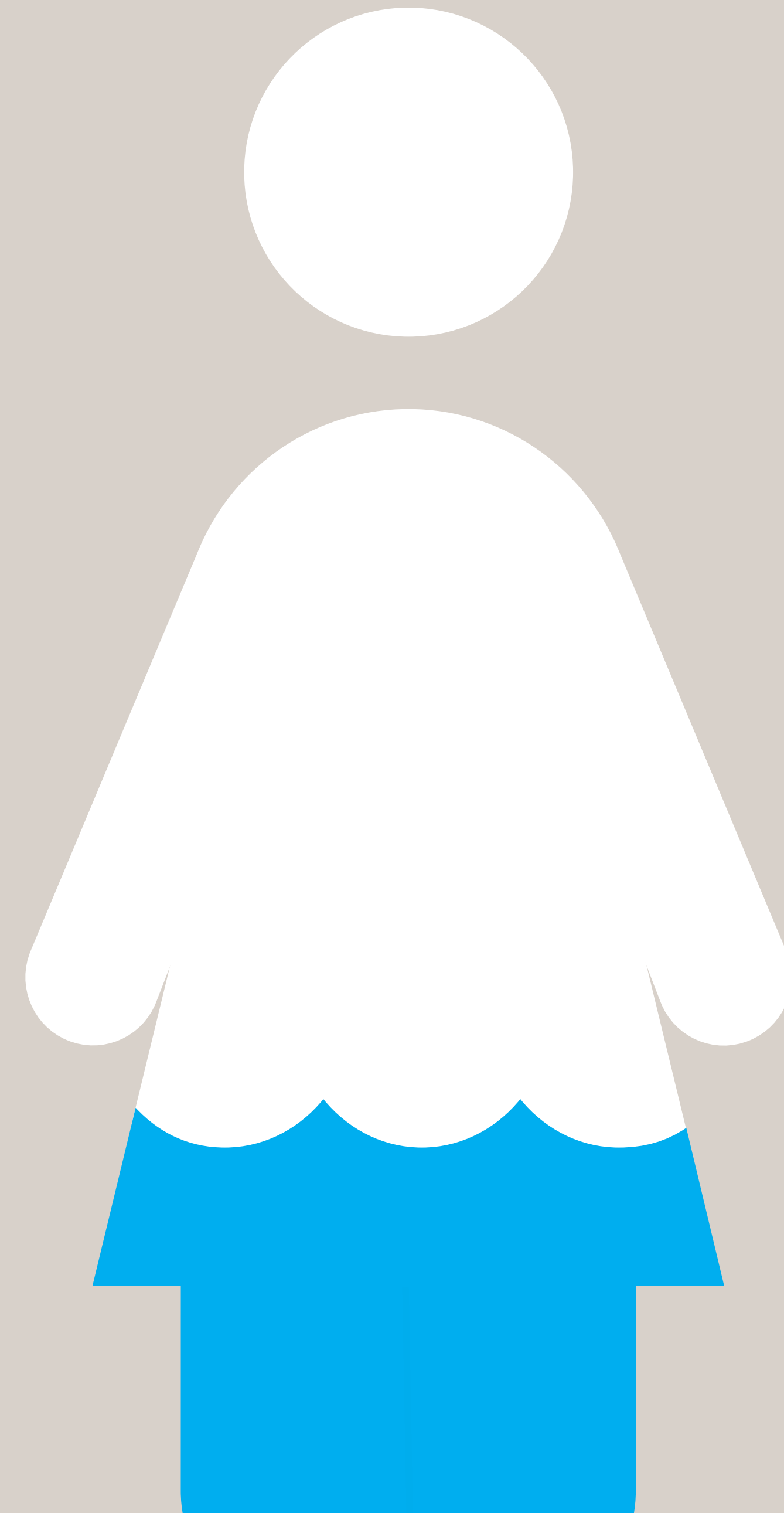


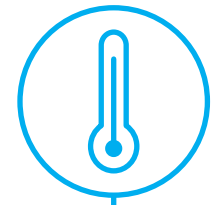
Adolescent Girls' Access to Water, Sanitation & Hygiene

Data Snapshot and Recommendations
for Gender-Responsive Climate Action



Despite progress, millions of adolescent girls around the world still lack access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. Among countries with data, women and girls are primarily responsible for water collection in seven out of ten (70%) of households using sources located off-premises.

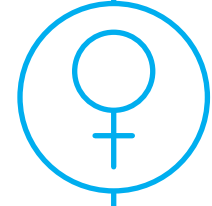
This action brief consolidates data on adolescent girls' access to water, sanitation and hygiene drawing on WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) global databases for the period 2000-2022. While gender analyses tend to group adolescent girls with adult women, this action brief spotlights WASH data on adolescent girls to better understand their needs vis-a-vis climate change. The brief also outlines key considerations for making climate-related financing, policy and programming responsive to adolescent girls. As global temperatures break barriers and exacerbate heatwaves, climate action will increasingly threaten adolescent girls' safety, learning and development.



The world is getting hotter.

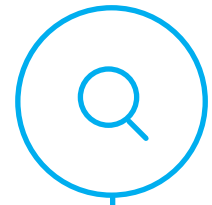
The last 12 months are the hottest on record.¹ While rising temperatures impact everyone, those who have historically contributed the least to climate change are disproportionately affected. Low-income countries experience a higher frequency of heatwaves; the poorest communities suffer the harshest consequences; and within these communities, people are not impacted by the adverse effects of climate change equally.²

Compared to adults, children are more vulnerable to climate shocks and environmental stresses.³ The countries atop the Children's Climate Risk Index are strongly correlated with societies with the highest measures of gender inequality.⁴



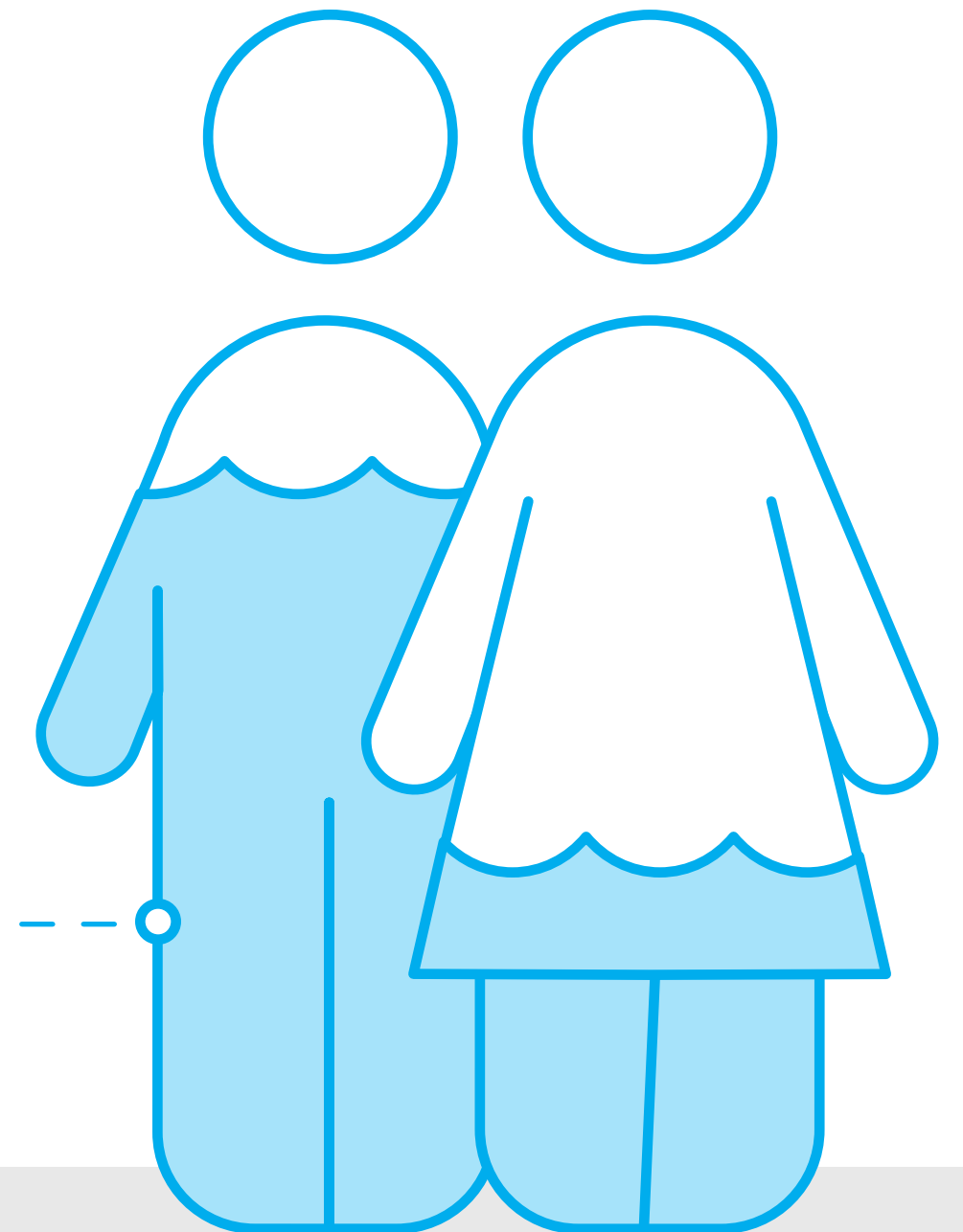
Because climate change and water are inextricably linked, global efforts to promote climate mitigation and adaptation must consider the gendered dimensions of water access and use.

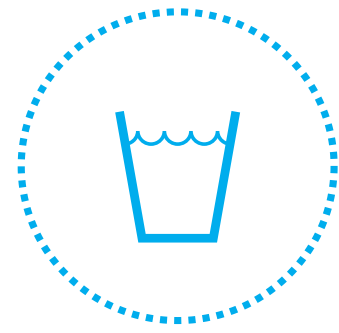
Women and girls have unequal roles in cooking, in caring for children and sick family members and in water collection. Their resilience is hampered by barriers to education, undervalued roles in agriculture and limited representation in the halls of political power. Moreover, the impacts of climate-related disasters expose girls to additional risks of experiencing violence and can lead to harmful coping strategies, including school dropout and child marriage.⁵



Given the gender-based differences in roles, responsibilities and resilience all stakeholders must apply an equity lens to climate action.

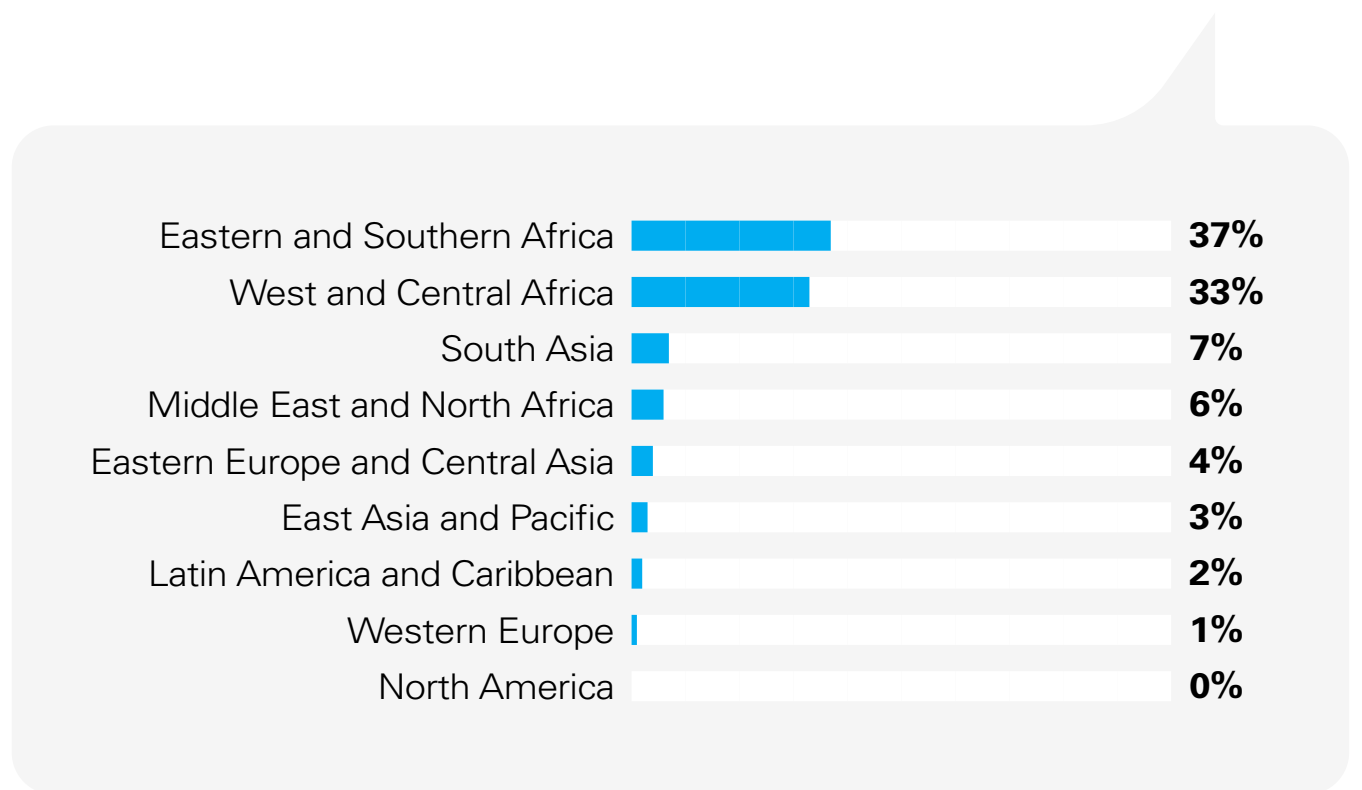
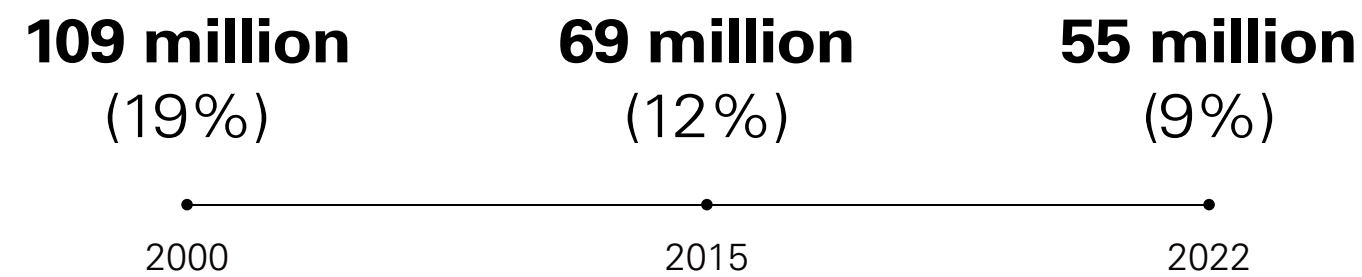
An equity lens promotes universal and equitable access to climate-resilient, safe and affordable drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for all, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls. This effort includes targeted investments, progressive social policy and multi-layered programming centered on adolescent girls' rights, development and leadership. Furthermore, an equity lens must focus on ensuring that all adolescent girls gain access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. Even though countries have made progress, the gains are not uniform across regions.



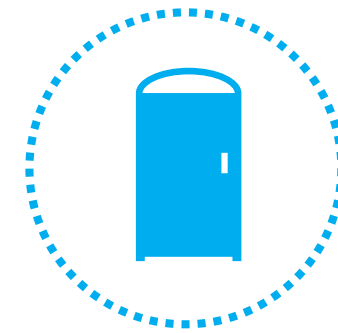


DRINKING WATER

Globally, nearly 1 in 10 (more than 55 million) adolescent girls aged 10-19 lacked access to at least basic drinking water services in 2022

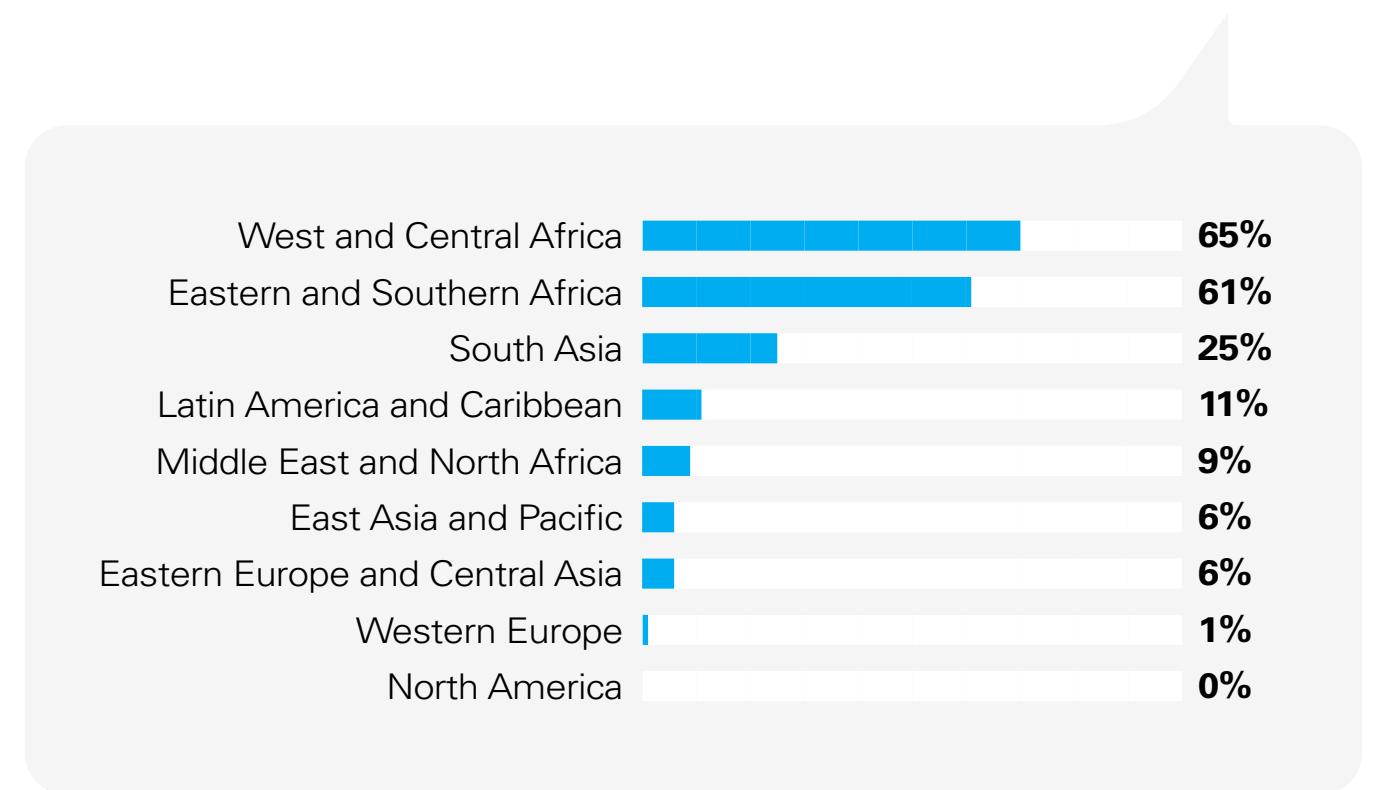
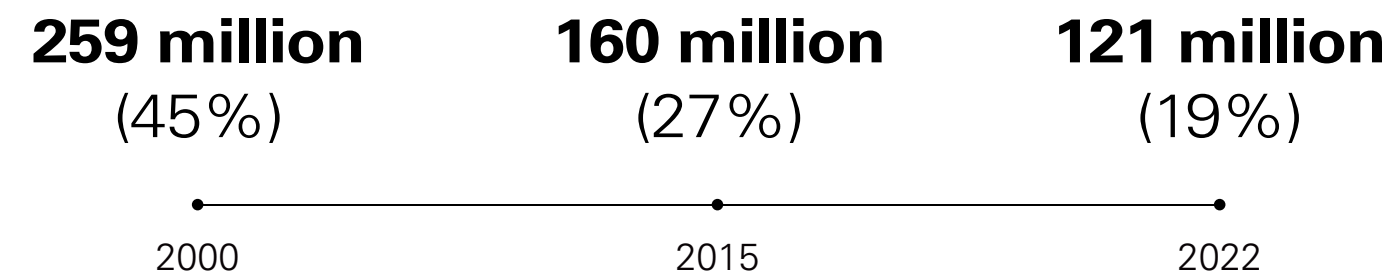


Source: WHO/UNICEF JMP 2023 Estimates
 Note: Basic drinking water services are from an improved source, provided collection time is not more than 30 minutes for a round trip, including queuing. Improved sources include: piped water, boreholes or tube wells, protected dug wells, protected springs, rainwater, and packaged or delivered water.

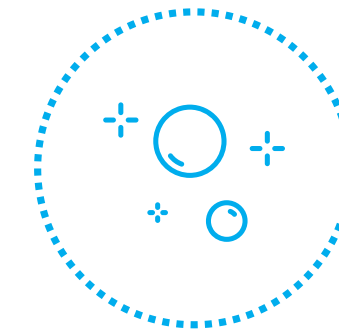


SANITATION

Globally, nearly 1 in 5 (approximately 120 million) adolescent girls aged 10-19 lacked access to at least basic sanitation services in 2022

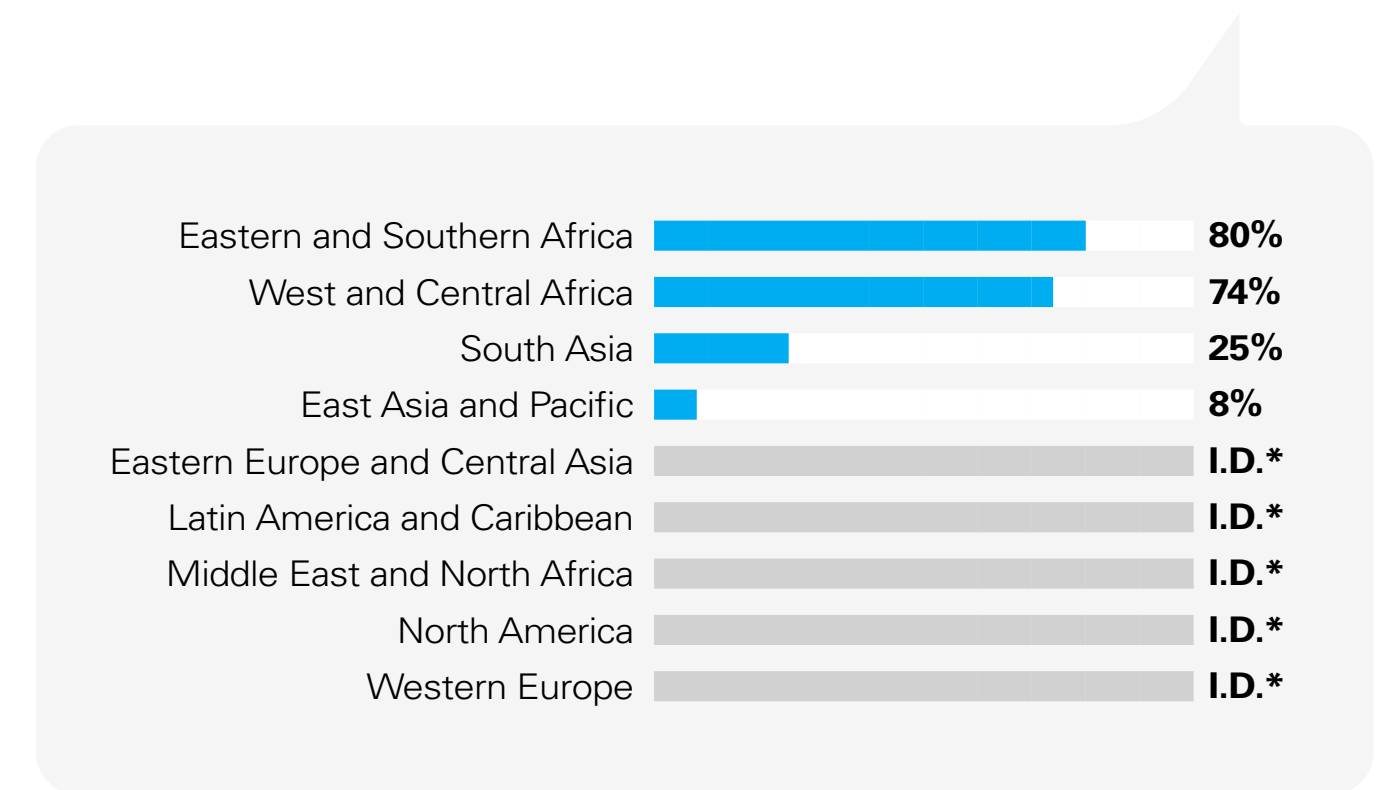
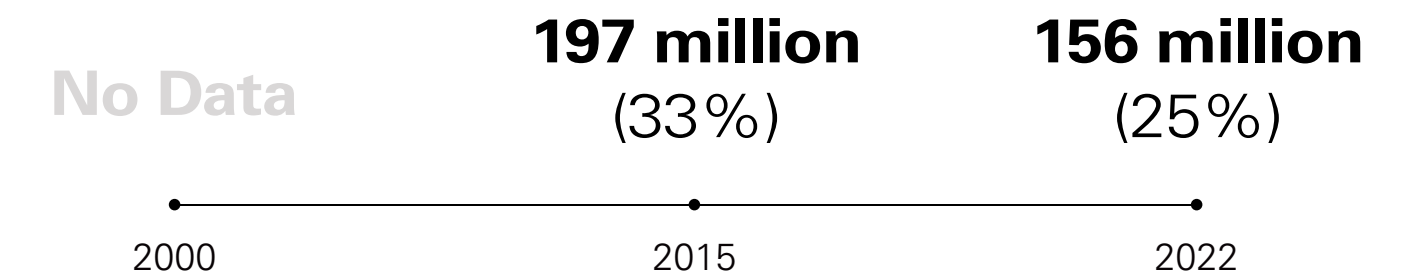


Source: WHO/UNICEF JMP 2023 Estimates
 Note: Basic sanitation services are improved facilities that are not shared with other households. Improved sanitation facilities include wet sanitation technologies such as flush or pour flush toilets connected to sewer systems, septic tanks or pit latrines; and dry sanitation technologies such as dry pit latrines with slabs (constructed from materials that are durable and easy to clean), ventilated improved pit (VIP) latrines, pit latrines with a slab, composting toilets and container based sanitation.



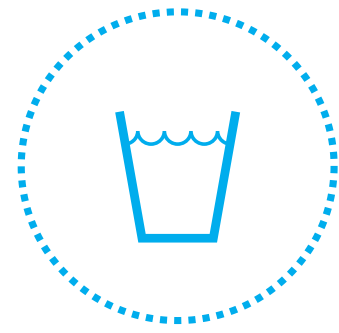
HYGIENE

Globally, 1 in 4 (nearly 156 million) adolescent girls aged 10-19 lacked access to at least basic hygiene services in 2022



*Insufficient Data

Source: WHO/UNICEF JMP 2023 Estimates
 Note: Basic hygiene services are defined as the availability of a handwashing facility with soap and water at home.



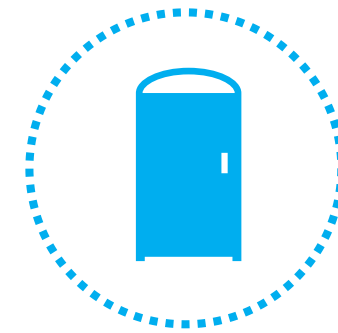
DRINKING WATER

Insights

- Since 2015, coverage of at least basic drinking water has increased from 88 per cent to 91 per cent in 2022, while more than 13 million girls have gained access to at least basic drinking water services between 2015 and 2022.
- In 2022, more than 55 million adolescent girls still lacked access to at least basic drinking water.
- In two out of nine UNICEF regions, more than 30 per cent of people lack access to at least basic drinking water.
- Most adolescent girls lacking access to basic drinking water services live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- In Eastern and Southern Africa, 37 per cent of adolescent girls lacked access followed by 33 per cent in West and Central Africa, in 2022.

Source: WHO/UNICEF JMP 2023 Estimates

Note: Basic drinking water services are from an improved source, provided collection time is not more than 30 minutes for a round trip, including queuing. Improved sources include: piped water, boreholes or tube wells, protected dug wells, protected springs, rainwater, and packaged or delivered water.



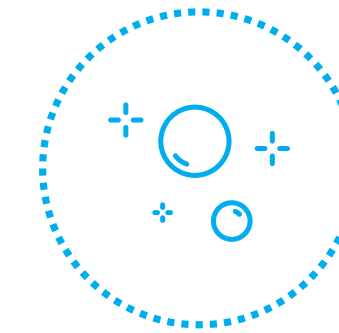
SANITATION

Insights

- Since 2015, coverage of at least basic sanitation has increased from 73 per cent to 81 per cent in 2022, while almost 40 million girls have gained access to at least basic sanitation services between 2015 and 2022.
- In 2022, around 120 million adolescent girls still lacked access to at least basic sanitation.
- In two out of nine UNICEF regions, more than 60 per cent of people lack access to at least basic sanitation.
- Regionally, nearly 2 in 3 adolescent girls aged 10-19 (44 million) lacked access to basic sanitation in West and Central Africa in 2022, followed by 6 in 10 adolescent girls (43 million) in Eastern and Southern Africa.
- In South Asia, 1 in 4 adolescent girls (42 million) lacked access in 2022.

Source: WHO/UNICEF JMP 2023 Estimates

Note: Basic sanitation services are improved facilities that are not shared with other households. Improved sanitation facilities include wet sanitation technologies such as flush or pour flush toilets connected to sewer systems, septic tanks or pit latrines; and dry sanitation technologies such as dry pit latrines with slabs (constructed from materials that are durable and easy to clean), ventilated improved pit (VIP) latrines, pit latrines with a slab, composting toilets and container based sanitation.



HYGIENE

Insights

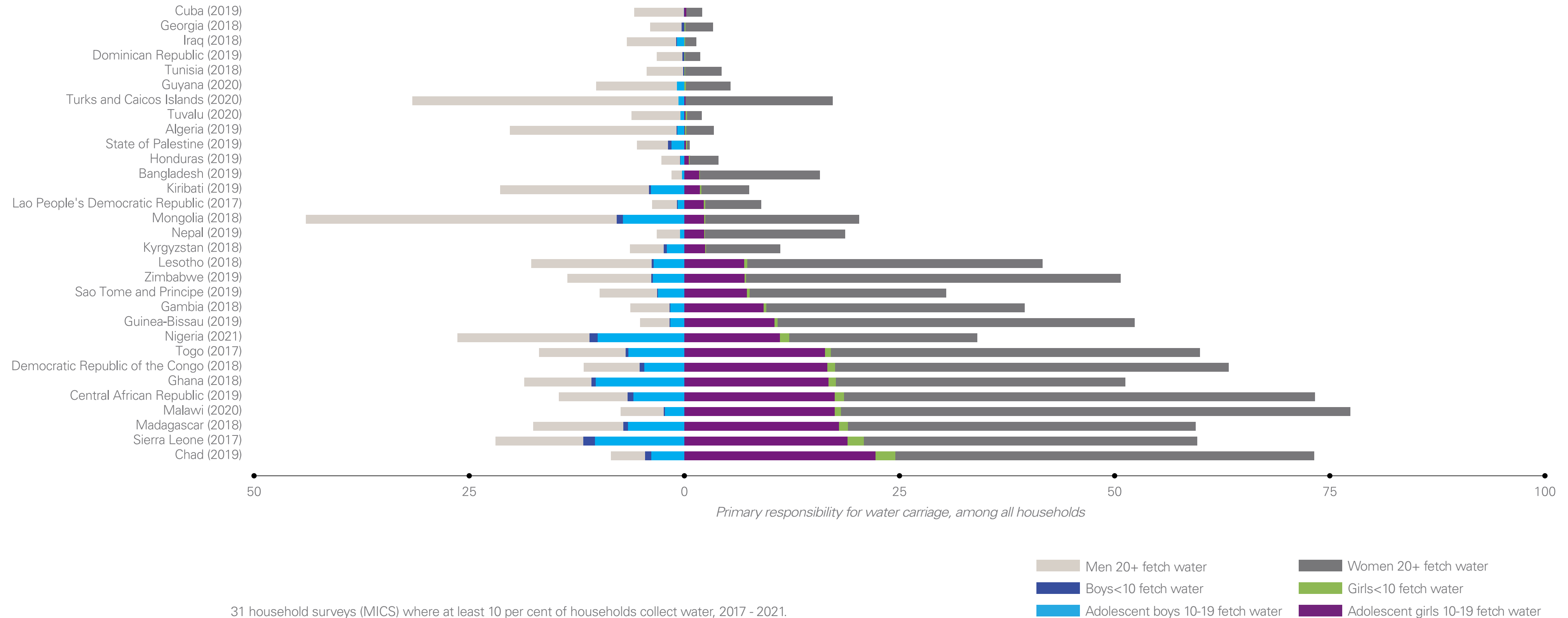
- Since 2015, coverage of basic hygiene has increased from 67 per cent to 75 per cent in 2022, while almost 30 million girls have gained access to basic hygiene services between 2015 and 2022.
- In 2022, nearly 156 million adolescent girls still lacked access to at least basic sanitation.
- In two out of four UNICEF regions with available data, more than 74 per cent of adolescent girls lacked access to basic hygiene.
- Among regions with data available, however, the proportion of girls lacking access to basic hygiene services is highest in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2022, 4 in 5 adolescent girls in Eastern and Southern Africa and almost 3 in 4 adolescent girls in West and Central Africa lacked access to basic hygiene services.
- South Asia has experienced a 15-percentage point decline in the population of adolescent girls lacking basic access since 2015, but 1 in 4 girls (42 million) in the region still lacked access in 2022.

Source: WHO/UNICEF JMP 2023 Estimates

Note: Basic hygiene services are defined as the availability of a handwashing facility with soap and water at home.

WATER COLLECTION

Adolescent girls are more likely than adolescent boys to be responsible for water collection



→ Among 31 countries in which at least 5 per cent of households collect water, few young girls and boys are the main person responsible for water collection within their households. However, as children enter adolescence, they are more likely to be relied upon to collect water and the activity becomes highly gendered, laying the foundation for even more pronounced gender disparities disadvantaging women in adulthood.

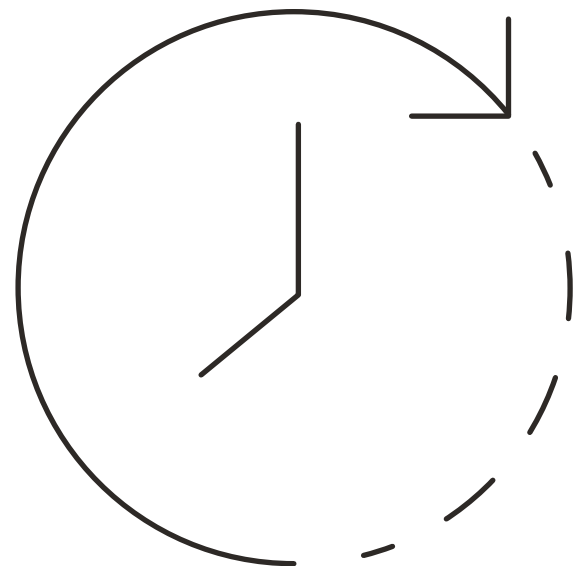
→ Adolescent girls are more likely than adolescent boys to be the primary person responsible for collecting water in 20 countries. In only three countries, are adolescent boys more likely to be responsible. In the remaining countries, the differences are negligible.

→ In 10 countries (Chad, Sierra Leone, Madagascar, Malawi, Central African Republic, Ghana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau),

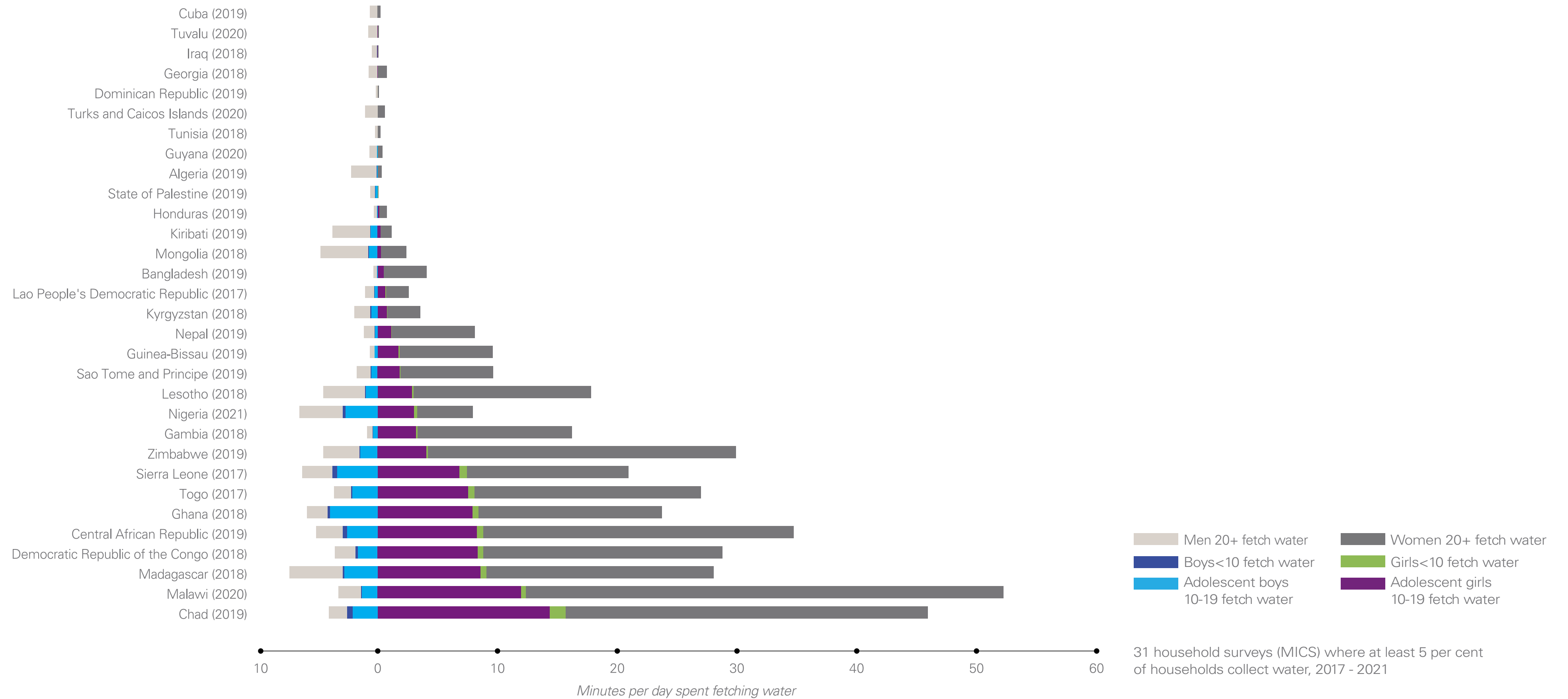
at least 10 per cent of households relied on adolescent girls to collect water compared to only three countries (Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria) in which 10 per cent or more of households relied on adolescent boys.

TIME SPENT COLLECTING WATER

Adolescent girls spend more time collecting water than adolescent boys – this responsibility will define their adulthood



In almost all countries with comparable data, the burden of water carriage remains heavier for women and girls



→ Adolescent girls spend more time collecting water than adolescent boys. Moreover, comparing adolescent girls' time spent collecting water to adult men's time demonstrates gendered expectations around the task.

→ In 11 countries, adolescent girls aged 10-19 spend on average, between 1 minute and 11 minutes more collecting water than men aged 20 and older (Chad, Malawi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar,

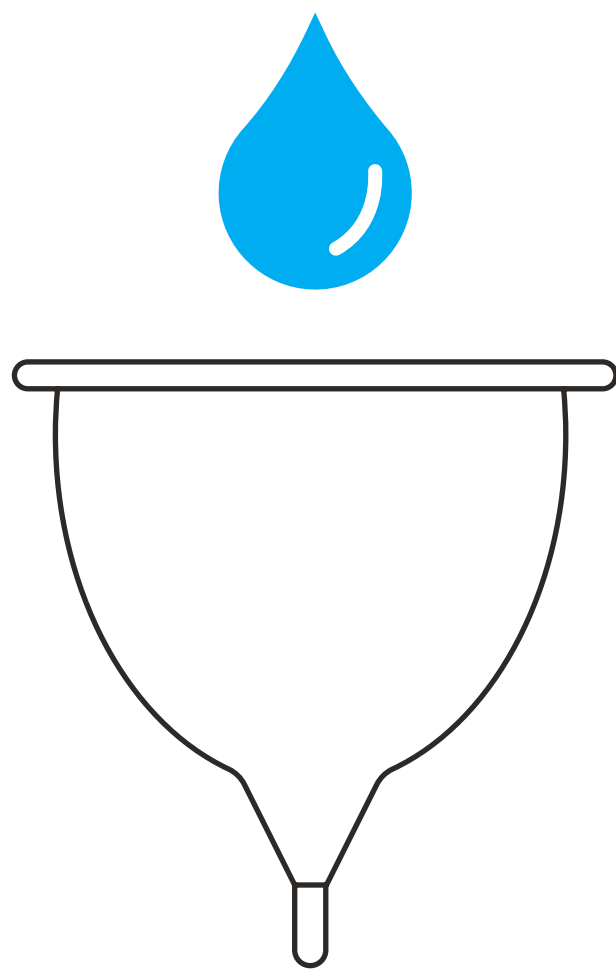
Central African Republic, Togo, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Zimbabwe).

→ Gender disparities in the time adolescents aged 10-19 spend collecting water are most pronounced in Chad, where, on average, girls spend 14 minutes collecting water compared to 2 minutes for boys. This is followed by Malawi where, on average, adolescent girls and boys spend 12 and 1 minute, respectively, collecting water.

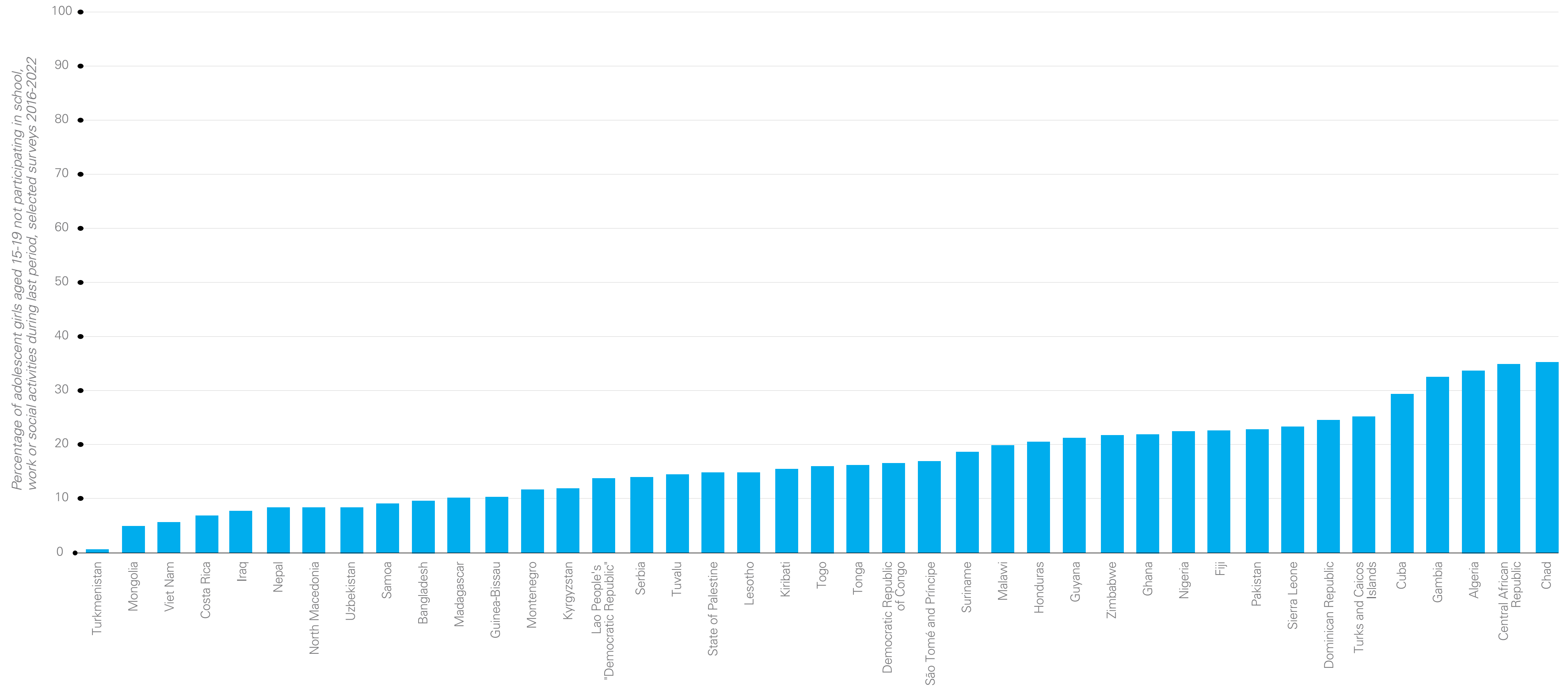
→ While gender differences in the time adolescents spend collecting water are relatively small, the disparities intensify as adolescents transition into adulthood, with women bearing the brunt of water collection in most countries with data. Moreover, even small differences disadvantaging girls can socialize them into thinking domestic duties are women's and girls' responsibilities, jeopardizing the continuity of their education and movement into the labour market.

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

Millions of adolescent girls did not participate in school, work, or other social activities during their last menstrual period.



Many adolescent girls did not participate in school, work or social activities during menstruation in 2022



→ In 32 of 41 countries with data, 10 per cent or more of adolescent girls aged 15-19 did not participate in one or more of the following activities during their last menstrual period: school, work or social activities.

→ As many as 1 in 3 girls did not participate in the Gambia, Algeria, Central African Republic and Chad.

Adolescent Girls & Gender-Transformative Climate Action

Addressing adolescent girls' basic WASH needs and water scarcity must be part of a comprehensive, gender-transformative approach to mitigate the impact of increased heatwaves, floods and other consequences of climate change and to build adolescent girls' resilience to climate change. A gender-transformative approach calls on international, national and local actors, including governments and the private sector, to apply a gender equity lens to analyses, policies and programming. These efforts include advancing implementation of the Sendai Framework Gender Action Plan.⁶ Grounded in evidence, gender-transformative action recognizes the need to center adolescent girls in climate adaption and mitigation efforts, investing systematically in:



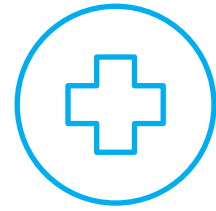
Meeting basic WASH needs, reducing adolescent girls' risks and vulnerabilities.



Building adolescent girls' resilience through education, skills and leadership.



Shifting gender norms that impede the full realization of their rights.



Millions of adolescent girls still lack access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

The global progress since 2015 is a notable achievement. However, the gains are uneven across regions, and where girls' access remains limited, they face an intersecting combination of other risks. For example, the millions of girls who do not attend school during menstruation likely face multiple intersecting obstacles to their participation.

Furthermore, approximately two-thirds of child marriages occur in regions that experience higher-than-average climate risks, including heatwaves and droughts.⁷ **As rising temperatures strain local economies and livelihoods, they fuel key drivers of harmful practices including child marriage.** Additionally, walking further distances and spending more time collecting water is associated with an increased risk of experiencing gender-based violence and girls' school dropout.⁸

A 2023 systematic review of research⁹ conducted between 1990 and 2022 concluded that most studies reported linkages between climate disasters and increases in child marriage.



Few climate change policies reference girls and their empowerment despite growing evidence on how to build their resilience, starting with girls' education.

A 2022 review concluded that only 2 per cent of national climate change strategies explicitly mention girls.¹⁰ An analysis by the Brookings Institute concluded that no country formally recognizes the role that investment in girls' education could play in its climate strategy. **Comparatively, countries that invest more in girls' education have fewer deaths from droughts and floods compared to countries that have invested less.**¹¹ Building resilience is also related to preparing adolescent girls to be actively engaged in the green economy.

The International Labour Organization¹² estimates that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, more than 80 per cent of the new green industry jobs will be in male-dominated and heavily digitized sectors. Given these trends, investments in girls' education as part of a climate change strategy must challenge gender-based perceptions that prevent girls from acquiring digital and green skills. In many settings, this effort also includes tackling the gender digital divide. Adolescent girls and young women have a significantly lower prevalence of digital skills than their male counterparts.

A UNICEF analysis of available data from 32 countries and territories found that, for every 100 male youth who have digital skills, only 65 female youth (aged 15-24) have the equivalent skills.¹³



Discriminatory gender norms remain barriers to the full realization of adolescent girls' rights.

In the last 200 years particularly, the role and status has changed largely because of shifting dominant notions of what society deems appropriate or acceptable for women and girls, among other socially marginalized groups.¹⁴ **Still, in many societies, some gender norms remain barriers to the full realization of adolescent girls' rights.** For example, norms often perpetuate unequal disproportionate domestic and care burdens that disadvantage adolescent girls including, but not limited to, water collection.¹⁵

In many contexts, these norms are manipulated to maintain power over women and girls. "Gender norms are social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men as well as girls and boys within a group or society; they are embedded in formal and informal institutions, including social, political, and economic systems and the built environment, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction in private and public life, [and], they play a role in shaping women's and men's access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power, and sense of self."¹⁶

Global efforts to build girls' resilience and reduce their climate and disaster-related risks requires a commitment to gender-transformative action across all levels (programmatic and systems) and with multiple stakeholders (girls themselves, parents, communities and political leaders). The increased attention to address climate change and its impact on women and children cannot be naïve about the interplay between discriminatory norms and how these influence the likelihood of realizing adolescent girls' rights. Ensuring adolescent girls in many of the most vulnerable communities inform and benefit from mitigation and adaptation efforts will require working with communities to advance girls' rights and leadership.

Adolescent girls, their families and communities, governments, international and civil society organizations (INGOs and CSOs), the United Nations (UN), academia and the private sector all have a role to play.

Key stakeholders can prioritize the actions across the following:



01

Evidence

- Conduct context-specific, sex-disaggregated and localized assessments to identify the underlying factors that contribute to adolescent girls' vulnerability and the gendered nature of climate and disaster risks.
- Use gender insights to inform, shape and influence climate-related investments, policies and programming.

02

Disaster Risk Reduction & Anticipatory Action Plans

- Ensure that climate and disaster policies and anticipatory action plans are gender-responsive (explicitly reference adolescent girls) and include measures to mitigate gender-based violence and harmful practices including child marriage and child labour.
- Ensure that disaster risk reduction, response and recovery measures are accessible to and address the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities.
- Engage adolescent girls and organizations led by women and girls in designing and implementing all climate and disaster-related policies, plans and interventions at local, national, regional and global levels.
- Integrate gender equality criteria into disaster risk reduction investments and increase funding allocations and access to financing for disaster risk reduction initiatives that advance gender equality.
- Ensure women and caregivers can easily access social protection safety nets — such as cash transfers — after a disaster to improve spending on child recovery within households.

03

Risk mitigation and violence prevention

- Reduce the distance traveled and time spent on water collection for women and girls, thereby freeing up time for education, leisure or other activities and mitigating exposure to risks of violence.
- Promote adolescent girls' menstrual health and hygiene, particularly in countries where menstruation socially isolates girls and is a barrier to the continuity of their education.
- Invest in the prevention and response to child marriage – adolescent girls have a right to continue their education, to benefit from the continuity of learning, and to be empowered to make decisions about their development and futures.
- Conduct safety audits and community engagement (including but not limited to men's and boys' engagement) to mitigate risks of gender-based violence against women and girls before, during and after a disaster.

04

Girls' education, skills development and leadership

- Prioritize and refocus on the commitment to girls' education and their continuity of learning, particularly the safe transition and completion of secondary education.
- Invest in building girls' digital and green skills, including efforts to address the gender digital divide and disparities in girls' STEM education.
- Strengthen capacity-building programmes to enhance girls' resilience and leadership – to be carried out in coordination with local and national efforts to engage the full spectrum of vulnerable or socially marginalized groups.
- Engage adolescent girls meaningfully in local, national, regional and global plans to address the climate crisis.

05

Transform harmful, discriminatory gender norms

- Raise awareness of gender roles and responsibilities and how these affect the different trajectories between girls' and boys' safety, learning and resilience to climate-related risks.
- Engage caregivers and influential community leaders in positive parenting and the opening of spaces for adolescent girls to contribute to public dialogue about decisions that influence their capacities to thrive amidst the climate crisis.
- Address the versions of masculinities (male norms) that reinforce women's and girls' subordination to men and boys, restrict girls' continuity of learning and condone harmful practices.
- Eliminate policies that discriminate against women and girls, further exacerbating climate-related risks and compromising their capacities to overcome shocks such as discriminatory land rights and nationality laws; restrictions on women and girls' access to public spaces and mandatory education fees.

Endnotes

¹ European Union Copernicus Climate Change Service (2023). *Monthly Bulletin: 2023 on track to become the warmest year after record October*. 10 November 2023. Brussels: European Union. [Link](#).

² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2023). *IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023*. Synthesis Report for the Sixth Assessment Report during the Panel's 58th Session held in Interlaken, Switzerland from 13 - 19 March 2023. [Link](#).

³ UNICEF (2021). *The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index*. New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

⁴ The Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) provides the first comprehensive view of children's exposure and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change; It ranks countries based on children's exposure to climate and environmental shocks, such as cyclones and heatwaves, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks, based on their access to essential services. [Link](#). Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a composite metric of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. [Link](#).

⁵ Doherty, Fiona & Rao, Smitha & Radney, Angelise. (2023). Association between child, early, and forced marriage and extreme weather events: A mixed-methods systematic review. *International Social Work*.

⁶ Gender Action Plan to Support Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (2024). [Link](#).

⁷ Save the Children (2023). *Global Girlhood Report. Girls at the Centre of the Storm – Her Planet, Her Future, Her Solutions*. Washington DC: Save the Children. [Link](#).

⁸ Tallman, PS et al (2023). *Water insecurity and gender-based violence: A global review of the evidence*. *WIREs Water*,10(1) [Link](#).

⁹ Doherty FC et al. (2023). Association between child, early, and forced marriage and extreme weather events: A mixed-methods systematic review.

¹⁰ Kwauk et al (2019). *Girls' education in climate strategies Opportunities for improved policy and enhanced action in Nationally Determined Contributions*. Washington DC: Brookings Institute, Plan International and UNICEF.

¹¹ Blankespoor, B., Dasgupta, S., Laplante, B., & Wheeler, D. (2010). *Adaptation to Climate Extremes in Developing Countries*.

¹² International Labour Organization (ILO), *Jobs in a net-zero emissions future in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020*.

¹³ UNICEF (2023). *Bridging the Gender Digital Divide*. New York: United Nations Children's Fund. [Link](#).

¹⁴ Pearse & Connell (2016) *Gender Norms and the Economy: Insights from Social Research*, *Feminist Economics*, 22:1, 30-53; Harper, C; et al. (2020). *Gender, Power and Progress: How Norms Change*. London: Overseas Development Institute. [Link](#).

¹⁵ UNICEF, UN Women and Plan International, *A New Era for Girls: Taking Stock of 25 Years of Progress*, New York, 2020. [Link](#).

¹⁶ Adapted from Cislighi, B. and L. Heise (2018). *Theory and Practice of Social Norms Interventions: Eight Common Pitfalls*. *Global Health* 14, 83, cited in Cookson, T.P., L. Fuentes, M.K. Kuss, and J. Bitterly. 2023. *Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice*. UN-Women Discussion Paper Series No. 42. New York: UN-Women. [Link](#).

unicef  | for every child