



Adolescents, youth and the SDGs: what can we learn from the current data?

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Foreword

 No-one but us knows how we live day by day, or the limitations we face. If we agree favourable actions that benefit adolescent girls, we will create a better world for everyone.

(Danha, 20 years old from Guatemala, at the AGIP Generation Equality Consultation, 2021)

Drafting this foreword presented us with a challenging task; we found ourselves pulled between despair and hope. We are in the middle of a world-changing pandemic that is shaking many of our communities to their foundations – but we are also on the precipice of a new feminist vision for collective action as we emerge from the Generation Equality Process. Twenty-five years since the ground-breaking Beijing Platform for Action was agreed, world leaders, UN agencies, civil society organisations, young activists, and the private sector are committing to a new future for women and girls around the world. If we get it right, it has the potential to accelerate progress towards a fairer world and improve life chances for millions of adolescent girls.

To be successful, this global plan must put adolescent girls and their experiences at the centre. It must be developed by them, for them and with them, and reflect the reality of every girl's life. This cannot happen without more data on adolescent girls, yet as this report points out, they continually fall through the gaps in research.

This report reveals what type of data are missing and best practices for tracking issues that affect adolescent girls, and identifies where investments are most needed. It shows us how to design interventions that help adolescent girls to blossom and grow – not simply exist. To achieve this, we must shift our data systems from measuring only the barriers that block girls' progress and start to measure the positive enablers that support adolescent girls to take control of their lives.

There is good practice we can build on, but we need to go further. Progress in understanding adolescents' access to services, including health and education; their experiences of violence and child, early and forced marriage; and rates of child labour, among other indicators, have given us a picture of their needs. But to understand how to support them to flourish, we also need tools that track their psychosocial well-being, connectedness, voice, agency, community engagement and economic empowerment.

The recently published Invisibility of Adolescents within the SDGs report showed us where adolescent girls are falling through the cracks. To prevent us from failing another generation of girls, we need dedicated investments and political commitment to better data for adolescent girls. Without this, girls will continue to be invisible and deprioritised and the needs of the most vulnerable adolescent girls will still be overlooked. The bottom line is that we cannot make plans and policies about adolescent girls if we do not understand their lives.

The Adolescent Girls Investment Plan (AGIP) exists to push for data that illuminate girls' lives and show us the impact that linked-up investments and cross-sectoral action can have. We believe that we can achieve change if we commit to closing the large, persistent gap in terms of resources, evidence and commitments for the most marginalised adolescents.

If we want a future that is better for adolescent girls, we need to make sure that they have the support they need. To put that in place, we need data that give a comprehensive picture of their lives, challenges and opportunities. As they journey from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, the unique aspects of their lives must be understood, and they themselves must be a part of that data systems process. Who better to define, measure and express their own dreams than girls themselves?

Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen

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Executive summary

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goal framework, premised on the goal to leave no one behind, centres the global development agenda around the world's most disadvantaged and heretofore overlooked populations. In order to understand the unique challenges faced by marginalised populations and most effectively deliver on that promise, the SDG Agenda calls for robust and disaggregated data collection that captures the inequalities faced by women and girls and young people more broadly, whose realities are often masked by reporting with broader scope. This report investigates what we can learn about adolescent and youth well-being based on available data, and the extent to which data that relate to adolescent girls' and boys' experiences are usefully disaggregated and reported, by answering three overarching questions:

- **What is the state of adolescent and youth progress in key SDGs?** Can we establish a narrative of how certain countries and regions are performing according to SDG indicators related to young people's well-being?
- **What is the extent of SDG data disaggregation?** Are data dimensions, primarily sex and age, being collected for those SDG indicators known to impact young people's well-being?¹
- **Call to action:** What are the priority recommendations to be implemented during the Decade of Action leading up to 2030?

We centre this report around six essential domains of adolescent and youth well-being, informed by two frameworks that reflect a growing consensus on how to understand the interconnected elements of well-being (see Annex 1 for frameworks). The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme's (2019) conceptual framework was developed as an integral part of the world's largest global study on adolescence in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), focusing on gender equality and the enhancement of adolescent capabilities among the world's most vulnerable populations. The GAGE framework is also closely aligned to the adolescent well-being conceptual framework developed by Ross et al.

(2020) for the United Nations H6+ Technical Working Group on Adolescent Health and Well-Being. In this report, we focus on 15 LMICs from Asia, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and sub-Saharan Africa. Based on these overlaid frameworks, we identify the following SDG goals that contain indicators directly relevant to our adolescent well-being capabilities:

- 2: Zero hunger
- 3: Good health and well-being
- 4: Quality education
- 5: Gender equality
- 6: Clean water and sanitation
- 8: Decent work and economic growth
- 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions



Education and learning

SDG indicators 4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.3.1, 4.4.1, 4.5.1, 4.6.1

Our findings show that data reported on formal educational outcomes is largely robust, though little information is available on non-formal and vocational education or ICT skills, which are a critical element of young people's educational trajectories in the developing countries we examine. Findings also vary by region, with boys performing ahead of girls in educational outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa, as opposed to in the MENA region where they are significantly outperformed by their female peers.



Bodily autonomy, integrity and freedom from violence

SDG indicators 5.2.1, 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 8.7.1

The bodily autonomy and integrity domain emphasises the protection of adolescents from physical and sex- and gender-based violence, including child marriage, harmful traditional practices, and other forms of coercion – vulnerabilities that are often magnified for adolescents in the second decade of life. This domain is the strongest that we examine in terms of data disaggregation by sex, though we find that age disaggregation is problematic, with a lack

¹ Disability is an additional critical dimension of adolescent vulnerability. However, only seven SDG goals call for data collection reflecting disability and so few indicators examined here include data on disability that no real conclusions can be drawn, except to identify the collection of disability data as a significant gap and urgent priority.

of precision in measuring age ranges within childhood that conceals the major differences in capabilities and life trajectories in various stages of childhood.



SRH, health and nutrition

SDG indicators 2.2.1, 2.1.2, 3.3.1, 3.7.1, 3.7.2, 3.8.1, 6.1.1, 6.2.1

Health outcomes for young people depend on equitable access to health services as well as information and knowledge about how to live a healthy life, and self-efficacy in taking the steps they need to care for their own health. Data series for this domain often cover broadly conceived indices such as access to drinking water and sanitation services, which, while useful in clarifying differences between urban and rural access to health infrastructure, shed little light on the disparities associated with sex and age.



Psychosocial well-being and social connectedness

SDG indicator 16.2.1

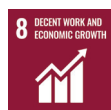
The psychosocial well-being and connectedness domain relates to an adolescent's sense of self and the capacity to maintain a positive attitude and healthy mindset in the face of adversity. We analyse SDG indicator 16.2.1: Proportion of children aged 1–17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month, finding that the vast majority of children and adolescents experience caregiver punishment and/or psychological aggression, including widespread violent discipline.



Voice, agency and community engagement

SDG indicator 5.4.1

The voice, agency and community engagement domain centres on a young person's ability to meaningfully and safely participate in their household, school and broader community. We analyse SDG indicator 5.4.1: Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location for this domain, and find that reporting on this domain is sparse, though it is evident that girls remain disadvantaged over their male peers when it comes to negotiating their own time use.



Economic empowerment and skills

SDG indicator 8.6.1

The economic empowerment and skills domain focuses on whether adolescents and youth have the opportunity to access decent employment, as well as the necessary numerical and financial literacy skills necessary to maintain credit and control over their own assets and incomes. We analyse SDG indicator 8.6.1: Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training (NEET), finding that the proportion of NEETs varies considerably by sex and geographical location: from the countries we examine, girls in Asian countries are least likely to be in education, employment or training when compared to boys or to girls in other regions.

It is worth noting that as the majority of data housed in the SDG metadata repository pre-dated the covid-19 pandemic, the findings in this report likely portray more promising trends than the reality faced by many adolescents and youth living under covid-19. The pandemic has further jeopardised the timely production of reliable data necessary to render the SDG Agenda useful, as well as likely setting back decades of progress across the SDGs, including for adolescents and youth.

² This indicator currently collates data on the 1–14 age cohort only.

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Overview

Premised on the central pledge to leave no one behind, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Agenda imagines a platform that reaches the world's most vulnerable and overlooked groups first, fast-tracks them within the global agenda and draws them into focus. In principle, the SDG framework offers an ambitious platform that moves beyond population averages and aggregates that often mask substantial inequalities, and calls for disaggregated data collection on groups that have been doomed to the margins of programming, policymaking and research – including adolescents and youth. With less than 10 years of the SDG Agenda remaining, and as we collectively embark on the Decade of Action in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic, this report asks what SDG data are telling us about adolescent and youth well-being and whether young people are sufficiently accounted for. By capturing trends and snapshots where the data permit, we analyse the extent to which progress has been made in key SDG domains and flag areas where growth appears stunted. Finally, we provide recommendations calling for regular and interlinked data collection mechanisms to fulfil the pledge to leave no one behind.

Why adolescence?

Adolescents and youth aged 10–24 years have been singled out as the greatest untapped resource capable of sealing the success of the 2030 Agenda (Sheehan et al., 2017; Ki-moon, 2016). Today's adolescents and youth – numbering an estimated 1.8 billion – represent the largest group of young people the world has ever seen, and taking stock of whether they are sufficiently reflected in the SDGs is of critical importance.

Unfortunately, we already know that the patterning of poverty, hunger, equity and inclusivity is heterogeneous and that gender disparities, for example, grow in virtually every sector as children enter adolescence (Freccero and Whiting, 2018; Save the Children, 2019; UNDESA, 2019; UNICEF, 2016). While significant advances have been made in reducing extreme deprivations globally, income inequality has been climbing within and between countries, and the world's poor are predominately rural, young and with little formal education (Alvaredo et al., 2018; World Bank, 2016). Multiple, overlapping inequalities

such as being female and belonging to an ethnic minority can push people further behind on educational access and health outcomes (Stuart and Samman, 2017). Unless adequately granulated data are captured by the SDGs, at a minimum by sex and age, there is a very real risk of this population group being left behind due to a lack of visibility in policy and programming. Understanding data trends on how young people develop during the transitional decade between childhood and adulthood has important implications not only for their own futures but also for the realisation of the central tenets of the SDG agenda, including poverty and inequality reduction, improved health, educational and economic outcomes, and the promotion of gender equitable and sustainable societies (GAGE consortium, 2019; UNDESA, 2017; Kleinert and Horton, 2016; USAID, 2016; UNFPA, 2010).

Additionally, the covid-19 pandemic has posed significant and unforeseen new challenges for today's young people and exacerbated vulnerabilities across education, bodily integrity, gender equality and employment domains. How countries respond to the new risks this cohort will continue to face, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and in humanitarian contexts, in relation to the covid-19 pandemic, will be critical for SDG progress. See Box 1: covid-19 and the SDGs on how the pandemic has impacted specific goals critical for adolescent development.

Report objectives, aims and structure

This report is part of a series³ that analyses the extent to which young people are visible in the SDG agenda and how they are faring in SDG domains that are known to impact both their personal and their societies' well-being. Here, we endeavour to produce a comprehensive snapshot of adolescent and youth performance within those SDG targets that most closely pertain to young people's holistic development, in order to discover and demonstrate the utility of SDG data that are currently available. Understanding, however, that inclusive information on SDG targets depends on robust data collection that is disaggregated by age and by sex, we capture and comment on disaggregation dimensions in our analysis. In a forthcoming technical report, we dive

³ Please see GAGE policy briefs here (2021) and here (2019), and a GAGE report here (2020) for additional publications in this series.

Box 1: covid-19 and SDGs

As the global response to the covid-19 pandemic continues, one of the many consequences has been the sidelining of SDG targets and indicators, and efforts to report on them. We know, however, that mitigation efforts to curb the spread of covid-19 have impacted key SDGs integral to adolescent well-being, as well as exacerbating adolescent vulnerabilities in very gendered ways. Below, we provide detail on SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 8, which have been severely impacted by the pandemic:

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

According to the 2020 SDG Report, the covid-19 pandemic risks reversing progress in SDG 3, with childhood vaccination programmes, family planning services and health screening services all interrupted or limited during the pandemic (UN, 2020c).

UNFPA has predicted that covid-19 mitigation measures could deny 47 million women access to modern contraceptives – leading to 7 million unintended pregnancies (UNFPA, 2020); and this does not acknowledge the potential needs and pregnancies of adolescent girls.

School closures due to covid-19 mean that many young people have been left without access to vital sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) information, frequently obtained via curriculum-based, comprehensive sexuality education (AGIP, 2020). Overwhelmed health systems mean critical SRHR services will become even more restricted.

Covid-19 is anticipated to impact adolescent mental health: evidence points to mental health consequences for girls experiencing situations of violence, including gender-based violence (GBV) (AGIP, 2020). Risk factors for adolescents' mental health and linkages with their sexual and reproductive health have also been documented, and exacerbated by the pandemic.

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

During April 2020, 194 nations enacted countrywide school closures affecting over 91% of enrolled learners (UNESCO, 2021). By June 2020, over 60% of learners continued to face total school shutdown and by April 2021 over 10% still do. School closures, if prolonged, disproportionately disrupt girls' education in particular (UN Women and IASC, 2015) and can lead to a myriad of negative consequences.

Over 100 million additional children and youth lack minimum reading proficiency (UN, 2020c).

Some estimates posit that 20 million girls may never return to school due to the school closures (Malala Fund, 2020), while an additional 2.5 million girls may be at increased risk of child marriage by 2025 and adolescent pregnancy is anticipated to increase by up to 1 million in 2020 (Save the Children, 2020; Makino et al., 2021).

Many vulnerable adolescents in LMICs may have been permanently lured away from school to engage in income-generating activities, especially if they are left behind without access to distance learning and without learning support at home (Evans and Mendez Acosta, 2020). Adolescents in conflict contexts were already 90% more likely to be out of school than their counterparts in stable contexts (ECW, 2020), with distance education difficult or impossible.

Global projections on learning outcomes are also bleak, particularly for vulnerable groups. In 2020, educational systems in LMICs reported larger student cumulative learning loss, fewer teachers systematically monitoring learning during closures, and a more profound gender divide between girls and boys and socioeconomic groups (UNESCO et al., 2020; Naylor and Gorgen, 2020; Webb et al., 2020).

If progress towards the fulfilment of SDG 4 is to be maintained, a medium-to-long-term recovery plan to address the educational gaps created by school closures while maintaining distance learning continuity for all learners needs to be prioritised.

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Recent gains made in advancing gender equality and women's rights could be reversed as a result of the covid-19

pandemic (UN, 2020b). The continued outbreak and mitigation response will exacerbate existing gender inequalities and expand discriminatory gendered norms impacting women and girls' well-being across educational, health and employment domains (UN, 2020a).

In times of crisis, more adolescent girls face the risk of child marriage, teenage pregnancy and GBV (UNDP, 2020). Covid-19's impact on community structure, household income and girls' access to schooling increases the risk that more girls will confront these problems.

Covid-19 poses new threats to adolescents living in LMICs and conflict-affected contexts: girls living in refugee or internal displacement camps face exacerbated risks and increased needs as the covid-19 crisis intersects with weakened, inaccessible and sometimes non-existent WASH facilities, health, education and formal and informal protection systems.

UNFPA estimates that due to the delays in programming to tackle harmful practices, increased acts of violence against women and girls, and families' perceived need to control girls' sexuality, one-third of the anticipated progress on the SDGs targets on child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) will be lost. While it is too early to tell the exact extent to which covid-19 is impacting rates of child marriage, evidence from previous acute emergencies strongly suggests that girls and women from poor and marginalised groups will be severely affected (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Some estimates predict that the pandemic will result in 2 million more cases of FGM over the next decade that could have been averted, and an estimated 13 million more child marriages over the same period (UNFPA, 2020).

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

With regards to economic justice, predictions signal that the covid-19 response is likely to be inequitable and that girls will bear disproportionately large domestic care burdens, suffer lasting interference in their education and income, be marginalised from services due to gender divides and face risks of being dispossessed from assets (ICRW and CWEE, 2020).

In crises, women and adolescent girls face increased financial instability – their overrepresentation in informal sectors (ILO, 2018) will have intensified their vulnerability during covid-19, and put them at greater risk of unemployment through dismissal from low-skilled supply chains.

Adolescent boys' and girls' entry into labour markets will also suffer (UNDESA, 2020). Moreover, current lockdowns leading to business closures will lead to increased demand for expanded safety nets and social protection interventions and there is an urgent need to extend social assistance packages to workers in informal sectors.

deeper into SDG reporting and analyse best practices in data disaggregation.

This report answers three overarching questions:

- **What is the state of adolescent and youth progress in key SDGs?** Can we establish a narrative of how certain countries and regions are performing according to SDG indicators related to young people's well-being?
- **What is the extent of SDG data disaggregation?** Are data dimensions, primarily sex and age, being collected for those SDG indicators known to impact young people's well-being?⁴

- **Call to action:** What are the priority recommendations to be implemented during the Decade of Action leading up to 2030?

The rest of this report is organised as follows: section 2 discusses the conceptual framework adopted for this study and provides a methodological overview; section 3 presents the findings; and section 4 provides conclusions and recommendations. We also provide strategic data disaggregation resources in Annex 3, highlighting ongoing efforts to promote the collection and use of granulated data.

⁴ Disability is an additional critical dimension of adolescent vulnerability. However, only seven SDG goals call for data collection reflecting disability and so few indicators examined here include data on disability that no real conclusions can be drawn, except to identify the collection of disability data as a significant gap and urgent priority.

In a follow-up to this report, we will focus on data collection gaps, especially when it comes to consistent reporting on disaggregated indicators, to illustrate a way forward for collecting the type of data that can inform policymaking to help young people around the world achieve fuller access to their capabilities in each of the six domains we examine.

Conceptual framing and methodology

How can we measure young people's well-being?

We centre this report around six essential domains of adolescent and youth well-being, informed by two frameworks that reflect a growing consensus on how to understand the interconnected elements of well-being (see Annex 1 for frameworks). The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) consortium's (2019) conceptual framework was developed as an integral part of the world's largest global study on adolescence in LMICs, focusing on gender equality and the enhancement of adolescent capabilities among the world's most vulnerable populations. The GAGE framework is also closely aligned to the adolescent well-being conceptual framework developed by Ross et al. (2020) for the United Nations

H6+ Technical Working Group on Adolescent Health and Well-Being, and we draw on both frameworks to identify the capability domains outlined in Table 1, reflecting current analytical approaches to adolescent and youth well-being.

Findings are divided into the six report sections delineated in Figure 1. In each domain, key SDG indicators that measure outcomes relevant to young people's life stage are identified and evaluated.

Adolescents or youth?

To understand young people's lives now and to predict their future trajectories, we examine both adolescent (ages 10–19) and youth (ages 15–24) age bands. We do this, firstly, to uphold a life-course approach. The imperative to track young people's lives from childhood to adulthood is now well-documented, and this increasingly means acknowledging that developmental milestones can occur into the early twenties and need to account for a larger spectrum of social and structural dynamics across years (Patton et al., 2012; Bhutta et al., 2020). We now know that developmental trajectories in the second decade of life are predictive of outcomes into adulthood and that life stages impact one another across domains and should be traced longitudinally (Bhutta et al., 2020; Alfvén et al., 2019). Secondly, and drawing on UNFPA's global strategy for adolescents and youth, we now understand that opportunities presented and choices made throughout

Table 1: Conceptualising adolescent capabilities and well-being: overlapping components of GAGE consortium (2019) and Ross et al. (2020)

Adolescent capabilities		
GAGE Conceptual Framework, 2020	UN Adolescent Well-being Framework, 2020	Report sections
Education and learning	Learning, competence, education, skills and employability	Education and learning
Bodily integrity	Safety and a supportive environment	Bodily autonomy, integrity and freedom from violence
Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and nutrition	Good health and optimum nutrition	SRH, health and nutrition
Psychosocial well-being	Connectedness, positive values and contribution to society	Psychosocial well-being and social connectedness
Voice and agency	Agency and resilience	Voice, agency and community engagement
Economic empowerment ¹		Economic empowerment and skills

¹ While the GAGE Conceptual Framework considers social protection as an integral part of economic empowerment, there is currently no respective SDG disaggregated data on social protection by age so we have not included it in our analysis here. We note, however, that it will be critical to include in future analyses and frameworks, given the differential age-specific vulnerabilities and risks that social protection can address for adolescents and youth.

adolescence and youth significantly shape an individual's future as adult (UNFPA, 2019). Finally, previous GAGE reporting shows that the dearth of adolescent-specific or youth-specific data trends within the SDG framework are too limited to draw substantive conclusions for either age band (Guglielmi and Jones, 2019). To fully grasp the implications of young people's current well-being status on their future development trajectories it is thus necessary to give due importance to age-specific outcomes within the ages 10–24, as well as to look holistically at the impact of those years on future well-being.

Country selection and SDG metadata

In this report, we focus on 15 LMICs from Asia, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and sub-Saharan Africa (see Table 2). In each regional grouping, countries were selected to be broadly comparable based on regional characteristics, population type and economic development status, as well as to ensure that a spectrum of political and demographic attributes are represented including income level, regime type, population size, urban/rural divide, humanitarian and refugee contexts, and ethnic and religious diversity.

Table 2: Countries examined

Region	Country
Asia	Bangladesh
	Bhutan
	Kyrgyzstan
	Nepal
	Pakistan
	Sri Lanka
MENA	Jordan
	Lebanon
	Palestine
	Tunisia
Sub-Saharan Africa	Ethiopia
	Kenya
	Rwanda
	Tanzania
	Uganda

It is important to note that this report relies exclusively on data available in the SDG Indicators Metadata Repository⁵ managed by the UN Statistical Commission. Where data are available, it is presented graphically in each section to highlight the challenges adolescents and youth face as well as how the SDG Agenda can contribute to make progress in achieving positive outcomes for young people around the world.

⁵ The SDG metadata repository can be accessed here: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>. We recognise that in some cases, additional data that relates to indicators examined here exist and can be found through other sources including national governments, IGOs and NGOs, but as this report seeks to evaluate the efficacy of SDG data collection, we limit its scope to those data made available by the SDG group itself. Likewise, it is beyond the scope of this report to check or validate the data collected by the UN Statistical Commission.

Findings

Education and learning

The education and learning domain pertains to adolescents' access to and performance within both formal and informal education, with additional emphasis on skills that impact other areas of well-being, from economic empowerment to voice, agency and community engagement. Education and learning skills cover a breadth of both cognitive and emotional characteristics that allow young people to develop and mature both intrinsically, in terms of growing in personal confidence and making good decisions for themselves, as well as in terms of their future employability and possessing the knowledge necessary to navigate our rapidly changing world (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018; Wodon et al., 2018; Kuper et al., 2018; UNESCO and UNGEI, 2019; UNESCO and UNGEI, 2020). This domain also assesses the degree to which young people have been supported to engage in continual learning, and whether they have access to services needed to this end.

Reporting on indicators related to formal education, especially for younger adolescents, including literacy, numeracy and completion rates far outweighs the data available for other learning outcomes including participation in non-formal education and ICT skills. For instance, while only Lebanon failed to report any data on school completion rates (4.1.2), just three countries in our analysis reported any data on ICT skills – none of which have data from more than one year in the last decade. Reporting on participation in non-formal education (4.3.1) and on literacy and numeracy more broadly (4.6.1) is similarly sparse. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify broad trends for those indicators that do have available data, especially in terms of gender parity in education outcomes.

Indicators for educational performance vary significantly by region. In sub-Saharan Africa and Asia boys have an advantage in educational outcomes, while in the MENA region they lag considerably behind their female peers.

Below, we provide infographic summary data from the SDG indicators analysed in this domain to showcase whether adolescents' and youth educational outcomes are improving.

Table 3: Education and learning indicators

GAGE well-being domains	UN Framework	Adolescent capabilities
		Pertinent SDG indicators
Education and learning	Learning, competence, education, skills and employability	4.1.1 Reading and math proficiency
		4.1.2 Completion rate (primary, lower and upper secondary education)
		4.3.1 Participation in formal and non-formal education
		4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill
		4.5.1 Parity indices re: education and vocational training (including ICT)
		4.6.1 Literacy and numeracy

Indicator 4.1.1 explores education outcomes for young people, using reading and maths proficiency as a metric of their performance. In sub-Saharan Africa and Asia boys have an advantage in educational outcomes, while in the MENA region they lag considerably behind their female peers, often because parents perceive investment in boys' education not to be worthwhile as employment for school graduates later in life is difficult to obtain (Presler-Marshall, 2018). In Bangladesh, by contrast, education performance for both boys and girls appears to be on the rise. In indicator 4.1.1, data are generally effectively disaggregated by age and sex, but where countries are split is in their ability to chart progress over time.

Are adolescents' education outcomes improving?

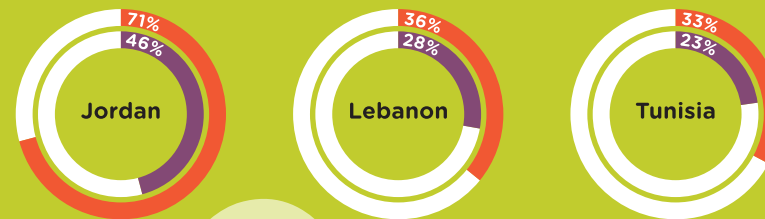
4.1.1 Reading and math proficiency

Reporting on primary and secondary schooling and parity around the world is generally comprehensive. However, there is much less reported on skills outcomes such as ICT ability or participation in technical and vocational education and training.

Across the **MENA region**, boys are disadvantaged academically, outperformed in reading at lower secondary level by girls.

Reading proficiency levels (%):

● Girls ● Boys



Bangladeshi girls' and boys' math proficiency rates at lower secondary level increased substantially from 2013-15.

● Girls ● Boys

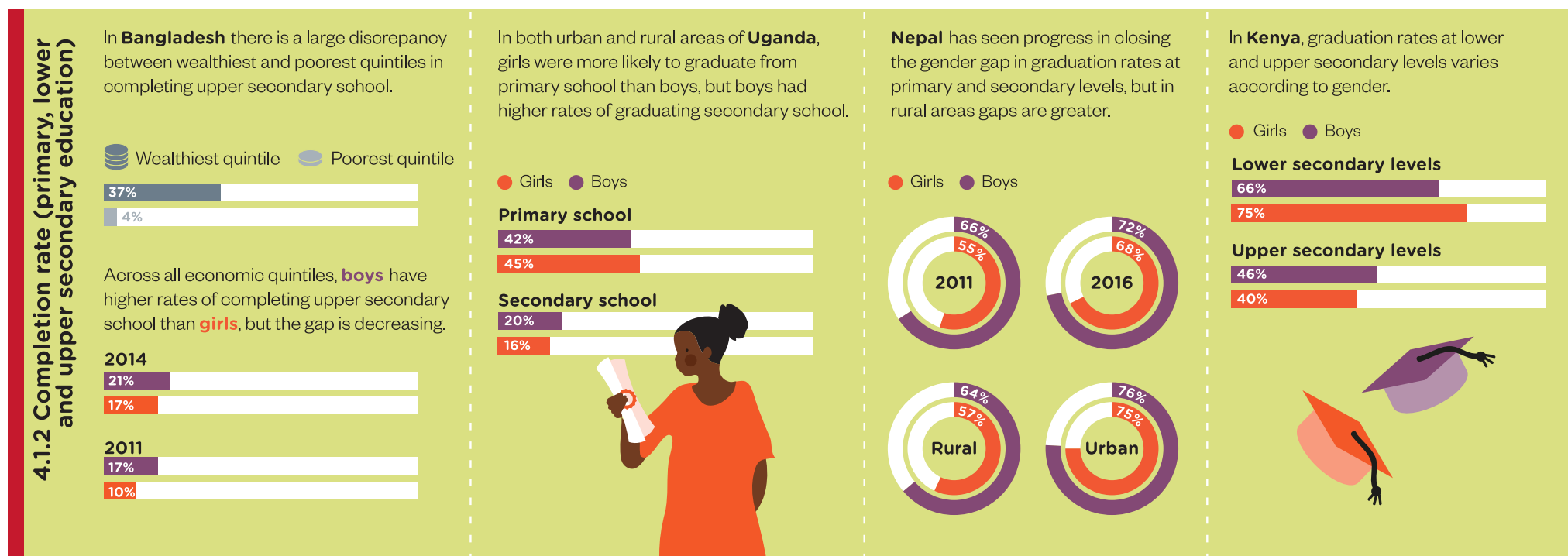


Bangladeshi girls' and boys' reading proficiency rates at lower secondary level increased from 2013-15.



Indicator 4.1.2 measures children's school completion rate, and the available data provide insight into the gender and geographic dynamics at play in the four countries examined below.

Are adolescents' education outcomes improving?



Indicator 4.5.1 Parity indices regarding education and vocational training (including ICT) are ratios that describe inequities between groups (girls vs. boys and rural vs. urban) where 1.0 indicates perfect gender or location balance. By observing parity indices' change over time, we can discover which groups of young people are advantaged in key educational outcome areas in Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya and Nepal.

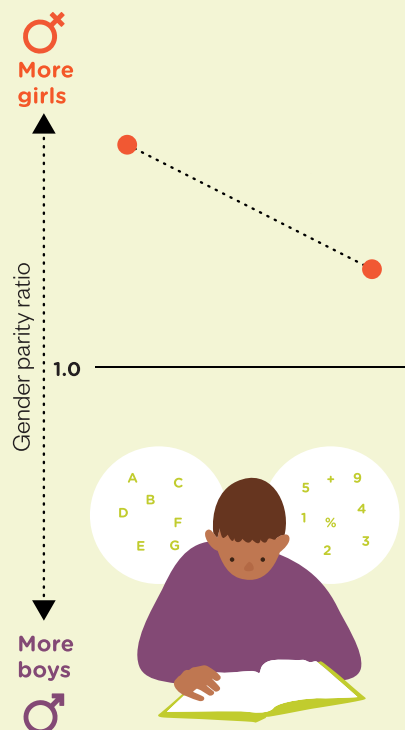
Of all the adolescent and youth capability domains, education has by far the most robust body of data to draw from owing to the number of indicators for which data have been reported and the richness of the data collected. The majority of countries examined report at least some data on education indicators, and the majority of data collected is disaggregated both by age and by sex. This is perhaps not surprising as indicators from this domain can draw from institutional/school records that are already organised by age.

Are adolescents' education outcomes improving?

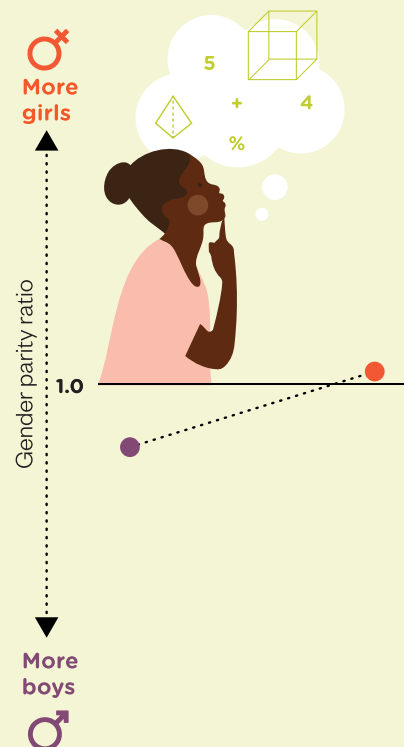
4.5.1 Parity indices re: education and vocational training (including ICT)

Parity indices are ratios that describe inequities between groups (girls vs. boys and rural vs. urban) where 1.0 indicates perfect gender or location balance.

Boys in **Jordan** have lower reading and math scores than girls, but the gap is narrowing: The **gender parity index** for reading skills in lower secondary schools dropped from 2.20 in 2012 to 1.53 in 2018.

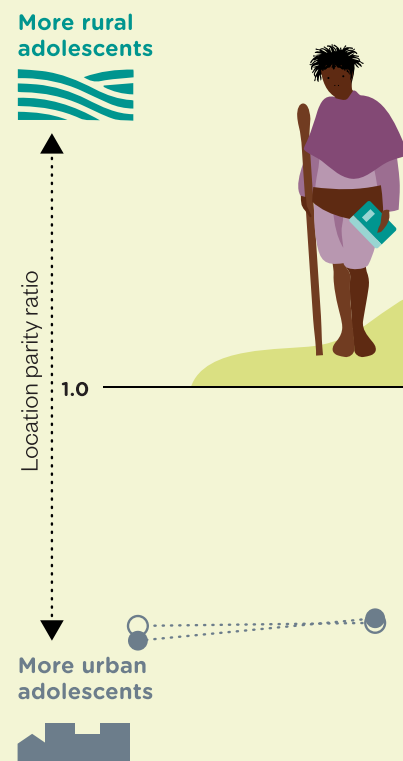


In **Kenya**, girls' primary-level achievement in math compared to boys has been trending upward – the **gender parity ratio** moved from 0.68 in 2006 to 1.07 in 2018.

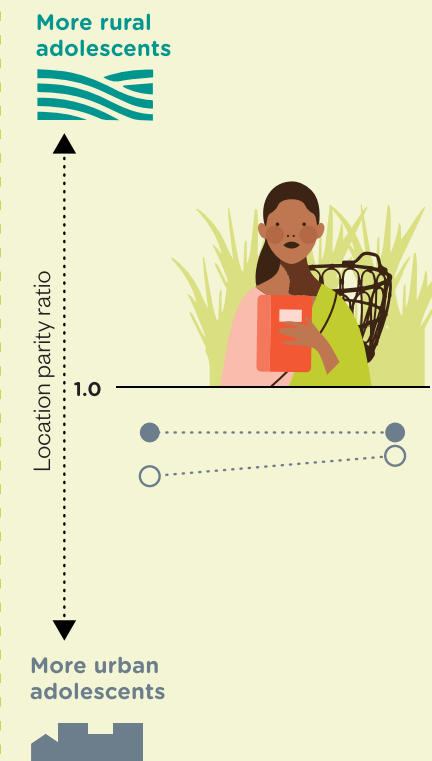


In **Ethiopia**, urban adolescents are more likely to complete lower secondary school than rural adolescents. Rural boys' completion rates are improving, but girls have made less progress. The **location parity ratio** for boys climbed from 0.13 in 2011 to 0.21 in 2016, while for girls it rose only from 0.18 to 0.19.

○ Girls ● Boys



By contrast in **Nepal**, rural girls are catching up to their urban counterparts with the **location parity ratio** improving from 0.69 in 2014 to 0.76 in 2016. Boys location parity is higher, and steady, at 0.84 in 2016.



Bodily autonomy, integrity and freedom from age- and gender-based violence

The bodily autonomy and integrity domain emphasises the protection of adolescents from physical and sex- and gender-based violence, including child marriage, harmful traditional practices and other forms of coercion. In many contexts, the second decade of life amplifies risks of and experiences of violence associated with bodily autonomy and integrity, potentially creating negative knock-on effects with other well-being domains and depriving young people of the chance to engage in enriching opportunities – including in education, employment, leisure and peer groups (Greene and Stiefvater, 2019; Fulu et al., 2017; Özler et al., 2020; Malhotra and Elnakib, 2021). While SDG data can be used to provide a fairly comprehensive snapshot of adolescents' and youth's bodily integrity across regions, longitudinal trends are more difficult to identify as many countries only report data from one or two of the last 10 years.

Of the four SDG indicators that pertain directly to adolescents' bodily integrity, two (5.2.1 and 5.3.2) collect data exclusively for girls, while all the data reported for the remaining indicators (5.3.1 and 8.7.1) disaggregate by sex, making this domain the most developed in terms of data disaggregation. Data are not always disaggregated by age, however, and SDG indicator 8.7.1 on child labour is neither disaggregated by adolescent nor youth age (reporting instead data on all children aged 5–17). This is a prime example of the problems associated with a lack of systemic and nuanced data disaggregation. Lumping ages 5–17 together is problematic, due to the vastly different capacities, trajectories and development of a 5 year old when compared to a 17 year old, including regarding identifying and reporting experiences of violence.

Below, we provide infographic summary data from the SDG indicators analysed in this domain, to showcase whether adolescents and youth are able to grow up in safe and supportive environments free from GBV, and whether child marriage rates are declining.

Table 4: Age- and gender-based violence indicators

GAGE well-being domains	Adolescent capabilities	
	UN Adolescent Well-being Framework, 2020	Pertinent SDG indicators
Bodily autonomy, integrity and freedom from violence	Safety and a supportive environment	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months
		5.3.1 Child marriage rates before age 15 and before age 18
		5.3.2 FGM/cutting rates
		8.7.1 proportion of children aged 5–17 engaged in child labour by sex and age

Indicators 5.2.1 and 5.3.1 present emerging patterns, including indications that high rates of IPV for the adolescent age band overlap with relatively high rates of child marriage, emphasising adolescent girls' vulnerability to physical and sexual violence in contexts where social norms allow for early marriage.

Are adolescents growing up in a safe and supportive environment, free from gender-based violence?

5.2.1 Physical and/or sexual IPV

Indicator 5.2.1 calls for data reporting on girls' experiences of IPV. Most countries disaggregate for age and gender, but a lack of data points make trends difficult to identify.



In **Jordan**, adolescent girls are at greater risk of IPV than women aged 20-24: 18% of girls **aged 15-19** experienced IPV in last 12 months, compared to 15% of **20-24 year olds**.

The same trend holds in **Ethiopia** (24% vs. 23%) and **Nepal** (17% vs. 12%) — both countries where rates of child marriage are among the highest in their regions.

● Girls aged 15-19 ● Girls aged 20-24

Jordan



Ethiopia



Nepal



In **Bangladesh**, more than one third of women **aged 20-24 experienced IPV** in the last year (35%), the highest of any country examined in this report.



Are child marriage rates declining?

5.3.1 Child marriage before age 18

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally, with 59% of women aged 20-24 having been married before 18 – of whom over one third are already married by 15.

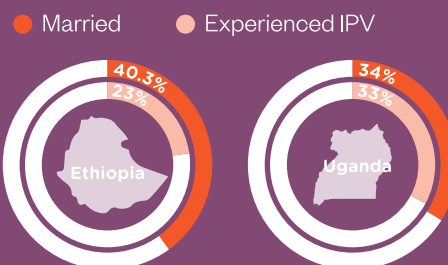
Regionally, this compares with 40% of **Nepalese** girls married by 18, of whom less than 1 in 5 married by 15.

In **Sri Lanka**, only 1 in 10 girls was married before age 18, and 1 in 100 before 15.

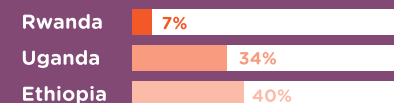


There is a strong correlation between child marriage prevalence and IPV.

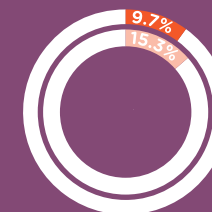
40.3% of **Ethiopian** women aged 20-24 were married before 18, and 23% reported experiencing IPV. In **Uganda**, 34% of women in the same age range were married before adulthood and 33% experienced IPV.



Rwanda has markedly lower CM rates compared to neighbouring countries: 7% of girls are married before 18, compared to 34% in Uganda and 40% in Ethiopia.

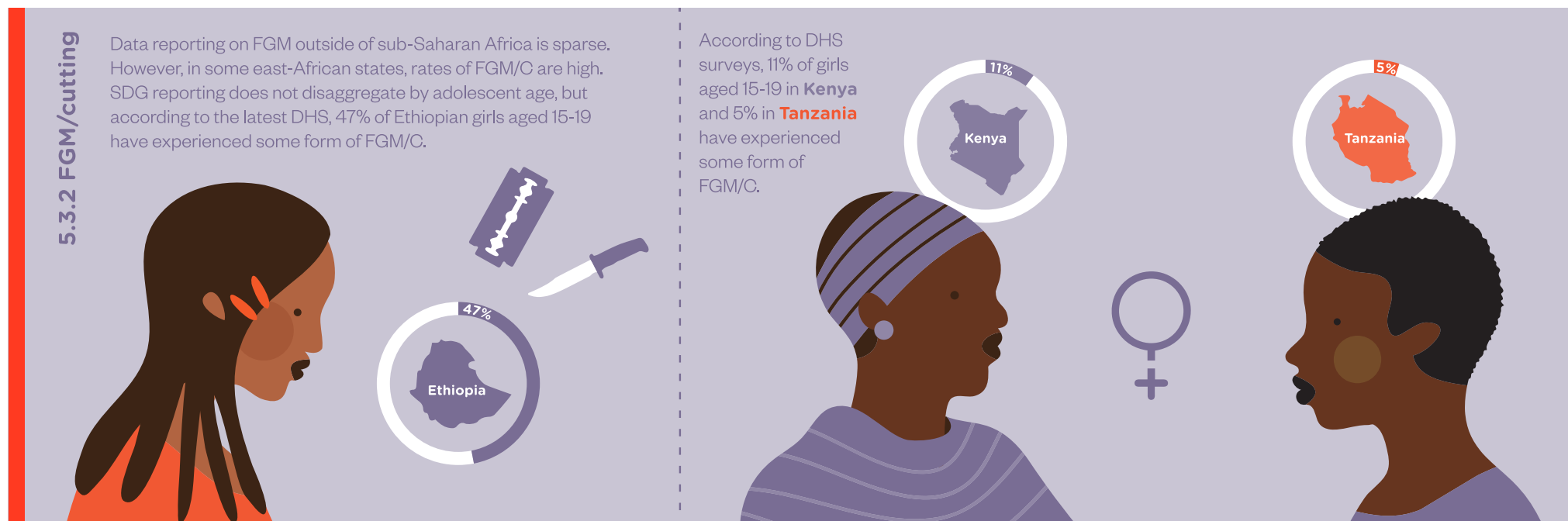


While marriage before age 15 in MENA is low, **Jordan** and **Palestine** both report high rates of marriage before 18 (9.7% and 15.3% respectively), reflecting a likely reliance on child marriage as a coping mechanism in humanitarian contexts.



Indicator 5.3.2 Data on FGM/cutting is highly localised, given that research and data collection has historically focused on the practice in sub-Saharan Africa. It is important to recognise, however, that growing evidence points to increasing rates of FGM/cutting in MENA and South-East Asia as well, and the SDG platform can be a useful tool for comparing both progress and setbacks across regions to learn more about drivers of this harmful traditional practice (Rashid and Iguchi, 2019; Kakal et al., 2021).

Are adolescents growing up in a safe and supportive environment, free from gender-based violence?



Indicator 8.7.1 Specific forms of child labour are not only a violation of bodily autonomy, but also present a threat to bodily integrity by forcing young people to spend more time in dangerous environments (Cross et al., 2018) and preventing them from spending time in school. However, child labour is a difficult phenomenon to track and analyse; while inherently exploitative in any form it differs widely in nature between contexts depending on whether it is paid, domestic or performed in hazardous conditions. Girls' experience of child labour is also frequently very different from boys', and breaking down child labour engagement by gender and age can provide useful information on how to address the needs of young people engaged in work.

Are adolescents growing up in a safe and supportive environment, free from gender-based violence?



SRH, health and nutrition

Health outcomes for young people depend on equitable access to health services as well as information and knowledge about how to live a healthy life, and self-efficacy in taking the steps necessary to care for their own health. The adolescent and youth life stage comes with dynamically evolving health needs, ranging from a nutrient-rich diet to nourish quickly growing bodies to improved access to SRH services. During puberty, young people are exposed to new risks for the first time such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and benefit from access to information about topics like menstruation that are often precluded by conservative social norms (Tegegne and Sisay, 2014; CSA and ICF, 2017; Harper et al., 2017; Buller and Schulte, 2018; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2021).

Data series for undernourishment (2.1.1), food insecurity (2.1.2), essential health service coverage (3.8.1), access to drinking water (6.1.1) and sanitation services (6.2.1) draw from indices that report on whole populations that often account for urban and rural divides but offer little insight into potential disparities associated with age or sex. These gaps constitute limitations in the effort to achieve sex-equitable health outcomes, as girls are frequently distinctly disadvantaged when it comes to accessing health and sanitation services (Sheehan et al., 2017).

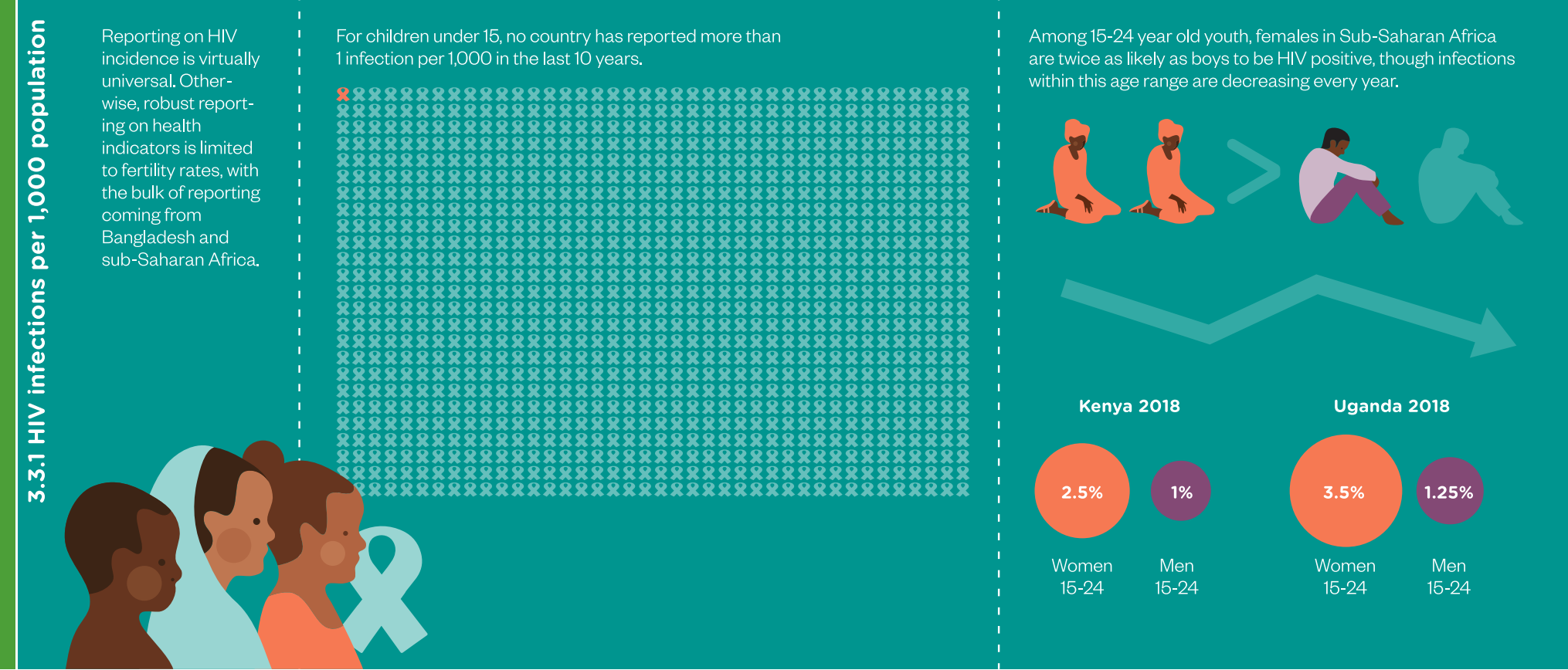
Below, we provide infographic summary data from the SDG indicators analysed in this domain to showcase our knowledge of adolescent and youth health outcomes when disaggregated by sex and age.

Table 5: SRH, health and nutrition indicators

Adolescent capabilities		
GAGE well-being domains	UN Adolescent Well-being Framework, 2020	Pertinent SDG indicators
SRH, health and nutrition	Good health and optimum nutrition	2.1.1 Undernourishment
		2.1.2 Moderate or severe food insecurity in population
		3.3.1 HIV infections per 1,000 population
		3.7.1 Proportion of women who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods
		3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate
		3.8.1 Coverage of essential health services
		6.1.1 Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services
		6.2.1 Safely managed sanitation services

Indicator 3.3.1 Of all the health-related indicators that we evaluate, some of the strongest and most sustained progress is found in HIV prevention. Among adolescents and youth, no countries outside of sub-Saharan Africa report more than 1 HIV infection per 1,000 population, and for children under 15, no country has reported more than 1 infection per 1,000 in the last 10 years. However, even within that relatively small population of HIV-positive adolescents, gender inequities are persistent. Among 15–24-year-old youth, females in sub-Saharan Africa are twice as likely as males to be HIV positive, though infections within this age range are decreasing every year.

What do we know about adolescents’ health outcomes?



Indicator 3.7.2 Girls who become pregnant in adolescence are at higher risk of a wide variety of adverse health outcomes for themselves and for their children including preventable causes of death such as post-partum haemorrhage and birth asphyxia (Save the Children, 2021), and early pregnancy creates a complex set of barriers to girls' well-being in other domains. Girls who give birth during adolescence have greater difficulty attending school and achieving economic empowerment due to early motherhood, and adolescent birth rates are closely linked to child marriage as 90% of births for adolescents take place in the context of marriage (GNB, 2021; Yakubu and Salisu, 2018; Kassa et al., 2018).

What do we know about adolescents' health outcomes?

3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate

After peaking at 113.5 in 2013, **Bangladesh's** birth rate per 1,000 women aged 15-19 has averaged 76 from 2015-18.



However, it remains significantly higher than its neighbours.



Adolescent birth rates in **Sub-Saharan Africa** throughout the last decade are consistently high and have trended upward in Ethiopia and Tanzania.

- In Ethiopia, rates increased from 71/1000 in 2013 to 80/1000 in 2014



- In Tanzania birth rates rose from 132/1000 in 2014 to 139/1000 in 2016



In **Kenya** and **Uganda**, rates remain consistent yet high averaging 96/1000 and 136/1000 respectively in 2014.



Psychosocial well-being and connectedness

The psychosocial well-being and connectedness domain relates to an adolescent's sense of self and the capacity to maintain a positive attitude and healthy mindset in the face of adversity. This domain relates to an adolescent's ability to set their own goals and the faculty to access positive social networks that promote meaningful relationships with others, including peers (GAGE consortium, 2019; Ross et al., 2020; Aldridge and McChesney, 2018). A connected and emotionally resilient adolescent endeavours to be valued and respected, while acting responsibly and caringly towards others and towards oneself (Van Breda and Theron, 2018; Desie, 2020).

In striving towards psychosocial well-being and connectedness, the importance of both internal emotional capacity and external social support must be secured. With adolescence epitomising emotional flux, both the recognition of psychological fragility and mental health as a public health concern for 10–19 year olds (Orth and van Wyk, 2020; WHO, 2020) and the centrality of a supportive environment within and beyond the confines of one's home are critical components in the promotion of psychosocial resilience. Intersecting with the bodily autonomy and integrity domain, adolescent girls in particular may face increased social isolation as they age, as caregivers may remove them from school, limit their friendships and confine them to the home sphere, all impacting their psychosocial well-being (GAGE consortium, 2019). Additionally, girls residing in humanitarian and conflict-affected contexts may risk sexual and gender-based violence during their adolescence and associated psychological trauma.

Overall, adolescents' psychosocial well-being and mental health outcomes are mediated by a multitude of factors, including the pressure to conform with social and gender norms, the exploration of sexual identities, poverty, the degree of safety and quality of family and peer relationships, and risk factors associated with age- and gender-based violence (WHO, 2020).

We analyse SDG indicator 16.2.1: Proportion of children aged 1–17⁶ years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month. The SDG indicator metadata, last updated in March 2021, classifies physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers as encompassing a multitude of detrimental actions including, 'screaming at a child, as well as calling a child offensive names... physical (or corporal) punishment to cause physical pain or discomfort, but not injuries.' The effects of physical and/or psychological aggression on children and adolescents not only represent a violation of their human rights but can also carry long-term harm into adulthood. Accruing data for this indicator is key to understanding both drivers of caregiver aggression and what works to combat it, as well as what short- and long-term damage it inflicts on adolescent psychosocial well-being and connectedness.

Below, we provide infographic summary data from the SDG indicators analysed in this domain, to showcase what we know about adolescent and youth psychosocial well-being.

Table 6: Psychosocial well-being and connectedness indicators

Adolescent capabilities		
GAGE well-being domains	UN Adolescent Well-being Framework, 2020	Pertinent SDG indicators
Psychosocial well-being and connectedness	Connectedness, positive values and contribution to society	16.2.1 Proportion of children aged 1–14 years who experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in last month

⁶ This indicator currently collates data on the 1–14 age cohort only.

Indicator 16.2.1 Across countries and regions, the vast majority of children and adolescents experience caregiver punishment and/or psychological aggression. Violent discipline is the most widespread, and socially accepted, type of violence against children and can have long-term consequences in adulthood. However, of the countries we examine here, none have data points from more than a single year, making the degree of progress over time difficult to ascertain.

What does the available data tell us about adolescents' psychosocial wellbeing?



Voice, agency and community engagement

The voice, agency and community engagement domain centres on a young person's ability to meaningfully and safely participate in their household, school and broader community (GAGE consortium, 2019). Through developing voice and agency, adolescents and youth are able to develop their identities in safe environments, evolve and understand their sense of purpose and negotiate their desires. Young people who are able to express themselves and socially engage in stimulating and safe spaces will also be setting the seeds to do so in their futures (Ross et al., 2020; Zimmerman et al., 2019).

The skills necessary to uphold personal voice, agency and community engagement will likely differ at various junctures in youth. Younger cohort adolescents may be more likely to discuss their choices and desires with household members, schoolteachers and peers on outcomes that impact their lives. Older cohort adolescents and youth may increasingly seek to make decisions for themselves and become active members of their communities, becoming the ultimate arbiters of their own lives (GAGE consortium, 2019; Marcus et al., 2017). Negotiating a more equitable distribution of household chores, voicing opinions on personal mobility, accessing spaces for community recreation and joining a school club are all ways in which adolescents can express voice and agency in adolescence, and will hone their skills in political and civic participation into adulthood.

We analyse SDG indicator 5.4.1: Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location for this domain. The SDG indicator metadata was last updated in June 2019 for this indicator and refers to unpaid domestic and care work 'activities including food preparation, dishwashing, cleaning and upkeep of the dwelling, laundry, ironing, gardening, caring for pets, shopping, installation, servicing and repair of personal and household goods, childcare, and care of the sick, elderly or disabled household and family members, among others.' SDG 5.4.1 yields data on time use, which can be seen as a proxy for voice and agency in the household, and has been correlated to the empowerment of women and girls (Jones, 2019; Zimmerman et al., 2019). Particularly during adolescence, 'girls may face a range of social risks and restrictions; early or forced marriage [and] increased home responsibilities' (Zimmerman et al., 2019) and how girls negotiate these risks is a powerful determinant of later life outcomes.

Below, we provide infographic summary data from the SDG indicator analysed in this domain, to showcase whether adolescents' and youth are able to negotiate their time use.

Table 7: Voice, agency and community engagement indicators

Adolescent capabilities		
GAGE well-being domains	UN Adolescent Well-being Framework, 2020	Pertinent SDG indicators
Voice, agency and community engagement	Agency and resilience	5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on domestic chores and unpaid care work

Indicator 5.4.1 Adolescent- and youth-relevant reporting on this indicator is sparse: from the list of countries examined in this report, only Palestine reports data for 15-24 year olds.⁷ To the extent that data is available, proportions remain broadly unchanged across urban and rural geographies, though the data clearly show that girls are disadvantaged over their male peers when it comes to negotiating their own time use.

Are adolescents able to negotiate their time use?



⁷ It is worthwhile to note that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Bank have recently developed new survey questions and guidance on assessing unpaid work that can be incorporated into Labour Force Surveys (LFS) and the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS). The lack of data for indicator 5.4.1 is at least partially a reflection of sector learning and piloting these new standards. For additional information, refer to: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/about/lfs-research-and-development/>.

Economic empowerment and skills

The economic empowerment and skills domain focuses on whether adolescents and youth have the opportunity to access decent employment, as well as the necessary numerical and financial literacy skills necessary to maintain credit and control over their own assets and incomes (GAGE consortium, 2019). Notwithstanding programmes and policies in recent decades throughout LMICs to improve girls' access and retention in education, these have not been matched by improved livelihood prospects for girls and women who in many contexts remain disadvantaged in accessing decent employment and in developing their economic capabilities (Kabeer, 2019; Hendriks, 2019). Economic empowerment remains a highly gendered domain.

For girls in many LMIC contexts, adolescence can be marked by reduced economic empowerment opportunities due to social norms and expectations. Upon hitting puberty, girls' mobility is frequently curtailed, additional burdens of domestic and care work further bind girls to the home, and many drop out of education and face early marriage, all factors which plague their chances at empowerment (AGIP, 2020). Many girls face discrimination for compounding reasons including gender norms that discourage female participation in the public sphere, lower levels of numerical and financial skills compared to boys, safety risks and threats of abuse in the workplace. The evidence also demonstrates that this discrimination has profound knock-on effects into adulthood: much deprivation experienced by adult women may have been averted if attention and investment in adolescence and youth had been prioritised (Kabeer, 2019).

For this domain, we analyse SDG indicator 8.6.1: Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training (NEET). The SDG indicator metadata was last updated in January 2021 and is classified as 'persons will be considered in education if they are in formal or non-formal education... but excluding informal learning. Employment is defined as all persons of working age who, during a short reference period (one week), were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit. For the purpose of this indicator, persons are considered to be in training if they are in a non-academic learning activity through which they acquire specific skills intended for vocational or technical jobs.'

The youth NEET rate of a country serves as a more comprehensive measure of youth labour market entry as compared to youth unemployment, as it includes those youth who have disengaged from formal or non-formal education, and those outside of labour market sectors due to engagement in household chores or disability, for instance. Additionally, indicator 8.6.1 provides a realistic snapshot of potential labour market entrants.

Below, we provide infographic summary data from the SDG indicators analysed in this domain, to showcase whether adolescents' and youth rights to economic empowerment are being achieved.

Table 8: Economic empowerment indicators

Adolescent capabilities		
GAGE well-being domains	UN Adolescent Well-being Framework, 2020	Pertinent SDG indicators
Economic empowerment		8.6.1 Proportion of youth not in education, employment or training

Indicator 8.6.1 The proportion of 15–24 NEETs varies greatly by sex and geography: girls in Asia are most often not in education, employment or training when compared to boys, and when compared to other regions.

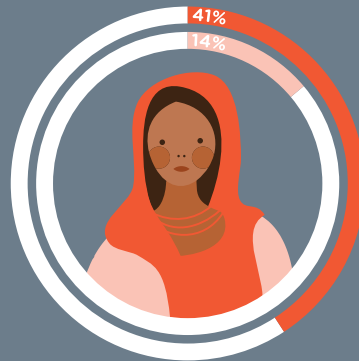
Are adolescents having their right to economic empowerment achieved?

8.6.1 Proportion of youth not in education, employment or training

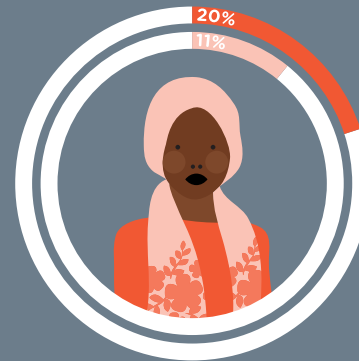
The proportion of 15–24 not in education, employment or training (NEET) varies greatly by sex and geography: girls in Asia are most often not in education, employment or training when compared to boys, and when compared to other regions.



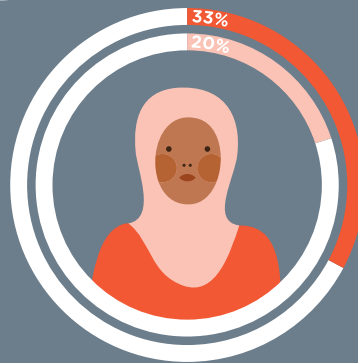
• In **Asia** 41% of girls are NEET compared to 14% of boys



• In **Sub-Saharan Africa** 20% of girls are NEET compared to 11% of boys



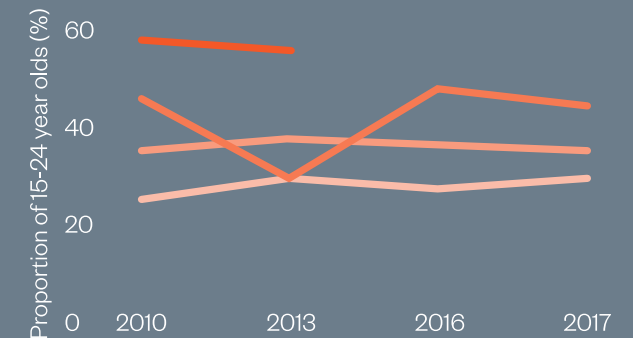
• In **MENA** 33% of girls are NEET compared to 20% of boys



It is difficult to establish the direction of trends in this indicator, even where multiple data points exist: progress does not appear linear and fluctuates greatly.

Proportion of 15–24-year-old girls who are NEET over time: Asia

— Pakistan girls
— Bangladesh girls
— Sri Lanka girls
— Kyrgyzstan girls



Conclusions and recommendations

Key takeaways

Notwithstanding important advances in fundamental domains, our analysis reveals that adolescents and youth face significant risks of being left behind in the SDG Agenda. Using 15 countries representative of their respective regions, we examined the extent to which usefully disaggregated data is available for key SDG indicators and what the state of progress is for this population group. It is worth noting that the majority of data collected by the SDG metadata repository used for the analysis in this report pre-dated the covid-19 pandemic. The extent of progress highlighted here likely portrays more promising trends than the reality faced by many adolescents and youth living under covid-19. The pandemic has further jeopardised the timely production of reliable data necessary to render the SDG Agenda useful, as well as likely setting back decades of progress across the SDGs, including for adolescents and youth given the closure of schools and basic services and the economic downturn (UN, 2020c).

To the extent that robust data is available, our analysis reveals a mixed picture of progress for adolescents and youth vis-à-vis relevant SDG indicators worldwide. In some domains, including education and bodily integrity, there is evidence of progress in some regions while others lag behind, and our investigation of health outcomes identified in the SDG Agenda reveals an upward trend in adolescent birth rates in sub-Saharan Africa in particular, representing a significant threat to girls' and young women's outcomes across domains. In terms of psychosocial well-being, young people experience endemic physical and psychological punishment by caregivers which can result in long-term psycho-emotional damage. While it is difficult to establish

trends on young people's negotiation of time use, SDG data highlights that girls face more care and domestic chore burdens than boys. Finally, young people's employability appears context- and gender-dependent: girls are much more likely to be out of secondary education, employment or training (NEET) when compared to boys, and girls in Asia are most at risk of NEET status.

Perhaps the clearest takeaway from this examination of young people's performance in key SDG indicators is that data crucial to shedding light on barriers to well-being are inconsistently reported and lack the specificity for a nuanced understanding of the threats that young people face. We do know that where age intersects with other vulnerabilities including sex, impacts are felt across capabilities and extend far into adulthood. Closing this gap is essential to realising the central tenets of the SDG agenda and requires a deliberate approach informed by robust data that accurately reflect the needs and conditions of vulnerable populations, including young people. While this report's findings highlight some areas of well-being where trends are clear, many of the indicators we examine for this set of countries tell us far less about how to improve the lives of young people than they should – and could – if reporting mechanisms and data collection were improved to the standard set out by the Agenda 2030.

As we have shown, the SDG agenda presents a valuable framework where data has the potential to illuminate trends and inform narratives that contribute to our understanding of the challenges adolescents and youth face. However, this report has underscored that a great deal more engagement and investment is required as we enter the Decade of Action to harness the 2030 Sustainable Development framework's full potential for young people now and inter-generationally. To leverage the SDGs to support the development window that the second decade of life is increasingly recognised as offering, the following priority actions should be considered:

A call to action

While the data available provide useful insight into the obstacles young people face in realising their capabilities, more thorough and precisely disaggregated data collection on relevant SDG indicators will be essential in developing sex- and age-sensitive policies that can contribute to delivering on the promise of the SDG 2030 Agenda. The following recommendations represent first steps on the way toward maximising the potential of the SDG indicators to equitably support young people around the world, and are particularly vital as the covid-19 pandemic continues to impact their lives.

Education and learning

Continue to collect disaggregated data on formal educational outcomes including reading and maths proficiency and school completion rates at every level, while also broadening the scope of reporting to include disaggregated data on participation in informal and vocational modes of education.

Bodily autonomy, integrity and freedom from violence

Focus data collection on specific age ranges to account for the variance in threats to bodily integrity pertaining to different ages. For example, younger children may be more vulnerable to violent methods of discipline from parents, while the threat of GBV is magnified in the adolescent life stage.

SRH, health and nutrition

Sharpen the focus of data collection on access to health services and infrastructure to identify gaps based on age and sex in addition to more generalised parts of the population.

Other domains: psychosocial well-being and connectedness, voice and agency, and economic empowerment

Collect and report data more frequently and regularly on indicators for SDG targets 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work) 16.2 (end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children) in order to establish observable trends in countries and regions over time.

Annex 1: Adolescent well-being conceptual framework

Annex table 1: The five domains of adolescent well-being that underpin the adolescent well-being framework

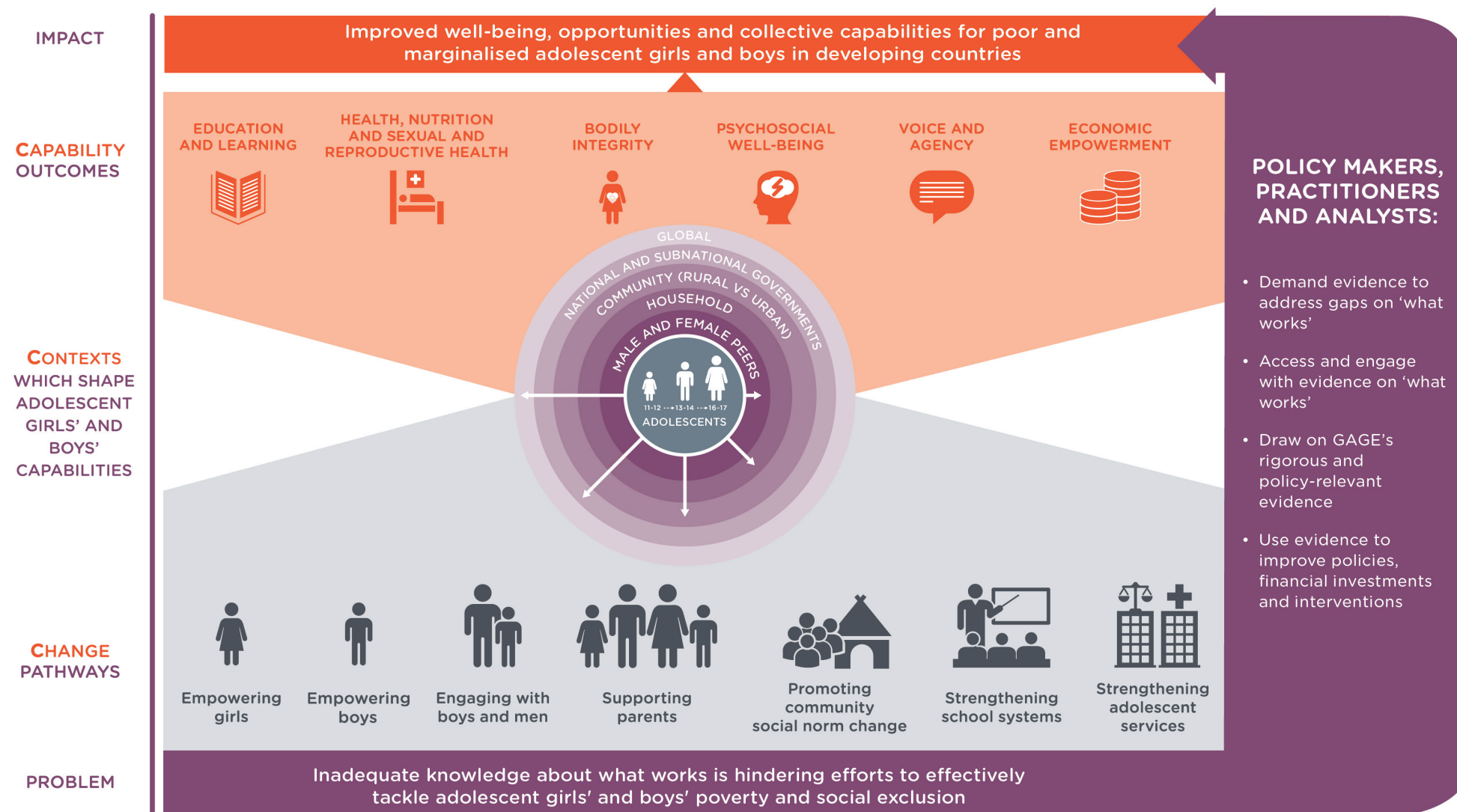
No.	Domain	Subdomains	Requirements include	Type of well-being
1.	Good health and optimum nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical health and capacities. Mental health and capacities. Optimal nutritional status and diet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information, care, and services: access to valid and relevant information and affordable age-appropriate, high-quality, welcoming health services, care, and support, including for self-care. Healthy environment: such as safe water supply, hygiene, sanitation and without undue danger of injury in the home, safe roads, management of toxic substances in the home and community, access to safe green spaces, and no air pollution. Skills to navigate the environment safely. Physical activity: Has access to opportunities for adequate physical activity. Diet: Has access to local, culturally acceptable, adequate, diversified, balanced, and healthy diet commensurate to the individual's characteristics and requirements, to protect from all forms of malnutrition 	Physical Nutritional Emotional Sociocultural
2.	Connectedness, positive values, and contribution to society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connectedness: Is part of positive social and cultural networks and has positive, meaningful relationships with others, including family, peers, and, where relevant, teachers and employers. Valued and respected by others and accepted as part of the community. Attitudes: Responsible, caring, and has respect for others. Has a sense of ethics, integrity, and morality. Interpersonal skills: Empathy, friendship skills, and sensitivity. Activity: Socially, culturally, and civically active. Change and development: Equipped to contribute to change and development in their own lives and/or in their communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connectedness: Has access to opportunities to become part of positive social and cultural networks and to develop positive, meaningful relationships with others, including family, peers, and, where relevant, teachers and employers. Valued: Has opportunities to be involved in decision-making and having their opinions taken seriously, with increasing space to influence and engage with their environment commensurate with their evolving capacities and stage of development. Attitudes: Has access to opportunities to develop personal responsibility, caring, and respect for others and to develop a sense of ethics, integrity and morality. Interpersonal skills: Has access to opportunities to develop empathy, friendship skills, and sensitivity. Activity: Has access to opportunities to be socially, culturally, and civically active that are appropriate to their evolving capacities and stage of development. Change and development: Has access to opportunities to develop the skills to be equipped to contribute to change and development in their own lives and/or in their communities. 	Emotional Sociocultural

3.	Safety and a supportive environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety: Emotional and physical safety. • Material conditions in the physical environment are met. • Equity: Treated fairly and have an equal chance in life. • Equality: Equal distribution of power, resources, rights, and opportunities for all. • Nondiscrimination. • Privacy. • Responsive: Enriching the opportunities available to the adolescent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety: Protection from all forms of violence and from exploitative commercial interests in families, communities, among peers and in schools, and the social and virtual environment. • Material conditions: The adolescent's rights to food and nutrition, water, housing, heating, clothing, and physical security are met. • Equity: There is a supportive legal framework and policies and equitable access to valid and relevant information, products, and high-quality services. • Equality: Positive social norms, including gender norms, to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all adolescents. • Nondiscrimination: Free to practice personal, cultural, and spiritual beliefs and to express their identity in a nondiscriminatory environment and have the liberty to access objective, factual information, and services without being exposed to judgmental attitudes. • Privacy: Their personal information, views, interpretations, fears, and decisions, including those stored online, are not shared or disclosed without the adolescent's permission. • Responsive: Has access to a wide range of safe and stimulating opportunities for leisure or personal development. 	Physical Emotional Sociocultural
4.	Learning, competence, education, skills, and employability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning: Has the commitment to, and motivation for, continual learning. • Education. • Resources, life skills, and competencies: Has the necessary cognitive, social, creative, and emotional resources, skills (life/decision-making) and competencies to thrive, including knowing their rights and how to claim them, and how to plan and make choices. • Skills: Acquisition of technical, vocational, business, and creative skills to be able to take advantage of current or future economic, cultural, and social opportunities. • Employability. • Confidence that they can do things well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning: Receives support to develop the commitment to, and motivation for, continual learning. • Education: Has access to formal education until age 16, and opportunities for learning through formal or nonformal education or training beyond. • Resources, life skills, and competencies: Has opportunities to develop the resources, skills (life/decision-making), and competencies to thrive. • Skills: Has opportunities to develop relevant technical, vocational, business, and creative skills. • Employability: Is given the opportunity to participate in nonexploitative and sustainable livelihoods and/or entrepreneurship appropriate for their age and stage of development. • Confidence: Is given the necessary encouragement and opportunities to develop self-confidence and is empowered to feel that they can do things well. 	Emotional Cognitive

5.	Agency and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency: Has self-esteem, a sense of agency and of being empowered to make meaningful choices and to influence their social, political, and material environment and has the capacity for self-expression and self-direction appropriate to their evolving capacities and stage of development. • Identity: Feels comfortable in their own self and with their identity(s), including their physical, cultural, social, sexual, and gender identity. • Purpose: Has a sense of purpose, desire to succeed, and optimism about the future. • Resilience: Equipped to handle adversities both now and in the future, in a way that is appropriate to their evolving capacities and stage of development. • Fulfilment: Feels that they are fulfilling their potential now and that they will be able to do so in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency: Has opportunities to develop self-esteem, a sense of agency, the ability to make meaningful choices and to influence their social, political and material environment, for self-expression and self-direction. • Identity: Has the safe space to develop clarity and comfort in their own self and their identity(s), including their physical, cultural, social, sexual, and gender identity. • Purpose: Has opportunities to develop a sense of purpose, desire to succeed, and optimism about the future. • Resilience: Has opportunities to develop the ability to handle adversities both now and in the future, in a way that is appropriate to their evolving capacities and stage of development. • Fulfilment: Has opportunities to fulfill their potential now and to be able to do so in the future. 	Emotional Cognitive
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Source: Ross et al., 2020

Figure 1: The GAGE conceptual framework



Source: GAGE consortium, 2019.

Annex 2: IAEG-SDG series of tools and resources for countries on data disaggregation

For further detail on SDG data disaggregation by country, please consult the following:

- 'Compilation of tools and resources for data disaggregation' (UNSC 52 2021 IAEG-SDGs background document) ([PDF](#))
- 'Data Disaggregation and SDG Indicators: Policy Priorities and Current and Future Disaggregation Plans' (UNSC50 2019 IAEG-SDGs background document) ([PDF](#))
- 'Compilation on Data Disaggregation Dimensions and Categories for Global SDG Indicators', includes all current and future planned data disaggregation dimensions and categories (UNSC50 2019 IAEG-SDGs background document Annex I) ([XLSX](#))
- 'Summary of Disaggregation Dimensions and Categories Available and Planned in Global SDG Indicator Database' (UNSC 50 2019 IAEG-SDGs background document Annex II) ([XLSX](#))
- 'Policy Priorities Inputs compilation' (UNSC 50 2019 IAEG-SDGs background document additional information) ([ZIP](#))
- 'Minimum disaggregation set', includes all disaggregation dimensions specifically mentioned in the target or indicator name (IAEG-SDGs 2018). ([XLSX](#))
- 'Overview of Standards for Data Disaggregation' (IAEG-SDGs 2018). ([PDF](#))

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About GAGE

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit www.gage.odi.org.uk for more information.

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