

ETHIOPIA: GENDER ISSUES BRIEFING NOTE

Headline Facts

Women seats in Parliament	Women working in the labour force	Women literacy rate	Women's experience of physical or sexual violence in lifetime	Deployed female UN peacekeepers
38.8% (2018) ¹	74% (2018) ¹ (men 87%) ¹	44.4% (2017) ² (men 59.2%) ²	28% (2016) ³	600 (2019) ⁴ (total number: 8000)



GENDER EQUALITY Ethiopia with its more than 110 million people is home to an ethnically and socially diverse population.⁵ Ethiopia has made progress towards gender equality such as reducing the education gap between boys and girls and increasing the representation of women in politics.⁶ However, Ethiopia remains a highly patriarchal society where women are disadvantaged to men. Ethiopia's ranking as 117 out of 149 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index reveals that gender inequality is pervasive.⁷ Women's experiences vary between different ethnic groups and is influenced by socioeconomic position, where poor women often face multiple disadvantages.⁸ Ethiopia has in recent years experienced both drought and conflicts, which have worsened pre-existing inequalities such as increasing women's unpaid labour, as well as created challenges such as gender-based violence (GBV) in temporary settlements and conflict-related sexual violence.^{9 10}

SOCIAL NORMS In most households, roles and responsibilities follow gendered patterns. Men are traditionally seen as the breadwinner and decision-maker in the family.¹¹ Girls help women with household chores and time-consuming activities such as collecting firewood and fetching water.⁸ ¹¹ These tasks are allocated to women on top of being engaged in productive work such as agriculture and livestock rearing, resulting in an unequal work burden.⁶ A girl's primary role is to become a wife and mother, which comes with strict controlling of female sexuality.⁸ Girls' abstinence from sex is closely linked to family honor, which affects age of marriage as some families choose to marry their daughters early to reduce the risk of pre-marital sex.⁸ Some girls are forced to undergo "virginity testing" before marriage.⁸ Wife beating is widely accepted, although there is a trend that it is becoming less accepted, especially among men. In the latest DHS, 63% of Ethiopian women aged 15-49 believed that wife beating can be justified, compared with 28% of men.³

DECISION-MAKING Women's decision-making power is limited compared to men's in many aspects. Men generally dominate household decision-making, although the majority of both women and men in the most recent national Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reported that most household decisions are made jointly.³ Men are more likely to decide how to spend income and land use.³ Although many women face restrictions to participate in decision-making on equal terms to men in their households, Ethiopia has seen significant advancements in women's political participation in recent times. In 2018, Ethiopia became the second African state after Rwanda to have equal gender representation in the cabinet¹², and in 2019, Ethiopia's parliament appointed the country's first female president.¹³ Female government officials launched 'Jegnit' in 2018, a national campaign to promote women's role in peacebuilding,¹⁴ and the environment for organisations working for gender equality is improving with the changing political landscape. Ethiopia has a long history of women organising in different forms, including in both peacebuilding and military organisations,¹⁵ and there is a growing women's movement working on a variety of issues, including promoting female leadership¹⁶

SECURITY AND JUSTICE Women are seen in various roles related to security and justice, for instance Ethiopia's Minister of Peace is female¹², and Ethiopia has received recognition for its contribution of female peacekeepers to the United Nations.⁴ However, women's security and access to justice remain restricted. Government security forces have been accused of violence and killings of civilians, including sexual violence against women and there have been reports of rapes against women in government detention centers.^{17 18} Weak law-enforcement and lack of capacity among police and judiciary to handle GBV cases constitute barriers to upholding women's rights.¹⁹ Women are often pressured by family and communities, and sometimes even the police, to turn to traditional justice systems or solve the dispute within the family instead of reporting their cases to the police.^{20 21}

LEGISLATION Ethiopia has signed international agreements relating to women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).⁸ Gender equality is enshrined in Ethiopia's constitution; however, the legal framework does not provide full protection of women's rights. Rape within marriage is not criminalised²² and despite the legal age of marriage being set to 18, many girls get married younger in customary or religious marriages.²³

GENDER, ETHNICITY AND CONFLICT In 2018, Ethiopia saw an unprecedented outbreak of inter-communal conflicts across the country, resulting in the highest level of internally displaced people in the world.²⁴ The long-standing conflicts have led to 3 million people being internally displaced.²⁵ Drivers of conflict include territorial disputes between ethnic groups and competition over land and water resources.²⁴ Women and girls are at increased risk of GBV during and following the conflicts.^{5 25} Groups at particular risk include adolescent girls, female headed households, pregnant, disabled and elderly women.²⁶ Humanitarian actors report that negative coping mechanisms are on the rise, including women engaging in survival sex²⁶ and families resorting to child marriage.²⁵ There are reports of sexual violence against women in conflict areas²⁷, and government security forces have been accused of perpetrating sexual violence against Ogadeni and Oromo women during conflicts in recent years.¹⁷

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) In the most recent DHS, 28% of ever-married women aged 15-49 reported experience of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, similar to the global average of 30%.^{3,28} For physical violence, a current or former husband is the most likely perpetrator of violence.³ Husband's use of alcohol and men's controlling behaviour are both strong predictors of spousal violence.³ GBV starts affecting girls at an early age and increases as they reach adolescence.⁸ Women who live away from their families and who are poor are also at high risk of GBV, especially sexual violence.⁸ These include young women in domestic labour, women who sell sex and women who live in the streets.⁸ Ethiopian women who work in domestic labour abroad, primarily in the Middle East, are also subject to GBV and forced labour.²⁹ Women and girls who migrate or are trafficked are at risk of sex trafficking, both during transit and in their countries of destination.²⁹ Child marriage is practiced across Ethiopia but particularly common in rural areas⁸, with the lowest median age of marriage being recorded in Afar and Amhara. ²² Nationally, 14% of girls are married by age 15 and 40% are married before they turn 18.²² Drivers of child marriage in Ethiopia include poverty and social norms (also see 'social norms'). Some parents marry their daughters at a young age in hope that it will bring them grandchildren who can take care of them when they grow old, while some marry them to protect the family's social status as unmarried women are stigmatised.²² Girls are also subject to marriages by abduction, which is often followed by sexual violence.³⁰ Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is another harmful practice that affects girls throughout the country. Nationally, an estimated 47% of girls aged 15-19 have undergone FGM/C.³ It is most common among Muslim communities (82%) and in the Afar (91%) and Somali (98.5%) regions.³ Beyond the impact of GBV on women's and girls' physical and mental wellbeing, the risk of GBV is also a barrier to women's and girls' movement.¹¹

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[Image]: Embassy of Ethiopia in Brussels (2019) *Ethiopia commits to enhancing women's participation in peacekeeping*, <https://ethiopianembassy.be/2019/02/05/ethiopia-commits-to-enhancing-womens-participation-in-peacekeeping/>

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