strategies between child protection actors and other sectors, using children's holistic wellbeing as the starting point, in order to ensure that all sectors prioritise, reach and are accountable to the most vulnerable children and adolescents, including girls.

Provide resources for the establishment and implementation of accountability mechanisms focusing on crimes against children, child rights violations, and the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on children in armed conflict.

Cash and voucher assistance/food/livelihoods. Provide flexible funding for programmes that support the economic stability and recovery of children, young people and their families, with specific attention to girls and young women. Increase food security funding to prevent hunger, build resilience, and support child and adolescent wellbeing in food-insecure areas. Invest in locally tailored research and innovation for greater impact.

Health, nutrition and psychosocial support services. Fund emergency healthcare and psychosocial support, prioritising the recruitment of female staff, and training all personnel in compassionate, survivor-centred approaches.

Provide flexible funding for universal healthcare access and quick response to health crises. Invest in local health systems, infrastructure and crisis response training.

Fund gender sensitive nutrition preventative initiatives of Maternal, Infant and Young Children Nutrition in Emergencies (MIYCN-E) and integrate them with cash assistance and social protection programmes.

7. Annexes

For additional content on the research methodology, tools or inferential statistics, please contact **research@plan-international.org**

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