



GIRLS' VISION *for* EDUCATION

MARCH
2025

Delivering on girls' needs and priorities
for education

MALALA FUND

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Executive summary

Our vision of education allows girls to have a better quality of life [and] respect, be prepared for more things and discover their place in the world.

— Vision statement from workshop with girls under 13 who are in school in Brazil



With milestone reviews underway for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action — two key global agendas to advance quality education and women and girls' rights — 2025 marks a critical year to measure progress towards **gender equality** in education. The SDGs rely on **gender parity** measures — particularly equal proportions of boys and girls enrolled in and completing school — to gauge progress in this area. While data shows that the world reached this target in 2013, gender inequality in education still pervades in lower-income countries.¹ Adolescent girls in particular face multiple, intersecting forms of age- and gender-based discrimination — compounded by poverty — that prevent them from accessing and completing 12 years of education.²

Today, 88 million adolescent girls are out of secondary school, and millions more are not receiving safe, quality education that equips them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.^{3,4} Girls know exactly what they want from their education — governments and global institutions must listen to them, act to advance gender equality in schools and realise the right to secondary education for all girls.



Malala Fund recognises that to understand what girls need from their education, we need to ask them.

At the Generation Equality Forum in 2021, we committed to create a new vision for education with girls – one that would meet their needs and aspirations.⁵ To take this commitment forward, we developed the **Girls' Vision for Education** consultation to hear from particularly marginalised girls, partnering directly with girls throughout the process. More than 800 girls from 30 countries shared critical insights into their challenges and priorities for secondary education. We heard:

- 1. Girls want an education that supports their independence and empowerment.** They seek to gain knowledge, skills and opportunities through education to help them be independent and confident and drive change in society.
- 2. Girls want to learn in schools fit for the 21st century where they receive respect.** They envision an education that is free from discrimination, supports their creative expression and offers opportunities to learn topics that interest them and equip them to actively participate in social, economic and political life.
- 3. Girls want governments to deliver on promises to reduce barriers to their education.** Governments should prioritise action to tackle financial barriers, gender-based violence and inadequate menstrual health and hygiene provisions that prevent girls from accessing and completing school.

Our vision for education will allow [girls] to be self-confident and speak boldly. Every girl gets the opportunity to complete their education smoothly so that there will be no dropout students like us. We want such an education system where girls can learn freely and comfortably.

— Vision statement from workshop with girls under 13 who are out of school in Bangladesh



Governments and global institutions must not ignore girls' demands for change, and need to work with girls to realise their vision for education and deliver on girls' rights. Malala Fund worked with girls, young women leaders and Girls' Vision partner organisations to identify five top areas for action:

- 1. Deliver on existing global commitments to girls by increasing investment and strengthening national education standards.** Girls want governments to increase education spending on their priorities and strengthen national legal and policy frameworks to ensure safe, quality education that better meets the needs and aspirations of all girls.
- 2. Resource girls who are driving change in their communities.** Girls are changemakers in their communities and need quality funding and resources to support their activism and initiatives to improve education for all girls.
- 3. Make space for girls in national and global decision-making and policy processes on education.** Girls' meaningful participation in decision processes is critical to ensuring that education systems and processes work better for them.
- 4. Prioritise gender equality education indicators.** By disproportionately focusing on gender parity, global policymakers are not effectively gauging progress on girls' education. They must place more priority on gender equality indicators. See Malala Fund's girls' education report cards.⁶
- 5. Galvanise efforts to address school-related gender-based violence, promote menstrual health and improve girls' digital access and learning.** Governments and global institutions must step up investments in these areas, which emerged as specific priorities for girls through the consultation process.



Malala Fund is incredibly grateful to the hundreds of girls who took part in the consultation process and those who worked directly with us to present the insights in this report. We read every response, workshop poster and piece of feedback.

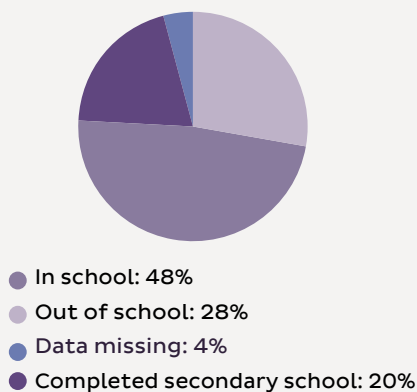
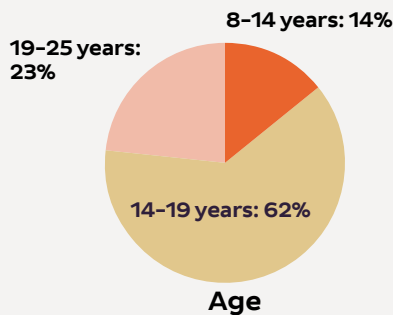


Consultation insights

Who are the girls?

810 girls:

- 482 girls from 12 countries in 76 workshops
- 328 girls from 25 countries (survey)



Disability status

159 girls: 20% of all consultation respondents



What girls want —

An education that supports their independence and empowerment

- **38%** of girls' vision statements mentioned girls being valued in society and helping others
- **64%** of girls in the survey said their vision for education would enable girls to take control of their futures

21st century schools where they are respected

- Girls prioritised creative subjects, life skills and digital learning
- **40%** of girls' vision statements for education referred to inclusion, safety and respect
- **15%** of girls in the survey specifically called for inclusive and gender-responsive education

Governments to deliver on commitments to reduce barriers, specifically

- **Financial barriers** — mentioned in 67% of workshops
- **Ending school-related gender-based violence** — 2nd top priority for all girls

That a girl is able to become financially independent to the extent that she is able to support her family members and help her parents by financially contributing to the household. Further, by doing this tomorrow she can serve as an avenue in raising a more financially independent generation.

– Vision statement from workshop with 14-16 year olds who are in school in Pakistan



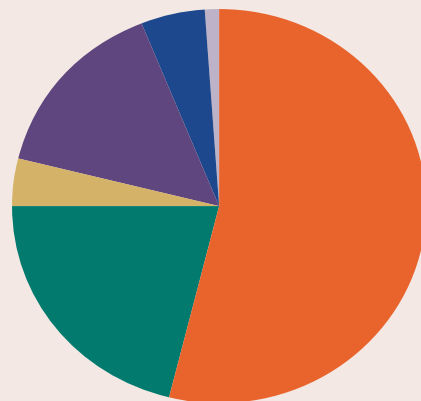
Spotlight: Power, menstrual health and digital

- **59%** of girls said girls themselves have the most power to improve education – more than governments (39%)
- **40%** of girls called for menstrual health and hygiene to improve education - top priority
- Digital learning and literacy was a clear priority for girls across workshops and survey responses

Education makeover!

How girls would allocate education budgets if they were in power

- Provision: school buildings, facilities (WASH excl)
- Financial support for girls/families
- Safety
- Inclusive/gender responsive specific (all)
- Wider social change/ community engagement
- Other



- 54%
- 21%
- 4%
- 15%
- 5%
- 1%



Consultation insights: out-of-school girls

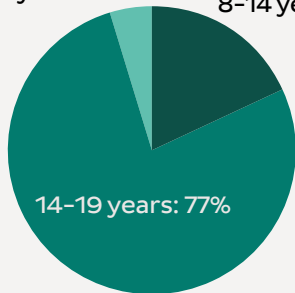
Who are the girls?

229 girls:

- 144 girls from 8 countries (22 workshops)
- 85 from 7 countries (survey)

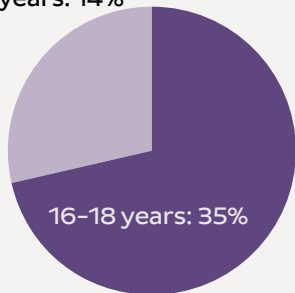
Age

19-25 years: 5% 8-14 years: 18%



Workshop (n=22 workshops)

19-25 years: 14%



Survey (n=86 girls)

Disability status

35 girls: 42% of OOS girls (survey)

Survey (n=86 girls)



What girls want —

An education that supports their independence and empowerment

- 41% of out-of-school (OOS) girls' vision statements mentioned learning vital skills. Developing self-confidence (36%) and promoting girls' value and being respected in society (36%) also frequently mentioned
- 71% of OOS girls in the survey said their vision for education would enable girls to take control of their own future

21st century schools where they are respected

- In workshops with OOS girls, they prioritised digital learning (46%) and performing arts/music (41%)
- In the survey, they prioritised literacy (55%) and creative skills (51%) as topics
- 25% of OOS girls' vision statements for education referred to inclusion, safety and respect

Governments to deliver on commitments to reduce barriers, specifically

- **Financial barriers** – mentioned in almost all workshops (91%)
- **Ending school-related gender-based violence** – OOS girls were particularly concerned about bullying, sexual abuse and unsafe routes. Improving safe routes was a priority for investment and improvements.

My dream about education will give girls the opportunity to seize their rights, to be good parents for their children, and something to be proud of for the community.

- Vision statement from workshop with 14-16 year olds who are out of school in Nigeria



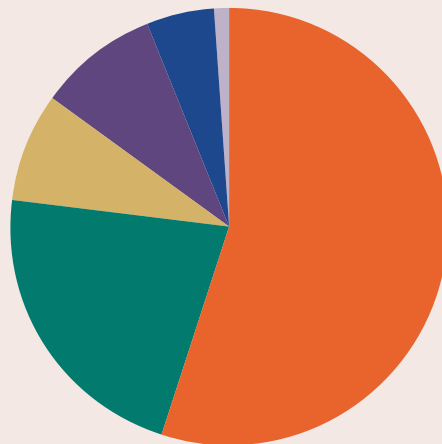
Spotlight: Power, menstrual health and digital

- 58% of OOS girls saw themselves as having the most power to improve girls' education, less than girls' families (63%)
- 31% of OOS girls called for menstrual health and hygiene to improve education - top priority
- Digital learning and literacy was less of a priority for OOS girls, but still in top three for topics, investments and improvements

Education makeover!

How OOS girls would allocate education budgets if they were in power

- Provision: school buildings, facilities (WASH excl)
- Financial support for girls/families
- Safety
- Inclusive/Gender Responsive specific (all)
- Wider social change/ community engagement
- Other



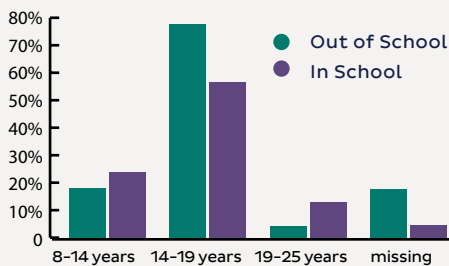
- 55%
- 22%
- 8%
- 9%
- 5%
- 1%



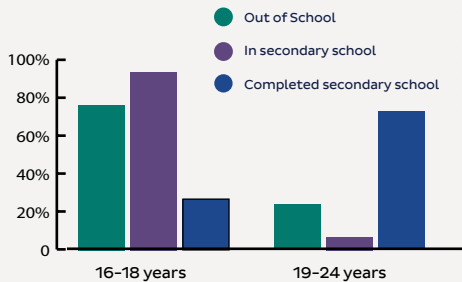
Consultation insights: different age groups

Who are the girls?

- 8-14 years 14% (n=114 girls)
- 14-19 years 62% (n=501 girls)
- 19-25 years 23% (n=185 girls)

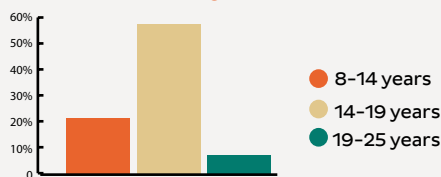


Workshop (n=72 workshops)

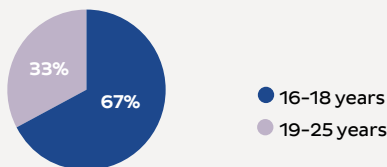


Survey (n=328 girls)

Disability status



Workshop (n=21 workshops)



Survey (n=86 girls)



What girls want —

An education that supports their independence and empowerment

- In vision statements (workshops), older girls tended to prioritise independence and financial stability more than other age groups. Girls (14-19 years) tended to focus on self-confidence and being valued in society.
- In the survey, older girls (19-24 years) prioritised being inspired to achieve their dreams and girls (16-18 years) prioritised being respected more.

21st century schools where they are respected

- In workshops, older girls (20-25 years) prioritised learning SRHR more than other groups and did not mention performing arts at all (a priority for others ages). Younger girls (8-13 years) prioritised learning creative arts (50%).
- In the survey, older girls (19-24 years) were more likely to mention life skills and younger girls (16-18 years) were more likely to mention creative skills.

Governments to deliver on commitments to reduce barriers, specifically

- **Financial barriers** — top barrier mentioned in all workshops across age groups
- **Ending school-related gender-based violence** — mentioned more by girls over 14 years. Improving safe routes was a priority for investment.

Our vision for education will [enable] girls to be independent of their parents or other community members and understand girls' rights and their position in communities.

- Vision statement from workshop with under 13 year olds who are out of school in Tanzania

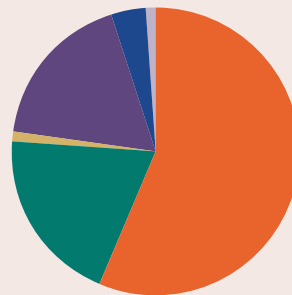


Spotlight: Power, menstrual health and digital

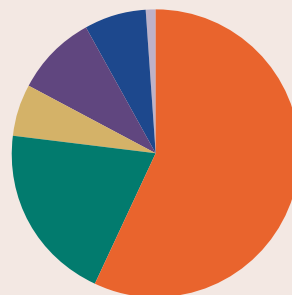
- 62% of younger girls and 55% of older girls said girls themselves have the most power to improve education
- 41% of younger girls and 39% of older girls called for menstrual health and hygiene to improve education - top priority
- Digital learning and literacy was a clear priority for girls across age groups

Education makeover!

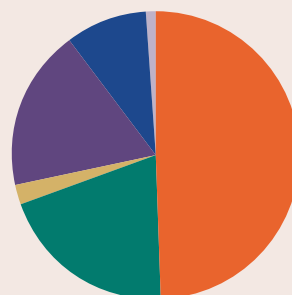
How girls of different ages would allocate budgets if they were in power



8-14 years (n=18)



14-19 years (n=47)



19-25 years (n=7)

- Provision: school buildings, facilities (WASH excl)
- Financial support for girls/families
- Safety
- Inclusive/gender-responsive specific (all)
- Wider social change/community engagement
- Other

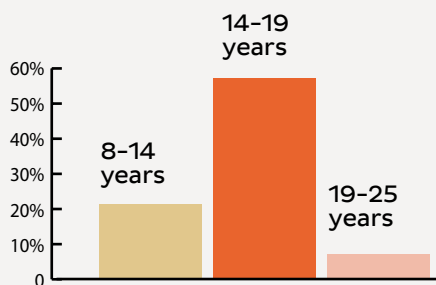


Consultation insights: girls living with disabilities

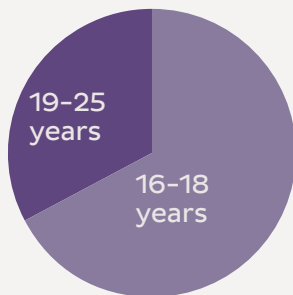
Who are the girls?

159 girls LWD

- 73 from 2 countries (21 workshops)
- 86 girls from 17 countries (survey)

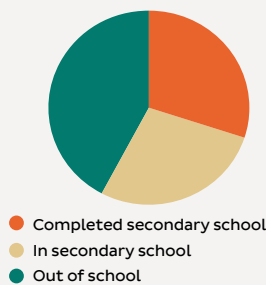


workshop (n=21 workshops)



Survey (n=86 girls)

Educational level



Survey (n=86 girls)



What girls want —

An education that supports their independence and empowerment

- In vision statements (workshops), girls living with disabilities (LWD) equally prioritised: inclusive and gender responsive education; girls valued in society and help others; independence and freedom.
- **74%** of girls in the survey said their vision of education would help girls take control of their lives

21st century schools where they are respected

- In workshops with girls LWD, they prioritised learning creative (57%) and performing (43%) arts much more than any other subject.
- In the survey, they prioritised learning finance and business skills more than any other group. They also prioritised literacy and digital learning.

Governments to deliver on commitments to reduce barriers, specifically

- Financial barriers (43%) and unsuitable facilities (36%) most frequently mentioned by girls LWD
- **Ending school-related gender-based violence** was the most frequently mentioned barrier in workshops, girls frequently mentioned bullying (50%) and sexual harassment/abuse (36%).

Our vision for education will allow girls to be empowered and resilient citizens who can lead [and mentor] others to be sustainable and independent.

- Vision statement from workshop with girls living with disabilities who are 14-16 years old and in school in Kenya



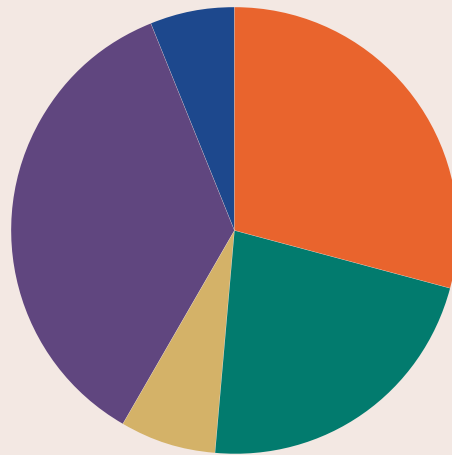
Spotlight: Power, menstrual health and digital

- 55% of girls LWD saw themselves as having the most power to improve girls' education with girls' families second (45%)
- 44% of girls LWD called for menstrual health and hygiene to improve education - top priority
- Digital learning and literacy was a clear priority for girls LWD across workshops and survey responses

Education makeover!

How girls LWD would allocate education budgets if they were in power

- Provision: school buildings, facilities (WASH excl)
- Financial support for girls/families
- Safety
- Inclusive/Gender Responsive specific (all)
- Wider social change/ community engagement



Introduction

Key terms

Girls: In this report, we refer to adolescent girls as individuals aged 10-24 who identify and/or are socialised as female.

Enrolment: Net enrolment rates refer to the proportion of the school-aged population in a country who are registered with schools.

Completion: Completion rates refer to the proportion of individuals who have finished the final grade of school within five years of the official age for that grade, according to UNESCO.

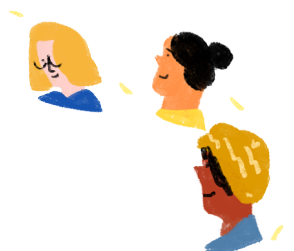
Out-of-school girls: These include any school-aged individuals who have never been to school, did not complete primary or secondary school, and completed primary education but did not enroll in secondary school.

Girls living with disabilities: These include girls who reported living with any – visual, hearing, mobility or cognitive – disability or chronic conditions that significantly affect their daily lives.

Today, 88 million girls are out of secondary school and millions more are failing to receive an education that equips them with the basic knowledge and skills they need to succeed.⁷ Inequality gaps in education are widening and too many girls face discrimination and abuse in school.⁸ Girls' perceptions of the barriers they face, their learning priorities and their ambitions for their futures should inform government policymaking and education financing

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to drive improvements in girls' education, including improving gender equality in education (SDG 4). Measuring progress in this area is largely limited to tracking gender parity – equal proportions of boys and girls – and focused on school enrolment and completion which was globally achieved in 2013.^{9 10}

However, parity is only a stepping stone to gender equality in education – fair and equal opportunities and outcomes – and receives much less attention in global policy debates on education despite slower progress and growing inequalities.^{11 12 13 14} Critically, the global focus on parity fails to capture the reality for girls in realising their right to secondary education or for responding to their needs and priorities.





Malala Fund is working for a world where all girls can learn and choose their own futures.

At the 2021 Generation Equality Forum, we committed to work directly with girls to articulate a new vision for education grounded in their needs, rights and priorities to build awareness of girls' perspectives in global policy forums.

Through this Girls' Vision for Education consultation process, we heard from more than 800 girls in 30 low- and middle-income countries. In this report, we present insights and recommendations for policymakers shaped by girls and young women. Girls' demands challenge the focus on gender parity for measuring progress on girls' education and emphasise the need to move towards gender equality indicators.

How we consulted girls

Through surveys and in-person workshops, we invited girls to reimagine education to better suit their needs and priorities. Reflecting feminist principles and Malala Fund's commitment to centre girls in our work, we worked with girls in the conception, design, analysis and outcomes of this project.



Project structure

Girls' Vision leads: Three young women, former Malala Fund Girl Fellows¹⁵ from Ethiopia, Nigeria and Pakistan, worked closely with us and our technical partner Here I Am to design the consultation process and analyse the data. They led on the design and implementation of the workshops and the identification and coordination of the steering committee.

Girls' Vision steering committee: Five young women from different low- and lower middle-income countries advised and supported the design of the consultation process, particularly the workshops.

Here I Am: A technical partner for the consultation facilitated its overall design, developed the online survey, collated all data and led the initial analysis.

Girls' Vision partners: Six partner organisations implemented workshops, including Malala Fund grantee partners and local partners or offices of international organisations.¹⁶ Some workshop facilitators provided additional feedback and insights during our final analysis.



Validation process: Malala Fund held sessions in November–December 2024 with 16 girl and young women leaders who are former Girl Fellows or work with our Girls' Vision partners and grantee partners.¹⁷ Six Girls' Vision partners served as workshop facilitators to review and validate the analysis. We also received written feedback from 21 girls via a survey.

Malala Fund staff: Staff led on pre-consultation design processes, supported the leads, led the final analysis and wrote this report with support from the leads.



Methodology

Target population: Throughout the design, implementation and analysis of the consultation, we prioritised listening to a diverse range of perspectives, focusing on the views of more marginalised girls. This included girls from low- and middle-income countries, out-of-school girls and girls living with disabilities. We also prioritised hearing from girls in secondary school or of secondary school age (14–18 years old).

Consultation tools:

- **Workshops with girls in low-income countries:** Trained by Girls' Vision leads, partners implemented workshops with groups of girls. Partners selected groups of girls often based on their formal education or disability status, or community factors (e.g., rural or refugee). In these workshops, facilitators shared information about Malala Fund and ran interactive activities about gender and power. Using illustrations and conversations, girls created posters to document their discussions and articulate a "vision statement".
- **Online survey:** The survey included a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions with responses collected anonymously. We distributed the survey to allies and partners working with target groups of girls and shared it publicly on Malala Fund's social media platforms. See Appendix for insights for girls from high-income countries.

Analysis: Following initial analysis by Here I Am, Malala Fund staff completed the analysis, including some revisions and deep dives into the data, continuing to work closely with the Girls' Vision leads. We also welcomed feedback from girls, young women leaders and workshop facilitators to validate our analysis and shape recommendations.

Limitations: The Girls' Vision consultation provides a snapshot of the needs and priorities of the girls we heard from. However, we did not undertake sampling and datasets are not directly comparable. The workshops produced collective/group responses and the survey produced individual responses. Workshops differed in their sizes and the collection of demographic data varied. Translators may have misinterpreted survey questions around barriers. As a consequence, significant variations emerged between responses collected by the two different methods.



Who are the girls?

Through the Girls' Vision consultation process, we heard from 810 girls from 30 countries: 482 via the workshops and 328 via the online survey

- **Status in relation to school:**

- Out-of-school girls – 28.3%
- Attending secondary school – 47.5%
- Completed secondary school – 19.8% (Figure 2)

- **Age:**

- Under 14 – 14%
- 14-19 years old – 62%
- Over 19 – 22.8%

- **Disability:** Self-reported living with a disability – 20% (26% of survey respondents and 15.2% of workshop participants)

- **Country:** The three countries with the most responses were Nigeria (14%), India (11.7%) and Bangladesh (9.9%). Most of the remaining responses came from sub-Saharan Africa (particularly Ethiopia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania), South Asia (Myanmar and Pakistan) and Brazil (see map). A small portion of survey responses came from high-income countries – we analysed these responses separately and present them in Appendix 1.

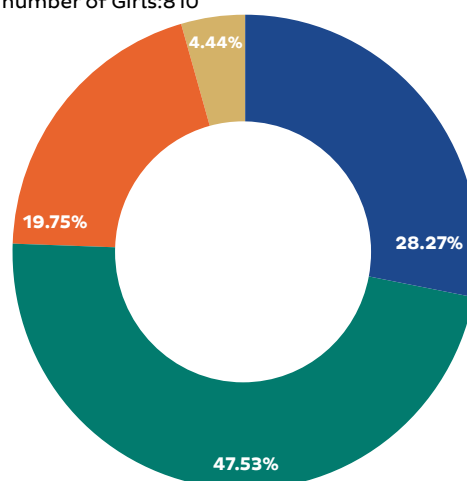


Figure 1: Numbers of girls per country and consultation tool, LMICs only

Workshop responses only	Workshop and survey responses	Survey responses only
Egypt (16)	Bangladesh (80)	India (95)
Kenya (77)	Brazil (68)	Syria (22)
Myanmar (53)	Ethiopia (56)	Morocco (11)
Sierra Leone (24)	Lebanon (39)	Somalia (9)
South Sudan (35)	Nigeria (113)	Mexico, Nepal, South Africa, Uganda (2 each)
	Pakistan (55)	Afghanistan, Colombia, Costa Rica, Georgia, Indonesia, Malawi, Niger, Thailand, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates (1 each)
	United Republic of Tanzania (39)	

Figure 2: Formal education level of all girls (LMICs only)

Total number of Girls: 810



- Out of school
- In secondary school
- Completed secondary school
- Data missing

1 Girls want an education that supports their independence and empowerment

Through the Girls' Vision consultation process, girls shared their expectations for successful education outcomes that went far beyond indicators associated with gender parity. Girls shared how critical education is to realising the lives they want and breaking down the barriers that undermine their futures. Girls' feelings of power and agency came through strongly throughout the consultation process.

My dream about education will give girls the opportunity to seize their rights, to be good parents for their children, and something to be proud of for the community.

– Vision statement from workshop with 14-16 year olds who are out of school in Nigeria



1.1. Independence and empowerment

Girls revealed that they want education to help them take control of their lives and futures. Being financially independent, making their own decisions, becoming leaders and supporting other girls in their communities came out strongly as desired outcomes of education.

Workshops:

Participants prioritised girls' leadership, helping other girls and greater personal independence or freedom in their vision statements. These priorities were fairly consistent across different ages, schooling situations and for girls living with disabilities. Older girls (20-25 years old) were more likely to mention financial stability for girls and their families and improved gender equality outcomes (Figure 3).

Survey:

Respondents highlighted similar themes. The survey asked girls how they would feel if they received the education described in their vision. Girls from all groups selected being "able to take control of their future" most frequently (64.3% on average). Older girls (19-24 years old) were more likely to select "inspired to achieve their goals" (44.1%) and much less likely to select being respected (26.6%) (Figure 4).



That a girl is able to become financially independent to the extent that she is able to support her family members and help her parents by financially contributing to the household. Further, by doing this tomorrow she can serve as an avenue in raising a more financially independent generation.

- Vision statement from workshop with 14-16 year olds who are in school in Pakistan



- SALAM**
- 1) Good qualities Teacher
 - 2) Good of a reading environment
 - 3) Teachers with high level education
 - 4) Government should provide enough reading facilities.
- ...ing that every student is safe
...ing and ...

Figure 3: Most frequently mentioned themes in girls' vision statements (workshops)

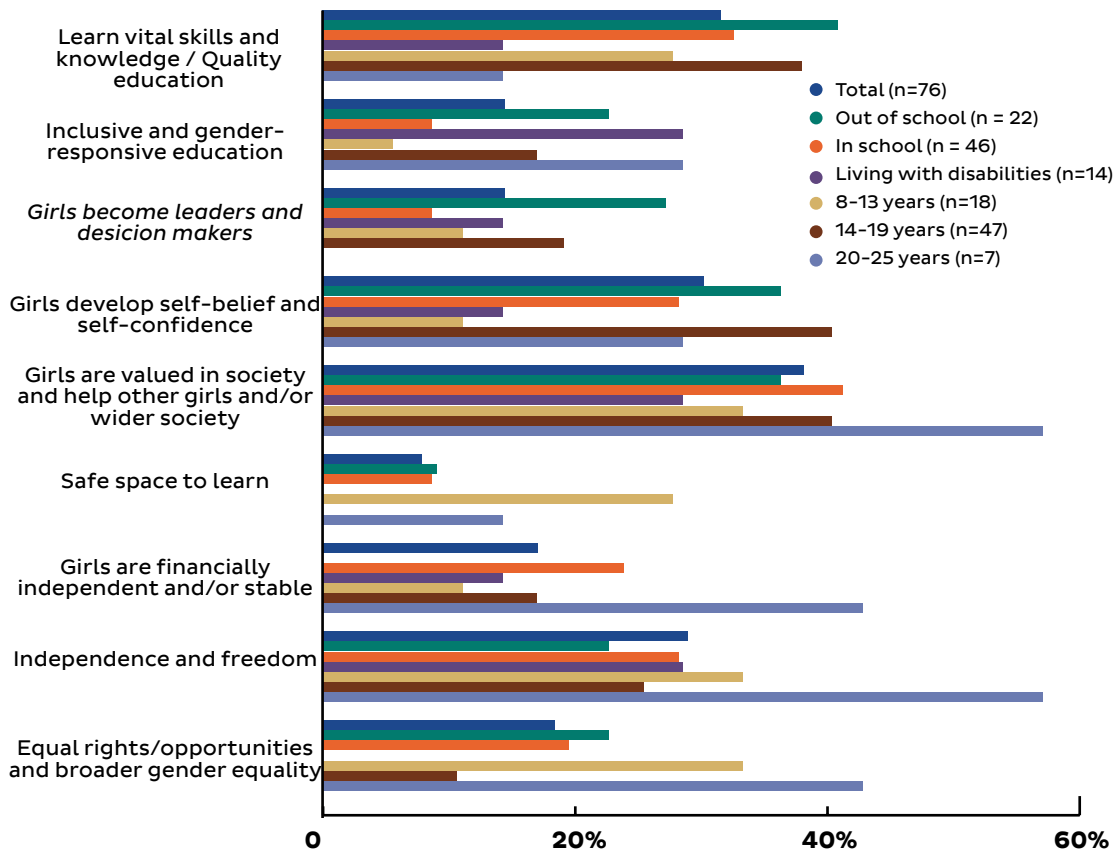
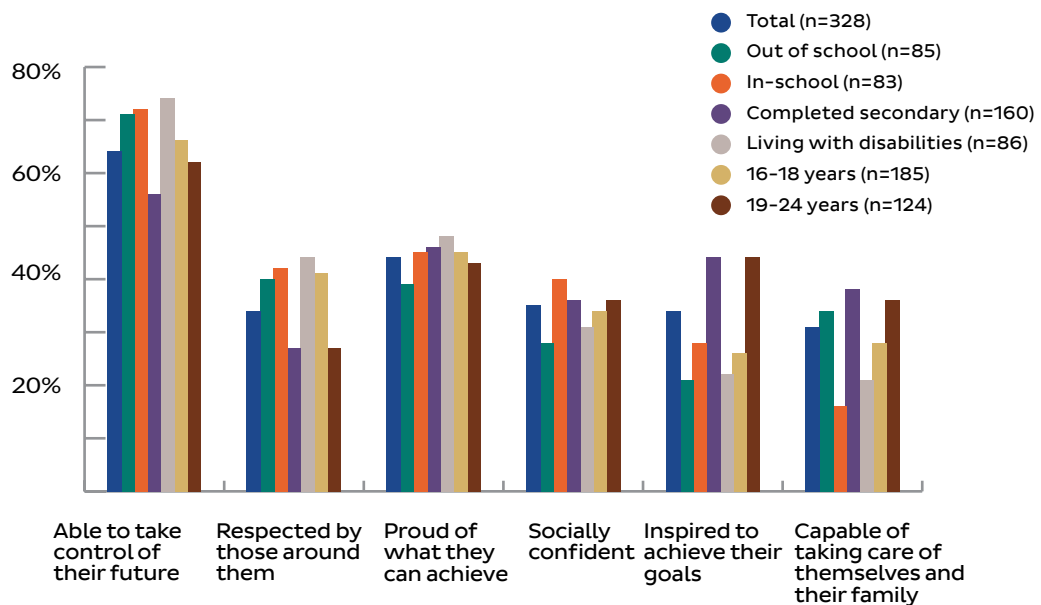


Figure 4: Girls' top responses to 'How do you think girls will feel if they get this education?' (survey, girls could select up to three options, 'other' excluded)



Girls' perceptions of power

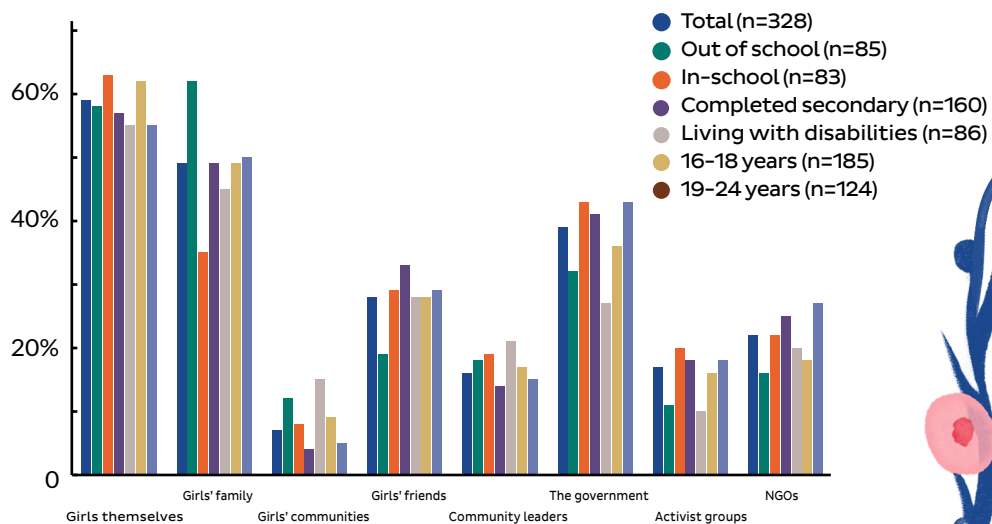
We also heard some striking insights into girls' current perceptions of their own agency and power. In the workshops, 87% of girls rated their influence over education decisions as high or very high. Of these, 23.4% reported believing that decision-makers would listen to them, and 20.3% said they would take action, individually or collectively, to improve girls' education.¹⁸

Similarly in responses to a survey question about who had the most power to improve girls' education, more than half of girls chose "girls themselves" (58.8%) — more than those who chose governments (39%) or girls' families (49.4%) (Figure 5).

Girls consistently expressed a desire for education that empowers them — offering independence, leadership opportunities and the ability to support their communities. Global policy frameworks must better reflect this emphasis on personal empowerment and future control, and investments must provide the kinds of school environments girls need.



Figure 5: Girls' top five responses to 'Who do you think has the most power to make education better for girls like you?' (survey, girls could select up to three options)



2

Girls want schools fit for the 21st century and where they receive respect

Girls who were part of our consultation, alongside millions of girls worldwide, live in countries or regions with not enough school buildings, high pupil-to-teacher ratios, inadequate supplies of teaching and learning materials and concerning levels of learning poverty.¹⁹

Girls revealed their preferences relating to subjects, facilities, teaching and learning approaches, school staffing and the structure of the school day, among other areas. To provide girls what they want from their education, policymakers would need to take a holistic approach and make a step-change in investment.

2.1. Girls' learning priorities

Girls want to learn subjects that will enable them to take control of their own lives and achieve social, political and economic empowerment: life skills, sports, arts, STEM, business and vocational skills and foreign languages.

Workshops: Girls particularly want to access **creative arts and crafts** education (38.7%),²⁰ with this subject ranking as an even higher priority for girls with disabilities (57.1%). **Performing arts and music** showed up among preferences for out-of-school girls (42%), girls living with disabilities (42.9%) and older girls (50%). Older girls and girls in school strongly mentioned **life skills education**. Out-of-school and older girls (20–25 years old) frequently mentioned **sports**. All girls, except girls in school, clearly prioritised **computing/digital literacy** (see box and Figure 6).



Survey: Responses similarly revealed girls' desire to learn **creative subjects** – art, drama and music – with these consistently prioritised by younger girls and out-of-school girls. Girls also selected **life skills** as a priority topic, which was the top response for older girls and the third-most common answer overall. **Digital literacy** also emerged as a priority (see box and Figure 7).

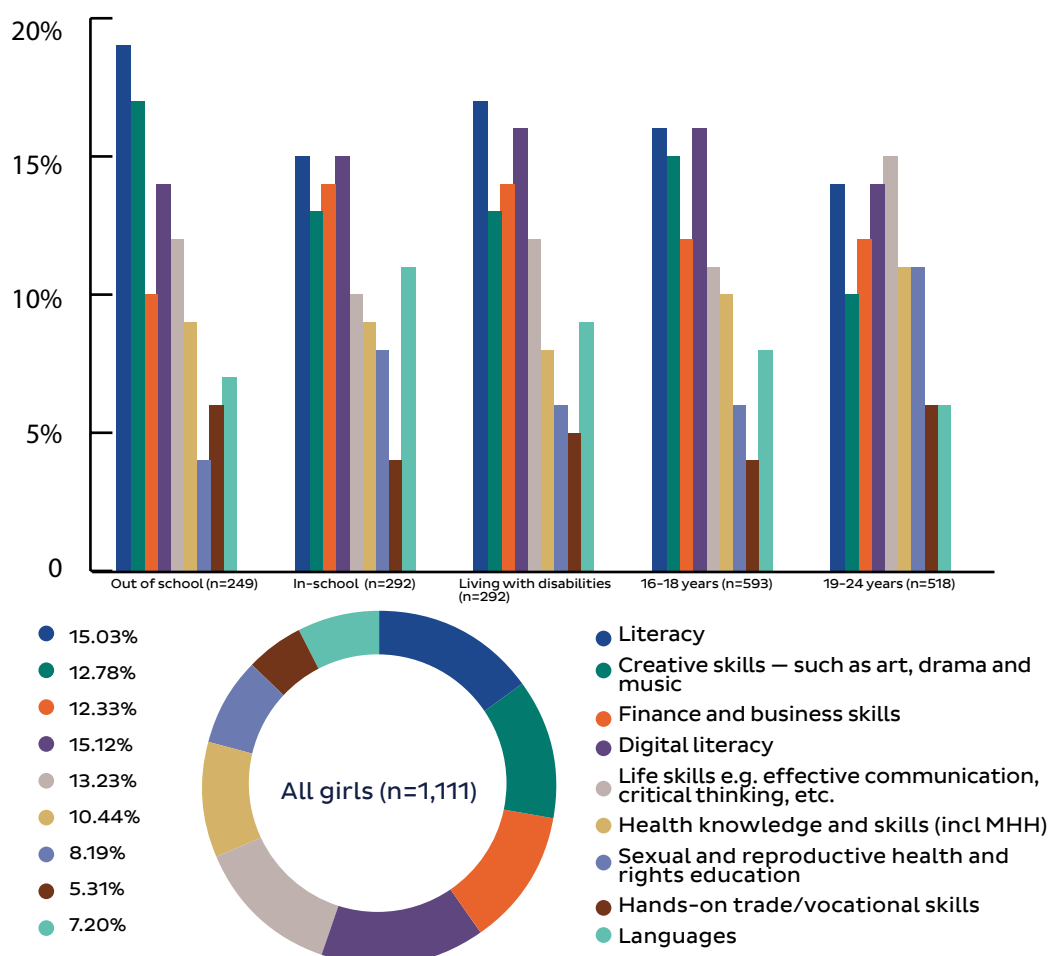
Our vision for education will allow girls to have technical and digital skills, learn the 3 sciences and mathematics, be independent, have self-confidence and advocate for herself and other girls in the community.

– Vision statement from workshop with 14–16 year olds who are in school in Kenya

Figure 6: Girls' top responses to 'what would she learn?' (workshops, top three responses per group highlighted)

	TOTAL (n=76)	OOS (n=22)	In school (n=46)	LWD (n=14)	8-13 years (n=18)	14-19 years (n=47)	20-25 years (n=7)
Life skills e.g. communication or critical thinking	29%	23%	37%	0%	17%	34%	43%
Literacy	29%	18%	35%	14%	33%	30%	29%
Health and hygiene (MHH excluded)	28%	27%	33%	21%	28%	32%	14%
Leadership and confidence	25%	32%	26%	0%	22%	30%	14%
Business and entrepreneurial skills	20%	32%	13%	21%	27%	21%	0%
Creative arts and crafts	38%	32%	28%	57%	50%	36%	29%
Performing arts and music	12%	41%	17%	43%	39%	32%	0%
Sports and fitness	25%	32%	26%	0%	28%	26%	29%
SRHR (incl. MHH)	9%	5%	13%	14%	11%	6%	29%
Digital literacy	33%	45%	28%	29%	33%	36%	29%
Science and maths	24%	27%	24%	14%	33%	19%	43%

Figure 7: Girls' top responses to 'which topics do you feel are the most important for girls to learn about in secondary school?' (survey -- all girls, girls could select up to 5 options, n=total responses)



Digital access, learning and literacy

Digital in all its forms emerged as a clear priority. Girls expressed a desire to access digital devices for learning, acquire digital literacy skills and benefit from improved internet connectivity in schools.²¹

- In workshops, digital literacy was the second-most mentioned topic and often in the top three subjects. Out-of-school girls (47.6%) and older girls (17-19 years old; 42.9%) frequently mentioned it, with less mentions among 8-13 and 14-16 year olds (33.3% and 34.4% respectively). In-school girls were slightly less likely to mention digital literacy (Figure 6).
- In surveys, respondents most frequently selected digital literacy, and all groups prioritised it (Figure 7). Girls explicitly prioritised digital in responses about how they wanted to learn, more than any other learning method in the workshops. Girls mentioned it in more than half of all workshops, particularly in workshops with out-of-school girls (71.4%) and older girls (85.7%).



2.2. Schools as welcoming and respectful environments for girls

Gender-based discrimination within schools affects girls' attendance and undermines their ability to gain knowledge, skills and other opportunities that 12 years of education should provide. For many girls, schools are hostile environments where discrimination is rife. These environments exclude girls from subjects or extra-curricular activities, prioritise boys for opportunities or resources, do not provide adequate menstrual health and hygiene facilities/services and normalise abuse.^{22 23 24}



Girls living with disabilities, pregnant or parenting girls, poor girls, girls in rural areas, and survivors of gender-based violence are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in education.²⁵ Failing to keep girls in school also increases their vulnerability to other forms of abuse, including child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).²⁷ No more than 5% of girls complete secondary school in the three countries with the worst CEFM rates.²⁸

Respect emerged as a common theme across both the workshop and survey responses.

Workshops: 40% of girls' vision statements mentioned wanting education that is inclusive, safe or respecting girls' rights, most often those written by younger girls (8-13 years old) or girls living with disabilities (Figure 1). Girls in 64% of workshops also mentioned discrimination in schools as education barriers: for example, unsuitable facilities for girls or girls living with disabilities and bullying or other forms of school-related gender-based violence. Out-of-school girls, older girls (17-19 years old) and girls living with disabilities commonly raised two or more of these issues (Figure 11).

Survey: 15.6% of girls specifically called for more gender equitable norms or greater respect in schools, a common theme across both age groups (16-18 years and 19-24 years old) and for girls in school. Of all girls' comments, 32.4% referenced wanting more welcoming, inclusive and/or safe schools.²⁹ Older girls (24.6% of all their comments) particularly prioritised inclusive or gender-responsive education, education that actively addresses gender-based barriers (Figure 8).

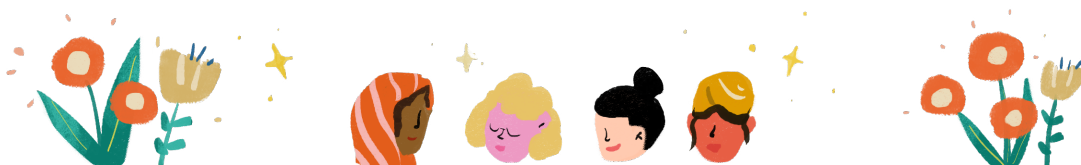


Figure 8: What three things would make education better for girls like you? (survey, open question, n=total responses)

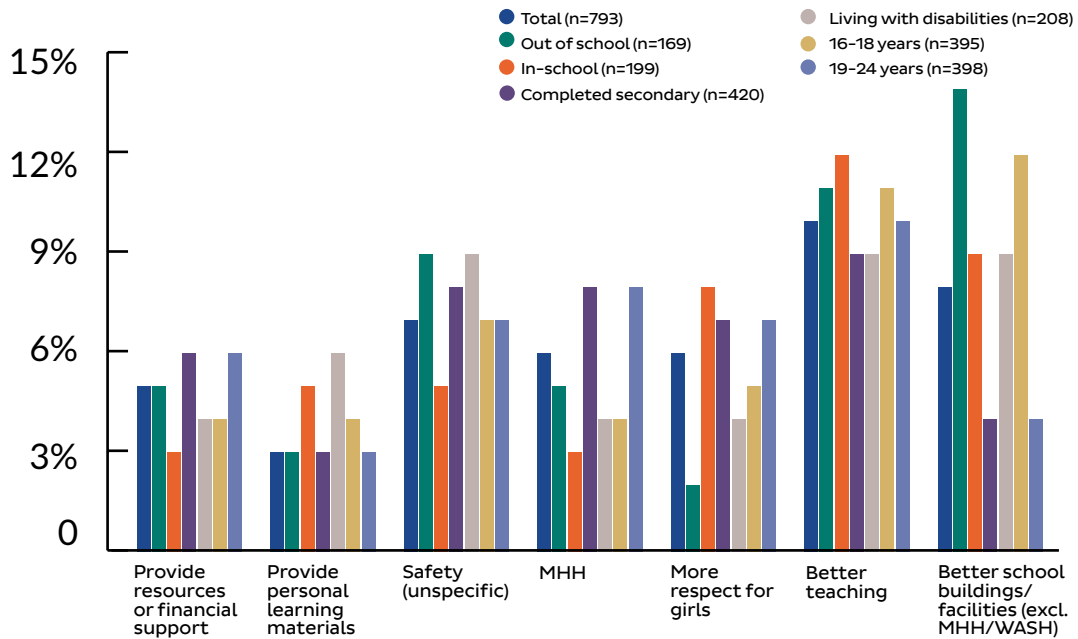
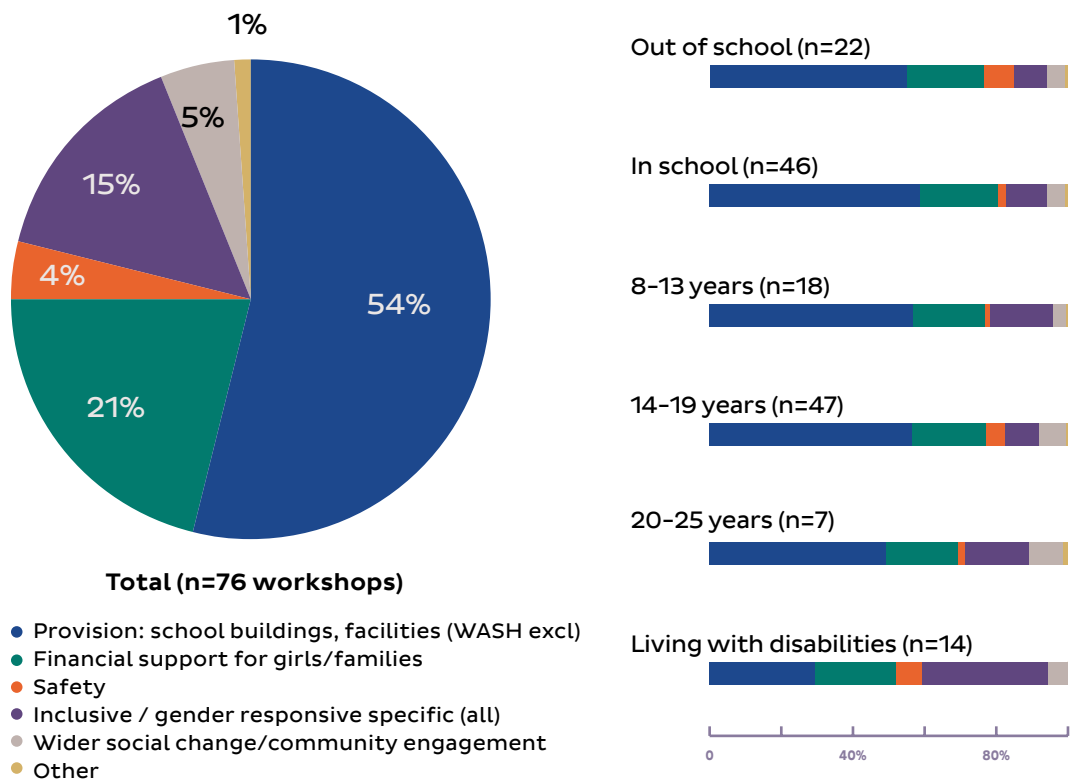


Figure 9: Top mentions/allocations from education makeover (workshops)



Girls' priorities for investment

We asked girls where they would invest in education if they were in power. In the survey, we also asked girls where they wanted their governments to invest. In the workshops, groups of girls most commonly cited investment in school buildings, equipment and facilities and improving teaching quality as priorities. Girls, particularly those living with disabilities, also prioritised providing financial support, such as scholarships. Participants consistently mentioned digital learning and access as a top-five investment priority, except for girls living with disabilities (Figure 9).

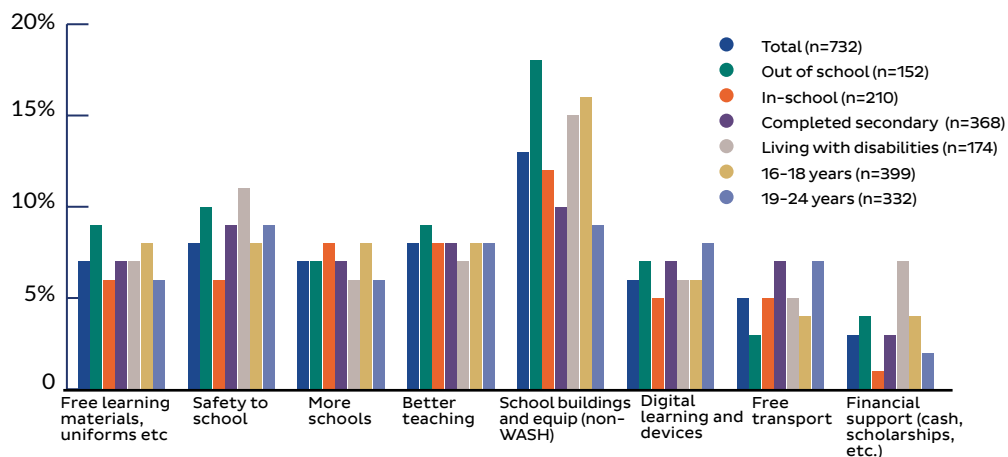
In the survey, girls mentioned digital learning and devices as priorities for investment more than anything else, particularly younger girls and out-of-school girls. Investments in safety and improving school buildings and facilities were common priorities. Younger girls (16-18 years old) and girls in school were slightly more likely to mention teaching improvements. Older girls (19-24 years old) were also more likely to mention transport investments (Figure 10).

Girls told us they want schools to be welcoming, inclusive and respectful environments where they can learn fully and freely, without discrimination. Some girls provided specific examples of how disrespect manifests in schools including harassment by other students and teachers, requirements of girls to do cleaning within the school, and discrimination in accessing "male" subjects like STEM or participating in extracurricular opportunities like sports clubs. The consultation process highlighted girls particularly vulnerable to discrimination in education, including pregnant or parenting girls, girls living with disabilities and girls at risk of CEFM.

In our school, every Thursday girls are supposed to do the cleaning. Boys are not required to do this. This used to make me late to go home and I didn't feel like coming to school the next day after going home.

– Workshop with girls under 13 years old who are in school in Bangladesh

Figure 10: Girls' top responses 'If you were in power, where would spend money to improve education' total and by groups (survey, open question, n=total responses)



3

Girls want governments to deliver on promises to reduce barriers to their education

Girls shared persistent and significant barriers to their education, through answering specific questions about barriers and sharing barriers unprompted related to investments, subjects, school facilities and other areas. Two key barriers emerged as the most important for governments to address.

3.1. Overcoming financial barriers

Household poverty – compounded by the direct and indirect education costs that families have to bear – creates barriers to education access and completion for all learners.³⁰ However, gender norms shape the way these barriers manifest for girls.

Girls identified “financial difficulties” as significant challenges for them and their families, impeding their education access and completion. They highlighted how these challenges interact with discriminatory gender norms, since families and communities tend to prioritise investment in boys’ education over girls’ with scarce resources.

She is unable to dedicate herself to her studies because she has to take care of her brother as their mother works the afternoon shift and leaves the eldest daughter to take care of the youngest son.

– Workshop with girls under 13 who are in school in Brazil

Parents do not have enough money to provide their kids with the resources needed at school to continue education. Ayera’s³¹ parents leave for work and since she has no brother, commuting to the school becomes a challenge. Due to domestic responsibilities, she finds it difficult to manage and complete school homework.

– Workshop with 14-16 year old girls who are in school in Pakistan

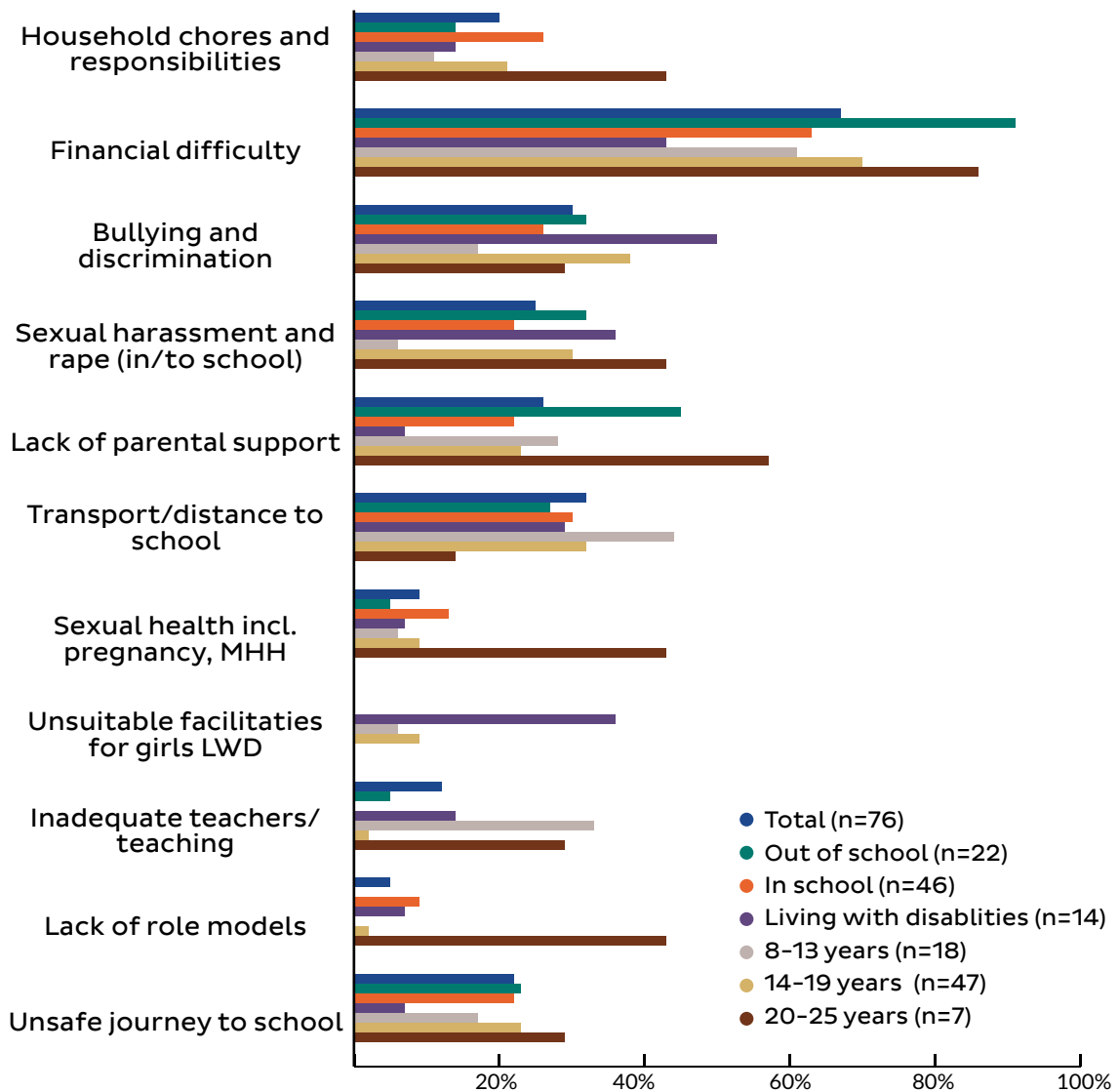


Workshops: Girls across all workshops mentioned finance most frequently as a barrier to education, including girls of every age range and schooling status, though notably not girls living with disabilities (Figure 11).

Survey: Girls' responses clearly prioritised measures to reduce or eliminate direct costs for education – specifically, free meals, free and affordable transport, providing learning materials and uniforms and “providing financial support” (Figure 10).

Girls also flagged that families consider opportunity costs when deciding whether to invest in girls' education. Girls' contribution to unpaid care is an important resource, helping households save on childcare expenses or free up other family members for income-generating activities. Girls noted a range of competing demands that undermine their education, including caring for siblings and other family members, chores and housework, or paid work.

Figure 11: Girls' barriers to education (workshops)



3.2. Ending gender-based violence on the way to and in school

Gender-based violence (GBV), the act or threat of physical, sexual or emotional harm based on a gender, is both a symptom and driver of gender inequality. School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) – GBV that occurs on the way to or in school – is a critical barrier to girls' education across the world. Unsafe routes to and from school are one of the primary drivers of girls' dropout: an estimated 60 million girls experience sexual assault on their way to school each year.³² Girls who are subject to GBV are less likely to complete 12 years of education and more likely to experience GBV in the future.³³ ³⁴ High rates of SRGBV also have a chilling effect beyond those directly affected, deterring girls from attending school due to fear from others' experiences.

Across both workshops and surveys, girls shared – with no prompting or specific survey questions – how various forms of SRGBV affect their education access and completion and undermine their visions for education.³⁵ Girls cited SRGBV committed by a wide range of perpetrators – teachers, boys and men in the community. They commonly mentioned sexual harassment and abuse, alongside bullying, a form of harassment shaped by and reinforcing discriminatory norms and male power. Evidence also shows bullying is a precursor to sexual harassment.^{36 37}

Our vision for education will allow girls to access quality education in a safe environment without anxiety.

– Vision statement from workshop with girls under 13 who are in school in Myanmar



Parents don't send [girls living with disabilities] to school because they are afraid that they would be lost/hurt on their way to or back from school because of their disabilities. School environments and systems are not designed in a way that can be beneficial for them. Teachers don't know sign language and don't feel responsible for [girls living with disabilities].

– Workshop with girls under 13 years old living with disabilities in Ethiopia



Girls shared strong concerns around their safety in and around school:

Workshops: Girls mentioned safety second-most frequently as an education barrier. Girls most frequently mentioned these forms of SRGBV: bullying, sexual assault or harassment and unsafe journeys, particularly out-of-school and older girls. Girls living with disabilities mentioned bullying and harassment more than any other barrier (Figure 11). Younger girls (8-13 years old) particularly mentioned ensuring schools are safe spaces as a priority (Figure 3).

Survey: Girls mentioned safety and security third-most frequently, with in-school girls less likely to mention it than other groups (Figure 8). In answers to questions about investment priorities, improving safe routes to school was girls' second priority, particularly out-of-school girls, older girls (19-24 years old) and girls living with disabilities (Figure 10).



A school where girls are taught about menstrual hygiene and hygiene generally, a school without GBV, a school where the teachers are educated and respect them, a school that is like a safe space for girls to express their feelings.

— Survey respondent, 22-24 years old, who has completed education in Nigeria



Menstrual health and hygiene³⁸

Girls emphasised how lack of access to facilities, products and services necessary for their menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) cause absences from school, and prompt embarrassment and shame. While ample evidence shows inadequate MHH support is a barrier to girls' education, it came out unexpectedly strong through the consultation process, possibly indicating a societal shift in girls' openness in speaking about the topic.

Girls in one-fifth of all workshops mentioned MHH as a priority. Older girls particularly mentioned it as an area for investment and as a subject (second-top mention). Girls in school mentioned this subject in 26.1% of workshops, compared to zero mentions in workshops with out-of-school girls. As a subject, girls living with disabilities prioritised MHH and digital literacy/learning equally in 28.6% of workshops (Figures 6 and 9).

44% of girls in the survey mentioned MHH when asked about additional equipment or facilities – the most common response on average and for all groups (Figure 12). Older girls were more likely to raise it and prioritise it for improvement of school facilities and investment (Figure 8).

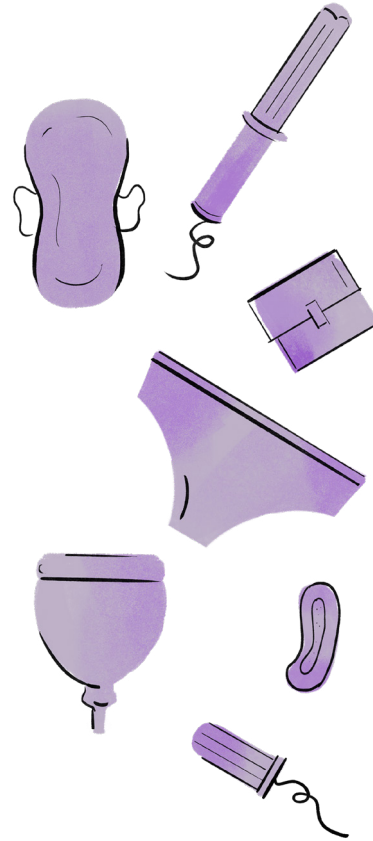
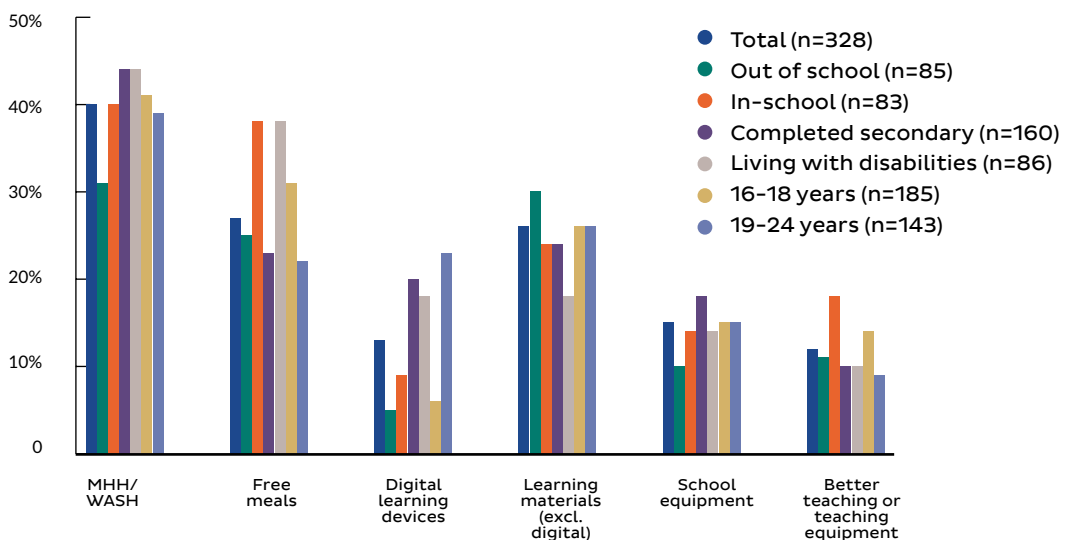


Figure 12: Girls' top responses 'What additional equipment and/or facilities would you include to give girls the best experience while they learn?' (survey, open question)





Recommendations

Through Girls' Vision for Education, Malala Fund set out to hear insights and priorities from girls and partner with them to shape our recommendations. Young women leaders and Girls' Vision partners supported Malala Fund's validation process. Through this process, we collectively identified key policy recommendations for governments and global institutions to help realise girls' visions for education.

- **Deliver on global commitments to girls by increasing investment and strengthening national education standards.** Girls are aware of the gaps between global standards and their governments' implementation of them. They want governments to increase education budgets and strengthen national legal and policy frameworks to provide 12 years of free, safe, quality education that meets the aspirations of all girls. They urge government action to support groups inadequately protected by global and national standards, such as pregnant or parenting girls, girls living with disabilities and girls subjected to child marriage.
- **Resource girls' activism.** Girls are changemakers in their communities and societies, but they need better access to quality funding and resources to power up their initiatives and activism to improve education.³⁹ Despite growing calls to increase funding for girls and youth-led organisations and youth representing 25-30% of populations in low- and middle-income countries, only 5.6% of global official development assistance (ODA) targeted gender and adolescent issues in 2020.⁴⁰
- **Make space for girls in national and global education decision-making and policy processes.** Girls' meaningful participation in decision processes is critical to ensuring that education policies and practices, and their implementation, work for them. Examples of good practice include meaningful consultations with girl-led groups and networks or inclusive and structured student groups; quota for girls in national delegations to global education policy processes; and well-resourced and meaningful national girl advisory bodies.
- **Prioritise gender equality education indicators.** Global policymakers' disproportionate focus on gender parity fails to accurately gauge progress on girls' education. They must place greater priority on gender equality indicators, particularly policy measures to remove financial barriers to education, address SRGBV and protect and promote girls' rights. See Malala Fund's girls' education report cards.^{41 42}
- **Galvanise efforts to address SRGBV and promote menstrual health and digital learning.** Girls specifically prioritised these areas through the consultation process. Governments and global institutions should respond by stepping up investments in these areas, particularly focusing on safety to, from and within schools, promoting MHH and improving girls' digital learning and literacy.

Next steps: Securing resources for girls' education



Girls need decision-makers to significantly increase investments in education to ensure schooling can meet the needs, uphold the rights and realise the aspirations of all girls. Countries need more resources to make secondary education cost-free, improve access for marginalised girls, upgrade facilities and get institutions online, train and hire teachers and provide quality learning materials. And they need funds to ensure girls' schooling is supported by safe transport, health services and social protection programmes. Gender-responsive interventions and programmes to tackle SRGBV, break down harmful gender norms and deliver MHH support are essential to realising girls' vision for education.

Informed by girls' insights from the Girls' Vision consultation process, we will continue our work to ensure governments and institutions increase investments in education systems that meet girls' needs and priorities.

Debt justice for girls

In the near-term, we will integrate Girls' Vision insights into our advocacy for the reform of international financial systems to unlock sustainable funding for girls' education. We are urgently calling for rapid, large-scale debt relief for lower-income countries which are currently spending 43% of their budgets on servicing debts on average – **almost three times as much as they spend on education.**

Heavy debt burdens can hinder governments' ability to uphold women and girls' rights and deprive them of vital public services throughout their lives. Reforming the current unjust debt system could free up billions of dollars for governments in lower-income countries to adequately fund education and other critical social sectors.

We welcome girl-led and girl-centred organisations and any advocates to join this effort to secure debt justice for girls. We need to work together to mobilise for change and achieve girls' visions for education.

Sign up for updates on our efforts to secure debt justice for girls:
mala.la/IFARsignup

Appendix 1: Insights from girls living in high-income countries

We opened our survey to all girls and received responses from 56 girls from 17 high-income countries (HICs). We have omitted these responses from the primary analysis presented in this report and share them below. Please note that the below presents a snapshot, and direct comparisons should not be drawn due to data limitations.



Education, independence and girls' perceptions of power

When asked how girls would feel if their vision for education was realised, girls from HICs were more likely to select “take control of their own futures” (32.5%) than the primary data set (26.47%).

Over 25% of girls from HICs identified governments as having the power to improve education and about 16% selected “girls themselves”. This was almost the inverse compared to girls in the primary data set (16.3% and 24.6% respectively).

Improvements and investments in schools

Girls from HICs' top-three priorities for subjects were (in order): sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education, literacy skills and life skills. In the primary data set, girls on average selected (in order) digital literacy/learning, literacy and life skills, and were much less likely to choose SRHR education.

Girls from HICs tended to prioritise learning provision in their responses to investment and improvements to education, both as their overall priority and much more so than girls in the primary data set.

Barriers to girls' education

Girls from HICs were slightly less likely to mention safety, but they shared many related concerns – notably sexual harassment with some mentions of gun violence and school shootings. MHH was also a clear priority for girls from HICs. Almost 30% of respondents called for free menstrual products.



Acknowledgements

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Page 3, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)

Page 5, AfyaPlus Organization

Page 15, David Exodus - UN Photo

Page 16, World YWCA - YWCA of Myanmar

Page 17, World YWCA - YWCA of Myanmar

Page 18, Roots and Wings Elixir during Addis Ababa Consultation

Page 19, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)

Page 20, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)

Page 25, David Exodus - UN Photo

Page 29, Yasmin Velloso

Page 32, photo courtesy of Pastoral Women's Council



Endnotes

1. UNESCO (2024) *#HerEducationOurFuture: Investing in girls' and women's education: a smart investment to accelerate development; the latest facts on gender equality in education* <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388934>
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10. SDG 4 commits governments to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education... for all." Target 4.5 seeks to eliminate gender disparities in education. Targets 4.1 and 4.2 are measured by increasing proportions of girls and boys in enrolment and completion.
11. Note that progress on SDG 4.a – committing governments to ensure "education facilities are child, disability and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all" – is much worse than on 4.5. <https://www.education-progress.org/en/indicators>
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18. 173 workshop participants provided feedback via a survey conducted by the workshop facilitator.
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