



# GIRLS' VISION *for* EDUCATION

MARCH  
2025

*Executive summary*

Delivering on girls' needs and priorities  
for education

**MALALA** FUND

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

**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.<sup>3,4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>
- 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.*

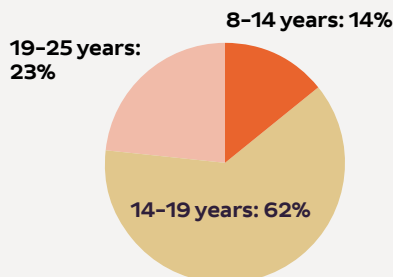


# Consultation insights

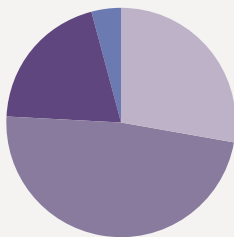
## Who are the girls?

### 810 girls:

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



### Age



- In school: 48%
- Out of school: 28%
- Data missing: 4%
- Completed secondary school: 20%

### Formal education status

### 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



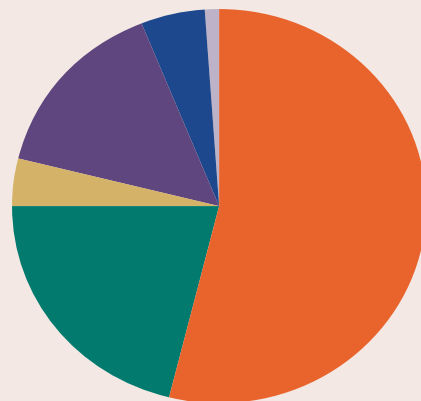
### Spotlight: Power, menstrual health and digital

- **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%



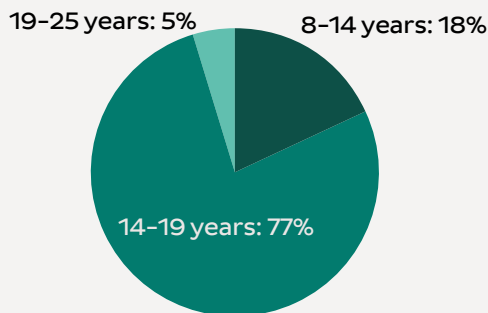
# Consultation insights: out-of-school girls

## Who are the girls?

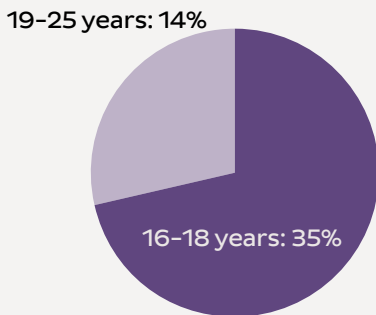
229 girls:

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

### Age



Workshop (n=22 workshops)



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



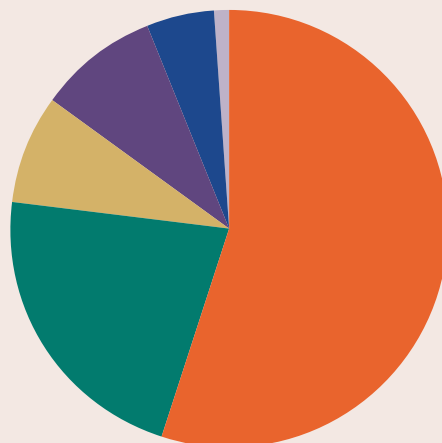
### Spotlight: Power, menstrual health and digital

- 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



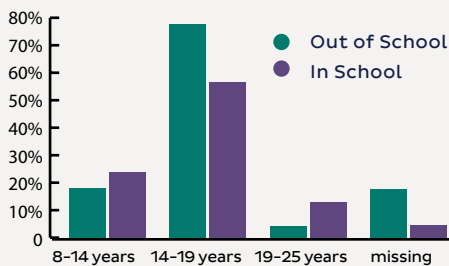
- 55%
- 22%
- 8%
- 9%
- 5%
- 1%



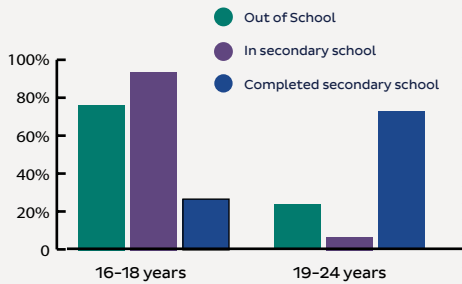
## Consultation insights: different age groups

### 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)

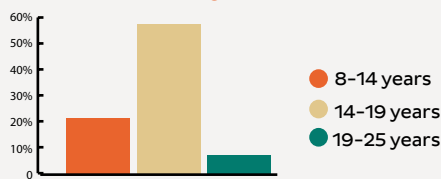


Workshop (n=72 workshops)

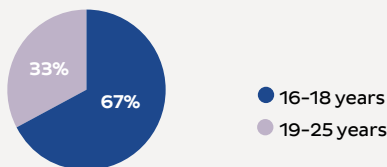


Survey (n=328 girls)

### 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

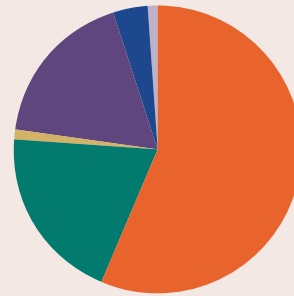


### Spotlight: Power, menstrual health and digital

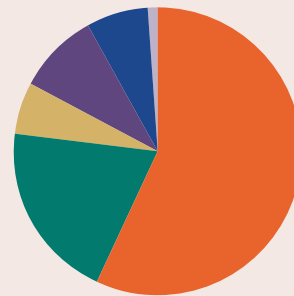
- 62% of younger girls and 55% of older girls said girls themselves have the most power to improve education
- 41% of younger girls and 39% of older girls called for menstrual health and hygiene to improve education - top priority
- Digital learning and literacy was a clear priority for girls across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

### Education makeover!

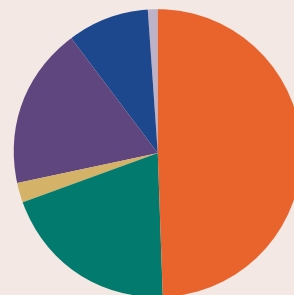
How girls of different ages would allocate budgets if they were in power



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

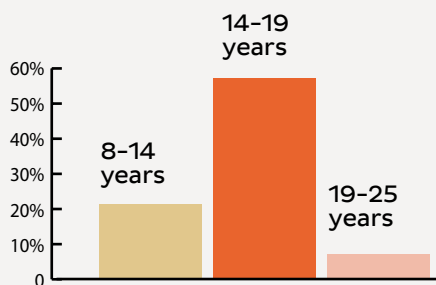


# Consultation insights: girls living with disabilities

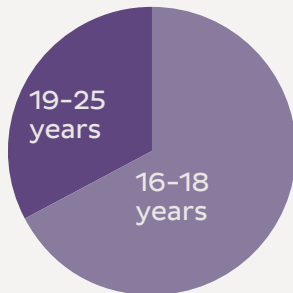
## Who are the girls?

159 girls LWD

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

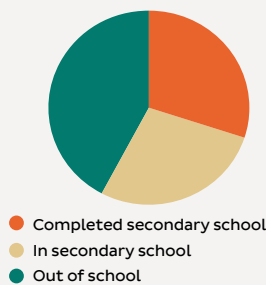


workshop (n=21 workshops)



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



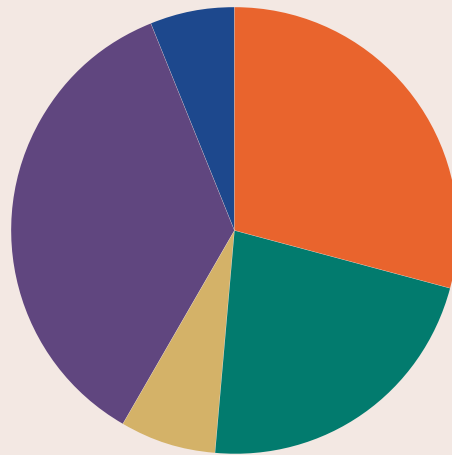
### Spotlight: Power, menstrual health and digital

- 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





# 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>
- **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.<sup>9 10</sup>
- **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.



## Acknowledgements

Malala Fund is incredibly grateful to all the 866 girls who shared their time and insights with us through the consultation process. We are also grateful to the 45 girls, young women leaders and workshop facilitators who supported the validation process.

For their leadership and collaboration, we are grateful to:

**Girls' Vision leads:** Meti Gemechu, Ayesha Kareem and Tamilore Omojola

**Girls' Vision steering committee:** Antara, Elizabeth, Hasna, Lauryn and Miriam

**Girls' Vision partners:** AfyaPlus Organization, Girl Child Africa Foundation & Save the Children South Sudan, Roots and Wings ELIXIR, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), World YWCA and Zindagi Trust.

**Technical partner:** Here I Am

We also acknowledge the leadership and efforts of Ines Goncalves, Jean-Ann Ndow and Mashal Hussain.

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### Photo credits:

Page 2, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)

Page 5, AfyaPlus Organization

Page 15, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)

## 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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7. For activists, we understand quality funding to be multi-year, flexible and covers core costs. CHOICE (2023) *Written statement on youth-friendly funding*. [https://www.choiceforyouth.org/news/news-articles/press-releases/csw68-statement-on-youth-friendly-funding?a\\_cceptCookies=67a35d81607fa](https://www.choiceforyouth.org/news/news-articles/press-releases/csw68-statement-on-youth-friendly-funding?a_cceptCookies=67a35d81607fa)
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10. Also see the Global Accountability Dashboard (<https://www.egeresource.org/global-accountability-dashboard/>) and the Global Platform for Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education (<https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/knowledge-hub/global-initiatives/gender-equality-platform>)



