Next Generation

Ending violence against women and girls

What we know brief
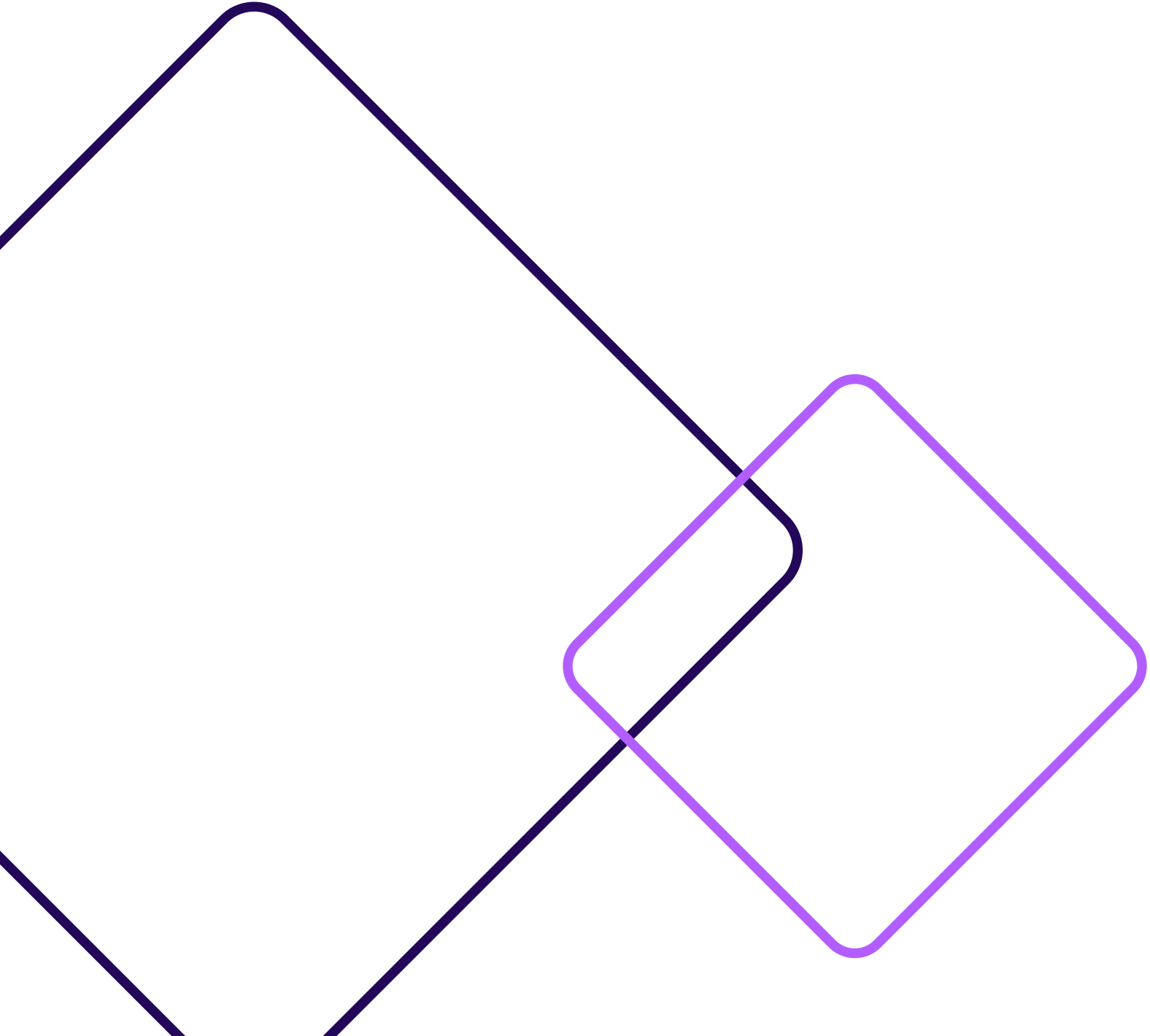
7 March 2024

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Executive summary

This thematic briefing paper seeks to understand the factors that facilitate or undermine efforts to end violence against women and girls in seven Next Generation countries. These are spread across South and East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe, and include Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland.

The paper has applied a socio-ecological lens to draw insights on the enablers for and barriers to ending violence at various levels: individual, interpersonal, organisational, community, societal, and policy and legal. It also incorporates the principles of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) to research design and delivery across the various country contexts. It reanalyses seven Next Generation datasets to the extent possible based on age (15–24 and 25–35), sex (young women and men), and location (rural and urban). Insights are also drawn from qualitative interview data, collected in 2023.

Overall, there is a greater volume of evidence on barriers than enablers, pointing to the urgent need to galvanise action on amplifying enablers and mitigating barriers.

Enablers for ending violence against women and girls

Progress on drafting legislative frameworks on violence against women and girls and investment in support services available to survivors are the major enablers for ending violence against them. Key enablers emerging from the evidence include:

- **Interpersonal:** Support from families and friends and engagement of men and boys in actions to advance gender equality and end violence against women and girls.

- **Organisational:** Organisational efforts from civil society organisations (CSOs), creation of safe spaces for women and girls, and donor and private sector support of organisations working to end violence.

- **Policy and legal:** Government commitments and legal reforms to end violence against women and girls.

- **Cross-cutting enablers:** Digitalisation and education (specifically comprehensive sexuality education), offering opportunities for empowerment and learning, and deconstructing negative gender and social norms.

Barriers to ending violence against women and girls

While governments have made strides to promote gender equality and end violence against women and girls, there are discrepancies between the laws in place and their implementation. The inefficient implementation of existing laws manifests in limited and low-quality services available to survivors, and in the continued social acceptance of harmful gender norms. Key barriers include:

- **Individual:** Because of a widespread culture of silence that blames survivors and protects perpetrators of violence, women and girls are often unaware of their rights and normalise the violence they endure.

- **Organisational:** Workplaces are often hostile environments for women, where gender discrimination, harassment, and violence are widespread. There are limited services available to survivors and first responders, such as healthcare providers and the police, do not have sufficient knowledge or the means to address the needs of survivors.

- **Societal:** Harmful gender and social norms result in the silencing and victim-blaming of women, deterring them from reporting violence.

- **Policy and legal:** Existing policies and laws on violence against women and girls are inadequately implemented.

- **Cross-cutting barriers:** Including an increase in incidents of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, geographical differences in the prevalence of violence and access to support services, and heightened risk of violence during crises, such as those resulting from conflict, climate change, and pandemics.
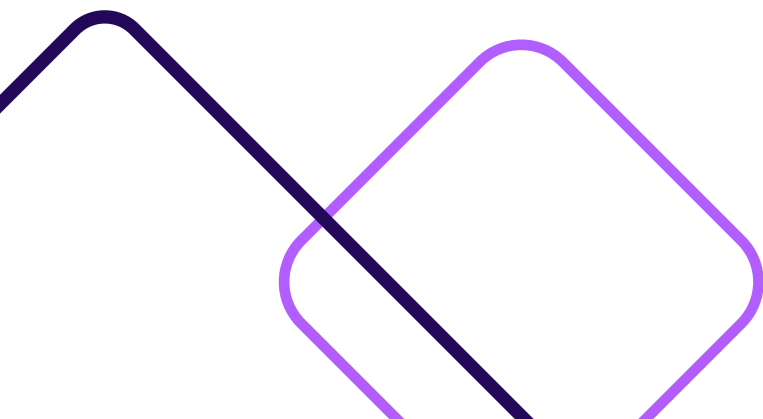
Way forward

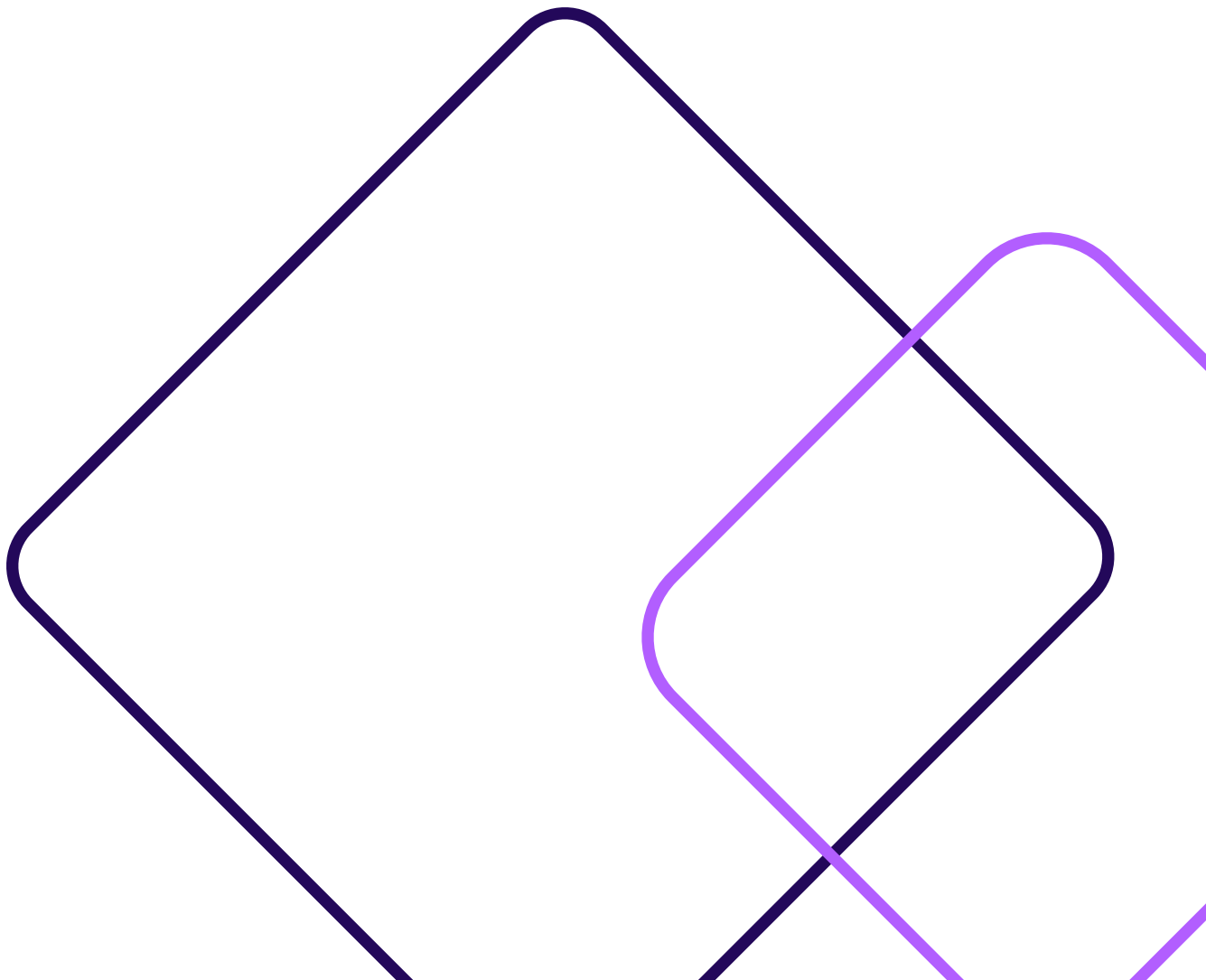The findings of this paper reveal how different stakeholders can work to end violence against women and girls:

1. Families, peers, and friends play a major role in shaping the behaviours and attitudes of women and girls, as well as their experience of safety and support. Specific efforts would include:

   - Increasing awareness of and educating families on all aspects of violence against

women and girls and their immediate and long-term impacts.

- Providing a safe space for girls to grow, free from stigmas and harmful gender norms.

- Investing in the well-being of women and girls in families and friendship circles.

- Enabling family members to act as role models for advancing progressive views on gender rights and equality.

2. CSOs and service providers (public and private) conduct crucial work to end violence against women and girls. However, they need to secure sustainable funding to replicate and/or scale up their operations to amplify positive impacts. Efforts would include:

- Collaborating with grassroots programmes and local communities to understand contextual needs and challenges.

- Engaging in targeted campaigns to debunk patriarchal gender norms.

- Strengthening collaboration between CSOs and government entities to leverage resources, scale up expertise, and holistically address violence against women and girls.

- Holding government entities accountable for their actions to address violence against women and girls.

- Establishing workplace regulations on violence against women and girls and gender equality, wherever these are absent, and strengthening implementation and oversight of the ones that exist.

- Introducing or strengthening protocols in place to prevent exploitation of women and girls who work in the informal sector.

- Establishing or strengthening trade unions to support labour movements and better protect women and girls.

- Showcasing work done to end violence against women and girls to promote transparency and trust.

3. Media companies have the power to shape narratives on gender and social norms and violence against women and girls. Work in this area could involve:

- Educating professionals on ethical reporting, specifically in a gender-sensitive lens.

- Using less stigmatising and victim-blaming imagery when representing violence against women and girls.

- Disseminating information on the resources and support available for and needed by women and girls affected by violence.

4. Schools and higher education institutions play a central role in the personal and professional development of young people and can prevent and respond to violence against women in many ways. Their work could include:

- Making educational spaces safer so women and girls can access them freely.

- Integrating gender-sensitive education within the curriculum, emphasising mutual respect, consent, sex education, and the dignity of all individuals, irrespective of gender.

- Commemorating international days such as the Day of the Girl Child, Children's Day and Women's Day so that they can raise awareness of rights.

5. Policymakers' and legislators' work is essential to end violence against women and girls. Areas to focus on could include:

- Reforming existing policies and laws to integrate violence prevention across different sectors, such as education, healthcare and legal systems, and ensuring their enforcement.

- Addressing specific legal barriers, such as penalties for violating laws related to child marriages, and domestic and sexual abuse, and promoting reforms that emphasise the importance of women's health and safety.

- Strengthening legislative frameworks on technology-facilitated gender-based violence to better prevent and respond to this form of violence.

- Empowering and funding CSOs to implement programmes and initiatives to end violence against women and girls, while ensuring that government actors remain the primary stakeholders responsible for preventing and responding to violence.

- Sensitisation and training programmes for policymakers to improve their understanding of the impacts of violence on the affected individuals and the wider society.

- Launching nationwide campaigns to raise awareness on violence against women and girls and disseminating vital information on existing laws and policies.

- Allocating resources effectively towards supporting potential victims and survivors, including equipping front-line providers with the capabilities and tools needed to prevent and respond quickly, and providing survivor-centred legal and medical support.

- Providing services closer to marginalised groups, especially for those living in remote areas, minorities, and those with disabilities.

- Collaborating with CSOs to ensure local needs and challenges are being addressed.

1 Introduction

Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation with detrimental consequences – physical, sexual, and psychological. Violence not only affects individuals but also communities and societies (UN Women, n.d.a). Globally, one in three women are subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV), non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life (ibid.).

Progress on ending violence against women and girls has been slow despite country and global-level efforts aimed at prevention and response. This briefing paper, a part of the British Council's thematic study, *Next Generation: What we know on women and girls*, delves into the enablers for and barriers to ending violence against women and girls in seven countries: Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland. The overarching research question is:

'What do we know about ending violence against women and girls?'

The focus on enablers and barriers is crucial to understanding women's and girls' experiences and shaping societies in which they can live free from harm.

The paper is organised as follows: Chapter 2 presents the research methodology; Chapter 3 focuses on country contexts; Chapters 4 and 5 delve into the key enablers and barriers; and Chapter 6 concludes with recommendations.

What is the Next Generation programme?

The Next Generation is a global research programme that explores the needs, potential, and aspirations of young people across the world. The research seeks to analyse the conditions that support young people to reach their potential as fulfilled, productive and active citizens. It includes those from underprivileged or geographically isolated backgrounds, as well as those from more established communities and represents the aspirations of young women and girls, as well as young men and boys.

Research is initiated in countries that are experiencing a period of notable change, with the purpose of ensuring that young people's voices are heard, no matter their background or gender, and that their interests are properly represented in decisions that will have lasting implications for their lives. The research is always completed with a series of recommendations to support policy change.

The overall aim of Next Generation is defined through three strands:

- **Research:** Understanding youth attitudes and aspirations, including those from underprivileged backgrounds and differences by gender.

- **Youth voice and capacity building:** Amplifying youth voices from a range of backgrounds, including supporting their active participation, inclusion within the research process and opportunities for skills development.

- **Policy impact:** Supporting better youth policymaking, including perspectives of underprivileged youth and support that increases the inclusion of women and girls.

Next Generation research has been conducted in Colombia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, Lebanon, Turkey, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Albania, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and the UK. Follow-up reports have been developed for Myanmar and Lebanon, and an overview report has been conducted on Next Generation countries in Africa. Work is currently underway in Iraq and Bangladesh, and new research will shortly be launched in Brazil and Kazakhstan.

This is the second of the What We Know research series based on the Next Generation studies, with a central focus on women and girls.

2 Research methodology

The paper uses a mixed-methods approach. It combines insights from the seven Next Generation country-level reports and datasets from 2018 to 2023 and new qualitative interview data from 2023.[1] Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model from the 1970s, which posits that people exist and interact within a complex ecological system of interrelated levels, provides a compelling framework to analyse the data. The five levels include:

1. **Individual:** The physical and cognitive characteristics of youth, such as age, education, income, experience, interests, attitudes and beliefs.

2. **Interpersonal:** The immediate social circle of youth, such as peers, partners, family, teachers, and community leaders, who influence young people's perceptions and behaviours.

3. **Organisational/community:** The structured communities and settings in which social relationships occur, including schools, workplaces, training academies, and neighbourhoods. The characteristics and interactions in each space can either facilitate or hinder young people's access to education, political, social and economic empowerment. Furthermore, they play a crucial role in fostering or addressing violence against women and girls.

4. **Societal:** The broad societal factors that shape youth participation in education, political, social and economic change processes, including social and cultural norms that help to maintain or rebalance inequalities and violence between groups in society.

5. **Policy and legal:** Public policies, laws and regulations at various levels – including local and national policy frameworks – and programme interventions around education, skills, violence against women and girls, and broader policies on empowerment.

Since the Next Generation reports were published at various points over the five-year period, the team reviewed policy and grey literature published between 2018 and 2023. This helped to better understand the contexts of each country. The research team also clustered key findings from the seven reports into themes, enablers, and barriers using the different socio-ecological levels. Fifty-eight semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted across the seven countries in native languages and English. Stakeholders for the KIIs included government officials, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, implementing partner agencies, and civil society (academics, thought leaders, activists, influencers, and rights-based organisations). Data from the interviews was anonymised and coded in a qualitative analysis grid using the socio-ecological levels. Enablers and barriers common to at least two or more countries are presented in the paper.

Cross-country insights derived from global datasets have focused on questions that allowed comparisons across at least four of the seven countries. These are related to restricted physical integrity, a sub-index of the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and its social acceptance among women, and child marriages.

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1 Reports (most recent first): Pakistan (June 2023), Indonesia (October 2022), Poland (May 2021), Nigeria (November 2020), Viet Nam (August 2020), Ethiopia (October 2019), and Sri Lanka (March 2019).

3 Country contexts

The seven countries in this paper have diverse political, social, and economic conditions. Three (Indonesia, Pakistan, and Nigeria) are the world's fourth, fifth, and sixth most populated countries with sizeable youth demographics. Youth aged 15–35 constitute a significant share in each country (25 per cent in Poland and between 30 per cent and 38 per cent in the other six countries). In most, women and girls make up 50 per cent of the population.

Table 1. Key data on each country

Key indicators	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Indonesia	Viet Nam	Nigeria	Ethiopia	Poland
Income classification*	LMIC	LMIC	UMIC	LMIC	LMIC	LIC	HIC
Total population (in millions)	234	22	277.5	99	219	123	38.4
Share of girls and women in total population	50%	52%	50%	51%	49%	50%	52%
Share of youth aged 15–35 in total population	37%	30%	33%	32%	34%	38%	25%
Year CEDAW ratified[2]	1996	1981	1984	1982	1985	1981	1980

Sources: OECD (2023), OHCHR (n.d.), World Bank (2023), UNDESA (2024).
*LIC: low-income country, LMIC: lower-middle-income country, UMIC: upper-middle-income country, HIC: high-income country.
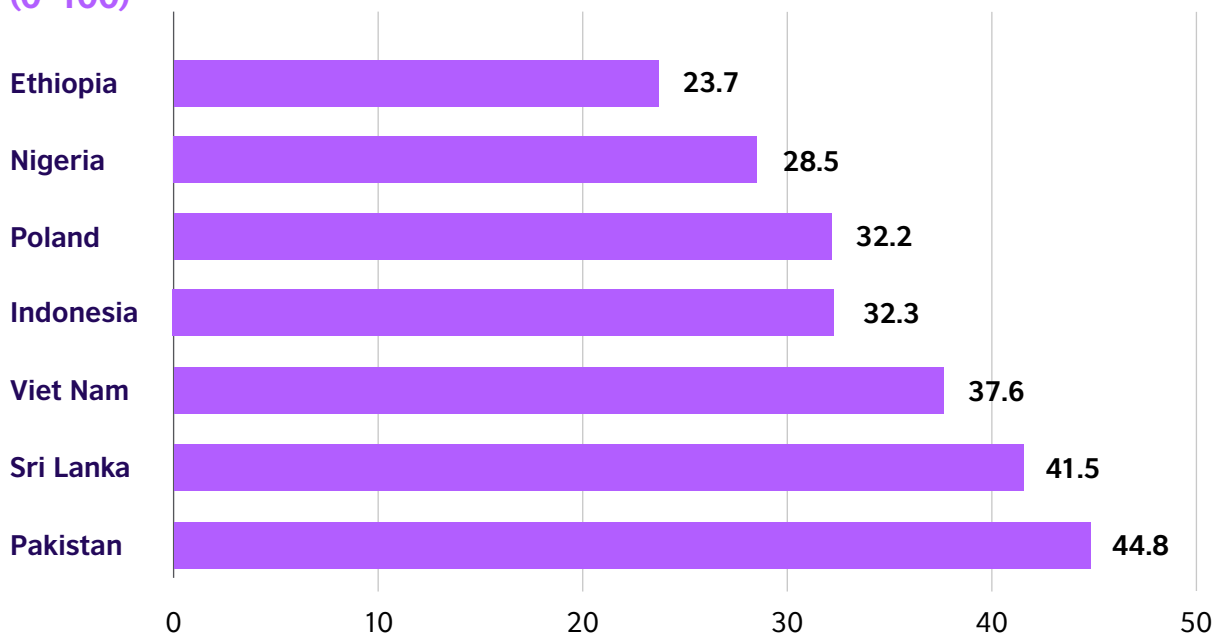
Although the rights of women and girls are protected by the Constitutions of each country, violence against them is still a major issue.

Of all seven countries, Pakistan shows relatively higher discrimination against women and girls, with a score of 44.8 out of 100 on the OECD's sub-index on restricted physical integrity (see Figure 1)**.** This sub-index refers to the extent to which women and girls are vulnerable to forms of gendered violence, including IPV, rape and sexual harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM), and control of their sexual and reproductive rights. Zero denotes no discrimination, and 100 denotes absolute discrimination.

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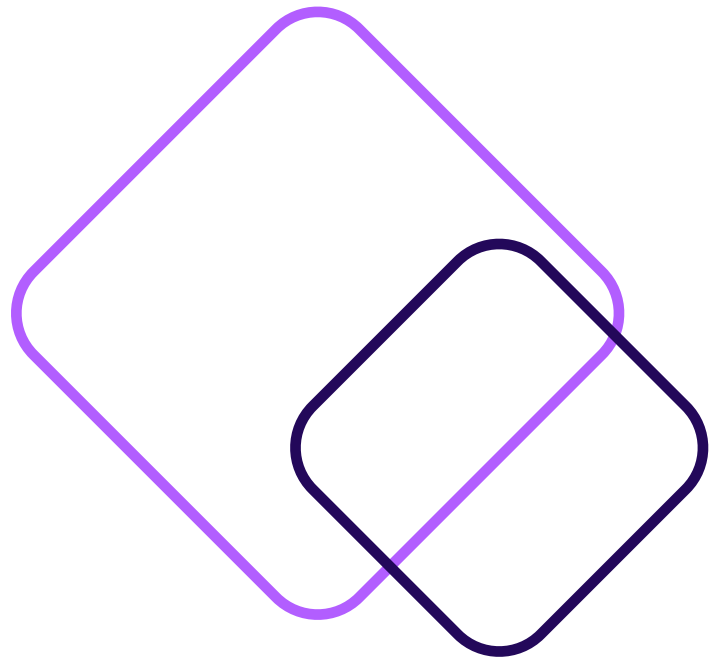
2   The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international legal instrument that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promotes women's and girls' equal rights.

Figure 1. Country scores on restricted physical integrity of women and girls (0–100)

Country	Score
Ethiopia	23.7
Nigeria	28.5
Poland	32.2
Indonesia	32.3
Viet Nam	37.6
Sri Lanka	41.5
Pakistan	44.8

Source: OECD (2023).

The share of women with social acceptance of IPV is over 50 per cent in Viet Nam, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan (see Figure 2). They also exhibit a high prevalence of IPV at 25 per cent, 24 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively. In Ethiopia, prevalence is significantly higher at 37 per cent compared to its social acceptance by women at 14 per cent (OECD, 2023).[3]

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3   SIGI does not include figures on men's social acceptance of IPV.

Figure 2. Prevalence of IPV and its social acceptance by women in each country (%)

◆ **Prevalence of IPV**
◆ **Share of women who socially accept IPV**
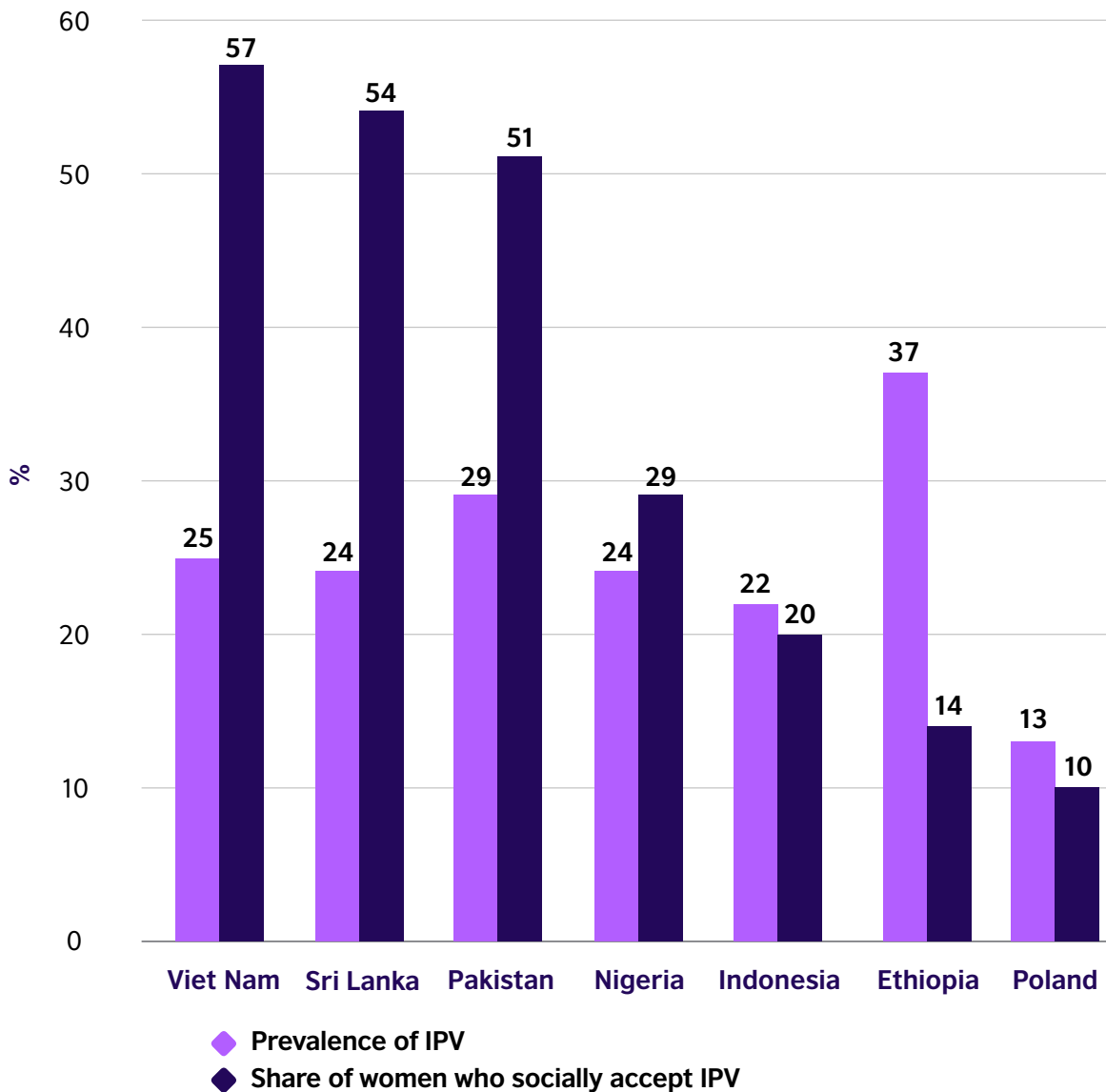
Source: OECD (2023).

Millions of women aged 20–24 are married before the age of 18 in the study countries (see Figure 3). **Four countries represent relatively large numbers of women:** Indonesia (25.5 million), Nigeria (19.4 million), Pakistan (19.4 million), and Ethiopia (18.6 million). In percentage terms, Ethiopia and Nigeria represent the highest shares at 40 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively.[4]

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4   Data is not available for Poland, and it is excluded from this comparative analysis.
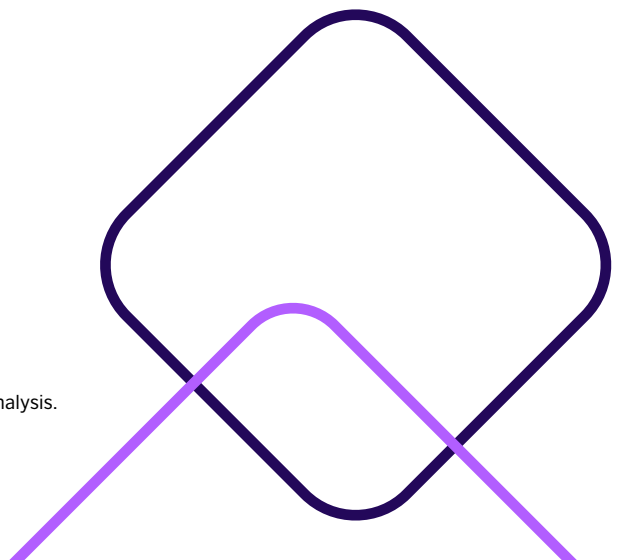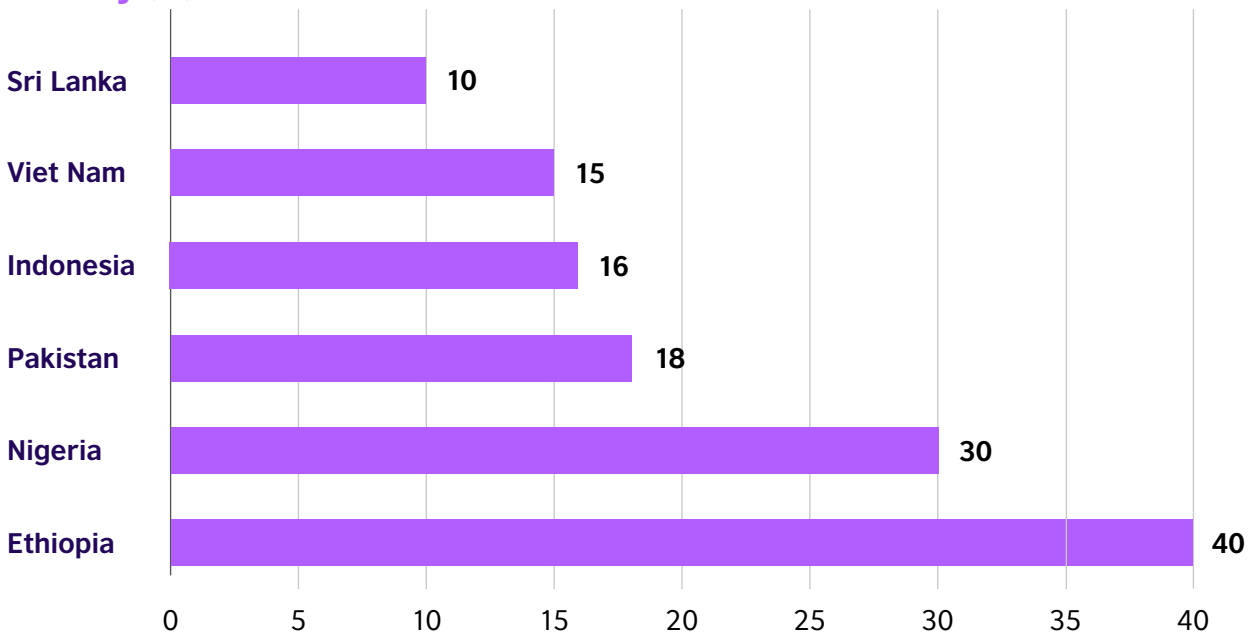
Figure 3. Share of women aged 20–24 married before the age of 18, by country (%)

Source: The Child Marriage Data Portal, 2023.

The laws to protect women and girls vary from country to country. Table 2 documents some of the key enactments to address issues around harassment of women in the workplace, rape, child marriage and rights, acid crime, domestic violence, human trafficking, and FGM, alongside some new laws that have curtailed the rights of women and girls. Subsequent chapters discuss the extent to which the enforcement of these laws, together with policies and national action plans to protect women, have enabled or hindered progress on ending violence against women and girls.
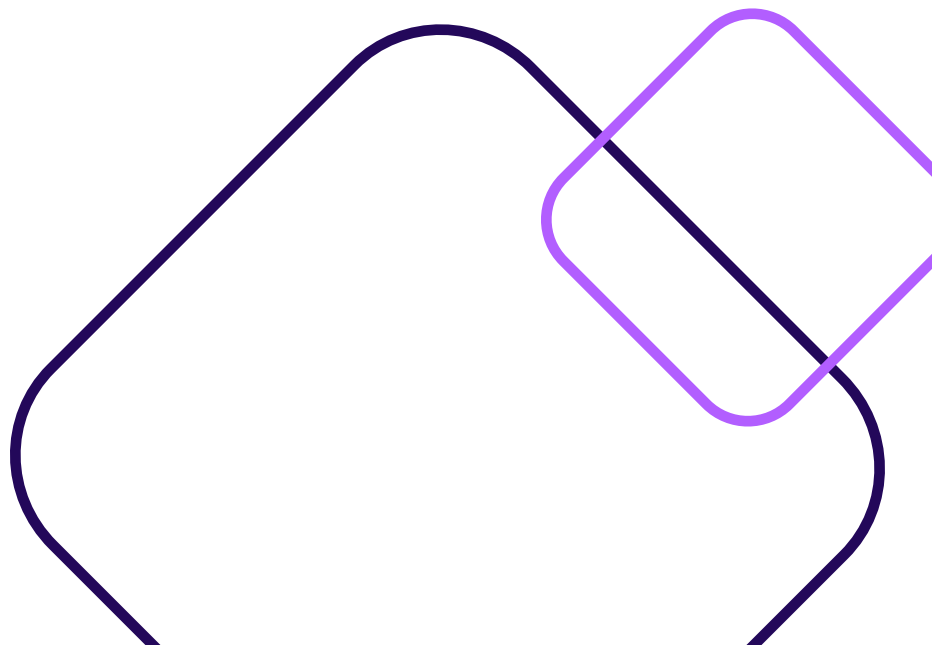
Table 2. Recent laws in each country

Country	Recent laws
Pakistan	Amendment of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act of 2022, which also criminalises harassment in the informal sector; Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act of 2021; Anti-Rape Act of 2016; Anti-Honour Killing Act of 2016; Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act of 2011 (PCSW, n.d.; Pakistan National Assembly, n.d.; Pakistan Senate, 2022).
Sri Lanka	Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act of 2015; amendment of Article 11 in 2015 prohibiting the use of degrading treatment; Domestic Violence Act of 2005; amendment to the Panel Code in 1995 that criminalises sexual harassment (World Bank, 2021; WDP, 2009; Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2015; Parliament Secretariat, 2023).
Indonesia	Law No. 12 on the Crime of Sexual Violence (UUTPKS) of 2022; amendments to the Penal Code in 2022 criminalise abortion and non-marital sex; Law on Anti-Trafficking of 2007; Victim Protection Law of 2006; Law on Domestic Violence of 2004 (UN Women, 2011; Anggiana and Dian Agustino, 2022; Satriana and Dewi, 2022, HRW, 2022).
Viet Nam	Prohibition of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace of 2012, which was updated by ministerial decree in 2023; the Amendment to the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control in 2022; the Law on Children of 2016; Anti-Human Trafficking Law of 2012; Domestic Violence Law of 2007 (Global Database on Violence Against Women, 2023; ILO, (2016); UNFPA Vietnam, 2022; IOE, 2023).
Nigeria	Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency Law of 2021; the Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act (Amendment) of 2015; the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015 which criminalises the practice of FGM; and the Child Rights Act (Minimum Age for Marriage) of 2005 (Global Database on Violence Against Women, 2023; Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency, 2022).
Ethiopia	Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019 of 2019 prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace; Civil Servants Proclamation: Sexual Harassment in the Workplace of 2017; ban on the medicalisation of FGM of 2017; and proclamation No. 909/2015 on Prevention of Trafficking in Persons of 2015 (World Bank, 2022; Global Database on Violence Against Women, 2023).
Poland	Anti-Violence Act of 2020; ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2015; Act on Counteracting Family Violence of 2005 (CoE, 2020).
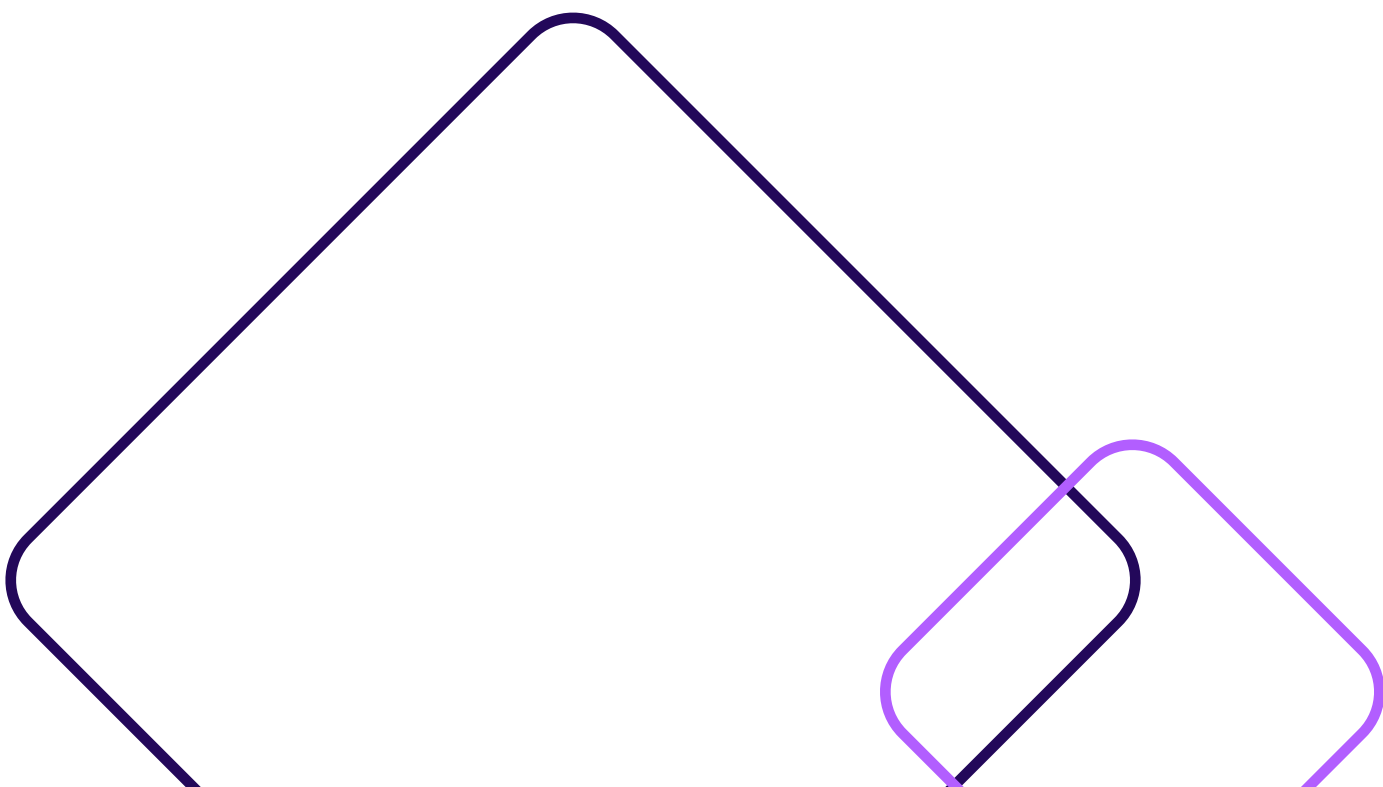
4 Enablers for ending violence against women and girls

This section explores factors that facilitate ending violence against women and girls. See Table 3 for a summary of key aspects.

4.1 Interpersonal enablers

Supportive familial bonds and friendships

Relationships with family and friends act as powerful enablers to end violence against women and girls. Their influence and support have the power to shape women's and girls' understanding and potential experience of violence and can educate men and boys on crucial issues of consent, boundaries, and respect. In Ethiopia, key informants recognised families as pivotal agents of change as they play an essential role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of their daughters and prioritising their education and empowerment (interviews, 2023). In Poland, key informants underscored the significance of friends and support systems (ibid.). These connections provide an additional layer of influence and support for women and girls and have the potential to reinforce messages of gender equality and foster a culture where violence is not tolerated.

Engaging men and boys in conversations on violence against women and girls

Men and boys are critical allies in the pursuit of gender equality. In Sri Lanka, key informants recognised that bringing men into clinics and sensitising them to behavioural change and relationship counselling is not just an addendum to the conversation, but a critical component in the holistic effort to eradicate violence against women and girls and build a society founded on equality and mutual respect (interviews, 2023). In Viet Nam, key informants emphasised the importance of involving men and boys in raising awareness of violence against women and girls and in promoting behaviour change (ibid.).

## 4.2 Organisational enablers

Civic activism

Civic activism is a powerful force in ending violence against women and girls, fostering change and resilience in diverse cultural contexts. Key informants from Pakistan say that the prevention and response landscape is shaped by the work of feminist groups in the country (interviews, 2023). They have been using social media for activism, recognising the internet as a powerful tool for advocacy, yet they struggle to reach vulnerable women, since most do not have access to the internet (ibid.). Girls at Dhabas was cited by key informants as a particularly active feminist group, known for its work on reclaiming public spaces for women and for organising the Aurat March (ibid.). In Nigeria, activists and civil society organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in launching campaigns, safe spaces, and strategic collaborations (ibid.). The commemoration of significant days, such as the Day of the Girl Child and International Women's Day, serves as a platform for raising awareness and mobilising local communities (ibid.).

In Poland, key informants shared some of the successes of CSOs working to bring about legal change in the country. They explained that pressure from CSOs contributed to improvements in the legal system, with legal entities more likely to support victims now than several years ago (interviews, 2023). For instance, mandatory reporting was implemented, requiring survivors to testify only once, with their statements recorded in court to prevent harassment and retraumatisation (Grevio, 2021). Safeguards during court hearings, such as separate safe rooms and the option to testify via electronic means, were also introduced (ibid.).

Community engagement and creation of safe spaces

Organisations play a crucial role in shaping safe environments and disseminating essential knowledge on violence against women and girls. They represent spaces of safety, growth and support, and can significantly prepare women and girls to address violence. In Ethiopia, key informants said that religious places are perceived
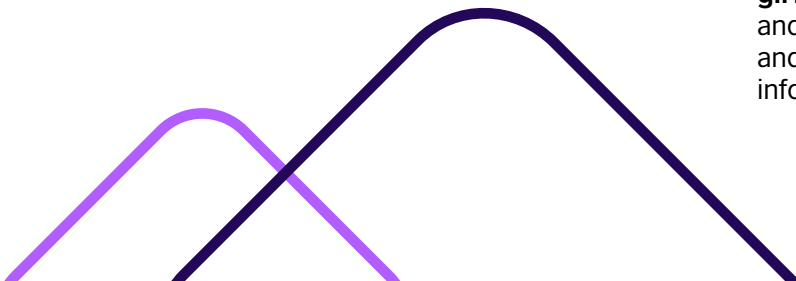
as sanctuaries for women, and they noted ever more organisations working on women's and children's rights (interviews, 2023). They claimed that there are over 4,700 civic organisations in the country: more than half of these work to support women and children and, as a result, various activities are aiming to increase awareness among women and girls and strengthen their ability to protect themselves (ibid.).

In Poland, key informants mentioned that many CSOs, such as the Ponton Group and the SEXEDPL Foundation, are creating safe spaces and conducting educational programmes on violence against women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) (interviews, 2023). Examples of CSO efforts to support marginalised and vulnerable women and girls include the creation of women's, feminist and queer camps and mothers' circles, which serve as spaces for self-care, self-education, awareness-building, and skills improvement (Grabowska and Rawłuszko, 2021).

Donor and private sector support

Donor and private sector support plays a crucial role in helping organisations that are working to end violence against women and girls. Increases in investments allow for the development and strengthening of services and programmes aimed at prevention and response. Key informants from Sri Lanka explained that a noteworthy surge in donor investments has facilitated technological enhancements within local organisations and developed their exposure and capacity in the field of violence prevention and response (interviews, 2023). In their view, this influx of financial support has contributed to the augmentation of shelter facilities, increasing the spaces available for women and girls affected by violence (ibid.). They also noted an increase in private sector engagement in the country, with major corporations such as MAS and Brandix working on preventing sexual exploitation, a trend connected to global brand advocacy needs and priorities (ibid.). Training initiatives for private sector entities have also become more common, with an increasing number of private sector partners aligning with and supporting anti-violence initiatives (ibid.).

In Nigeria, key informants referred to the creation of a national Gender-based Violence (GBV) Fund (interviews, 2023). This ambitious initiative was launched by gender-responsive private companies and women chief executives with the support of UN Women, the European Union's Spotlight Initiative and Women in Successful Careers (WISCAR) (WFM, 2023). The Fund will address critical issues such as support systems for survivors, prevention work, and service provider training (interviews, 2023; Agbonkhese, 2023). It marks a concerted effort to increase private sector participation and investment in GBV initiatives (WFM, 2023).

Prioritising formal and comprehensive sexuality education

Formal and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) emerge as powerful catalysts for change across diverse countries. Education instils confidence in women, empowering them to take proactive steps against abuse, and provides them with the tools to navigate both personal and professional spheres. In Pakistan, key informants noted a shift away from traditional views on education with the inclusion of CSE (interviews, 2023). Incorporating life skills and CSE information into the government curriculum is critical to ending violence (ibid.). This strategic shift aims to challenge and unlearn normalised violent behaviours against women and girls, fostering a sense of confidence and awareness among them (ibid.).

In Sri Lanka, key informants noted a growing interest in CSE within the Ministry of Education (interviews, 2023). This comprehensive approach emphasises norm change and life skills, launching nuanced discussions about respect, consent, communication, and empathy (ibid.). Interviewees also saw CSE as a long-term tool for reducing violence, dispelling traditional gender norms, and cultivating empathetic individuals (ibid.).

Key informants in Nigeria recognise education as the foundation for empowerment (interviews, 2023). Education is seen as a tool to prevent early marriages, facilitate informed decisions about family planning, and carve out diverse career paths in addition to mitigating childhood abuse (ibid.).

4.3 Policy and legal enablers

Government commitments and legal reforms

Developing new laws and policies to support women's rights, amending existing ones, and committing to international agreements are positive national efforts to address violence against women and girls. In Pakistan, a noteworthy transformation has taken centre stage with the implementation of the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act in 2021 (interviews, 2023). Here, the legal landscape has undergone a profound transformation, with calls to establish rape crisis cells in hospitals to provide critical support to survivors and the abolition of the two-finger virginity test (ibid.). Furthermore, changes in the definition of rape, combined with a strong emphasis on consent and gender-neutral laws, pave the way for more equitable and inclusive legal recourse (ibid.).

In Sri Lanka, key informants saw a noticeable increase in interest in violence against women and girls from various ministries (interviews, 2023). In 2023, the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security were launched, aimed at promoting women's rights in the country (UNFPA Sri Lanka, 2023; Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment, 2022). Crucially, interviewees see a discernible change in societal discourse, with violence against women and girls and menstrual health issues moving from hushed to open discussion, fostering a positive and inclusive dialogue (interviews, 2023).

Indonesia has made significant legislative progress on women's empowerment and preventing violence against women and girls, according to key informants. FGM was recently contested by female religious leaders, signalling a change in cultural norms (interviews, 2023; UNFPA Indonesia, 2023). The country is also in the process of introducing a comprehensive National Strategy (Stranas) aimed at preventing child marriages, demonstrating a proactive approach to addressing critical societal issues related to women's and children's rights (interviews, 2023). Some interviewees also noted a degree of backsliding, which is documented in the next section on barriers.

In Viet Nam, laws and recent amendments are prominent in efforts to combat domestic violence. Examples include the 2016 Law on Children, which protects them from sexual abuse and any other exploitation (interviews, 2023), and the 2007 Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, which was amended in 2022 (interviews, 2023; UNFPA Vietnam, 2022). These initiatives reflect Viet Nam's commitment to fostering an environment of safety and equity.

In Nigeria, key informants cited evidence of the enactment of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) of 2015 as legal progress (interviews, 2023). Designed to protect girls, this legal framework guards against harmful practices such as FGM (WFD, 2021). Moreover, Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu signed the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency bill into law in 2021, establishing the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (Salau, 2023; Lagos State Ministry of Justice, 2023), which aims to increase awareness on sexual violence, domestic violence, and child abuse and develop proactive measures to end violence against women and girls (interviews, 2023; Udombana, 2017; Lagos Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency, n.d.).

In recent years, many governments introduced or amended acts to protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace. Examples include Pakistan's amendment of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act of 2022, which also criminalises harassment in the informal sector (PCSW, n.d.); Vietnam's Prohibition of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace of 2012, which was updated by ministerial decree in 2023 (Global Database on Violence Against Women, 2023); and Ethiopia's Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019 of 2019 prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace (World Bank, 2022).

4.4 Cross-cutting enablers

New digital technologies as an opportunity for empowerment

New digital technologies are a transformative force in shaping societal attitudes and providing avenues for empowerment to women and girls. Where there is access to the internet, digitalisation has created diverse opportunities, from knowledge dissemination to connecting with friends, enabling women and girls to address violence in innovative ways. In Pakistan and Poland, digital platforms are seen as safe spaces for women and girls to disseminate information, seek advice, educate themselves and be more assertive (interviews, 2023). However, concerns remain over technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

In Viet Nam, social media platforms were found to be especially useful to survivors of violence, who sometimes use them to speak up about the violence they have experienced and to find support (Lamphere-Englund et al., 2020). In Sri Lanka, where mobile and digital uptake is high, the post-COVID shift towards digital platforms has created numerous opportunities for women and girls (interviews, 2023). For key informants, the Know4Sure website stands out as a prime example of leveraging digital platforms to offer discreet and convenient access to health services (ibid.). This service extends to individuals in rural areas, underscoring the potential of digitalisation in enhancing healthcare accessibility (ibid.).

Key informants from Indonesia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia view technology as an inspiration for young women. Digital platforms provide avenues to share experiences, social activities, and reading initiatives, creating opportunities for positive change (interviews, 2023). Through social media, technology becomes a driving force for progress and empowerment, facilitating information dissemination, education, and challenging stereotypes. An example of this is provided by the #ArewaMeToo movement in Nigeria, which highlighted violence against women in socially and religiously conservative states in the North (Curran et al., 2020).

Table 3. Summary of enablers for ending violence against women and girls

Level	Enablers for ending violence against women and girls
Interpersonal	• Supportive familial bonds and friendships
	• Engaging men and boys in actions to end violence against women and girls
Organisational	• Civil activism
	• Community engagement and creation of safe spaces
	• Donor and private sector support for organisations
	• Prioritising formal and comprehensive sexuality education
Policy and legal	• Government commitments and legal reforms
Cross-cutting	• New digital technologies as an opportunity for empowerment

Source: Authors' analysis.
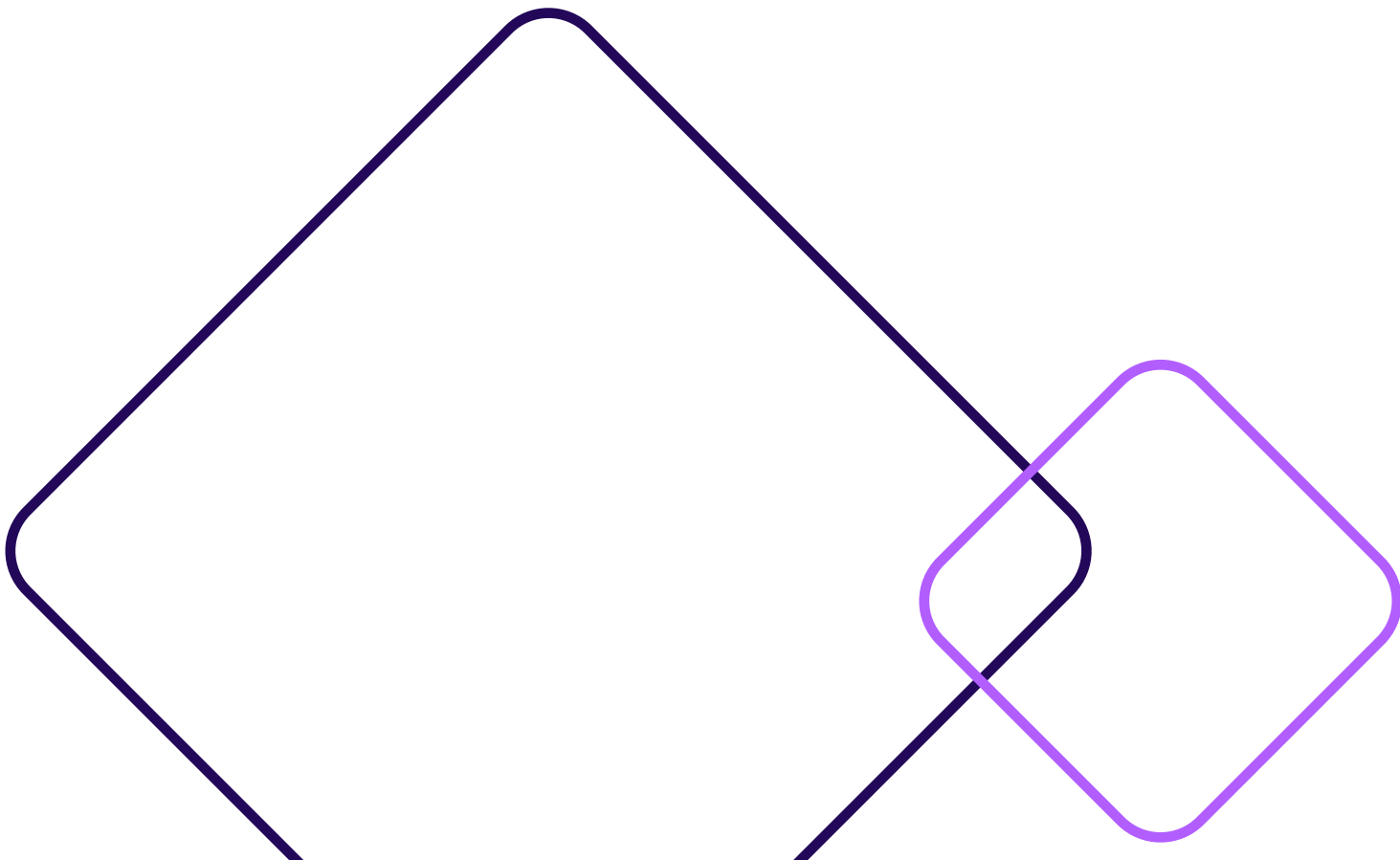
5 Barriers to ending violence against women and girls

In addition to the widespread prevalence of violence against women and girls, there are several specific barriers to ending it that emerged out of the research. See Table 4 for a summary of key barriers.

5.1 Individual barriers

Normalisation of violence and limited awareness of women's rights

A culture of silence that blames survivors of violence and protects perpetrators, alongside limited awareness of women and girls' rights, leads to the normalisation of violence in many countries. Violence is closely linked to patriarchal gender and social norms that subjugate women and girls to men and boys. This barrier emerged strongly in KIIs in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and Ethiopia.

In Pakistan, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, women commonly perceive violence as an ordinary aspect of their lives, often unaware of their rights and the protective legal frameworks in place (interviews, 2023). This frequently results in the lack of reporting. Despite high education levels among women and girls in Sri Lanka, key informants were concerned about women's acceptance of violence and the impacts of wider social conditioning that make many women feel that if they do not get punished, they are not loved (ibid.).

While key informants did not specifically talk about men and boys' normalisation of violence against women and girls, it is crucial to highlight that harmful societal and gender norms have a negative impact on all genders. Societal norms and expectations surrounding masculinity, including the pressure to embody toughness and power, significantly contribute to gender inequality, harassment, and abuse. These expectations shape the thinking and behaviour of men and boys, often having adverse effects on their mental well-being and relationships, contributing to the pervasiveness of violence against women and girls (Burrell, n.d.)

5.2 Organisational barriers

Limited services and resources

Limited services and resources for survivors pose serious health and safety challenges for women and girls. Poor service quality impacts survivors' trust in institutions and their overall well-being, safety, and healing. The issue of limited services and recourse is acute in Indonesia, according to interviewees, with survivors facing significant obstacles (interviews, 2023). The scarcity of services and shelters adds to the difficulties women face when attempting to leave abusive situations (ibid.). Key informants thought that the presence of institutionalised violence and patriarchy within existing shelters, which are predominantly government-run, complicates survivors' path to safety and recovery (ibid.). A similar theme emerged in interviews in Viet Nam, with key informants stating that the lack of services and shelters for women in need makes them vulnerable to violence and deters them from seeking help (ibid.).

Limited and restricted funding also has an impact on the work of CSOs in many of these countries (interviews, 2023). While these organisations may implement effective programmes, the short duration of funding cycles and their prescriptive nature compromises the initiatives' sustainability and scalability. This jeopardises the long-term effectiveness of projects aimed at assisting survivors.

Ineffective first responders

First responders, such as the police and healthcare providers, are often unable to provide support. This tends to be related to the lack of training in, sensitisation about, or prioritisation of a survivor-centred approach. In Pakistan and Nigeria, there are notable challenges concerning first responders, particularly the police and healthcare providers. From key stakeholder perspectives, these providers often lack the necessary sensitisation to address domestic violence and sexual assault effectively (interviews, 2023). Inadequate resources impede the ability of providers to offer the requisite support, on time and to high standards. These affect the overall response to such incidents and impose a heavy burden on survivors who come forward (ibid.).
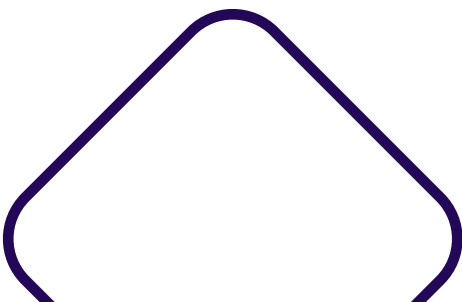
Challenges in Poland's medical system exacerbate the difficulties survivors face when seeking help (interviews, 2023). Key informants mentioned that chaotic mandatory reporting procedures contribute to inefficiency, potentially discouraging survivors from reporting violent incidents (ibid.). Access to essential services and assistance is also hampered by the lack of a streamlined and supportive medical response system (ibid.).

Hostile working environments

Work environments are found to be hostile places, where discrimination and violence are widespread. The issue of workplace-related violence is prevalent, extending beyond just sexual violence and abuse. In Pakistan, there are numerous workplace challenges, including the absence of adequate policies addressing issues such as gender pay gaps or harassment (ibid.). The environment in many workplaces is not conducive for women (millions work in the informal sector), posing obstacles to their active and equal participation in the workforce (ibid.). In Sri Lanka, women face various forms of violence and discrimination, including gender pay gaps (interviews, 2023). This underscores a broader challenge within the workplace, where unequal treatment and opportunities contribute to a hostile environment for women.

5.3 Societal barriers

Harmful gender and social norms

Rigid and restrictive gender and social norms constitute a prevalent obstacle to ending violence against women and girls. These norms, deeply embedded in patriarchal systems shaped by traditional, cultural, and religious beliefs, give rise to discriminatory practices that harm women and girls from an early age and minimise their prospects of reaching their full potential. Likewise, these norms harm young men and boys, proscribing ideas around masculinity, femininity, and romantic relationships, and promoting power imbalances that fuel discrimination, harassment, and abuse.

In Sri Lanka and Viet Nam, key informants explained that cultural norms profoundly influence perceptions of romantic relationships and raised concerns over the prevalence of IPV and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) (interviews, 2023). Harmful social and gender norms in Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia frequently lead to practices such as child marriages and FGM and impede the comprehensive dissemination of information on family planning and sexuality, especially to young girls.

Interviewees from Indonesia shared that there are many vulnerable girls in the country, who are victims of child sexual abuse, child marriages, and FGM (interviews, 2023). In eastern Indonesia, the Nusa Tenggara Timur province has a cultural practice known as 'Kawin Tangkap' (capture tradition). In this tradition, a man forcibly kidnaps and impregnates a woman without her consent. If the woman becomes pregnant, the man then proceeds to marry her (ibid.).

Social stigma and victim blaming linked to under-reporting

Social stigma, victim-blaming, and the normalisation of violence in societies deter survivors from seeking help and reporting violence. The way societies view violence against women and girls has detrimental consequences on survivors' reporting rates and recovery journeys. Underreporting emerged as a common barrier in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland.

Key informants associated causes of this barrier to deeply ingrained patriarchal mindsets, stigma surrounding reporting, and strong cultural traditions (interviews, 2023). In Ethiopia, key informants explained how societal norms encourage women to remain silent, and how reporting violence is met with shame: these adversely impact women and girls' future endeavours (ibid.). In Poland, women and girls harbour concerns about escalating violence and lack confidence that the legal system will provide support. There is a pervasive fear of being ridiculed and blamed, all contributing to apprehension about reporting and considering the absence of adequate support networks throughout the reporting process (ibid.).

5.4 Policy and legal barriers

Inadequate implementation and enforcement of existing laws

While governments are making efforts to end violence against women and girls, more work needs to be done to effectively address this issue. Despite legislative strides, the effectiveness of these measures remains hampered by a range of systemic issues, according to key informants. This leads to inefficient support for survivors, low rates of prosecution and, as a result, discourages survivors from reporting violence.

In Pakistan, where legal reforms have been

implemented, a victim-blaming culture and the lack of awareness among duty-bearers impede the translation of laws into tangible change (interviews, 2023). Despite the enactment of laws, the gap between legal frameworks and practical implementation remains wide, rendering them ineffective in reducing the incidence of violence (ibid.).

In Indonesia, there is a need for robust policies that foster empowerment that is impeded by deeply entrenched cultural and social values (interviews, 2023). Despite collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, the financial backing for women's empowerment initiatives in regional government agencies remains severely limited (ibid.). Moreover, the amalgamation of family planning programmes with women's empowerment, despite being distinct fields, reflects the lack of prioritisation (ibid.).

Viet Nam's struggle lies in outdated laws and the lack of gender equality guidelines, rendering prevention interventions unsustainable in key informant views (interviews, 2023). The negligible allocation of government funds for services underscores the lack of commitment to tackle the issue, leaving international organisations to fill the void through alternative budgeting exercises (ibid.).

Nigeria encounters slow justice processes and challenges in law enforcement, especially concerning issues like FGM (interviews, 2023). Despite having legal frameworks in place, the effective implementation of these laws is marred by systemic obstacles, contributing to a situation where justice for victims remains elusive (ibid.).

In Ethiopia, interviewees find that ineffective justice systems and the lack of accountability allow perpetrators to act with impunity (interviews, 2023). Inadequate law enforcement, defective investigative processes, and lenient sentencing fail to act as deterrents, fostering an environment where violence is accepted or viewed as inconsequential (ibid.).

In Poland, the fight against violence against women and girls is entangled with political agendas, notably of right-wing groups (interview, 2023). The past eight years witnessed a government targeting human rights advocates and, by extension, efforts to combat violence (IPFF, 2022). The prior administration, characterised by a reluctance to champion women's rights, often engaged in counterproductive meddling with laws rather than constructive reforms (Amnesty International,

2022). The negative trajectory persisted with the reduction in funding for human rights organisations and CSOs dealing with violence and women's rights, as well as introducing anti-abortion laws, described by a key respondent as the 'institutionalisation of violence against women and girls' (interview, 2023). While the administration elected in 2023 may renew hope in ending GBV and promoting gender equality, women and girls still face numerous legal barriers that are yet to be addressed (OHCHR, 2023).

5.5 Cross-cutting barriers

Increase in technology-facilitated gender-based violence

As technology advances, it introduces new dimensions to the spectrum of violence, expanding the potential for harm through digital channels. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) has become a shared reality in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland. In Pakistan, the surge in internet and social media use not only propels progress but also begets an unsettling rise in cyberbullying and harassment, posing a direct threat to women's safety, according to key informants (interviews, 2023).

In Indonesia, interviewees are concerned over the links between grooming and online violence (interviews, 2023). The virtual realm, intended for connection, becomes a breeding ground for exploitation, particularly impacting vulnerable groups like young girls (ibid.). Viet Nam navigates the dual nature of technology, which offers women opportunities in areas like e-commerce while simultaneously posing new threats (ibid.). Online recruitment is especially perilous, exposing those with limited access to employment opportunities to the risk of trafficking (ibid.).

In Nigeria, key informants saw the digital landscape as a deceptive terrain where women and girls fall victim to online violence, including sexual violence and death (interviews, 2023). In urban Ethiopia, interviewees noted that even though digital technology enhances access to information, it exposes women to a spectrum of potential risks, including the amplification of exploitation and negative portrayals on social media (ibid.).

In Poland, key informants warned of the hidden dangers of seemingly benign technological spaces, such as rideshare app drivers engaging in sexual violence against passengers (interviews, 2023; Mazur and Serafin, 2022).

Geographic location

Geographic disparities emerge as a significant determinant of violence against women and girls across countries. Differences in location within a country influence attitudes to violence against women and girls, and how survivors report on it and access services. Key informants from Pakistan noted a stark rural-urban divide (interviews, 2023). While major cities struggle with attitudes perpetuating victim-blaming within the justice system, rural areas face the additional challenge of limited access to basic services for women (ibid.). In Sri Lanka, key informants highlighted regional disparities, with notable differences in reporting across districts (ibid.). They also mentioned that rural-urban dynamics influence service accessibility, noting the variable effectiveness of referral systems in different settings (ibid.).

In Indonesia, interviewees discussed barriers to education in rural areas, with children enduring long commutes to school (interviews, 2023). This geographic challenge hampers their educational opportunities; young girls are more vulnerable to violence on their commute and at school (ibid.). In Viet Nam, key informants pointed towards the limited access of migrant populations to support services (ibid.).

In Nigeria, a north-south divide is prominent, with women in the south more likely to report domestic violence than their northern counterparts (Curran et al., 2020). In Ethiopia, interviewees noted a geographic dimension to reporting difficulties, with the intimidation of victims by perpetrators and the delayed resolution of reported cases being higher in rural areas, particularly for girls (interviews, 2023). This highlights the importance of understanding local dynamics to address violence against women and girls (ibid.).

Escalation of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic

As the world struggled with COVID-19, a 'shadow pandemic' of escalated violence against women and girls spread in different countries, including Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. The contexts of each country presented distinct challenges, but the growth of violence manifested as a global phenomenon (UN Women, n.d.b; Dawsey-Hewitt et al., 2021). In Pakistan, interviewees explained how economic stressors during lockdowns heightened family tensions, resulting in an alarming increase in violence, particularly against women (interviews, 2023).

In Indonesia, key informants referred to the surge in internet and social media use, resulting in a concerning increase in TFGBV, including the dissemination of pornographic images (interviews, 2023). The National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) received 940 reports of TFGBV in 2020, which was four times higher than the figure in 2019 (USAID, n.d.). Similarly, the Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SafeNet) registered an increase from 60 complaint cases in 2019 to 620 in 2020 (ibid.).

Lockdowns and restrictions in Nigeria had a disproportionate impact on female caregivers (interviews, 2023). The inability of women to move freely exacerbated their vulnerability to gender-based and domestic violence (ibid.).

Table 4. Summary of barriers to ending violence against women and girls

Level	Barriers to ending violence against women and girls
Individual	Normalisation of violence and limited awareness of women's rights
Organisational	• Limited services and resources • Ineffective first responders • Hostile working environments
Societal	• Harmful gender and social norms • Social stigma and victim-blaming linked to under-reporting
Policy and legal	• Inadequate implementation and enforcement of existing laws
Cross-cutting	• Increase in TFGBV • Geographic location • Escalation of violence during COVID-19

Source: Authors' analysis.

# 6 Conclusion and recommendations

This paper examines the enablers for and barriers to ending violence against women and girls, across Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Poland. Broadly, the Next Generation reports and interview data draw attention to the following.

Progress on drafting legislative frameworks on violence against women and girls and investment in support services available to survivors are the major enablers for ending violence against them. While governments have made strides to promote gender equality and end violence against women and girls, there are discrepancies between the laws in place and their implementation. The inefficient implementation of existing laws manifests in limited and low-quality services available to survivors, and in the continued social acceptance of harmful gender norms.
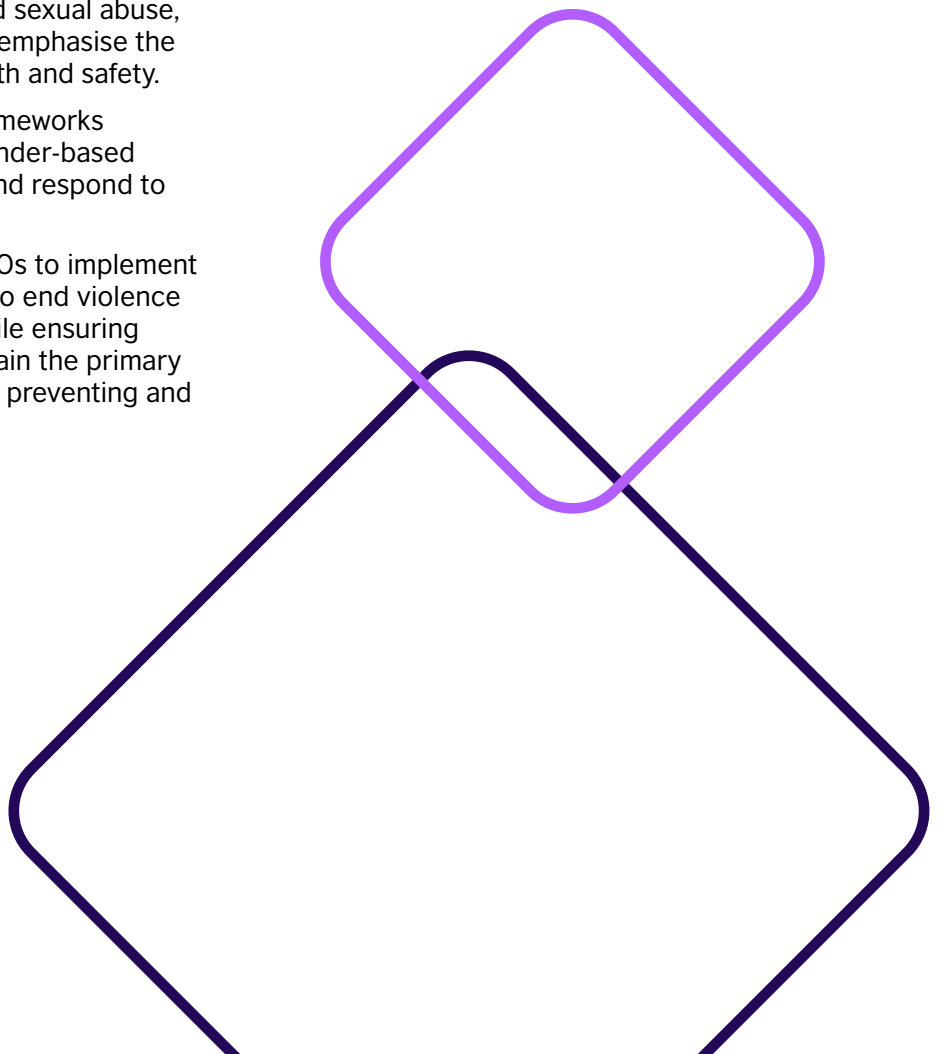
Recommendations

The findings of this paper reveal how different stakeholders can work to end violence against women and girls:

1. Families, peers, and friends play a major role in shaping the behaviours and attitudes of women and girls, as well as their experience of safety and support. Specific efforts would include:

   • Increasing awareness of and educating families on all aspects of violence against women and girls and their immediate and long-term impacts.

   • Providing a safe space for girls to grow free from stigmas and harmful gender norms.

   • Investing in the well-being of women and girls in families and friendship circles.

   • Enabling family members to act as role models for advancing progressive views on gender rights and equality.

1. CSOs and service providers (public and private) conduct crucial work to end violence against women and girls. However, they need to secure sustainable funding to replicate and/ or scale up their operations to amplify positive impacts. Efforts would include:

   • Collaborating with grassroots programmes and local communities to understand contextual needs and challenges.

   • Engaging in targeted campaigns to debunk patriarchal gender norms.

   • Strengthening collaboration between CSOs and government entities to leverage resources, scale up expertise, and holistically address violence against women and girls.

   • Holding government entities accountable for their actions to address violence against women and girls.

   • Establishing workplace regulations on violence against women and girls and gender equality, wherever these are absent, and strengthening implementation and oversight of the ones that exist.

   • Introducing or strengthening protocols in place to prevent exploitation of women and girls who work in the informal sector.

   • Establishing or strengthening trade unions to support labour movements and better protect women and girls.

   • Showcasing work done to end violence against women and girls to promote transparency and trust.

2. Media companies have the power to shape narratives on gender and social norms and violence against women and girls. Work in this area could involve:

   • Educating professionals on ethical reporting, specifically in a gender-sensitive lens.

   • Using less stigmatising and victim-blaming imagery when representing violence against women and girls.

   • Disseminating information on the resources and support available for and needed by women and girls affected by   violence.
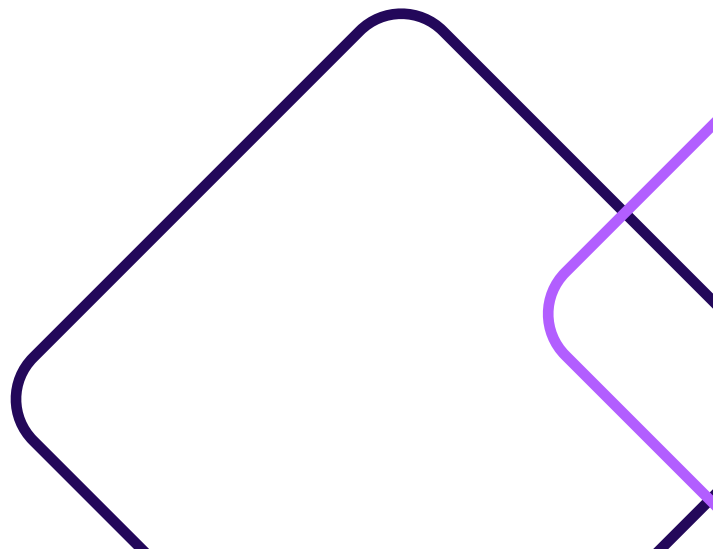
3. Schools and higher education institutions play a central role in the personal and professional development of young people and can prevent and respond to violence against women in many ways. Their work could include:

   • Making educational spaces safer so women and girls can access them freely.

   • Integrating gender-sensitive education within the curriculum, emphasising mutual respect, consent, sex education, and the dignity of all individuals, irrespective of gender.

   • Commemorating international days such as the Day of the Girl Child, Children's Day and Women's Day so that they can raise awareness of rights.

4. Policymakers' and legislators' work is essential to end violence against women and girls. Areas to focus on could include:

   • Reforming existing policies and laws to integrate violence prevention across different sectors, such as education, healthcare and legal systems, and ensuring their enforcement.

   • Addressing specific legal barriers, such as penalties for violating laws related to child marriages, and domestic and sexual abuse, and promoting reforms that emphasise the importance of women's health and safety.

   • Strengthening legislative frameworks on technology-facilitated gender-based violence to better prevent and respond to this form of violence.

   • Empowering and funding CSOs to implement programmes and initiatives to end violence against women and girls, while ensuring that government actors remain the primary stakeholders responsible for preventing and responding to violence.

   • Sensitisation and training programmes for policymakers to improve their understanding of the impacts of violence on the affected individuals and the wider society.

   • Launching nationwide campaigns to raise awareness on violence against women and girls and disseminating vital information on existing laws and policies.

   • Allocating resources effectively towards supporting potential victims and survivors, including equipping front-line providers with the capabilities and tools needed to prevent and respond quickly, and providing survivor-centred legal and medical support.

   • Providing services closer to marginalised groups, especially for those living in remote areas, minorities, and those with disabilities.

   • Collaborating with CSOs to ensure local needs and challenges are being addressed.

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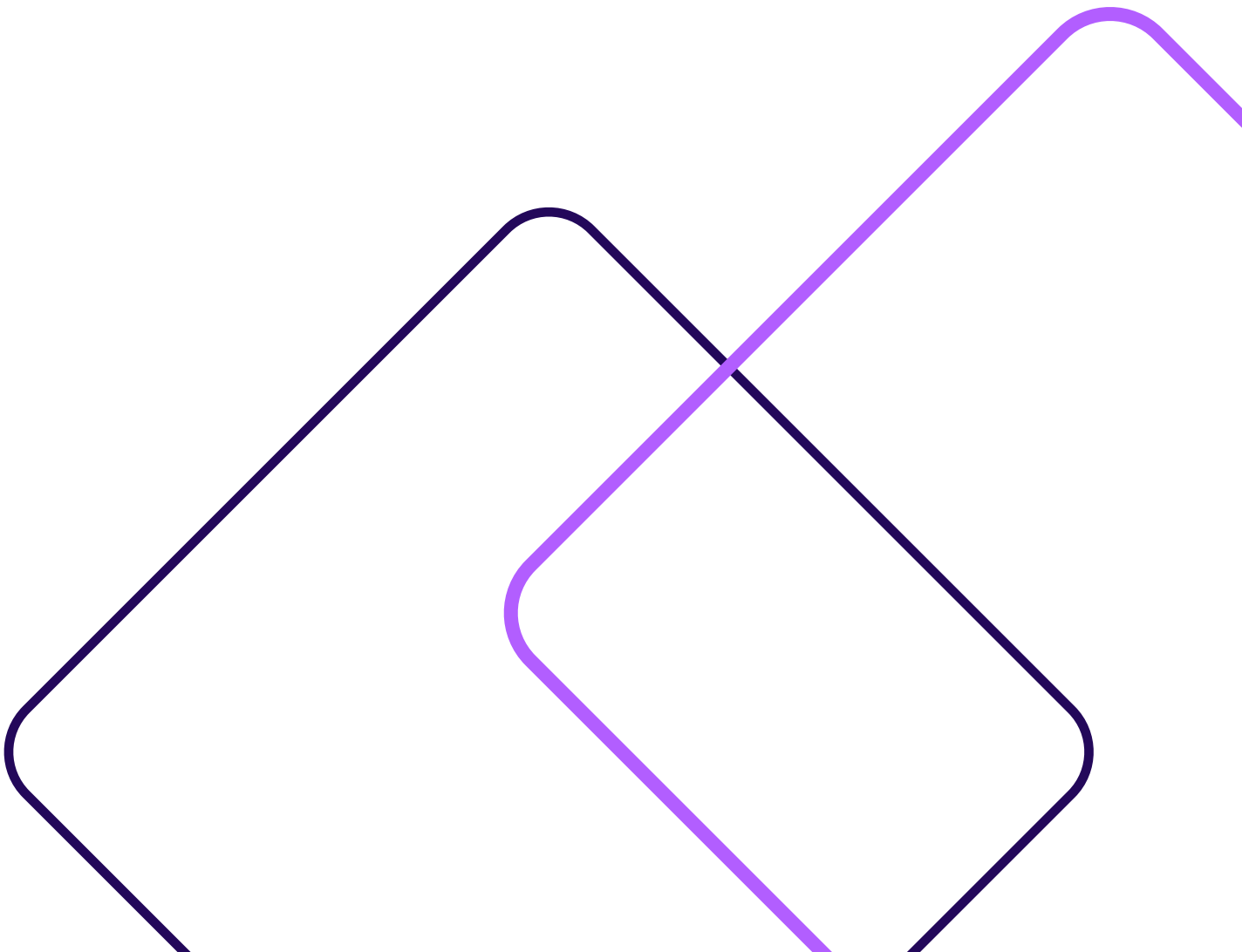
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