

The State of the World's Girls 2024

PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Until we are all equal

Still We Dream

Girls and young people living through conflict

A 14-year-old girl who became pregnant after being displaced by conflict in Mozambique
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Executive Summary

This year's State of the World's Girls Report focuses on the experiences of young people whose lives are dominated by conflict. We wanted to understand how the experiences of violence, educational disruption, livelihood loss, and emotional distress, brought on by conflict, vary for girls and young women, boys and young men, and how this will affect their lives in the future. What do these differences mean for humanitarian aid organisations, governments, policy makers, communities and for young people themselves and what can be done to really embed this understanding into action?

The research involved a large-scale survey of 9,995 participants from ten countries – Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan, Ukraine, the Philippines and one country that is unable to be named because of political and operational sensitivities. A further 104 from Ethiopia, Cameroon, Colombia and the Philippines took part in in-depth interviews. Armed conflict affects everyone but it affects them in different ways. This report looks at the gendered dimensions of conflict, emphasising in particular the needs and rights of girls and young women who, in times of conflict and in times of peace and plenty, are often overlooked.

> **"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 found after the war. So, I can say everyone was affected by the war in different ways."**
>
> Addodas, 19, Ethiopia

For a full breakdown of research findings go to: plan-international.org/still-we-dream

In 2024, nearly 300 million people will need humanitarian support.*

Conflict is one of the major drivers of humanitarian needs. The impact on civilians and, especially, on children and young people, is devastating. They are recruited, abducted, attacked in schools and hospitals, subjected to sexual violence and denied humanitarian aid. Within all this devastation, as our research emphasises, conflict is experienced differently by girls and boys, by young women and young men and these differences, captured by both the survey and the in-depth interviews, are the main focus of this report.

> **"Provide food, shelter, security measures for us to move about, learning programmes for abled and disabled [people] so that we all should be busy."**
>
> Ikome, 16, Cameroon



A mother and her two children living in a crowded displacement camp in Ethiopia © Plan International



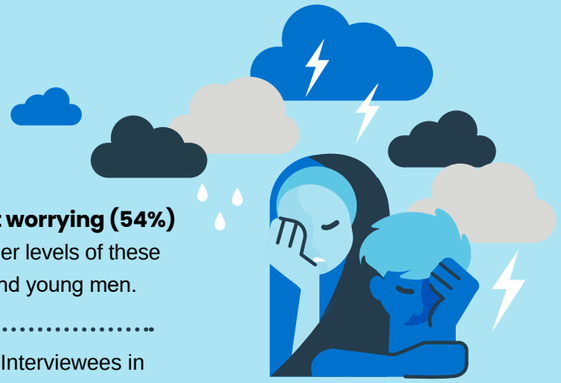
Preparing food kits for distribution in Lebanon
© Plan International

What emerges from this current study is how important it is, if support is to be effective, to understand that different conflicts, context and identities reveal a myriad of different experiences. Fear is a common thread, as is the struggle for basic necessities but girls and young women report much higher levels of emotional stress. They are sexually assaulted, and their opportunities more restricted by domestic responsibilities, and pregnancy. Boys and young men are targeted to fight, many are killed and they feel responsible to be family breadwinners and protectors. The qualitative interviews illustrate the constant brutality and trauma suffered or witnessed by many of the interviewees, whoever they are and wherever they are. Lives have been shattered, communities and families destroyed: although both the survey and the in-depth interviews reveal clear gender differences in how conflict is experienced, everybody suffers.

> **"There were always shootings, and we would hurry home early because of the constant gunfire, and we were very scared…There were no vehicles to help us whenever we evacuated; there were only carabaos and makeshift carts. The helicopters were dropping bombs and explosions, and we were scared. We left our belongings and ran…"**
>
> Amira, 24, Philippines

* UN OCHA's Global Humanitarian Overview 2024: released in December 2023.

Key findings



Young people reported high levels of emotional distress

including **sleep disturbances (55%±)** and **constant worrying (54%)** with girls and young women reporting significantly° higher levels of these emotional stress indicators than boys and young men.



27% of girls & young women in the survey reported **sexual and gender based violence** as a constant risk of everyday life, as did girls and young women in the interviews.

Interviewees in Ethiopia, in particular, had both witnessed and experienced extreme sexual violence against girls and young women and emphasised the **urgent need for safety and support, including mental health services**. Girls and young women made pregnant due to rape, reported being stigmatised when returning to their homes.

38% of survey respondents reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe,

with girls and young women (39%), feeling less safe than boys and young men (36%).



More than half of all survey respondents had missed out on education due to the conflict: boys and young men in slightly greater numbers than girls and young women, 53% compared to 52%.



Boys and young men were targeted for recruitment in greater numbers by armed groups than girls and young women, 22% compared to 14%. Some 17% of all survey respondents aged 17 and under had been asked to join or support an armed group.



Over 45% of survey participants reported reducing their food intake: 47% of girls and young women compared to 44% of boys and young men. Girls and young women also reported having greater difficulty assessing food aid. 59% of survey participants have limited or no access to electricity and 41% have limited or no water.



63% of survey respondents whatever their gender identity, **had their livelihoods affected to some degree by the conflict** in their country. Financial support and help rebuilding economies emerged as a key priority throughout the research.



65% of young people want peace talks, and they want young people to be involved in them: girls were more in favour of young people being involved than boys, with 45% of young women favouring youth involvement, and 39% particularly suggesting girls and young women's involvement in peace talks.

± Percentages have been revised up or down to the nearest whole number: half points have been retained.
° Throughout the report 'significant' is used in the statistical sense: a result that is not attributable to chance.

For a full breakdown of research findings go to: plan-international.org/still-we-dream

Calls to Action

When their societies emerge from conflict, and as they live through it, young people have a lot to offer.

It is crucial to listen to young people as they navigate their way through the complex challenges they face.

They all need to be empowered financially and educationally, they need basic necessities but also access to services that are tailored to their situations, particularly with regard to sexual and reproductive health and rights and psychosocial support, both during and post-conflict.

Conflict can blight an entire generation but it is the experience and energy of this generation, if they are properly supported, that will help their communities survive and rebuild.



> "Provide them with quality education, accompaniment [and] more than anything psychological protection."
> Martha, 22, Colombia

> "The youths are future builders and need to be involved in peace talks."
> Akungha, 24, Cameroon

Despite the bleakness of their current situation there is still a sense of hope for the future and the young people taking part in the research have many ideas of how they can survive conflict and rebuild in its aftermath.

Girls and young people need all parties to conflict, national governments, humanitarian agencies and donors, to work together and:

- **Implement immediate ceasefires and commence meaningful peace talks aimed at lasting peace, ensuring that girls' and young people's voices and specific needs are included.**
- **Stop and condemn all grave violations against children in conflict, including recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups, killing and maiming, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions, and denial of humanitarian access.**
- **Support safe and inclusive education for children and young people, including peace education, funding for the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, and alternative learning approaches.**
- **Target humanitarian aid, making sure girls, boys, and young people have equal access to food, water and shelter, and that services for survivors of violence are prioritised, including for girls and young women.**
- **Bolster local economies and provide employment opportunities so girls, boys and young people have tailored options, recognising their different needs.**

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