



Plan International UK

REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES: GIRLS **CHALLENGING** THE GENDER RULES

Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador

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CONTENTS

Summary	6	3 Conclusions and recommendations	78
Introduction	10	3.1 Conclusions.....	78
i. Report overview.....	12	3.2 Recommendations and future research.....	80
ii. Report structure.....	13	3.2.1 Recommendations for donors and practitioners.....	80
1 Exploring and conceptualising 'disruption' of gendered social norms	14	3.2.2 Building the evidence base for future programming.....	81
1.1 Underpinning inequality: the significance of gendered social norms.....	14	Annex One: Background of the <i>Real Choices, Real Lives</i> study and summary of data	82
1.2 Gender socialisation and influencing.....	15	Background and study design.....	82
1.3 Exploring gender socialisation and change in <i>Real Choices, Real Lives</i>	17	Future direction of <i>Real Choices,</i> <i>Real Lives</i>	83
2 Looking deeper: analysis of 'glitches' and influences	22	Overview of the Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador girls' contexts and data.....	84
2.1 Adolescent pregnancy, relationships and marriage.....	23	Annex Two: Contextual analysis: indicators and policy/legal framework for gender equality	88
2.1.1 Adolescent pregnancy.....	23	Endnotes	91
2.1.2 Relationships.....	34		
2.2 Expectations of behaviour.....	40		
2.2.1 Obedience and play.....	40		
2.2.2 Violent behaviour.....	47		
2.3 Gender roles: division of labour.....	58		
2.4 Education and future career aspirations.....	71		
2.4.1 Education.....	71		
2.4.2 Employment.....	73		

LIST OF BOXES, FIGURES, MAPS, TABLES AND CASE STUDIES

Box 1 Human Development Index and Gender Inequality Index rankings.....	10	Figure 4 Parent/carer attitudes: “Girls are better behaved than boys”, 2018-2019.....	40
Box 2 Background of the <i>Real Choices</i> , <i>Real Lives</i> study.....	11	Figure 5 Parent/carer attitudes: “Girls are at more risk of violence than boys”, 2018-2019.....	49
Box 3 Definition of social norms and gender norms.....	14	Figure 6 Leyla’s timeline of ‘glitches’ (<i>when</i> and <i>where</i>).....	52
Box 4 Indicators on fertility in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador.....	23	Figure 7 Parent/carer attitudes: “Boys should have more freedoms than girls”, 2018-19.....	56
Box 5 Sexual and reproductive health.....	24	Figure 8 Parent/carer attitudes: “Boys and girls should have the same household responsibilities”, 2018-2019.....	58
Box 6 Grandparents as caregivers.....	27	Figure 9 Juliana’s timeline of ‘glitches’ (<i>when</i> and <i>where</i>).....	66
Box 7 Marriage statistics in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador.....	35	Figure 10 Education statistics in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador.....	72
Box 8 Girls’ awareness of and critique of gendered issues in relationships.....	37	Figure 11 Young people not in education, employment or training.....	73
Box 9 Saying “no” to parents and peers.....	41	Map 1 <i>Real Choices</i> , <i>Real Lives</i> Cohort Study map: Where the girls live.....	8
Box 10 Corporal punishment and girls’ agency.....	42	Map 2 Identifying ‘glitches’ across the Latin American and Caribbean countries.....	18
Box 11 ‘Machismo’ and the impact of gendered norms on boys and men.....	47	Table 1 What is and is not captured in our data.....	17
Box 12 Gender-based violence in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador.....	55	Table 2 Summarising multiple factors of influence.....	20
Box 13 Violence restricting girls’ freedoms.....	56	Table 3 Brazil, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador: Summary of Cohort girls’ household structures (in 2018) and participation.....	84
Box 14 The impact of gender roles on family relationships.....	60	Case study: Doris, El Salvador.....	30
Box 15 Legislation promoting gender equality in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador.....	62	Case study: Leyla, Dominican Republic.....	50
Box 16 Female employment in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador.....	69	Case study: Juliana, Brazil.....	64
Figure 1 Gender socialisation: spheres of influence in girls’ lives.....	15		
Figure 2 Parent/carer attitudes: “It is worse for a girl to have a child outside of marriage than it is for a boy”, 2018-2019.....	28		
Figure 3 Doris’s timeline of ‘glitches’ (<i>when</i> and <i>where</i>).....	32		

ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
FGC/M	Female genital cutting/mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GII	Gender Inequality Index
HDI	Human Development Index
ILO	International Labour Organization
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
NEET	Youth not in education, employment, or training
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	South East Asia
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
VAW	Violence against women

SUMMARY

This latest report from the *Real Choices, Real Lives* Cohort study is the third in a series of three reports for 2019, focusing on the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) countries – Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador. The first report, published in March 2019, focused on Sub-Saharan Africa (Benin, Togo, and Uganda), and the second report in the series, published in August 2019, focused on South East Asia (Cambodia, the Philippines, and Vietnam). This report looks in depth at the responses of the 35 girls across the three LAC countries to the gender socialisation process which has surrounded them from birth. The analysis is based particularly on data from 2015 to 2018, when the girls moved from middle childhood into early adolescence. It draws substantially on detailed longitudinal case studies of three girls. These girls’ stories were selected, not to represent a generalised example of the LAC Cohort, but because they provide more pronounced cases of ‘pushback’ and, through the girls’ varied experiences, enable us to consider different potential influences.

The study identifies the strength of gendered expectations, but also that there is potential for gender norms to shift – with girls, and their families, questioning what is considered appropriate and beginning to do things differently, or aspiring to things being different from the norm. We see that there can be ‘glitches’ in the process of gender norm reproduction, and the report therefore looks closely at: how and why girls start to question the expectations they grow up with; and when and why they decide that “something different” than the norm is possible. Our analysis provides the foundation for considering whether they continue to hold this belief as they grow older. *Real Choices, Real Lives* is uniquely placed to track this as the girls continue to grow up and to use this information to both support girls’ resistance and influence programming and policy within the international development community.



Shelling pigeon peas in the Dominican Republic, 2018

MAP 1: REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES COHORT STUDY MAP

Where the girls live



KEY

- M** Migrated
- D** Deceased
- L** Left the study
- as of 2017

VIETNAM

Chau	Oanh
Hang	Quynh
Hoa	Sen
Huong	Tan
Kieu	Thi
Kim	Thom
Ly	Tien
Mai	Trinh
Nguyet	Uyen
Nhi	Yen

PHILIPPINES

Chesa	Melanie
Christine	Michelle
Darna	Reyna
Dolores	Rosamie
Jasmine	Rubylyn
Jocelyn	Angela M
Mahalia	Nicole D
Maricel	

UGANDA

Amelia	Nimisha
Beti	Rebecca
Dembe	Sheila
Jane	Shifa
Joy	Sylvia
Justine	Achen M
Mirembe	Nasiche D
Namazzi	

CAMBODIA

Bopha	Reaksmei
Davy	Roumany
Kannitha	Sothany
Leakhena	Thearika
Lina	Kanya M
Mony	Mealea M*
Nakry	Sokanha M*
Puthea	

Margaret
Thea
Elaine **M**
Elizabeth **M**
Ianna **M**
Lillian **D**
Omalaria **D**

INTRODUCTION

Since 2007, Plan International UK has been tracking the lives of over 120 girls across nine countries in three regions (see Map 1).¹ Our qualitative longitudinal study, *Real Choices, Real Lives*, provides significant insights into the choices, decisions, and realities that shape girls' lives as they grow up in a gendered world (see Box 2 and Annex One). Given our position as an organisation promoting children's rights, with a focus on adolescent girls, the evidence from *Real Choices, Real Lives* is especially valuable for informing our gender transformative programming and policy work, as well as that of others in the field.² As such, evidence from the study is targeted at international development practitioners and policy makers, as well as the development research community.

In this report – the third in a series of regionally-focused reports – we look at the three Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries that are part of *Real Choices, Real Lives*: Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador. Our first report looked in depth at Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)⁵ and the second report in the series analysed the Cohort data from South East Asia (SEA).⁶ The analysis and discussion of *where* and *when*, and *how* and *why* girls are challenging gendered expectations in SSA and SEA is already framing and informing our understanding in LAC. Once all three regionally-focused reports have been completed, we will be able to analyse and synthesise significant similarities and divergences across the study. However, to ensure that the same depth of analysis of the lives and experiences of the girls in the

Box 1 Human Development Index and Gender Inequality Index rankings

Brazil and the Dominican Republic are ranked within the category of 'high development' on the Human Development Index (HDI) – Brazil since 2005, and the Dominican Republic since 2010, while El Salvador is ranked lower, in the category of 'medium development'. The HDI measures a country's average development in relation to, for example, living standards, health, and education.

In terms of the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which measures three aspects of human development (reproductive health, empowerment, and economic participation of women/girls in relation to men/boys), the Dominican Republic is rated highest for gender inequality of the three countries, and El Salvador the lowest.

Human Development Index³

Brazil 79 (0.759)
Dominican Republic 94 (0.736)
El Salvador 121 (0.674)

Gender Inequality Index⁴

Brazil 94 (0.407)
Dominican Republic 103 (0.451)
El Salvador 91 (0.392)

study is undertaken across all countries, our focus here is on the LAC girls, without drawing direct comparisons with the observations from the SSA or SEA reports. In that sense, the areas covered between the three reports are not directly the same – with the ‘glitches’ being drawn from what is observed in the LAC girls, rather than following the same areas observed in SSA and SEA.

We acknowledge the variation between the three LAC countries, highlighted for example in the HDI rankings (see Box 1), with Brazil ranked significantly higher

(i.e. having higher human development scores in key domains) than El Salvador in particular, but also compared to the Dominican Republic. There is also variation between the contexts in which the girls live within the three countries, and they are from households that reflect different socio-economic dynamics. However, by focusing on three countries within a region, and going deeper into the data, we are able to root our analysis within those contexts more thoroughly and consider commonalities, as well as differences, between the girls’ experiences in greater detail.

Box 2 Background of the *Real Choices, Real Lives* study

Real Choices, Real Lives is a longitudinal study tracking the lives of a cohort of girls from when they were born (in 2006) until they will turn 18 (in 2024). The study is being undertaken in nine countries across SSA (Benin, Togo, Uganda), SEA (Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam) and LAC (Brazil, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador). In the three LAC countries there are a total of 35 girls (10 in Brazil,⁷ 12 in the Dominican Republic, and 13 in El Salvador).

The methodology is based around a core approach which, from the beginning of the study, has drawn on in-depth interviews with caregivers and, since 2013, when they turned seven, with the girls themselves. Whilst our study primarily focuses on the girl and her immediate family, we also consider the wider context to inform our analysis. For example, we have undertaken life histories with parents and interviews with other household members. Over the years, we will look to strengthen this – as social networks become increasingly defined in the girls’ lives.

Annex One provides further detail on the study design, sampling, ethics, and limitations as well as an overview of the data held for Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador specifically.

I. REPORT OVERVIEW

In previous reports, we have drawn from our breadth of qualitative data to explore the daily lives of the girls and their families and have observed the ways in which age, gender, and poverty interact, often negatively, in terms of girls' personal development and the opportunities available to them. In 2015, the study began to probe attitudes and behaviours relating to gendered norms, identifying characteristics of 'acceptors', 'consenters', and 'resisters' to these norms in the interviews with the girls and their family members. This current report looking at LAC data uses longitudinal analysis to explore these findings up to 2018,⁸ when the Cohort girls turned 12. Upon entering early adolescence, the girls have begun to face new challenges and expectations, as well as opportunities, relating to gender. At the same time, among the international development community, interest in adolescence has increased significantly, including prominence in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁹ There is growing appreciation of the importance of this life stage, particularly from a gender equality perspective.

Gender socialisation, the process of males and females being raised to conform to an allocated gender role, begins from birth. However, different expectations about appropriate behaviour often intensify during adolescence and gender identities become stronger.^{10,11} The onset of puberty brings "reinforcement of social expectations and pressures from family, peers, and society to conform to hegemonic sex-typed identities and roles".¹² It is now recognised that, contrary to previous beliefs, the gender socialisation process is not completed by adolescence¹³ – which is increasingly seen instead as a critical transition point presenting new opportunities and constraints, as well as providing a key window of opportunity¹⁴ for interventions in both policy and programming.¹⁵ However, there is still relatively limited data on

adolescence, especially early adolescence, in the development literature, particularly in comparison to data on under-five year olds and adults.¹⁶ The paucity of evidence and "knowledge gaps around the determinants, mechanisms, experiences and outcomes of gender dynamics and discrimination in childhood"¹⁷ undermine policy and programming effectiveness, in particular those aimed at transforming gender relations. With these knowledge gaps in mind, the arrival of adolescence for the Cohort girls marked a natural opportunity to take the exploration of the gender socialisation process a step further. While the outcomes of this socialisation have been observed in our previous reports,¹⁸ here we focus on *where*, and *when* – and more significantly point to *how* and *why* – the girls demonstrate 'glitches' in the process of reproducing gender norms.

There is growing recognition of the need to address gendered social norms to support positive development outcomes, yet there remains a disconnect between theory and practice. This is partly because of the inherent challenges of both determining and measuring social norms¹⁹ and of understanding why they change: "critical information if we are to design projects that hasten the process of change and build new norms".²⁰ Indeed, although there is evidence in the wider literature of 'disruption' of, or 'positive deviance' from, gender norms, this evidence, particularly where it draws from girls' own experiences rather than being linked to specific interventions, is limited.²¹

Our longitudinal analysis – grounded in in-depth case studies from Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador – highlights strong gendered expectations of behaviour across all three contexts; for example, "**Girls must always be clean, with their hair nicely done**" (Dariana, Dominican Republic, 2018);

“[Boys] are more rebellious, and the girls aren’t. The girls are easier to deal with” (Bianca’s mother, Brazil, 2018). At the same time, there are examples of girls – and their families – who are noticing, questioning, or rejecting expectations around girls’ behaviour and roles in different areas of their lives: **“Boys should do chores but they don’t care. They should sweep, mop, wash the mops, but they don’t do anything”** (Gabriela, El Salvador, 2018); **“In this world, there’s a lot of prejudice; just because you’re a man, you can’t do anything. Just because you’re a woman, you have to do everything”** (Tatiana, Brazil, 2018). Such statements highlight the potential for expectations to be challenged, although – interestingly – in some cases where girls do describe instances of going against expectations of how they should behave, they do so in terms of describing themselves as being “like boys”.

In the LAC report, we analyse the points of noticing, questioning, or rejecting gendered expectations – the ‘glitches’, or deviations – not as evidence of disruption or change of gendered social norms, but rather as markers of where there is potential for gender norm transformation if, and when, the broader social, economic, and political conditions align.²² It is important to note that the case studies are not chosen to be representative of the wider Cohort data, but to illuminate the nuanced and complex interactions between the influences across the course of a girl’s life – providing the basis to draw out commonalities with and differences to other girls. This analysis, therefore, provides a valuable contribution to existing knowledge by enabling critical insight into considering the timing, duration, and scope of interventions that aim to bring about a transformation in gender inequality.

II. REPORT STRUCTURE

The report is structured into three main sections.

- The first section draws on the wider literature to conceptualise gender socialisation and provide a framework for understanding where ‘glitches’ occur and how they are influenced – including a summary of our LAC data.
- This sets the scene for in-depth analysis in the second section, drawing from a series of case studies from Brazil, the

- Dominican Republic, and El Salvador and pulling together analysis across the LAC Cohort. The analysis considers both the types of ‘glitches’ in the process of gender norm reproduction as well as the potential influences – considering first what the ‘norm’ is as well as ways in which it is challenged.
- In the third section we present a summary and conclusions and some recommendations, built on our in-depth analysis, for future policy and programming responses, as well as for future research.

1 EXPLORING AND CONCEPTUALISING 'DISRUPTION' OF GENDERED SOCIAL NORMS

1.1 UNDERPINNING INEQUALITY: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDERED SOCIAL NORMS

Gendered social norms and stereotypes underpin and reproduce inequitable practices that ultimately result in girls and boys (and women and men) enjoying differential access to resources, as well as unequal opportunities and outcomes (see Box 3). The LAC region has shared conceptualisations of gender across countries. In many contexts, the Catholic Church – and, increasingly, evangelical churches – maintains a strong social and political influence and promotes conservative ideas of gender. The Catholic Church – and, more recently, the evangelical churches – have consistently fought to override progressive reforms particularly with respect to sexual and reproductive health.²³ Patriarchy, often described through the concept of 'machismo', remains pervasive and contributes to gender differentiation, in terms of roles and responsibilities for women and men, as well as high levels of violence against women and girls.²⁴ In addition to gender, the race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality or geographical location of girls and women may be associated with socio-economic inequality and poverty.²⁵ By following 35 girls living in poverty in the LAC region, the *Real Choices, Real Lives* study reveals how gender norms and stereotypes affect girls' choices and lives in their communities.

Misconceptions that 'gender' relates solely to issues concerning women and girls are being disproven by research looking deeper at how concepts of what it means to be 'feminine'

Box 3 Definition of social norms and gender norms²⁶

Social norms: *the 'informal rules of the game', influencing behaviour within any social group about what other people do (the typical behaviour) and what one should do (appropriate behaviour). Importantly, social norms carry social implications – i.e. rewards when followed and sanctions when not followed.*

Gender/gendered norms: *a socially constructed set of 'acceptable' feminine/masculine behaviours which individuals are taught to 'perform', usually according to their sex. Failure to 'perform' one's allocated gender carries consequences, whilst adherence is rewarded.*

and what it means to be 'masculine' affect social interactions and personal well-being at many different levels. For example, social concepts and expectations of what it means to be 'masculine' are increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of gender-based violence (GBV).²⁷ Gendered expectations of behaviour can also stunt the development of an individual's identity, forcing them to follow rules that determine which activities they can and cannot take part in, how they express themselves, and what they should look like.

1.2 GENDER SOCIALISATION AND INFLUENCING

Gender socialisation sees the reproduction of ‘acceptable’ feminine/masculine behaviours, or gendered social norms, via interaction between various individual, social and structural influences (see Figure 1).²⁸ Judith Butler, among others, argues that there can be ‘slippage’ in the reproduction of gendered social norms, wherein these ‘acceptable’ behaviours are exposed as social constructions – that is, made-up rules, subject to change – rather than being biological truths.²⁹

Indeed, studies have shown that individuals behave differently when faced with the same set of expectations, sanctions and rewards.³⁰ This is dependent on individual, social and structural factors including:

- a person’s own values and beliefs;
- their social status and family values; and
- the availability of resources and opportunities.³¹

These influences are often two-way, with structural changes affecting individual attitudes and behaviours, and individual-level changes also influencing wider social dynamics.³² For example, whilst a household’s economic circumstances or social status may influence whether they decide to send a girl to school or not, her attendance also relates to broader structural factors in terms of the policy context, and opportunities in terms of the availability

of education and work.³³ The wider literature points to the importance of social institutions, networks and interactions to “change, usually subtly but sometimes more profoundly, [beliefs] ... [as] individuals update their understanding of the norm, and of the costs and benefits of following or resisting the norm, through each meeting”.³⁴ This is especially important given the life stage of the girls in the Cohort, as social interactions often broaden out towards adulthood, and family and parental influences become less significant.³⁵

While there remain gaps in the understanding of why social norms fade or emerge, what can be observed highlights that they do not change ‘cleanly’, but often through contested processes which can be either slow or relatively rapid.³⁶ What people do in practice may change before the norm changes, and, at the same time, their beliefs and attitudes may change before their behaviour.³⁷ Borrowing from the sociology literature, the concept of ‘resistance’ can be both individual or collective, as well as spanning from proactive and overt opposition to questioning and objecting.³⁸ For example, it can involve speaking out or behaving symbolically in opposition to expectations, such as in choices of hairstyle or clothing. Social scientist James Scott asserted that, while “everyday forms of resistance rarely make headlines”, they are significant given the resources available to those who are relatively powerless.³⁹

Figure 1 Gender socialisation: spheres of influence in girls’ lives





A girl helps to manage the family crops in the Dominican Republic, 2018

1.3 EXPLORING GENDER SOCIALIZATION AND CHANGE IN REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES

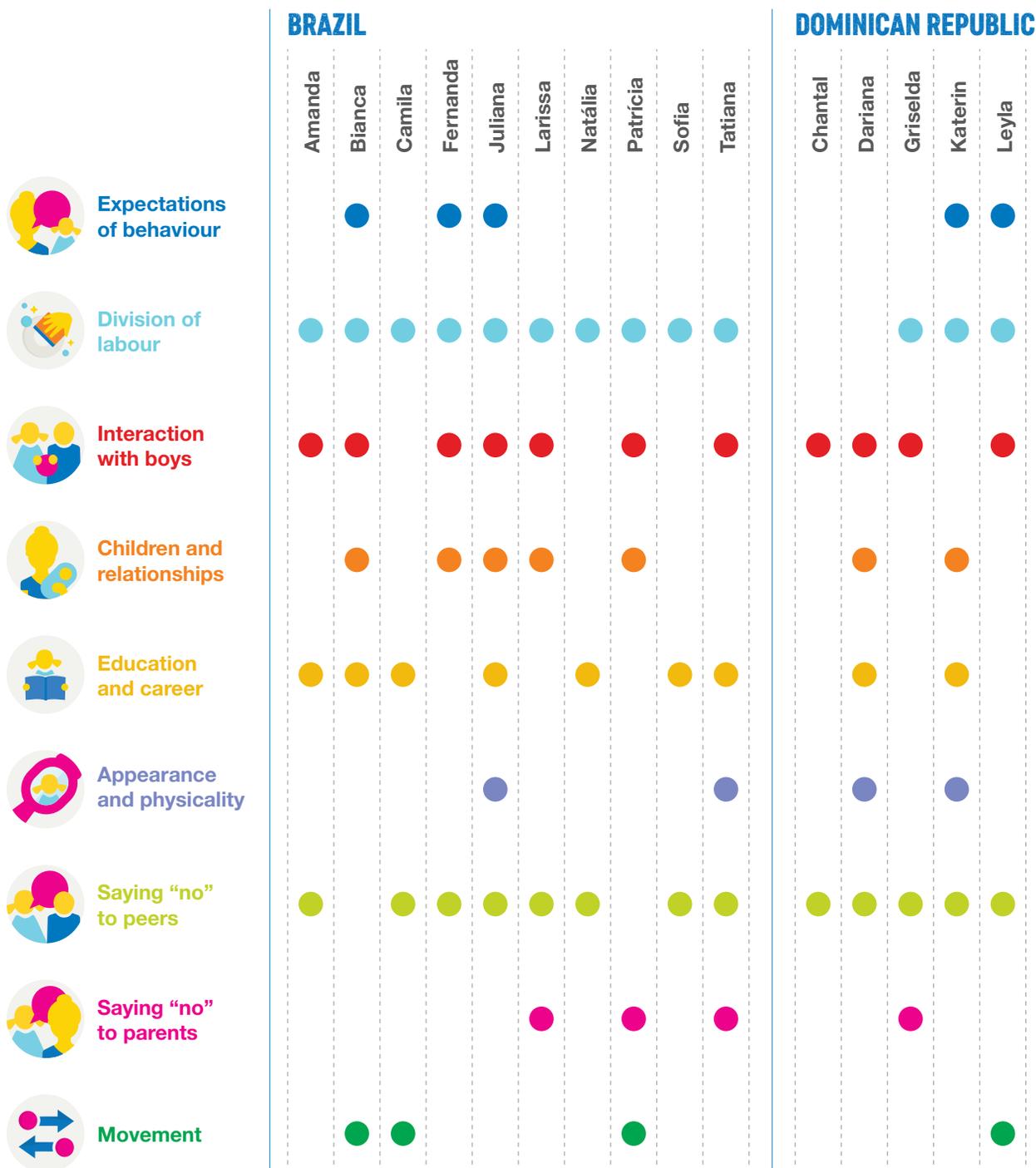
Drawing from the conceptualisation of the gender socialisation process, and its fluctuations, outlined in Section 1.2, analysis of the 2014-2018 LAC data identifies that, across the three countries, every girl demonstrated some type of ‘glitch’ in the reproduction of gendered social norms in one or more areas of her life. We observed these ‘glitches’

through discursive, attitudinal, and described behavioural changes⁴⁰ articulated by the girls in terms of expectations of their behaviour related, for example, to their participation in activities and sports, or to their interactions with boys, as well as to their future roles – both in terms of education or employment and relationships and children (see Table 1).

Table 1 What is and is not captured in our data

Typology		What we observe in our data
Discursive	Identifying differences	<p>“Women do more chores than men... the men only play, watch TV, they don’t do anything.”</p> <p>Doris, El Salvador, 2016</p>
Attitudinal	Verbal attitudes	<p>“Both [males and females] should do the same thing... Because we both have the same rights.”</p> <p>Leyla, Dominican Republic, 2017</p>
Behavioural	Described behaviours	<p>“[My school friends] make fun of me, they say I’m a tomboy, that I’m always playing ball, with the boys... then I tell them that this is sexist, because a girl can play ball just like a boy.”</p> <p>Juliana, Brazil, 2018</p>
Typology		What is outside the scope of our data
Behavioural	Individual active behaviour	Observed behavioural change on the Individual Level
Norm change	Collective active behaviour	Observed behavioural change beyond the Individual Level (family, social network, community etc.)

MAP 2: IDENTIFYING 'GLITCHES' ACROSS THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES



Our analysis also detects that for the girls in the three LAC Cohort study countries, whilst there is contextual variance in their relative importance, factors influencing ‘glitches’ in the gender socialisation process cut across the structural, social, and individual spheres. Table 2 provides a summary of the key influences observed – ranging from broader changes in terms of changes in the national economic situation, female employment, and exposure to non-normative gender roles in the home, through to the girl’s personality

and priorities. In the LAC context, we identify the significance of **Social** and **Structural Level** influences in shifting traditional gender roles, as well as the impact of adolescence on the **Individual Level**, with concerns around early pregnancy and exposure to GBV being particularly significant in dictating girls’ expected behaviours and freedoms. Considering these dynamics is important at this critical point in the girls’ lives where they are considered by those around them to no longer be children, but young women.

Table 2 Summarising multiple factors of influence

Structural level	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Socio-economic situation, changes in economy, and changes in male/female employment. 2 National and regional level policies and laws in terms of education, corporal punishment, gender equality, and rights rhetoric. 3 Representation of women in public life.
Social level	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Parent/carer attitudes and behaviours – the girl’s most significant relationships and how they change; exposure to normative and non-normative gender roles; contrasting attitudes and behaviours of parents/carers. 2 The presence/absence and behaviour of males in the house including a) adult males and b) male children (brothers/ cousins/peers). 3 The use of corporal punishment in the home and/or at school and exposure to violence.
Individual level	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 The girl’s priorities and if she recognises how they interact/ conflict with each other, including those related to education and leisure time. 2 The girl’s physical and cognitive maturity and awareness of social norms around her. 3 The girl’s repetition of gendered social norms or her level of disruption or general ‘disobedience’ in other areas of her life.



In the classroom in the Dominican Republic, 2018

2 LOOKING DEEPER: ANALYSIS OF ‘GLITCHES’ AND INFLUENCES

Our analysis of the LAC data is structured to consider areas where we see evidence of strong gendered expectations and norms and how those expectations are being challenged. In doing so, we take account of our broader primary data to locate our understanding of ‘glitches’ within the context of what the ‘normal’ expectations related to behaviour are.

In the case of LAC, our evidence highlights the reproduction of gendered expectations in many cases – both by the girls and their families. This is interesting in itself, but how dynamics compare to other contexts will be a key aspect of our cross-regional synthesis (once all reports have been completed). Through a series of case studies (one from each country) we see indications of where girls are challenging these norms, signalling the potential for change. Drawing from these, we are also able to consider girls’ experiences – the commonalities, as well as differences – across the broader Cohort. As such, in the following sub-sections we explore what type of ‘glitch’ can be observed in a girl’s

specific context, and in what area of their life, and, over time, related to expectations of acceptable or unacceptable behaviour in terms of:

- i. girls’ future roles (adolescent pregnancy and relationships)**
- ii. girls’ behaviour and participation in activities**
- iii. girls’ role in the household**
- iv. girls’ education and career aspirations.**

Although in the LAC Cohort glitches were observed across all of the girls, the case studies provide examples of where this ‘pushback’ and its potential influencing factors are more pronounced; the case studies also provide variation and the opportunity to consider varying influences. Our primary analysis is supported by broader literature, as well as a series of national-level indicators which point to broader gendered outcomes, for example, national education statistics, statistics on childbirth, and on levels of violence in these contexts.



PLAN INTERNATIONAL DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Two girls chatting after school in the Dominican Republic, 2018

2.1 ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE

2.1.1 Adolescent pregnancy

What are the expectations of adolescent pregnancy?

Adolescent pregnancy is common in the three LAC countries, particularly in the Dominican Republic, where 90 births occur in every 1,000 adolescent girls (see Box 4). The high rate of adolescent pregnancy is due to a number of factors, such as gendered sexual norms and expectations as well as lack of access to contraception and abortion. Most of the mothers in the LAC Cohort were teenagers when they became pregnant, with the average age of the girls' mothers at the birth of their first child 19.9 in Brazil (youngest 15, oldest 25), 17.6 in the Dominican Republic (youngest 13, oldest 21) and 16.1 in El Salvador (youngest 13, oldest 18). The *Real Choices, Real Lives* data highlights concerns among both girls and

their families around adolescent pregnancy and relationships. Fears of adolescent pregnancy in LAC are based largely on the Cohort mothers' own experiences of teen pregnancy, and in some cases due to adolescent pregnancies of the Cohort girls' peers in the community:

“It wasn’t at all easy; I was mostly on my own, there, I lived in the capital and spent a lot of time alone; I got depressed – I would say: ‘Oh my God, why do I feel so strange? Could it be because I gave birth to this kid without wanting it, without having planned it?’ I always said that. And over time I told him: ‘Well Lord, you allowed it to happen, what can we do?’”

(Dariana’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

Box 4 Indicators on fertility in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador⁴¹

Indicator	Regional	Brazil	Dominican Republic	El Salvador
Total fertility rate, per woman, 2017	2	1.7	2.3	2
Adolescent birth rate per 1,000 women aged 15-19, per year, 2006-2017	62 (2018)	62	90	69
Contraceptive prevalence rate, women currently married or in union, aged 15-49, modern methods, 2019 ⁴²	70%	77%	69%	68%
Unmet need for family planning, women currently married or in union, aged 15-49, 2019	10%	7%	11%	10%

Box 5 Sexual and reproductive health

Further demonstrating the focus on gendered expectations of behaviour in preventing adolescent pregnancy, there is limited discussion of contraceptive methods across the three countries. Only three mentions were made of contraception in 2018: Amanda's mother says, **"Usually the condom is the safest [method]"** (Brazil, 2018), Sofia's mother reports that her daughter is being instructed on how to use a condom (Brazil, 2018), and Rebecca's aunt suggests pregnancy could result from not using "protection" (El Salvador, 2018). The absence of discussions about contraception reinforces the normative idea that it is up to girls to behave in certain ways to prevent pregnancy.

Although they do not discuss contraception as a form of adolescent pregnancy prevention, in 2018 33 out of 34 caregivers in LAC agreed that girls should receive sexual and reproductive health education (SRH). Valerie's mother did not know whether they should and expresses concern that she may not be qualified to educate her daughter: **"Maybe I haven't got the right information to talk to her about that"** but says **"If it [SRH education] comes to this school she will learn"** (Dominican Republic, 2018). It appears that caregivers overwhelmingly agree that SRH education is necessary for their girls, though in some cases there is a concern that learning about sexuality may increase the likelihood of the girls getting pregnant. Four girls in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador report not yet having received any SRH education either at home or school. For girls who have had SRH education, there is variation in where they have learned: while 20 girls in total have had a combination of school and home SRH education, four girls have only received instruction at school, and six have only received it at home from their parents, siblings or other relatives.

"Because... sometimes... sometimes we go and talk to them at home, and they've already taught them everything at school. And then we go and teach them, they already know about it in another way, a different way..."

(Bianca's mother, Brazil, 2018)

"Well, it should start in the home, because we should trust them and tell them how things are, so that she can develop awareness, and tell her why things shouldn't be done, we shouldn't just tell her – 'Don't do this.' We have to explain why she shouldn't do it."

(Saidy's mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

In addition to abstinence-centred SRH education at home, though not explicitly referenced in the *Real Choices, Real Lives* data, SRH education in schools may not be comprehensive or science-based, depending on the local, cultural and religious ideas that may permeate curricula.

Especially in El Salvador, there are high rates of sexual violence against girls and women,^{43,44} which can lead to unwanted pregnancies. This is observed in our data, for example, with reports of the risk of rape expressed explicitly by two caregivers in Brazil, five in the Dominican Republic, and six in El Salvador.

"I tell them that if a girl goes out when she is very small... she might get raped by someone she doesn't know."

(Bessy's grandmother, El Salvador, 2018)

Secondly, should an adolescent become pregnant, there is no legal elective abortion in the three LAC countries: abortion is prohibited in the Dominican Republic, criminalised in El Salvador (with criminal penalties imposed for suspected abortion), and heavily restricted in Brazil (see Annex Two). This is significant in the context of concerns related to rape, as rape is a legal ground for abortion in Brazil, but not the other two countries.⁴⁵ The political influence of the Catholic and evangelical churches, which oppose abortion, and sociocultural expectations of motherhood, have contributed to these restrictive laws and pervasive stigma surrounding abortion.⁴⁶ Girls must choose between seeking clandestine and potentially unsafe abortions or living with the consequences of early pregnancy.

“Because I had her as a single mother and with different problems and I hope that doesn’t happen to her; if she’s going to get married she can get married, if she wants to move in with someone she can move in, but she should have a family, have children within a family.”

(Gladys’ mother, El Salvador, 2018)

“I see many girls passing by on the street and going out. There is one here, from that corner, who went to school with her. She’s pregnant! Twelve years old... Twelve. So, there are some.”

(Larissa’s mother, Brazil, 2018)

The LAC Cohort data also demonstrates that it is perceived as girls’ responsibility to challenge this cycle of adolescent pregnancy in practice. Parents advise girls to look after themselves and not to get **“led astray”** (Chantal’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018) or **“get into something [they] shouldn’t be doing now”** (Tatiana’s mother, Brazil, 2018). Three parents in El Salvador say that SRH education is necessary so that girls do not get fooled by boys: **“She has to know so that she doesn’t get fooled someday; she has to know all about it”** (Mariel’s grandmother, El Salvador, 2018). Overall, there is a prevailing focus by caregivers on abstinence over safe sex and contraception. Preventing adolescent pregnancy is perceived as a matter of girls’ behaviour – not getting taken advantage of and not letting boys touch them. The expectation is that girls must be good girls in enforcing abstinence because boys will not change their behaviour.

“If a [male] friend tells you – let’s go there, you know you can’t go, you can’t let anyone touch you either, if anyone gets fresh with you, you have to tell us [...] You know that a

lot of people like to take advantage of innocents [...] They could tell her, seduce her, and get fresh with her, because she has to look after herself because some people like using weak people.”

(Nicol’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“I keep on telling her that she must not be that silly girl who lets herself be taken in by someone else so that she doesn’t fall into that trap [pregnancy]... I keep on telling her she mustn’t be stupid or get involved with anyone because they will just get her pregnant, so I keep on telling her, look after yourself, I tell her, because she is developing fast.”

(Hillary’s mother, El Salvador, 2018)

With an understanding among both girls and their caregivers that adolescent pregnancy is something to be avoided, girls must navigate gendered expectations of behaviour to ensure they do not ‘make a mistake’ or ‘mess up’ by becoming pregnant. Within this context, notions of how to prevent adolescent pregnancy are shaped significantly by gender norms.

How and why are girls challenging these expectations?

The LAC Cohort girls are aware that most of their mothers had adolescent pregnancies and that those pregnancies had negative effects on their lives. Looking at the case of Juliana in Brazil (see case study on p64), whose mother had her at the age of 15 and who lives with her maternal grandparents, we can see where this awareness turns into critique: **“To be honest, I think it was very wrong for her to have me... to have me at 15”** (Juliana, Brazil, 2018). Juliana explains that her mother, **“didn’t even finish her studies, she didn’t go to university. I think she should have finished her studies and gone to university**

before having a relationship” (Juliana, Brazil, 2018). Further, Juliana has observed her friends getting into relationships and worries that they will neglect their studies. She notes that, **“[There] are some parents who allow it and other parents who don’t, who say that this is very wrong, because they can end up having children, getting pregnant”** (Juliana, Brazil, 2018). Juliana does not want to be distracted by a relationship at her age or have children until she is 20 because she wants to focus on her aspiration to become a police officer. On the **Social Level**, her grandmother also wants Juliana to go to university and work rather than become involved with a boy: **“My wish is to see her finish her studies, that she should not be interested in this ‘friendship’ business, dating, these things, at school”** (Brazil, 2018). To prepare Juliana to achieve this goal, her grandmother supports her access to SRH education, **“I’d like her to be better prepared, as I wasn’t... but I’d like her to be”** (Brazil, 2017) stating that she herself discusses these issues with Juliana.

A number of other girls in the LAC Cohort specifically refer to their mothers’ adolescent pregnancies as something they want to avoid and do “differently”.

“I think [my life] will be different [from my mother’s] [...] Because I won’t start dating soon, I don’t think so.”
(Fernanda, Brazil, 2017)

“I mean, not to end up like she did – she only studied until Grade 8; unlike her I want a career, a good life, etc.”
(Leyla, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“She was 16 when she had me.”
[“Do you want to be a mum at that age?”] **“No.”**
(Doris, El Salvador, 2017)

Many of the Cohort mothers’ personal experiences of adolescent pregnancy have

shaped their perspectives on sexual and reproductive health. The mothers want their girls to challenge this norm by not repeating their mistakes:

“No. I want [Bianca’s experience of pregnancy] to be very different. So, that’s why I always go back to studying. I really want her to study, finish her studies, and in the future, after she is 20, she said she thinks of having a child or two.”
(Bianca’s mother, Brazil, 2017)

“I don’t want her to have children at a young age, because that was what happened to us – we had children at the age of 16; I know that I have to talk to her about sexuality, about sexual relations.”
(Gladys’ mother, El Salvador, 2018)

“I don’t want what happened to me to happen to her, at an early age: I want her to look after herself.”
(Valeria’s mother, El Salvador, 2018)

Girls and their caregivers understand that girls are the most affected by adolescent pregnancy. Avoiding pregnancy is perceived as a matter of responsibility at the **Individual Level** rather than linked to issues at the **Structural Level** detailed in Box 5 on sexual and reproductive health. The Cohort girls demonstrate awareness of the expectation that girls are responsible for preventing adolescent pregnancy. When asked about SRH education, girls say it is important so that they do not **“make a mistake”** (Raisa, Dominican Republic, 2018) or **“mess up”** (Saidy, Dominican Republic, 2018). Caregivers agreed with the girls’ assessment, stating **“When they have a baby it all goes wrong”** (Madelin’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018) and **“She is ruined for life especially as she is so young”** (Rebecca’s aunt, El Salvador, 2018). In these **Social Level** attitudes, the

Box 6 Grandparents as caregivers

Something which is distinctive in the LAC Cohort is the number of girls who live with their grandparents or whose grandmother is their main carer. Often the Cohort grandparents express contrasting attitudes regarding gender to those of Cohort parents – mainly, but not always, reflecting more ‘traditional’ and inequitable concepts of gender roles and gendered norms – highlighting the intergenerational aspects of **Social Level** influences in the girls’ lives. In cases where the girls are living with grandparents partly or directly due to the very young age their mothers were when they gave birth to them, many of the Cohort grandmothers are particularly emphatic, and in some cases proactive to ensure, that their granddaughters do not follow the same path as their daughters with regard to early pregnancy, relationships and dropping out of school – demonstrating awareness not only of the negative outcomes but also the causes of gendered norms and inequalities.

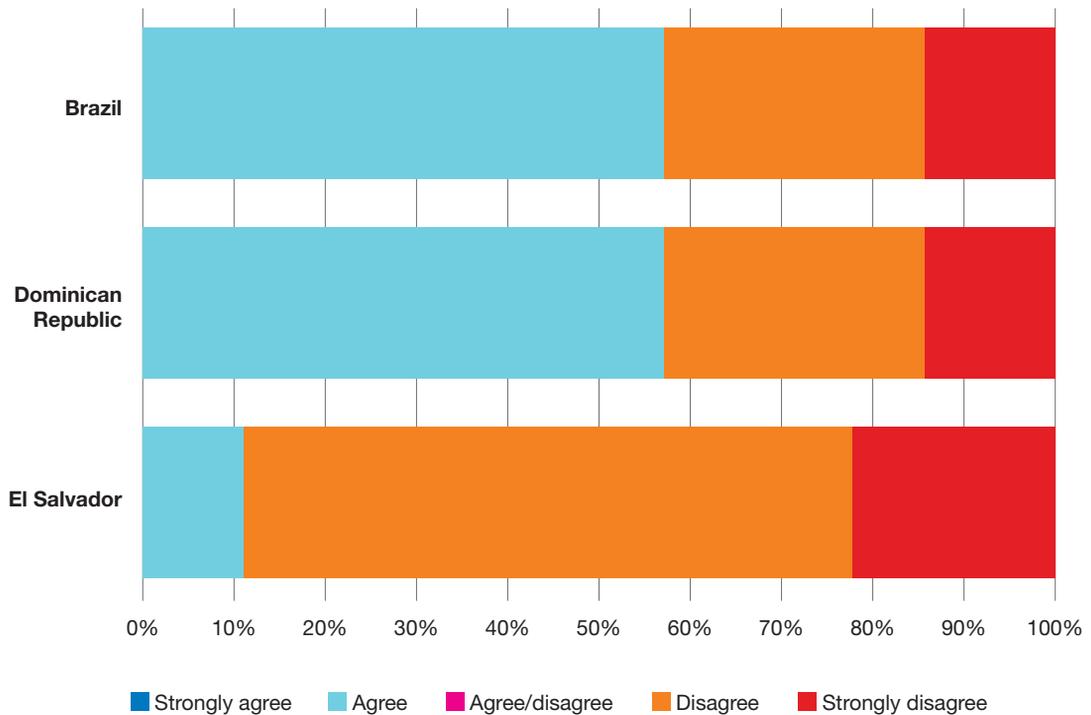
In El Salvador, five of 12 girls live with their grandparents alone (Andrea, Bessy, Mariel) or with a single parent and grandparents (Raquel and Valeria). For two of the girls – Andrea and Raquel – their mothers migrated abroad to look for work. The mothers of two other girls – Bessy and Mariel – left to live with new partners. In Brazil, just Juliana lives with her grandparents alone while Camila and Larissa live with a single parent and grandparents. In the Dominican Republic, just one girl – Saidy – lives with her grandparents. There are a few factors that might influence the higher level of grandparents as caregivers in El Salvador.

In El Salvador, there is a higher rate of adolescent pregnancy among the Cohort mothers, with all 13 mothers having given birth as teenagers. Because the mothers were still children, it is considered ‘logical’ that some grandparents would provide caregiving support, as Andrea’s grandmother emphasises, **“You end up with children bringing up children”** (El Salvador, 2018). This difficulty of having children while still a child is raised by Stephany’s mother who says that if this happens, **“It won’t be the same any more, and after that, even if you are 15 or 16, you’ll be grown up by then, because you are already a mum”** (El Salvador, 2018). In addition to not being of age, some of the fathers will not support the girls in caring for their children, as Bessy’s grandmother explains: **“Some boys just leave them: they just get them pregnant and then don’t help them”** (El Salvador, 2018).

Socio-economic factors may also be at play in El Salvador. As indicated above, two of the girls’ mothers sought work in another country: Raquel’s mother went to the United States while Andrea’s mother went to Italy. Andrea’s uncle also left to seek work abroad, and it appears that her father also works abroad as her grandmother reports, **“[Andrea’s] dad wanted to take her away, but she started crying and I said, ‘No, at least your dad promises you something’, but it’s different in another country, she doesn’t want to go, but he does help her”** (El Salvador, 2018).

Economic hardship is one of many push factors for migrants in El Salvador. Leaving their children behind gives economic migrants more flexibility and the ability to send remittances. This is where the support of grandparents may become necessary.

Figure 2 Parent/carer attitudes: “It is worse for a girl to have a child outside of marriage than it is for a boy,” 2018-2019



Cohort caregivers underscore that although adolescent pregnancy is a norm, it is one that should be challenged by these girls due in large part to its gendered consequences.

This is further demonstrated by the attitudes questionnaire⁴⁷ posed to girls’ parents, which shows that most parents in Brazil and the Dominican Republic agree that it is worse for girls to have a child outside of marriage than it is for boys (see Figure 2): **“A baby won’t stop a boy from being what he wants to be, because he goes on working, studying, working and studying, but not a woman”** (Chantal’s parents, Dominican Republic, 2018). Juliana’s grandmother agrees, **“It’s worse for a woman: for a man everything is easy, and for a woman it’s more difficult”** (Brazil, 2018). Larissa perceives this disparity as well, stating that raising a

child is more challenging for a girl **“because girls feel more shame than boys”** (Larissa, Brazil, 2018).

In El Salvador, parents disagreed with the statement because they felt pregnancy outside of marriage was equally bad for girls and boys. Nevertheless, there is still a recognition that boys might have more freedom after a pregnancy: **“Girls ruin their own lives, because I have seen cases where the boys go on studying and the girls leave school, but even though the boy is a dad he can still go to secondary... but the girl is not allowed to go because she is pregnant”** (Susana’s uncle, El Salvador, 2018). Indeed, wider evidence suggests that girls who had adolescent pregnancies had often already dropped out of school when they became pregnant, or would do so due to their

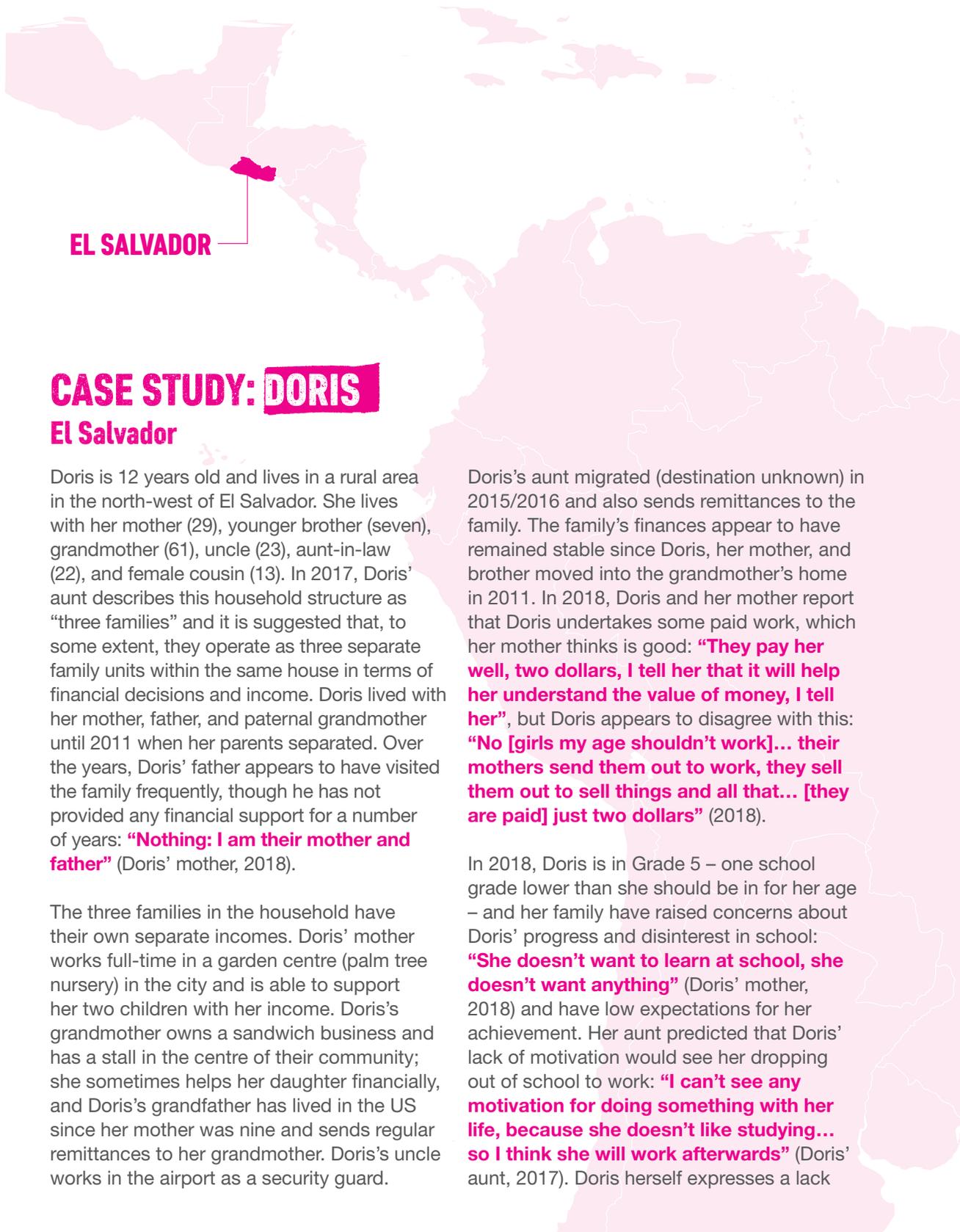


Depicting her aspirations for a professional career in the Dominican Republic, 2017

pregnancy.⁴⁸ Furthermore, several parents expressed concern that due to the girls' age, care responsibilities would likely fall to the family: **"Her parents have to support her and the baby; it's worse, because then she can't progress, she will have a hard time"** (Sharina's mother, Dominican Republic, 2018).

Among the LAC Cohort, there is evidence of strong intention from the Cohort girls and their family members for the girls to 'do things differently' by avoiding adolescent pregnancy. Although preventing adolescent pregnancy is considered a way to empower girls to

achieve their goals, the ways girls are taught to prevent adolescent pregnancy often rely on highly gendered norms around sex and relationships and overlook the role that socio-economic factors play. Specifically, boys are regarded as desirous of sex while girls are vulnerable to manipulation and must prevent boys from taking advantage of them. Moving forward, there may be significant challenges for the girls to avoid adolescent pregnancy due to the combination of socio-economic and **Structural Level** factors which reinforce gendered attitudes about sex and pregnancy at the **Individual Level** and **Social Level**.



EL SALVADOR

CASE STUDY: DORIS

El Salvador

Doris is 12 years old and lives in a rural area in the north-west of El Salvador. She lives with her mother (29), younger brother (seven), grandmother (61), uncle (23), aunt-in-law (22), and female cousin (13). In 2017, Doris' aunt describes this household structure as "three families" and it is suggested that, to some extent, they operate as three separate family units within the same house in terms of financial decisions and income. Doris lived with her mother, father, and paternal grandmother until 2011 when her parents separated. Over the years, Doris' father appears to have visited the family frequently, though he has not provided any financial support for a number of years: **"Nothing: I am their mother and father"** (Doris' mother, 2018).

The three families in the household have their own separate incomes. Doris' mother works full-time in a garden centre (palm tree nursery) in the city and is able to support her two children with her income. Doris's grandmother owns a sandwich business and has a stall in the centre of their community; she sometimes helps her daughter financially, and Doris's grandfather has lived in the US since her mother was nine and sends regular remittances to her grandmother. Doris's uncle works in the airport as a security guard.

Doris's aunt migrated (destination unknown) in 2015/2016 and also sends remittances to the family. The family's finances appear to have remained stable since Doris, her mother, and brother moved into the grandmother's home in 2011. In 2018, Doris and her mother report that Doris undertakes some paid work, which her mother thinks is good: **"They pay her well, two dollars, I tell her that it will help her understand the value of money, I tell her"**, but Doris appears to disagree with this: **"No [girls my age shouldn't work]... their mothers send them out to work, they sell them out to sell things and all that... [they are paid] just two dollars"** (2018).

In 2018, Doris is in Grade 5 – one school grade lower than she should be in for her age – and her family have raised concerns about Doris' progress and disinterest in school: **"She doesn't want to learn at school, she doesn't want anything"** (Doris' mother, 2018) and have low expectations for her achievement. Her aunt predicted that Doris' lack of motivation would see her dropping out of school to work: **"I can't see any motivation for doing something with her life, because she doesn't like studying... so I think she will work afterwards"** (Doris' aunt, 2017). Doris herself expresses a lack



GIRLS ALSO HAVE TO GET AN EDUCATION, SO THEY CAN GET AHEAD IN LIFE AND NOT BE LEFT STUCK AT HOME JUST DOING HOUSEWORK

of enthusiasm for school: **“It’s very boring”** (2015); however, she also regards education as important, **“because girls also have to get an education, so they can get ahead in life and not be left stuck at home just doing housework”** (2017). She makes sure she attends school regularly: **“No [I don’t miss school]. Not one single time. Never. I don’t want to miss because of my grades. Do my tests”** (2015). While Doris mentions wanting to go to university in 2017, she also talks about needing to reach Grade 10 to then be able to start teacher training, as well as about her ambitions to pursue possible careers in hairdressing and selling tortillas.

There is a strong sense of a gendered division of labour in the household: **“Men do the chores outside the house; the domestic chores are down to the women”** (Doris’ mother, 2012). There is one adult male in the house – Doris’ uncle – and since sometime in 2014/2015 the only boy is Doris’s younger brother who is still regarded as too young to carry out chores. Doris has a strong sense that boys are not expected to do housework and witnessed her aunt carrying out most of the household responsibilities when she was younger, with some of this burden now being passed on to herself: **“Women do more**

chores than men... The men only play, watch TV, they don’t do anything” (Doris, 2016). Doris’ aunt explains how gendered norms are at the core of this division of labour: **“The thing is that people make girls do more than boys, because they think that sweeping will turn the boys into homosexuals, or if they wash clothes that means they are women. So they don’t have much respect in that way, so most of the chores are for girls, not boys”** (2017).

From a young age Doris enjoyed playing with boys and did not differentiate between girls’ and boys’ games. However, as she became older, she began to express a preference for playing with girls firstly because boys are **“rough”** and then because they are **“very, very offensive and horrible”** (2017). Doris’ mother prohibited her from having male friends: **“because sometimes they’re perverted, and when they see pretty girls... they want to be their boyfriends”** (2016) and in 2018 she describes Doris’ new interest in romantic relationships with boys: **“She is bigger, because she is older, she was already going around with a boyfriend, but I told her she couldn’t”** (Doris’ mother, 2018).

From 2014, Doris’ mother and aunt describe Doris as **“rebellious”** and **“restless”** and associate her change in behaviour with the separation of her parents: **“Her dad and I have broken up and that has affected her; maybe she was traumatised or something”** (Doris’ mother, 2018) and the influence of Doris’ father’s gang-related activities and subsequent imprisonment sometime in 2016/2017: **“She is also a bit rebellious in that way... Her dad is in prison; that might have affected her”** (Doris’ aunt, 2017). In 2017, Doris went to her teacher to talk about how her father’s imprisonment had affected her and her mother reports that Doris no longer confides in her, apparently blaming her in some way for the fact that her father **“doesn’t come home any more”** (2018).

FIGURE 3: DORIS

Timeline of 'glitches' (when and where)



Division of labour



Interaction with boys



Children and relationships



Education and career



Movement

"I don't want to go. It's only me who does errands. Can't other girls go?"

"The girls are not guilty for not doing errands: getting eggs, potatoes, vegetables, food, cheese, juice."

"The women, because women do more chores than men... The men only play, watch TV, they don't do anything... Because women do more chores, men are lazy to get water, they say to them 'Go get me water.'" Do you think this is fair? "No."

"When I get older, I'm going to seek more male friends."

2015

2016

"Dads don't do anything... [women] mop, sweep, tidy up, do chores, make the beds." Do you think this is fair? "No."

"[The boys can go out to play] because they don't do anything... They go out to play, and we're stuck here doing the chores."

"She doesn't want to do anything now; I have to keep on telling her; before, I didn't have to say anything." (Mother)

"The boys don't do anything... they have to take the rubbish out and that's all."

"I wish it was night-time all day long... Because we don't do any cleaning at night."

"Some [boys at school] behave badly, some behave well... They don't do the cleaning; they go around fighting."

"She's more rebellious... she is rebellious and wants to have a boyfriend." (Mother)

"They [teenage girls in the community] want to have boyfriends, but then they get pregnant, they have to know what to do with kids and all that... They can have relationship when they are 20 or 25 years old, by then they know what's good and what's bad... You know what I mean... Like other girls who are only 12 and already in relationships."

"[I want to] not be the same as her [talking about her mother] ... When my parents quarrelled... my dad went off with another woman."

"She was 16 when she had me." Do you want to be a mum at that age? "No."

What about you – do you want to get married? "No."

"[I want my life to be] different... workwise."

"Girls also have to get an education so they can get ahead in life and not be left stuck at home just doing housework."

"[I plan to study] until the second year of high school (Grade 10). To do teacher training."

Would you like to have a job? "Yes... making tortillas, working at the hair salon..."

"I can't go to the football pitch on my own, only if I go with my mum, but all the boys can go."

2017

2018

2.1.2 Relationships

What are the norms surrounding relationships in these contexts?

Parents and carers in the LAC Cohort express concern about relationships with males in adolescence as they may be precursors to sex and pregnancy and their related consequences. Many of the LAC girls' mothers began relationships or sexual relations at an early age with older men who got them pregnant and there is concern that this dynamic persists, **"In my community, children my age get into relationships very quickly"** (Stephany, El Salvador, 2018). Some carers indicate the issues involved with entering relationships at a young age:

"I'm afraid, because I became disillusioned with that relationship. I was disappointed despite him being a good man: he was affectionate and loving towards me. I became disillusioned, as a 20-something-year-old young woman and a man who was almost 50."

(Leyla's mother, Dominican Republic, 2017)

"Because I had her as a single mother and with different problems and I hope that doesn't happen to her. If she's going to get married, she can get married; if she wants to move in with someone, she can move in, but she should have a family, have children within a family."

(Gladys' mother, El Salvador, 2017)

"I was 17 when I had [Susana]. I think it wasn't good, because my parents left me with my grandmother... That was not good for me and that's how I decided to get into a relationship so young, so I think it was a bad thing, but despite what I said at least

I have stayed with their dad. Even if you get married, you might say 'But you're married, you're not just like that [a young mother]'. I think it was a bad experience, not to have waited longer."

(Susana's mother, El Salvador, 2017)

A small number of the Cohort girls in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador already appear to be interested in entering into romantic relationships with boys, which is a cause of concern for many parents and caregivers who often prohibit the girls from having any form of relationship with boys. Doris' mother in El Salvador (see case study on p20) expressed this concern in 2016, banning Doris from having any male friends **"because sometimes they're perverted, and when they see pretty girls... [they] want to be their boyfriends"** (Doris' mother, El Salvador, 2016). This statement reflects a common trope that boys and men are sexually aggressive. The idea that males cannot control their sexual impulses underpins the focus on girls' individual responsibility to prevent adolescent pregnancy by not letting boys touch them. Nevertheless, Doris had other ideas about boyfriends: **"When I get older I'm going to seek more male friends"** (Doris, El Salvador, 2016) and in 2018 Doris already appears to have become involved with someone: **"She is bigger, because she is older, she was already going around with a boyfriend, but I told her she couldn't"** (Doris' mother, El Salvador, 2018).

["Have you ever had a boyfriend?"]

"I was just seeing a boy." ["Does your mother know?"] **"No."**

(Larissa, Brazil, 2018)

"Her friend already has a boyfriend, and she wanted to get her into that. But I spoke to her, I explained things,

I told her dad, I told her mum. They spoke to her too.”

(Saidy’s grandmother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“There’s a boy who is after her who says he is her boyfriend, but I told her that I hadn’t given her my permission; I said, ‘What boyfriend?’”

(Hillary’s mother, El Salvador, 2018)

Leyla in the Dominican Republic (see case study on p50) is aware of the restrictions placed on male-female interactions and criticises them, suggesting that male-female relationships are inevitable: **“We’re not going**

to be spending all our time with girls: one day we’ll have to get together with boys”

(Dominican Republic, 2018). Leyla’s mother has prohibited Leyla from having a boyfriend and after overhearing Leyla discuss boyfriends with female cousins, Leyla’s mother reports using corporal punishment to prevent this:

“I hit her and she wrote a letter she was going to send to her grandfather. She was going to live with her grandfather because I don’t let her have a boyfriend”

(Dominican Republic, 2018). Leyla’s mother entered into a relationship with a man 30 years her senior at the age of 14 and had her first child with him. This experience has coloured her perspective on adolescent relationships: **“I can’t stop**

Box 7 Marriage statistics in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador

Although marriage was not raised as the primary concern for girls engaging in relationships in the LAC Cohort, it is notable that there are high rates of child marriage across the three countries. Child marriage under the age of 18 affects one in four girls in Brazil and El Salvador and more than one in three girls in the Dominican Republic. All three countries have low minimum age requirements for marriage for girls – 16 (Brazil), 15 (Dominican Republic) and 18 (El Salvador). Indeed, Brazil has the fourth largest number of child brides in the world⁴⁹ and many informal unions occur before the age of 18 in the Dominican Republic (see Annex Two).

Indicator	Regional ⁵⁰	Brazil		Dominican Republic		El Salvador	
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Child marriage by 18, 2017 ⁵¹	23% (date not available)	36%		36%		26%	
Child marriage by 15, 2017 ⁵²	5% (date not available)	11%		12%		6%	
Average age at marriage ⁵³		1996		1999		1971	
		25.4	22.7	24.3	21.6	24.7	19.0
		2000		2007		1992	
		26.2	23.1	26.2	21.3	25.3	22.3
		2010		2013		2007	
		31.9	29.7	25.7	20.9	25.5	22.5

asking myself why on earth I fell in love with that man. How could I have gone off with him?" (Leyla's mother, Dominican Republic, 2017).

Although some Cohort girls are interested in relationships, none of the caregivers support them dating. When the girls were aged 12, they were considered too young to date, as Juliana's grandmother argues, **"I told her that she's not going to, it's not the time for dating yet, she's not old enough to date, it's not time yet"** (Brazil, 2018). Saily's grandmother agrees, **"She is not old enough for that"** (Dominican Republic, 2018), as does Hillary's mother, **"She isn't old enough to have a boyfriend: she is much too young"** (El Salvador, 2018). This leads to some concern about influences from other girls who may be engaging in relationships at this age: **"If anyone tells her to have a boyfriend, it's wrong because she's too young [...] so I'm only [worried] about these friends from over there"** (Stephany's mother, El Salvador, 2018). Karen's mother is also worried: **"Those girls who are only thinking about boyfriends are bad friends, so I have stopped her now; I don't like those friends at all"** (El Salvador, 2018).

Caregivers frequently state that girls should not have boyfriends and that dating would be a barrier to their future aspirations. It is understood that boyfriends will distract the girls from their studies. Natália's mother tells her daughter, **"You're not going to start having boyfriends, now you're going to focus on your studies. Go study, finish school, think about going to university, because there are many opportunities, you only have to want it, to take a course"** (Brazil, 2018). Camila's mother provides similar advice, **"I always tell her: 'Camila, finish your studies, don't go looking for a boyfriend now, because when you start dating, you'll get knocked up'"** (Brazil, 2018). This desire for girls to finish their studies led

Dariana's mother to say her daughter cannot have a boyfriend until she is 18, **"[Then she] will decide on her goals for herself; [she will say]: 'I'm going to get ahead and I will have a boyfriend, but I will go to study to be successful'"** (Dominican Republic, 2018).

The expectation is that girls will avoid relationships and this expectation is communicated to them repeatedly. Disobedience on this issue has involved corporal punishment for one of the girls who is interested in boys: Leyla, whose experience is described above. Rebeca's mother argues that hitting the girls is ineffective, as is the case with her brother and his daughter, **"So he didn't let her and he hits her, so I told him: 'Look, don't hit her, sit down with her'. And he is rebellious, he hits her and he hits her"** (Dominican Republic, 2018). She suggests instead that he **"Give her advice: talk to her and give her advice"** (Dominican Republic, 2018). Giving advice and verbal punishment appears to be the preferred response by caregivers, as with Bessy's grandmother, **"I told [Bessy's sister] off for her own good"** (El Salvador, 2018).

Despite the prevalence of Catholicism and evangelicalism in these three countries,⁵⁴ religious beliefs were rarely mentioned with respect to relationships and marriage. When they were, it was to suggest that boyfriends would not be of interest for the girl because of the family's religious beliefs, **"As we are Jehovah's Witnesses the girls are virgins when they get married and always get married to men who are Witnesses too, so as she has biblical principles she is very different"** (Mariel's grandmother, El Salvador, 2018). Susana's uncle implies that attending church is regarded by some families as a sufficient preventative measure with regard to adolescent relationships and pregnancy: **"I think that maybe because of educational levels... there are dysfunctional families that have a different way of thinking, they**

think that just because their mother goes to church, that will solve everything, but I don't think that's the case" (El Salvador, 2018).

A common theme is the need for the girls not to keep secrets with respect to adolescent relationships. Griselda's father notes that some girls lie about having boyfriends, **"They have their boyfriends behind the scenes and then they don't succeed"** (Dominican Republic, 2018). Rebeca's mother knows this as well and tells her eldest daughter not to hide her relationships, **"Because I told her: [Rebeca's sister], I don't want you to have a boyfriend in secret; you will have a boyfriend when you are 18"** (Dominican Republic, 2018). Gladys' mother feels the

same as she thinks a secret boyfriend might lead to an adolescent pregnancy as it did for her, **"That is another thing I don't want her to lie to me about, no secrets, because I don't want her to have children at a young age"** (El Salvador, 2018). There is a sense that if a girl chooses to have a boyfriend, then if she is honest, at least her caregivers can provide guidance to avoid her dropping out of school or becoming pregnant.

How and why are girls challenging these expectations?

Despite the relatively common practice of child marriage (see Box 7), the verbally expressed expectation among the Cohort

Box 8 Girls' awareness of and critique of gendered issues in relationships

Stephany in El Salvador demonstrates awareness of infidelity in relationships and views school as a way for women and girls to protect themselves from this: **"To learn, so that no one will fool her in that... doing something like when the dad is cheating on the mum with another woman"** (Stephany, El Salvador, 2017).

Doris (see case study on p30) in El Salvador also criticises infidelity as a result of witnessing her own parents' separation; however, she appears to place the blame for this on her mother:

["What different things do you see in your future?"] **"Not to be the same as her [my mother]"** ["In what aspects?"] **"When my parents quarrelled... My dad went off with another woman."** (Doris, El Salvador, 2017)

Patrícia says she sees herself studying and working in the future but she does not see herself with a family. She says she has thought about having a family and raising two or three children, **"but sometimes I don't think so"** because **"many women suffer with the separation, the husband goes and kills her, and I don't want that"**. Patrícia's mother and father separated in 2016 and she says that she has seen femicide reported on TV. Brazil has the fifth highest rate of femicide in the world, with 4.8 murders per 100,000 women⁵⁵ despite the introduction of laws (such as the Maria da Penha law on domestic violence⁵⁶), and research raising awareness of the issue (such as the Mapa da Violência⁵⁷). The intersectional aspect of femicide in Brazil has been largely overlooked – although the rate of femicide of white women has decreased (by 15 per cent from 2006-2015) the rate of femicide of black women *increased* over the same period (by 22 per cent from 2006-2015) and in 2015, 68.8 per cent of the women killed by aggression in Brazil were black.⁵⁸ Patrícia herself is black and not only demonstrates awareness of this issue but states that it has influenced her future intention of having a family.

girls and their families is that they will not, and should not, get married before they turn 18. When asked what age girls should get married, 22 girls said that girls must be at least 20 – seven girls from Brazil, six girls from the Dominican Republic and nine from El Salvador. Three said 30 or older, including two girls from Brazil and one from the Dominican Republic, while three – all from El Salvador – said that girls could get married at 18 (the remaining girls did not respond to this question or specify a particular age).

On the **Individual Level**, many of the girls demonstrate an awareness of what causes girls to marry early. Raquel in El Salvador suggested that girls might get married at 18 “[because] they are not doing well at school” (El Salvador, 2018). Interestingly, Dariana makes a link to consequences related to adolescent pregnancy: **“They get married so quickly that the woman can get pregnant and the child can come out with problems”** (Dariana, Dominican Republic, 2018). These responses highlight that concerns about sex, reproduction, and relationships are pronounced in the LAC context and that there are serious implications for girls’ futures. The LAC Cohort girls expressed three prevailing reasons for waiting until they are in their twenties to get married: 1) they will be more grown up; 2) they will have finished their studies; and 3) they will have a job.

“Because they will be adults by then, they already know everything.”
(Andrea, El Salvador, 2018)

“Because it won’t mean she has to leave school, and then have to look after children.”
(Susana, El Salvador, 2018)

“Well, to get married, I don’t think there’s a right age, but I think it should be after you have, you know, you have a job, have a home. When

you’re ready, you know, to have a family.”
(Bianca, Brazil, 2018)

By aspiring to finish their studies, find a job and have their own home before marriage, girls are challenging both the common practice of child marriage and the perception that girls’ priority is to get married and have children. Although many of the girls eventually want to marry and have children, their personal goals of education and work take precedence.

On the **Social Level**, the girls’ caregivers share the desire for girls to achieve their goals. They want the girls to focus on their studies and not to become distracted by boys and bad influences: **“I just tell them to study, be careful who your friends are, don’t listen to any of the boys, or let him take you out here or there; a lot of girls have got pregnant”** (Andrea’s grandmother, El Salvador, 2018). Again, **“I worry about her, because now the girls, when they start dating, they don’t want to study any more”** (Camila’s mother, Brazil, 2018). By avoiding premature relationships and dating, girls are also avoiding the risk of adolescent pregnancy and safeguarding their futures.

On the **Structural Level**, there have been recent efforts to tackle child marriage in the LAC region (see Box 7). In 2019, Brazil banned child marriage under the age of 16. Although the official age of marriage is 18, girls under 16 could previously have married if they were pregnant or had an older partner, and avoided legal intervention.⁵⁹ This is a step forward by Brazil; however, girls of 16 or 17 can still marry with parental permission. In line with the UN, Plan International believes that child marriage is a human rights violation and that the minimum legal age for marriage should be 18 for men and women regardless of circumstances.⁶⁰ In 2017, the Dominican Republic – where child marriage is common, especially in poor and rural areas – closed



Dreaming of a future career as an architect in Brazil, 2019

a loophole that allowed girls to be married under the required age of 18 with parental and judicial permission.⁶¹ El Salvador also closed a child marriage loophole in 2017, which now means that girls cannot legally be married with parental or judicial permission even if they are pregnant or have an older partner.⁶² Although these policy changes do not address informal unions, they acknowledge that loopholes around the laws on the minimum age for marriage violate girls' rights.

As can be seen in Box 7, age at first marriage for girls has increased significantly in the

2000s in Brazil, while it has decreased slightly in the Dominican Republic and increased slightly in El Salvador. The data was collected prior to child marriage reforms in all three countries. It is possible that with these reforms the average age at first marriage will increase, especially in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador where the average ages are 20.9 and 22.5, respectively. Both adolescent pregnancy and marriage undermine girls' ability to achieve their goals. **Social Level** and **Structural Level** interventions in child marriage can help to safeguard girls' futures.

2.2 EXPECTATIONS OF BEHAVIOUR

2.2.1 Obedience and play

What is the norm?

While parent/carer responses to the statement “Girls are better behaved than boys” were relatively mixed (see Figure 4), the dominant attitude expressed by those in agreement with the statement or unsure of their answer was that overall girls are more “obedient”:

“Yes, because the... how do I say this... females are easier to control than boys.”

(Chantal’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“Boys are a handful and girls behave well. Because as I say, she obeys...”

(Andrea’s grandmother, El Salvador, 2018)

“They obey much quicker. Boys are harder work.”

(Nicol’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“I think it’s because they are more shy, their shyness makes them behave. Boys are more agitated.”

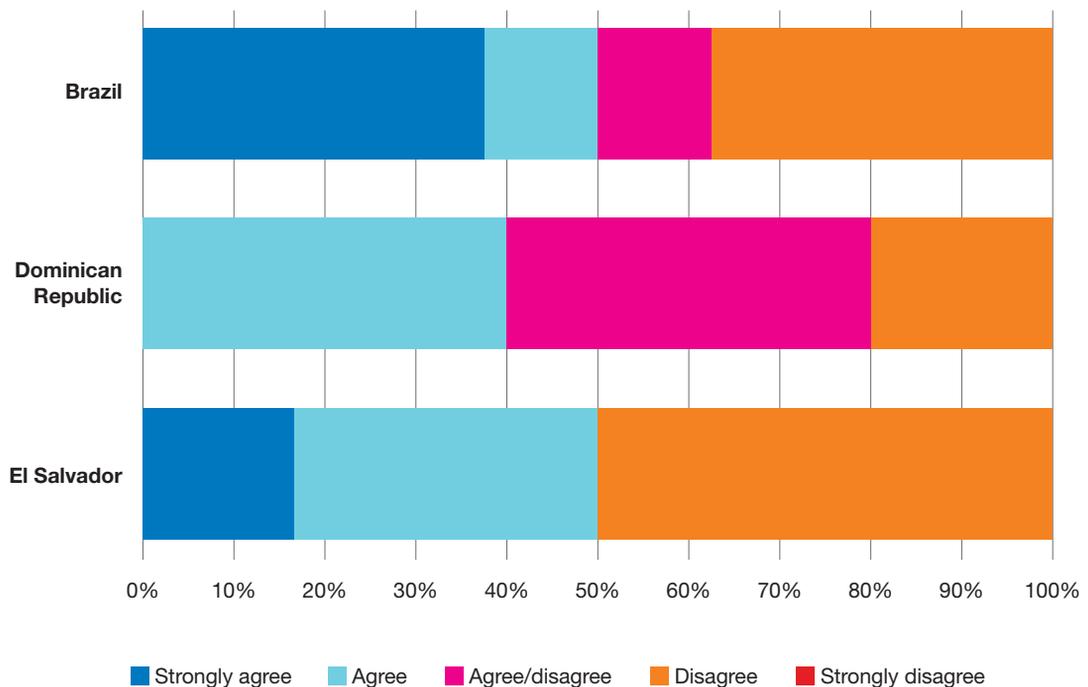
(Larissa’s mother, Brazil, 2018)

“Well, there are boys who behave well and there are boys who don’t, but girls, I say that girls behave better than boys. Because they are more immersed, they stay at home more.”

(Bessy’s grandmother, El Salvador, 2018)

Further gendered expectations of behaviour expressed by the Cohort families are linked to which activities are classed as ‘acceptable’ for

Figure 4 Parent/carer attitudes “Girls are better behaved than boys”, 2018-2019



Box 9 Saying “no” to parents and peers

In 2017, girls’ reported ability or willingness to say “no” to peers or parents was relatively consistent across each country, particularly with respect to saying “no” to parents. In 2017, eight out of ten girls in Brazil said they would say “no” to their friends, as did ten out of 12 girls in the Dominican Republic, and ten out of 13 girls in El Salvador. However, in 2018 *all* girls in LAC said they would say “no” to their friends (they were not asked about saying “no” to their parents).

Both girls who said they feel they can and those who feel they cannot say “no” to their friends report concerns about maintaining friendships. Depending on the circumstances, girls fear that their friends might get angry and stop speaking to them if they do not comply with their requests. Nevertheless, the girls are generally able to overcome these social concerns in favour of *not* doing something they do not want to do:

“It’s because sometimes my friends tell me: ‘Let’s go over there’, then I say, ‘I don’t want to’, then they say that if I don’t go, they won’t talk to me any more.”

(Juliana, Brazil, 2017)

“I wouldn’t go to the place they wanted me to go. Even if they get upset with me.”

(Natália, Brazil, 2017)

“I have to do it because otherwise they might hit me or tell me off.”

(Karen, El Salvador, 2017)

With regards to parents, the main reason for girls not feeling they can say “no” is the expectation that as children they must obey their parents:

“I’d have to do it. Because I can’t disobey my parents.”

(Natália, Brazil, 2017)

“Well, I would, because they’re my parents, right, if they tell me to, I have to do it. My parents are my parents, everything they tell me to do, I do. If it’s a very wrong thing, very wrong, I will not do it, I’ll say ‘Dad and Mum, this is wrong, and I will not do it’, and they will not hit me.”

(Tatiana, Brazil, 2017)

“I have to do it if they ask me to do it.”

(Raisa, Dominican Republic, 2017)

“Because they are my grandparents and I would do it.”

(Saidy, Dominican Republic, 2017)

“Whether I like it or not, I have to do it.”

(Gladys, El Salvador, 2017)

Although most girls will not say “no” to their parents, some express resistance about complying by suggesting that they would not be happy to follow orders, or that they might delay completion of the task. For example, Bianca (Brazil), says, **“I’d do it, but I’d be angry”** (2017).

Box 10 Corporal punishment and girls' agency

All three LAC Cohort countries have committed to ending the use of corporal punishment in all settings – home, school, and alternative care settings – however, only Brazil has passed specific legislation (in 2014) outlawing its use.⁶³ In the Dominican Republic, the use of corporal punishment was made illegal in schools in 2003, but not yet in the home, despite official commitments by the government in 2009 and 2011 to do so.⁶⁴ Similarly, in El Salvador the use of corporal punishment has been illegal in schools since 1996, but commitments in 2010 and 2014 to prohibit its use in all settings still lack relevant legislation.⁶⁵ In 2014, UNICEF found that 52 per cent of children aged one-14 in El Salvador⁶⁶ and 63 per cent of children aged one-14 in the Dominican Republic⁶⁷ had experienced some form of violent discipline. While a minority of Cohort parents indicate awareness of the illegality of violent punishment, this is referred to in cases where severe or extreme abuse is described. The *Real Choices, Real Lives* data demonstrates that more work needs to be done to develop and enforce legislation prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in these contexts. Girls in all three Cohort countries cite corporal punishment as a reason they must obey their parents:

Interviewer's note: "The girl was asked what would happen if she didn't agree to do what her mother asked her to do, and the girl answered that her mother would hit her."

(Camila, Brazil, 2017)

"I'd do it... Because they [would] hit me [if I didn't]."

(Dariana, Dominican Republic, 2017)

"They would hit me [if I disobeyed]."

(Rebecca P, El Salvador, 2017)

The girls in El Salvador report the highest use of corporal punishment by parents or carers out of the three countries. When asked about the use of corporal punishment, parent/carer responses were mixed; however, the most common attitude expressed was that the use of violent punishment is not good and alternative forms of discipline are better, but that in certain cases its use is a necessary response to disobedience and bad behaviour. The distinction is also made by many between 'hitting' or 'beating' and 'spanking' or 'slapping' where the former are regarded as violent and unacceptable and something that happens when things get out of control, while the latter are regarded as acceptable and normal forms of punishment of children:

"Only when she deserves it and she's being stubborn when we're speaking to her and she doesn't pay attention... It's not fair to mistreat them for the hell of it."

(Hillary's mother, El Salvador, 2017)

"Where the kid annoys you so much, that despite yourself, you whack them."

(Madelin's mother, Dominican Republic, 2017)

"When I argue with them and it doesn't work, I give them a good slap... Not always, but sometimes when I need to; it's a good idea to pull their ears just a little bit... we are parents and we keep them on a short leash."

(Natália's mother, Brazil, 2017)

“They can be punished but not to the point of hitting them or beating them with a stick, or hitting them in sensitive areas; we can do that for some things, but not to the point of killing them, as they say, you know.”

(Rebecca P’s mother, El Salvador, 2017)

In Brazil, the Cohort girls who reported experiencing corporal punishment in 2017 either suggested this was a last resort for their parents (Tatiana), or something that no longer happens (Patrícia), or something that is threatened but not necessarily used (Camila):

“My dad said he does not like to hit me, but when I do something very, very, very wrong, he does, but I don’t really think he hits me.”

(Tatiana, Brazil, 2017)

“She [my mother] doesn’t hit me now.”

(Patrícia, Brazil, 2017)

It is difficult to understand the true extent of the use of violent punishment; for example, Rebeca (Dominican Republic, 2017) reports that she would **“get a beating”** when she breaks the rules her mother sets, but this contrasts with what her mother says:

“Well, if I was scolding her and then decided to hit her, all that would do is traumatise her, it won’t make her stop doing it. No – if she wants something, I just don’t buy it, I don’t give it to her, and that’s how I make her understand.”

(Rebeca’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2017)

Some LAC Cohort girls and family members also report witnessing the use of corporal punishment by teachers at school, and one of them reports being hit herself:

“Some boys who are friends go to them with tales and the teacher hits them [with a ruler] and tells us off.”

(Doris, El Salvador, 2017)

“Yes, he [their teacher] hits them on the head, he whacks them now and then, but the kids don’t... Not so violently, you understand? Because other people hit them violently, while others do it affectionately, they tap them with a rod.”

(Valerie’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)



Reading at home in Brazil, 2019

girls and boys, in terms of games and sports. Many of the girls in the LAC Cohort enjoy playing football; however, parent/carer attitudes towards this are often contrasting, with mothers and female carers being more likely to advocate girls playing traditionally 'male' sports than fathers and male carers. For example, below are some of the responses to an attitude question asked in 2011: "It is all right for a girl to want to play rough sports like football":

"Girls have their games and boys have theirs."

(Sharina's father, Dominican Republic, 2011)

"In other countries it is not criticised, but here it is."

(Leyla's father, Dominican Republic, 2011)

"That is all right, it is a good sport, I have seen girls playing it on the television."

(Dariana's mother, Dominican Republic, 2011)

"It is not normal. Girls have to practise sports which are more adequate for them."

(Juliana's grandfather, Brazil, 2011)

"I would support my daughter if she decided to play football."

(Sofia's mother, Brazil, 2011)

"Yes, [it is all right], because it is exercise."

(Susana's mother, El Salvador, 2011)

"No, [it is not all right]."

(Susana's father, El Salvador, 2011)

How and why are the girls challenging these expectations?

The LAC Cohort girls demonstrate a variety of 'glitches' in relation to gendered expectations

of behaviour, from noticing a difference in what is regarded as acceptable behaviour for themselves compared to their male peers, to criticising expectations of girls' behaviour, appearance, and freedom of movement, and, in some cases, describing instances where they have challenged these expectations directly.

"Like a boy"

Looking at the case of Juliana in Brazil (see case study on p64), prior to 2018, she reiterated strongly gendered attitudes towards 'acceptable' behaviours for girls: **"I think girls should behave like ladies and boys like gentlemen... [Girls should] dress better, fix the hair, keep the legs crossed"** (Juliana, Brazil, 2016) and expectations of 'femininity': **"[A girl at school] has a beautiful body, but she dresses like a man... I think she should take care of herself... they call her 'Mary-macho'"** (Juliana, Brazil, 2017). However, in 2018 Juliana's attitudes and behaviours appear to shift and challenge these norms: **"For me, appearance doesn't matter"** ["Do you think you've changed the kind of clothes you wear?"] **"I have, a lot... I'm more masculine"** (Juliana, Brazil, 2018). Juliana describes how her peers react to her choosing to play football with boys: **"They [my school friends] make fun of me, they say I'm a tomboy, that I'm always playing ball, all the time, with the boys..."** as well as outlining her response to this criticism: **"Then I tell them that this is sexist, because a girl can play ball just like a boy"** (Juliana, Brazil, 2018). Previously, Juliana indicated that her grandmother forbids her from playing with boys: **"She says I shouldn't be around boys. And when they come to play with us, I'm supposed to quit playing"** (Juliana, Brazil, 2017); however, in response to the 2018 storytelling exercise,⁶⁸ she recommends that the girl defy her parents' wishes for her not to play football, and the use of corporal punishment to deter



Girls cycling in the Dominican Republic, 2017

her, to follow her dream: **“I think she [the girl in the story] should continue playing, because what her parents think is a bit sexist... Because one day she could be a [football] player, if she wants to, because her dream is to play ball, just like mine”** (Juliana, Brazil, 2018).

On the **Social Level**, in 2011 Juliana’s grandfather expressed a gendered attitude

towards ‘acceptable’ sports for girls: **“It is not normal [for girls to play football]. Girls have to practice sports which are more adequate for them”** (Juliana’s grandfather, Brazil, 2011). However, her mother had a different opinion: **“Yes [it is all right for girls to play football], I like playing football myself”** (Juliana’s mother, Brazil, 2011).

This contrast in attitudes is an example of discordance between **Structural Level**

changes in social norms and these changes being translated to the **Individual Level**, in a context where women's football was illegal until 1979 due to it being regarded as against women's 'nature', but where recent victories for the Brazilian women's football team have been highly televised, with its star players using this platform to advocate for an end to discrimination against women in sports.⁶⁹ Juliana has lived with her grandparents for the majority of her life, and had little to no contact with her father until 2018. She considers that her father has a significant influence on her changed behaviour: ["What makes you think you've become tougher, more aggressive?"] **"[The] influence of my father... Sometimes he only talks to me, only when I do something stupid, then he starts talking, talking about his life. So, he starts talking about how he is, what he does... And I start acting like him"** (Juliana, Brazil, 2018). On the **Individual Level**, Juliana demonstrates heightened awareness of gendered expectations of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in this period of adolescence, alongside firm resistance to peer pressure, as well as social and familial expectations of her behaviour. On the **Social Level**, her peers' comments and her new relationship with her father may be contributing to her understandings of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', where non-adherence to gendered norms for girls is given the labels of **"masculine"** and **"tomboy"**.

In El Salvador, Andrea's grandmother punishes her granddaughter for behaving **"as if she were a male"**: **"We scold her so much; we tell her not to hang out with boys: it's like she's a man. She puts herself in the hands of those males and she goes off to play football with them, she loves that"** (Andrea's grandmother, El Salvador, 2016). Methods of deterrence include using corporal punishment: **"...she plays with spinning tops, kites, marbles, football ... so that makes me angry and I tell her I'm going to hit her, but**

I call her bluff and don't punish her, I just hold up a branch and do that... and she says, 'Do you want to hit me for that?', I say, 'You shouldn't be out playing ball', but she doesn't listen, as they are things they play at school..." (Andrea's grandmother, El Salvador, 2017). In 2018, Andrea continues to challenge these expectations; in response to the storytelling exercise, she recommends that the girl question her parents: **"Ask them what's wrong with playing [football] with boys."** (Andrea, El Salvador, 2018). Similarly, whilst Valeria in El Salvador recognises that those around her find her behaviour non-normative (**"Sometimes they tell me that I am a boy..."**), this does not deter her from doing what she enjoys, though she makes sure it is not visible to anyone: **"...but I tell them that it's fun to play; sometimes when there's no one around I get two little cars and start playing at home"** (Valeria, El Salvador, 2017).

Fernanda in Brazil enjoys playing football and prefers to wear sportswear rather than traditional 'feminine' clothes, which her mother does not approve of: **"Her mother argues with her. [She says] 'My daughter, try to wear nice clothes, girls' shirts'"** (Fernanda's father, Brazil, 2017), and which her peers call her names for: **"Because the other girls started talking, kept teasing her, like, 'Hey, girl, are you going to be a 'sapatão?'"** (a slur in Brazilian Portuguese meaning 'lesbian', often used against females who behave/dress in traditionally 'masculine' ways or play 'male' sports like football) (Fernanda's father, Brazil, 2017). Her father, however, encourages Fernanda to play football, describes her as **"bull-headed"**, and hopes that she becomes a police officer rather than a teacher: **"It would make me very proud if she did that. She doesn't have the vocation to be a teacher. Her thing is playing ball, or this police thing, because she's really bull-headed"** (Fernanda's father, Brazil, 2017).

2.2.2 Violent behaviour

What is the norm?

Violence is a dominant and constant aspect of many of the LAC Cohort girls' lives. In El Salvador in particular, where homicide rates are among the highest in the world for a country officially at 'peace', the Cohort girls consistently report witnessing violence in their communities. In all three countries, a

prevalent culture of 'machismo' contributes to high rates of domestic violence and femicide (see Box 11 on 'machismo' and Box 12 on GBV), by perpetuating the normalisation of violence and its association with 'masculinity'.

When asked their opinion on the statement "Girls are at more risk of violence than boys"

Box 11 'Machismo' and the impact of gendered norms on boys and men

The culture of 'machismo' or 'ultra-masculinity', wherein dominant notions of 'masculinity' or 'maleness' such as strength, virility, and aggression are exaggerated, has a significant impact on social expectations of behaviour for males in these contexts. The outcomes of such expectations are negative for both males and females, as boys are socialised from a young age not to express too much emotion, and prove their strength, courage, and dominance over women. Attitudes towards what are 'acceptable' behaviours and activities for boys are strongly gendered in the LAC Cohort data and often linked to this 'machismo' culture which is particularly evident in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador. When asked in 2011 their thoughts on the statement "It is ridiculous for boys to play with dolls", almost all LAC Cohort parents and carers agreed. Looking at the parents and carers in our case studies as examples:

"Of course! [It is ridiculous.]"

(Leyla's father, Dominican Republic, 2011)

"It is ridiculous, it is wrong for a boy to play with dolls. It's very bad; I think it is very bad. Because, how do you say, they say they change; they become fairies. That's what they say."

(Leyla's grandmother, Dominican Republic, 2011)

"I think this is very weird; it's the girls who play with dolls."

(Juliana's mother, Brazil, 2011)

"[Yes, it is ridiculous.] Dolls are for girls."

(Juliana's grandfather, Brazil, 2011)

"Girls and boys are different and these differences are natural, for example, they can't play the same games, girls mustn't play ball, they play with dolls, and boys mustn't play with dolls."

(Doris' mother, El Salvador, 2011)

This demonstrates the intrinsic nature of gendered norms for girls, boys, women, and men, and the need to disrupt the socialisation process for both males and females to tackle the root causes of gender inequality.



Shelling pigeon peas at home in the Dominican Republic, 2018

(see Figure 5), all Cohort parents and carers in Brazil and the Dominican Republic agreed that girls are more at risk of violence than boys; half of Cohort parents and carers in El Salvador agreed, whilst the other half regarded the risks to be high for both boys and girls. Their qualitative responses outline the norm that views girls as overall more vulnerable and weaker than boys:

“Girls are more fragile; they don’t have the strength to defend themselves.”

(Natália’s mother, Brazil, 2018)

“A woman [girl] is always more fragile.”

(Bianca’s mother, Brazil, 2018)

“Girls are more defenceless than boys.”

(Rebeca’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“They are more vulnerable than men.”

(Griselda’s father, Dominican Republic, 2018)

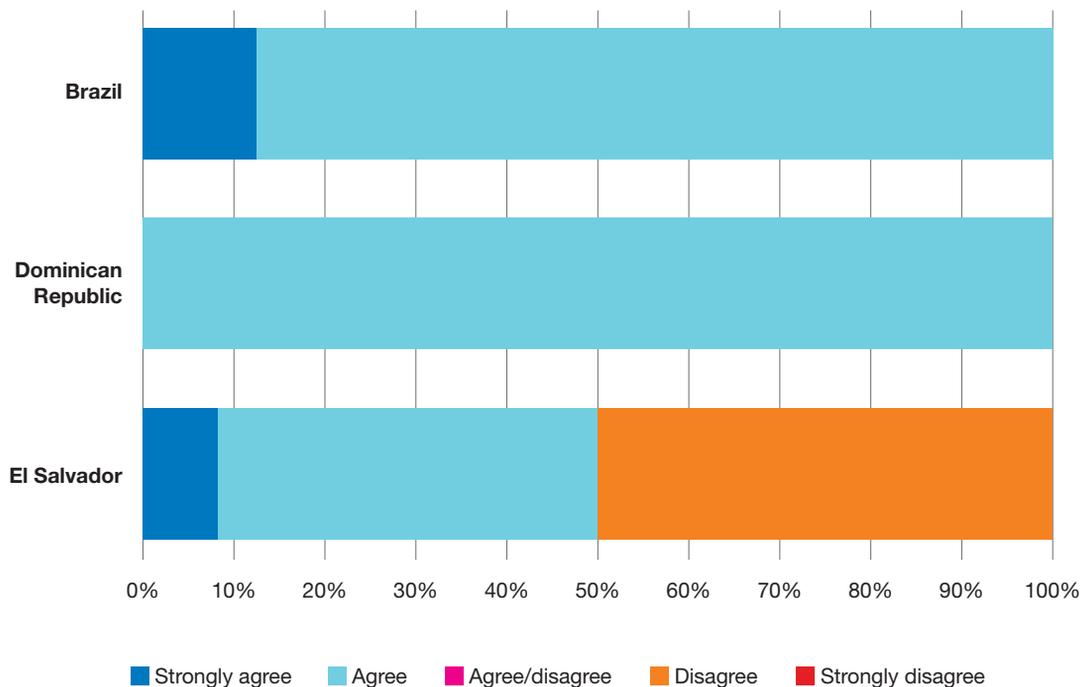
“It’s more common for girls to be abused.”

(Stephany’s mother, El Salvador, 2018)

How and why are girls challenging these norms?

A number of the LAC Cohort girls demonstrate ‘glitches’ in the reproduction of these norms which label girls as weaker and boys as stronger; however, the way in which many do this is by indicating that girls’ strength is more important than their appearance so that they are able to defend themselves from violence. Looking at Leyla’s case (see case study on p50) in the Dominican Republic, we explore the links between reports of violent behaviour in girls and their experiences of violence inflicted by male peers.

Figure 5 Parent/carer attitudes “Girls are at more risk of violence than boys”, 2018-2019





DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

CASE STUDY: **LEYLA**

Dominican Republic

Leyla is 12 years old and the third youngest in a household of eight. She lives in a rural area in the southern Peravia region of the Dominican Republic with her mother (33), stepfather (34), older brother (15), half-brother and half-sister from her mother's first marriage (19 and 17), and two half-brothers from her mother's current relationship (three and six months). Until 2017, members of Leyla's extended family also lived in the home – her maternal aunt, three female cousins (17, 11, and eight) and one male cousin (16). Leyla's maternal grandmother was the head of the family and Leyla's main carer until her illness and death in 2014, which caused a significant shift in the household dynamics. Leyla's father, who lived with the family until his separation from her mother sometime in 2015, appears to have continued contact with his children and sends their mother some financial support. Leyla's mother described her ex-partner as **"a bit violent"** and said that their separation affected her a lot but that **"things between him and me were not going well and it's better to split up before something happens"** (Leyla's mother, 2015).

In 2017, Leyla's stepfather was the highest earner in the household, working as an 'intermediary' in plantain transportation. However, in 2018 he was out of work. Leyla's mother contributed the most stable income to the household, working full-time as a domestic worker in the closest city before the birth of her son in 2018, and while she received three months state maternity leave, her employer hired someone else after this period leading

to financial concerns for the family. Leyla's grandmother and aunt cared for the children while Leyla's mother worked, and during the grandmother's illness and her own pregnancy in 2015, Leyla's mother stopped working and for a period was significantly more present in Leyla's life (2014-2016). Leyla's mother was eager to start working again in 2016 when her son was eight months old and did so despite her partner not wishing her to: **"He doesn't want me to go away to work, but I told him that I would go away to work"** (Leyla's mother, 2016). In 2017, Leyla's mother and aunt explained that they manage the household finances: **"Our husbands hardly make any of the decisions at home; they are here but they don't make any decisions in the house"**, and in 2012 Leyla's grandmother indicated that this is the norm in their community: **"We women are the ones in charge. One hundred per cent of women lead the home, because when anyone asks, 'Who is the head of the household?' [I respond] 'I am.'"**

All three school-aged children in the household are in full-time education; her older half-brother (19) is attending university, and Leyla is in Grade 8 – the correct school year for her age. Education is very important for Leyla's mother: **"Children who don't learn today, who won't know anything tomorrow, they won't be anyone in the future"** (2017). She expresses concern for Leyla's academic progress, which is lower than that of her siblings, reporting behavioural and attendance issues at school:



“IF THEY [BOYS] HIT ME, I HIT THEM BACK AND THAT’S IT”

“She only goes to school to fight” (Leyla’s mother, 2017), and explaining, **“They sent for us; the teacher spent the day with her in the head teacher’s office”** (Leyla’s mother, 2018). Leyla herself expressed a lack of interest in school from 2015 onwards: **“What I don’t like is when I’m tired and I don’t like going, no... But Mummy says I have to go.”** However, in 2018, she regards education as important **“because we have to become professionals”** and aspires to go to university and become a doctor, which she says her uncle has said he will pay for: **“He keeps telling me to finish school here quickly so I can... go to university there; when I finish here he will pay me to go to university there like his dad paid for him to go.”**

Household work is mainly carried out by females, with one of Leyla’s older brothers helping with some tasks: **“Boys should do them too but usually it’s girls who have to do them”** (Leyla, 2018). Her older sister (17) quarrels with Leyla for not doing her share of the housework: **“When I was your age, Mum would go to the capital and I knew how to cook and I did the cleaning and you don’t want to do anything!”** (Leyla’s mother, quoting her eldest daughter, 2018). Despite a gendered division of labour at home, Leyla’s mother says

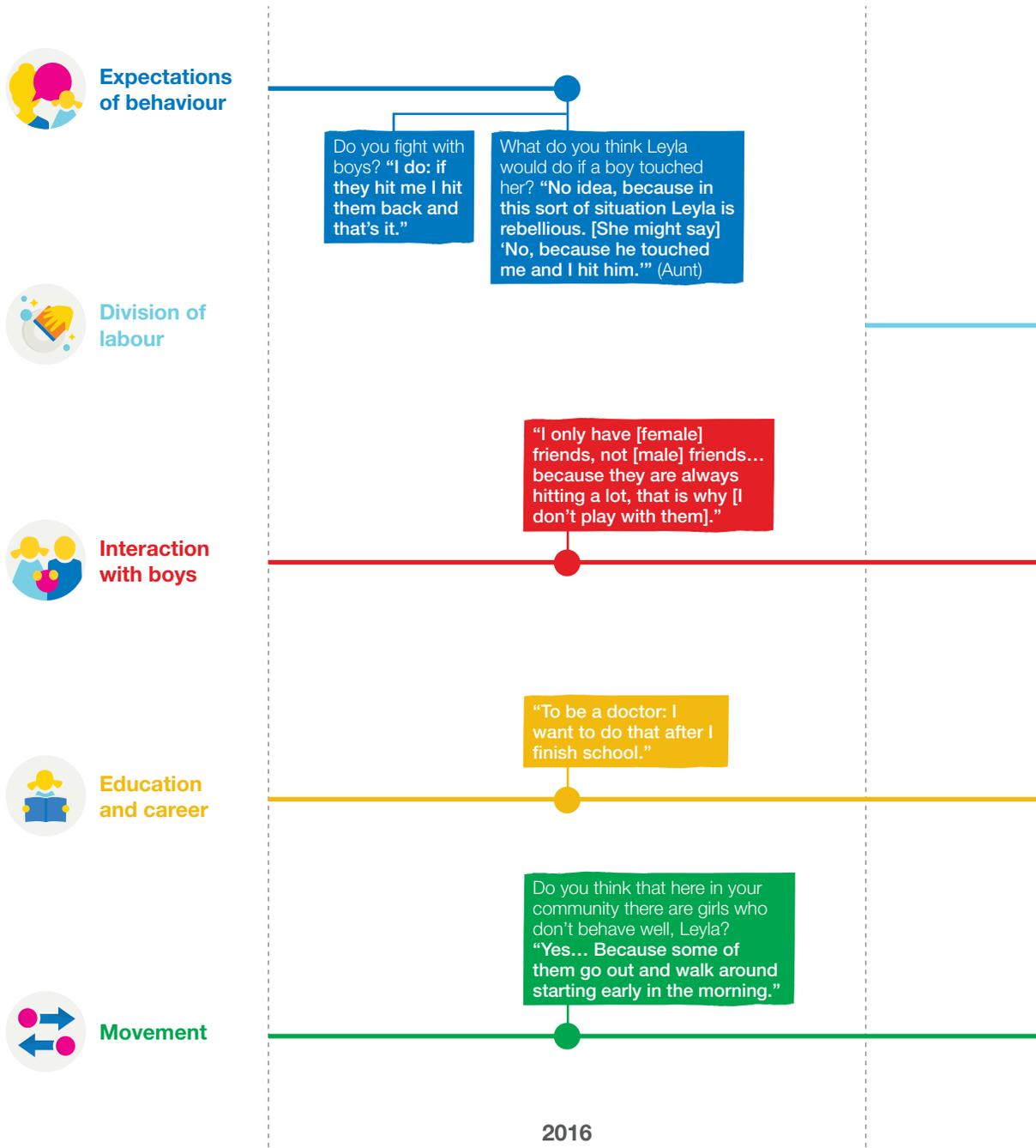
that things have changed in her community: **“Right now they’re all the same, because men do women’s things, and women do men’s things, that’s the way things used to be... because in the past they would give you something to do and say: ‘You have to do this; you can’t do that because you’re a woman’”** (Leyla’s mother, 2017). In 2011, Leyla’s father described his upbringing where he carried out traditionally ‘female’ chores: **“I swept and cooked and lots of people were confused...”** and said that he would not let any sons of his do the same. Referring to the need to demonstrate ‘masculinity’ in the *machismo*-dominated culture in the Dominican Republic (see Box 11), and prove his own virility, he said, **“...that’s why I did what I did, I have seven children with six women”.**

Previously, Leyla cited her father as one of her main confidantes but in 2016 she described how her father no longer wants to spend time with her, and prioritises her brother instead: **“He liked me to play and do all sorts of things, but he doesn’t like it anymore... He just goes out and takes the boy and that’s it.”**

A number of Leyla’s family members describe her as **“rebellious”** in terms of her disruptive and sometimes violent behaviour at school, where Leyla has fought with boys: **“If they hit me, I hit them back and that’s it”** (Leyla, 2016). In 2018, her mother describes Leyla as a **“handful”** due to her going out without permission on the streets with a new group of friends – which is a concern due to reports of community and gang violence. To dissuade her from doing this, her mother uses corporal punishment. Leyla’s mother is also concerned that Leyla may have a boyfriend – which she has prohibited – and Leyla herself refused to discuss the subject, but said that boys and girls should be allowed to spend time together because **“One day we’ll have to get together with boys”** (Leyla, 2018). Her mother imagines that at 17/18 years old, Leyla will be **“a bit arrogant, because she is opinionated”.**

FIGURE 6: LEYLA

Timeline of 'glitches' (when and where)



And your brother doesn't do chores? "No." Why not? "Well, I don't know." What does your brother do then? "Sometimes he washes up, when my sister is washing clothes or mopping, and I am not here because I am at school." Do you think it is fair? "Well, both should do the same thing... Because we both have the same rights."

"[My brother] doesn't do anything at home and he is always out... Thing is, we girls have to do chores because we are girls, the boys can't do that much... I mean, not just us, boys should do them too, but usually it's girls who have to do them."

"I've heard her with her [female] cousins, talking about boyfriends with her [female] friends, that she is going to take a message. I hit her and she wrote a letter she was going to send to her grandfather. She was going to live with her grandfather because I don't let her have a boyfriend." (Mother)

"We have to get used to being friends with each other, because we're not going to be spending all our time with girls; one day we'll have to get together with boys... If she [the girl in the story]⁷⁰ stops playing with boys, then, who knows, she won't like boys, and she will just be focused on girls, and that's not very good."

"[School is important for girls] because we have to become professionals, because if we don't go to school and [if we] leave school we have to end up working as maids, and things like that, and that's not good."

"I mean [I want] not to end up like she [my mother] did – she only studied until Grade 8: unlike her I want a career, a good life."

"She always does whatever she feels like... she wants to go out and walk around without getting permission, and [it's] not how we do things." (Mother)

"She has been a bit of a handful, I'm always having to control her because she has a bunch of friends who want to take her out, to be out on the streets and I don't want that. But everything's good at school, I can't complain about school, she is always there. [Those friends are] terrible... They are out on the streets all the time, they're not at home, they want Leyla to be like them." (Mother)

2017

2018



Looking after younger siblings in the Dominican Republic, 2018

“So that we can defend ourselves”

In 2016, Leyla described her own violent behaviour as a response to experiences of violence from her male peers: [“Do you fight with boys?”] **“I do, if they hit me I hit them back and that’s it”** (Dominican Republic). Leyla’s aunt indicated that she would expect this behaviour from Leyla if a boy were to touch her without her consent, and while she describes this behaviour as “rebellious” she

does not otherwise criticise it: [“What do you think Leyla would do if a boy touched her?”]

“No idea, because in this sort of situation Leyla is rebellious. [She might say] ‘No, because he touched me and I hit him’” (Leyla’s aunt, Dominican Republic, 2016).

The risk of GBV is a major concern for many of the LAC Cohort parents and carers, with high rates of violence against women and femicide in all three contexts, where

Box 12 Gender-based violence in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador

Lifetime experience of physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner, 2014 (% of female population)⁷¹

Country	Rate
Brazil	31%
Dominican Republic	17%
El Salvador	26%

Femicide or femicide, 2018 (in absolute numbers and rates per 100,000 women)⁷²

Country	Absolute number	Rate
Brazil	1,206	1.1
Dominican Republic	106	1.9
El Salvador	232	6.8

The complex impact of gang violence on women and girls – particularly prominent in the El Salvador Cohort context – has been largely overlooked until recently, where research has highlighted that the gendered nature of gang violence, wherein boys and men are expected to prove their ‘masculinity’ through violent acts against members of other gangs, also increases violence against women and girls in the community. This occurs not only when women and girls are caught in the crossfire, but in the intrinsic associations of ‘masculinity’ with violence and dominance over women where even during times of relative ‘peace’ between male gang members, female relatives and partners of gang members (who often have little choice or agency in these relationships) are still targeted in acts of proving ‘dominance’.⁷³

progress to address the normalisation of GBV has been relatively limited (see Box 12 on GBV and Box 8 on relationships). While violent and aggressive behaviour is associated by the Cohort families with males and ‘masculinity’ and a threat to the girls, a number of parents reporting similar behaviour in the girls themselves suggests that violence as self-defence is seen to be a positive characteristic for their daughters. Katerin’s mother in the Dominican Republic says that her daughter picks fights at school, behaviour she interprets positively because: **“If anyone touches Katerin she will break one of his eyes!”** (Katerin’s mother, Dominican Republic,

2016). Katerin herself expresses a similar attitude: **“[It is important for girls to be fit and strong] because when a boy hits me, I can hit him back”** (2016), suggesting that this is something she already has experience of. Raquel in El Salvador and Rebeca in the Dominican Republic also indicate that violence against girls is something they are aware of happening, and both think that being strong and fit is necessary for girls: **“Because if a boy wants to hit her, a girl has to learn things”** (Raquel, El Salvador, 2017); **“So that we can defend ourselves if someone tries to do something to us”** (Rebeca, Dominican Republic, 2017).

Box 13 Violence restricting girls' freedoms

Despite the majority of Cohort parents and carers in the three LAC countries disagreeing with the statement that “Boys should have more freedoms than girls”, the data shows that the Cohort girls have very limited freedom of movement in their communities compared to their male peers, with the majority citing ‘home’, ‘school’, ‘church’ and, in a few cases, a sports area as the only spaces they spend time in regularly. Parents and carers say that they restrict the girls’ access to spaces for two main reasons: 1. the risk of community violence and GBV, and 2. the risk of adolescent pregnancy.

“We always hear things like, ‘That girl left home to go to school and never came back’; someone’s daughter went to someone’s house and hasn’t come home. We worry, yes, that they’ll go missing, that they’ll go after a classmate or a friend and disappear. We’re always worried.”

(Natália’s mother, Brazil, 2018)

“The way things are in this country now, all you hear is: ‘They killed a girl in that place, she went out with so and so, with a young man, and she was never seen again, or in a hotel, or...’ It’s a risk girls take when they go out like that.”

(Valerie’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“I tell her it’s bad to go anywhere. And that they will... There are men... because no, I don’t let her go to these places, things are very dangerous now.”

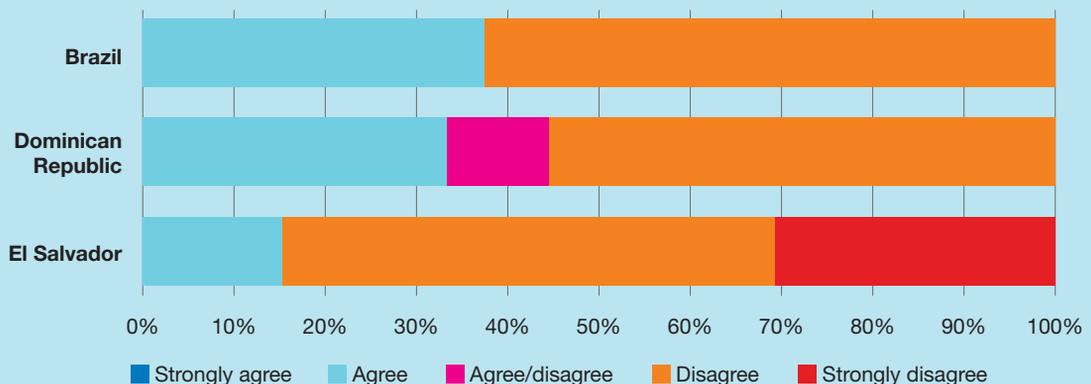
(Raquel’s grandmother, El Salvador, 2018)

In the Dominican Republic in particular, parents and carers even express concern for the girls’ safety inside the home:

“Any scoundrel comes here and finds there is no one at home, and she is the only one there, she doesn’t know how to defend herself, there has to be an active person at home because that’s why there are so many rapes and things, this country is going to the dogs right now with all this rape business, abusing girls.”

(Valerie’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

Figure 7 Parent/carer attitudes: “Boys should have more freedoms than girls”, 2018-2019



“Now it’s unusual not to be touched [by males], even if you don’t go out.”

(Raisa’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“She has developed now; I tell her that once a girl has her period she has to look after herself, because lots of young people, if they do anything with a girl... and then, even if she doesn’t go out and is shy, we have to tell them that they have to look after themselves.”

(Sharina’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

These are gendered norms which both demonstrate the pervasiveness of GBV in adolescent girls’ lives (see Box 12), and the expectation that girls protect themselves from risks by limiting their movement – any challenges to these norms could therefore mean the girls are put in danger. In this way, violence – both community and gender-based – presents a trap for girls and women in these contexts, where norms that limit their access to spaces are viewed as necessary for their safety but perpetuate fundamental gender inequalities of freedom of movement without addressing the root causes of violence.

Many of the LAC Cohort girls have noticed a difference in the spaces they and their male peers have access to, but there is little evidence that they challenge these norms, instead indicating the spaces where they feel ‘safe’ and demonstrating awareness of the violence in their communities which is at the core of their limited movement:

“It’s very dangerous, because if you go after the boys, you can get ‘pon pon’, gunshot. [I] feel good [that girls can’t go where boys go] because you should not seek danger.”

(Heydi, El Salvador, 2016)

“[I feel safest at church] I think it’s a very calm place and nothing bad can ever happen there. [I feel unsafe] when I pass by the [basketball] court, because there are some bad boys who like to hang out there... Usually there are lots of fights there.”

(Bianca, Brazil, 2018)

As the Cohort girls get older, parent/carer dependence on using their authority to restrict the girls’ movement becomes increasingly problematic as the girls start making their own decisions and other **Social Level** influences take on bigger roles in their lives:

“Now she is big, [I am worried] about her going out on her own... Because she can go out on her own, and the guys and things like that. I wouldn’t like her to go out on her own.”

(Gabriela’s mother, El Salvador, 2018)

“Before, she never wanted to go out, because what if she says, ‘I’m going to sleep over at a friend’s house’, and it’s a lie? So I won’t let her sleep at a friend’s house.”

(Gladys’ mother, El Salvador, 2018)

2.3 GENDER ROLES: DIVISION OF LABOUR

What is the norm?

Despite the majority of LAC Cohort parents/carers expressing agreement with the statement “Boys and girls should have the same household responsibilities” (see Figure 8) these attitudes are not reflected in their own, and the Cohort girls’, descriptions of division of labour in their homes, showing a disjuncture between gender equitable attitudes and behaviours.

The LAC Cohort girls consistently report that domestic work is expected to be either wholly or mostly carried out by females in their households, communities, and schools.

“Women always do more chores than men.”

(Katerin, Dominican Republic, 2017)

“Boys play ball games and girls play with dolls. Men do nothing at home, and women work a lot.”

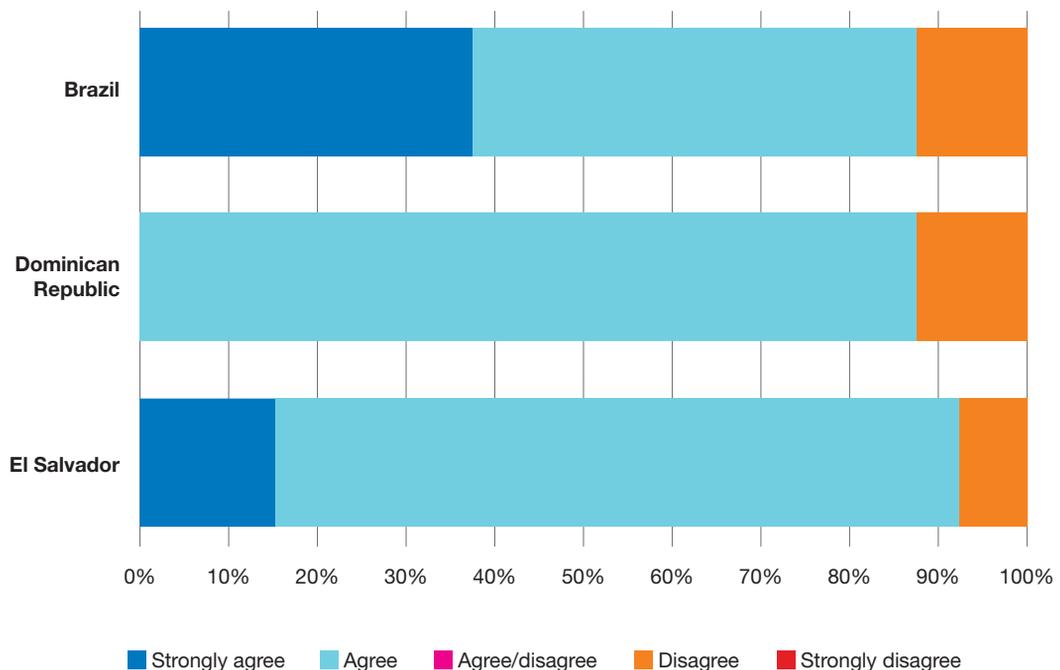
(Patrícia, Brazil, 2016)

“Boys hardly ever do the cleaning at school: they sweep a bit, and they make a huge mess. Boys should do chores but they don’t care. They should sweep, mop, wash the mops, but they don’t do anything.”

(Gabriela, El Salvador, 2018)

Justifications for a gendered division of labour often revolve around women’s access to spaces, where the home is regarded as their primary space while men carry out work ‘outside’ of the home, yet association of housework with females is dominant even in contexts where female carers are employed and contribute an income to the household.

Figure 8 Parent/carer attitudes “Boys and girls should have the same household responsibilities”, 2018-2019



This division of labour is also associated with ingrained concepts of gender roles where lack of adherence to norms carries social consequences, namely being regarded as homosexual – which in machismo-prevalent contexts is viewed as something negative.

“Men should work outside, and women should stay at home with domestic tasks.”

(Griselda’s father, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“[The] thing is that people make girls do more than boys, because they think that sweeping will turn the boys into homosexuals, or if they wash clothes that means they are women. So they don’t have much respect in that way, so most of the chores are for girls, not boys.”

(Doris’ aunt, El Salvador, 2017)

“I swept and cooked [when I was a child] and lots of people were confused... But you are a man... That’s why I did what I did, I have seven children with six women.”

(Leyla’s father, Dominican Republic, 2011)

How and why are girls challenging these norms?

Gendered norms related to division of labour in the household and at school, which see an increasing contrast in how boys and girls spend their time as they enter adolescence, is the area where the LAC Cohort girls show the highest number of ‘glitches’. ‘Glitches’ vary from simply acknowledging that there is a gender-based difference in the type of work that is allocated/done, or the amount of work that is allocated/done in their household or the community, to stating that division based on gender is unfair, with some girls refusing to carry out what their parents or carers expect of them.

“Dads don’t do anything”

On the **Individual Level**, many of the girls demonstrate an awareness of the differences in behaviour of adult males and females in their homes, as well as differing expectations of themselves and their male relatives and peers.

Doris in El Salvador (see case study on p30) comments on how these differing expectations impact how, and in which spaces, she and her male relatives spend their time: **“[The boys can go out to play] because they don’t do anything... They go out to play, and we’re stuck here doing the chores”** (2017). Further, observing the adult males in her house in 2016, Doris criticised their behaviour, not only in not carrying out household responsibilities but in demanding service from the females in the home: **“The women, because women do more chores than men... The men only play, watch TV, they don’t do anything... Because women do more chores, men are lazy to get water, they say to them, ‘Go get me water.’”** [“Do you think this is fair?”] **“No.”** In 2017, Doris specifically identified and critiqued the norm that fathers do not help with housework: **“Dads don’t do anything... [women] mop, sweep, tidy up, do chores, make the beds”** [“Do you think this is fair?”] **“No.”** Here, Doris expresses attitudes which challenge the norm of a gendered division of labour; however, she also demonstrates the normalisation of these divisions wherein both adult males and male children are permitted to enjoy leisure time while females carry the burden of domestic work.

On the **Social Level**, Doris’ mother has expressed attitudes which support traditional gender roles: **“Men do the chores outside the house; the domestic chores are down to the women”** (Doris’ mother, 2012); [“Why are Doris’ chores different to the males in the house?”] **“Doris is a girl, and boys are**

stronger because they are male" (Doris' mother, 2014). While she agrees with the statement "Boys and girls should have the same household responsibilities" in 2018: **"Because both have to contribute, not just because they're male or female"**, there is no evidence that this attitude is translated into practice in the household. Doris has witnessed her aunt carry out the majority of the household work since Doris has lived in the home (from 2011), and many of these responsibilities are now being transferred to Doris as she gets older. Her aunt expressed attitudes which appear to critique this division of labour and the gendered norms behind it: **"The thing is that people make girls do more than boys, because they think that sweeping will turn the boys into homosexuals, or if they wash clothes that means they are women. So they don't have much respect in that way, so most of the chores are for girls, not boys"** (Doris' aunt, 2017). Whilst this may have influenced Doris' own expression of attitudes which challenge these norms, there is no indication that this division of labour will change in the home. Instead, Doris has begun to refuse to carry

out her allocation of chores: **"She doesn't want to do anything now; I have to keep on telling her; before, I didn't have to say anything"** (Doris' mother, 2018).

"Boys should too"

Parent/carer responses to the statement "Boys and girls should have the same household responsibilities" (see Figure 8) suggest that attitudes and practices concerning traditional gender roles are changing in these contexts:

"Because we're living in a liberal world: these days boys as well as girls have to have their responsibilities."

(Madelin's mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

"Because a boy can do whatever a girl can do too, the only difference between them is the sex: whatever a man does a woman can too, and whatever a woman does a man can do too."

(Gladys' mother, El Salvador, 2018)

Box 14 The impact of gender roles on family relationships

Some of the Cohort girls from the Dominican Republic who have brothers describe how their relationship with their fathers has changed as they get older, where the gendered 'realms' of the home (female) versus public spaces (male) and gendered 'types' of work, where manual labour is viewed as only acceptable for males, reduce the amount of time the girls spend with their fathers.

Madelin's younger brother is allowed to help her father with carpentry, but she was not offered this option at the same age: **"Dads like taking boys when they go to work, but not girls."** (2018)

Sharina and her younger sister (11) have never gone to the family plot of land, but her younger brother has: **"Because my dad doesn't like us to go to the plot."** (2018)

Leyla (see case study on p50) used to have a close relationship with her father, but in 2016 she described how he now prioritises spending time with her brother: **"He liked me to play and do all sorts of things, but he doesn't like it any more... He just goes out and takes the boy and that's it."**



A family's field of crops in the Dominican Republic, 2018

However, as Madelin in the Dominican Republic points out, there is a disjuncture between these attitudes and the enforcement of an equal division of labour:

“Some boys don’t like washing dishes or mopping, because they say that’s for girls, but I think chores are for everyone.” [“And why do you think boys don’t do them?”] **“Because they don’t like to.”** [“And do girls like it?”] **“Neither, some don’t.”** [“So why do they do them?”] **“Because they make them do it.”** [“But they don’t make the boys do it?”] **“Hardly ever.”** (Madelin, Dominican Republic, 2017)

Leyla in the Dominican Republic (see case study on p50) describes a similar situation, suggesting that boys “should” carry out chores:

“[My brother] doesn’t do anything at home and he is always out... Thing is,

we girls have to do chores because we are girls, the boys can’t do that much... I mean, not just us, boys should do them too, but usually it’s girls who have to do them.”

(Leyla, Dominican Republic, 2018)

Similarly, Valeria’s mother in El Salvador discusses the difficulties of ensuring that boys help with housework: **“Boys can’t do housework, but girls can. Because they don’t like it, when you tell them to do chores, they don’t like it”** (Valeria’s mother, 2018), demonstrating the reproduction of gendered norms to the next generation of boys who are socialised to reject these tasks.

Natália’s mother in Brazil justifies her agreement that boys and girls should have the same responsibilities **“because rights should be equal”** (Natália’s mother, Brazil, 2018), indicating an association of

Box 15 Legislation promoting gender equality in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador

All three Cohort countries have legislation in place for the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women in economic and political life, including the creation of the Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women⁷⁴ and Ciudad Mujer⁷⁵ (‘Women’s City’) initiative in El Salvador; the National Gender Equality and Equity Plan (2007-2017)⁷⁶ in the Dominican Republic; and the Secretariat for Women’s Policies in Brazil.⁷⁷ However, the most recent reviews by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) found significant limitations in the scope, funding, and implementation of all such legislation⁷⁸ (see Annex Two).

The creation of specific institutes, committees, and initiatives for the promotion of gender equality can increase the visibility of efforts and aid the dissemination of concepts which challenge traditional patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes, while the introduction of legislation on issues such as parliamentary representation (quotas for female participation⁷⁹) and domestic violence (such as the Maria da Penha law⁸⁰) can provide women and girls with the legal language and instruments to challenge gender inequitable attitudes and practices. However, without sufficient funding and implementation **Structural Level** progress will remain superficial – potentially impacting gendered attitudes, but not providing the opportunity to translate this into real behavioural change.

housework with gender equality and rights. Leyla expressed a similar sentiment in 2017 when discussing how she and her sister do more work than their brother: **“Well, both should do the same thing... Because we both have the same rights.”** The use of ‘rights’ language appears to reflect a wider, possibly **Structural Level**, influence of gender equality discourse demonstrated by many Cohort family members on a number of topics (see Box 15): **“Laws are changing everything. Now, women have the same**

rights as men” (Juliana’s grandfather, Brazil, 2011); **“In the same way as a man has the right to work, so does a woman”** (Dariana’s father, Dominican Republic, 2018); **“Yes [both girls and boys should go to school]: they have the same rights”** (Karen’s mother, El Salvador, 2016).

Looking deeper at Juliana’s case in Brazil (see case study on p64) we can see how the wider socio-economic context is influencing her ‘glitches’ in this area.



PLAN INTERNATIONAL BRAZIL

Mapping her social network in Brazil, 2019



CASE STUDY: JULIANA

Brazil

Juliana is 13 years old and lives in an urban area in the north-eastern state of Maranhão in Brazil. She lives with her maternal grandparents and younger sister (11) and until 2018 had frequent contact with her mother (28), stepfather (33), and two half-brothers (eight and four), though she only lived with her mother for one year, in 2010-2011. Her maternal grandmother suggests that Juliana's mother has a limited relationship with her daughter, explaining, **"What I couldn't do for my children, I try to do for them [my grandchildren] today. Not even their mother is as close to them as I am"** (Juliana's grandmother, 2013). In 2018, her mother moved out of the area with her partner to another city, which caused some distress for the family: **"We've cried a lot already"** (Juliana's grandmother, 2018). Juliana's grandmother is her main carer, and while there appears to be no contact or financial support from Juliana's father, Juliana has a relationship with her paternal grandmother who provides some financial and childcare support.

The household has seen a number of shifts in dynamics due to the 2014 economic crisis⁸¹ in Brazil which led to Juliana's grandfather being out of work for much of the past four years and Juliana's grandmother becoming the family's breadwinner, having never previously worked: **"The crisis is really knocking on everyone's door in Brazil"** (Juliana's grandmother, 2015). Juliana's grandmother is a domestic worker for a family and negotiated a formal contract with her employer, in line with labour law reforms,⁸² which included minimum wage, benefits, and

payment of outstanding money she was owed. She explained that her employer values her: **"She said she doesn't see herself there without me, you know?"** (2017). In 2018, Juliana's grandfather became employed as a janitor, shifting the family dynamics once more. Before she started working, Juliana's grandmother did not take part in any economic decision making for the household. This then shifted to shared participation with her husband in the period when they both had work, then to a discussion about who should decide when she was the sole earner: **"As he's just become unemployed [again], we've just started thinking about this issue now, you know? We're still going to sit and talk about it"** (2017).

Education is a priority for Juliana's grandmother, who takes a hands-on approach to Juliana and her sister's learning: **"We educate them first at home. But studying they will learn more and have further knowledge"** (Juliana's grandmother, 2009). Her major concern is the low quality of schooling in the community, particularly secondary education where disorganisation, teacher absences, and violence in schools has impacted on Juliana's progress: **"I think the school is so disorganised she got a little lost, she became demotivated"** (2015); **"They miss work a lot. A teacher gets sick and doesn't go to work, and they don't get a replacement"** (2016); **"The other day they dismissed the kids because they said people were going to invade the school... Sometimes she spends three days without**



“THEY SAY I AM A TOMBOY...I TELL THEM THAT THIS IS SEXIST, BECAUSE A GIRL CAN PLAY BALL JUST LIKE A BOY”

going to class, because I’m afraid to send her to school” (2017). She would like to send Juliana to another school but does not have the resources: **“If we do not send them to a private school, or to reinforcement classes, then the student fails completely. So, Juliana’s performance dropped 100 per cent when she went to that school. A lot.”** (2018). Juliana would like to attend university and has had a number of different career aspirations over the years including becoming a doctor, a vet, a lawyer, and most recently, working with computers.

Prior to becoming employed, Juliana’s grandmother carried out the majority of household work in the home and criticised her daughter for requiring Juliana to carry out chores including caring for her younger half-brothers when she went to visit: **“I was really furious, I argued with her, I said: ‘This girl is too young’”** (2016). When Juliana’s grandmother began work and her grandfather was unemployed these dynamics shifted, **“He sweeps, he cleans, he cooks, you know? We share”** (Juliana’s grandmother, 2017); however, in 2018, when both grandparents are employed, Juliana reports that the full burden falls on her: **“I take care of the whole house, because they can’t be here all the time... almost all**

the time, because they’re working, both of them, and I stay at home alone, together with my sister” (2018).

Juliana reported having male friends until 2015 when she began to express ideas that girls don’t, or shouldn’t, play with boys and reported being told by her grandmother to stay away from them: **“She says I shouldn’t be around boys. And when they come to play with us, I’m supposed to quit playing”** (2017). In 2018, however, Juliana criticises parents who try to stop girls from playing football with boys: **“I think she should continue playing, because what her parents think is a bit sexist.”**⁸³

The area where Juliana and her family live has high levels of violence: **“It’s very dangerous, violent. Because the other day there was a shoot-out around here. It was afternoon, we were sleeping, we heard the screams; there was a man who had a knife in his hand, and another one got cut”** (Juliana, 2017). This is a cause of great concern for her grandmother and restricts Juliana’s movement in the community: **“We never let her go by bus alone... [when] she doesn’t come home, I’m like, ‘My God, she hasn’t arrived yet’, so one takes her, the other one picks her up, we take turns”** (Juliana’s grandmother, 2018).

Juliana has a close and positive relationship with her grandmother; however, both report that Juliana has become less affectionate – which is reportedly a trait of her mother’s. **“I used to be a more affectionate person before, and now I don’t even like hugs... Well, I don’t like when people touch me”** (Juliana, 2018). Prior to 2018, there is no mention of contact with Juliana’s father; however, she now reports spending time with him and describes how he has influenced her behaviour: **“[The] influence of my father [made me tougher]... sometimes he only talks to me, only when I do something stupid... he starts talking about how he is, what he does... And I start acting like him”** (2018).

FIGURE 9: JULIANA

Timeline of 'glitches' (when and where)



Expectations of behaviour



Division of labour



Interaction with boys



Children and relationships



Education and career



Appearance and physicality

"I think girls should behave like ladies and boys like gentlemen... [Girls should] dress better, fix the hair, keep the legs crossed."

"There are men who wash the dishes, sweep the house, and there are men who don't, so the women have to do it every day." Do you think this is right, this is fair? "No, I don't think so."

Do boys and girls play together? "Yes, they do." And do you always play with boys, too? "Yes." Do you think it's right for boys and girls to play together? "I do."

"I think she [the girl in the story] should continue playing, because what her parents think is a bit sexist... Because one day she could be a [football] player, if she wants to, because her dream is to play ball, just like mine... The way they hit her just because she was playing with the boys, I think this is wrong. Because there's nothing wrong with a girl playing football: it's a kind of exercise and that's all."

Do girls always play with boys? "They do. Just with my friends' brothers, because I'm not used to playing with the boys who live down there." Does your grandmother let you play with them? "No... She says I shouldn't be around boys. And when they come to play with us, I'm supposed to quit playing."

"...I don't think it's right getting pregnant at 15... Because she [a girl in the neighbourhood] is still underage... She needs to finish her education. She hasn't finished school yet. She's still going to Grade 8."

Juliana says she would like to be a lawyer and work at the courts of justice to put criminals in jail (interviewer's notes).

2012

2013

2014



Juliana's case highlights trickle-down-effect influences in shifting gender norms. On the **Individual Level**, prior to 2018 Juliana appeared to be fairly acceptant of gendered expectations of her behaviour as a girl, and of her responsibilities as a (grand)daughter: **"I think girls should behave like ladies and boys like gentlemen... [Girls should] dress better, fix the hair, keep the legs crossed"** (2016). Yet she is firm in pointing out that the division of household work is unfair: **"There are men who wash the dishes, sweep the house, and there are men who don't, so the women have to do it every day."** ["Do you think this is right, this is fair?"] **"No, I don't think so"** (2017).

On the **Social Level** Juliana's grandmother is her main carer, with whom she has a close and positive relationship and whose role in the household has seen a shift over the past three to four years from housewife to breadwinner: **"I managed to get some small jobs; I started to work and I was keeping the house. I don't even earn a minimum wage, but I was keeping the house because he [my husband] really did not do anything"** (Juliana's grandmother, 2016). Juliana's grandmother's own attitudes towards the division of labour have changed over this period – she now expects her husband to help – alongside her increased participation in economic decision making. Juliana has also witnessed her grandfather's role change as he is more present at home during periods of unemployment, and reportedly starts to help with domestic work: **"He sweeps, he cleans, he cooks, you know? We share"** (Juliana's grandmother, 2017).

On the **Structural Level**, we can see that the economic crisis in Brazil, which began in 2014/2015, has had a significant impact on levels of employment: Juliana's grandfather's loss of his job and subsequent difficulties in finding another is attributed to the crisis. Her grandmother states, **"The crisis is really**

knocking on everyone's door in Brazil" (2015). However, we can also see that male employment dropped significantly more than female employment, from 72 per cent in 2012 to 66 per cent in 2017, while female employment dropped from 48 per cent to 46 per cent over the same period (see Box 16). This difference is in part due to most 'formal' sectors of employment being affected by the economic downturn; the majority of employees in these sectors were men, while women were and continue to be more likely employed in 'informal' and precarious work. Since entering employment as a domestic worker and becoming the family's breadwinner, Juliana's grandmother appears to demonstrate increased agency both in the house and at work, now expecting her husband to help with housework: **"[I don't agree with] that business of getting home and doing nothing"** (2017) as well as actively taking part in the economic decision making in the house. She suggests that her husband's continued periods of unemployment may even result in her taking the lead on these decisions when she previously had no involvement at all. She has also negotiated a formal contract with her employer and has been driven to do so due to the introduction of Brazil's labour law reforms which require her to have a formal contract: **"She [my employer] said she doesn't see herself there without me, you know?"** (2017). The reforms allow free negotiations between employer and employee and, while they are regarded by some as controversial, advocates say that they enable the large numbers of people working informally in Brazil (like Juliana's grandmother) access to more protection and agency.⁸⁴

It appears that shifts in Juliana's household in 2017 have influenced her own, her grandmother's, and her grandfather's attitudes and behaviours regarding gender roles. In 2018 things changed once again when her grandfather found a job and the burden of looking after the house now falls

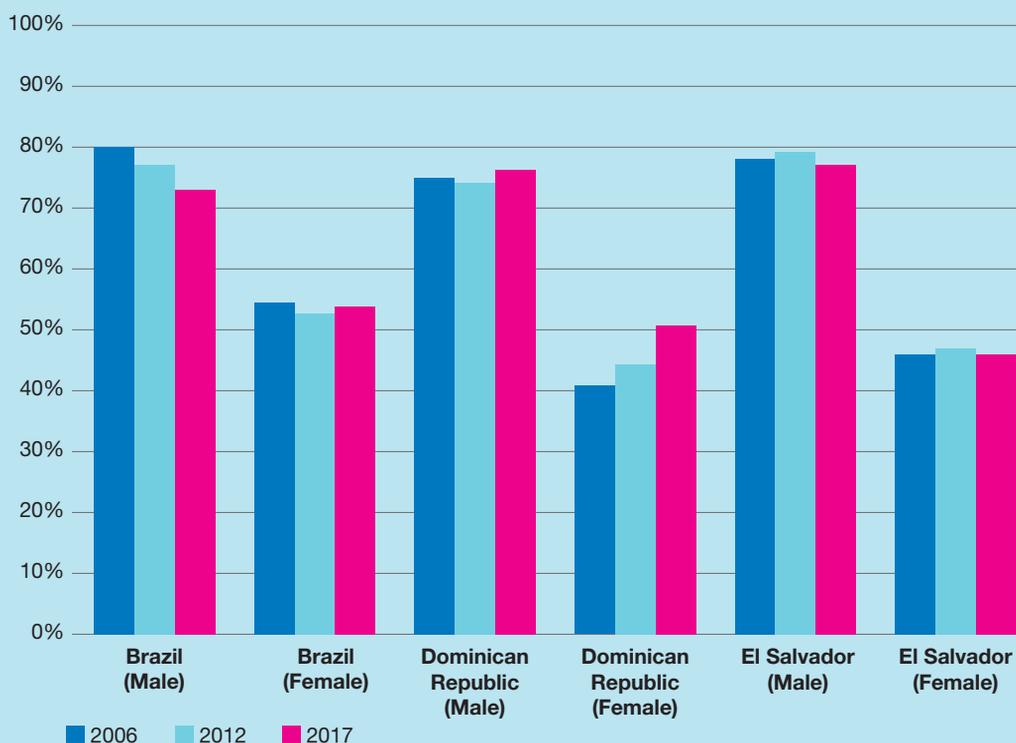
Box 16 Female employment in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador⁸⁵

In Brazil, **six** out of nine of the mothers or female carers are in paid employment: a fisherwoman (Amanda's mother), a hair stylist (Camila's mother), a farmer (Fernanda's mother), a domestic worker (Juliana's grandmother), a school cook (Larissa's mother), and a seamstress (Natália's mother). Prior to becoming pregnant, Sofia's mother was a nail technician but says she has since sold nail kits and has not gone back to work full-time. Bianca's mother and Tatiana's mother farm on family land for family consumption.

In El Salvador, **nine** out of 13 households include adult females in paid employment, **five** of whom are merchants, one (Doris' mother) works in a garden centre, and one (Andrea's grandmother) is a tailor.

In the Dominican Republic, **six** out of 12 mothers or female carers are in paid employment, one (Leyla's mother) is a domestic worker, two (Rebeca's mother and Sharina's mother, who sells ice for extra household income) are merchants, one (Saidy's grandmother) is a farmer, one (Katerin's mother) does occasional work as a substitute teacher and was studying nursing until 2018 when she was forced to stop for financial reasons, and one (Griselda's stepmother) works abroad.

Labour participation rate % of 15+ population



on Juliana's shoulders: **"I take care of the whole house, because they can't be here all the time... almost all the time, because they're working, both of them, and I stay at home alone, together with my sister"** (Juliana, 2018). Further, Juliana's grandmother was the only parent/carer in the Brazil Cohort to disagree with the statement that "Boys and girls should have the same household responsibilities" in 2018: **"I think the responsibility has to be the girl's, because a man... it's not that he won't learn to do that, but the domestic activities have to be the women's responsibility"** suggesting that the window of opportunity to change gendered norms in the household was limited.

In 2018, all but one of the Cohort girls in Brazil either explicitly noticed a gendered division of labour in their household and community or went further and criticised it:

"In this world, there's a lot of prejudice, just because you're a man, you can't do anything. Just

because you're a woman, you have to do everything. I think the men also have to do things, right? Not just the women."

(Tatiana, Brazil, 2018)

"They [males] don't do the dishes, don't fold clothes, don't make the bed... [...] Because they don't like doing these things... They think these things are for girls."

(Amanda, Brazil, 2018)

"They [my brothers] could also do chores, not just me."

(Camila, Brazil, 2018)

While the majority of the Brazil Cohort mothers and female carers are in some form of employment, Juliana's case is the only example of where gender roles shifted significantly due to a change in household breadwinner, while the other households have either both male and female adults employed, or no male adults present.



A family's plot of land in the Dominican Republic, 2018

2.4 EDUCATION AND FUTURE CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Across the three contexts, the importance of education in providing the girls with a positive future is expressed by all of the Cohort families and the girls themselves. The role of education is underlined in terms of ensuring that the girls have a better life than that of their mothers, gain future ‘professional’ employment, and avoid early pregnancy and marriage.

“If she continues to study, she will achieve something. Because after girls get married and they don’t continue studying, they just get stuck.”

(Sharina’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“I tell her – ‘Focus hard on what you’re going to do, and concentrate, I don’t want you to fall into the same things as me, concentrate on your studies.’”

(Karen’s mother, El Salvador, 2018)

“I tell her, ‘Look, do you see your friends there, all with big bellies? It’s the ugliest thing in the world. They begin to study and don’t finish school. So, your father is working hard so you can graduate, so you can finish your studies.’”

(Tatiana’s mother, Brazil, 2018)

2.4.1 Education

What are the opportunities available to girls in these contexts?

Families aspire for the girls to finish high school and, in more than half of cases, attend university – in 2018 seven out of nine parents in Brazil, seven out of 13 parents in the Dominican Republic, and six out of 12 parents in El Salvador indicate that they plan for their daughters to progress to higher education.

“[I tell her] ‘Go study, finish school, think about going to university, because there are many opportunities, you only have to want it, to take a course’.”

(Natália’s mother, Brazil, 2018)

“By the time she is 17 she will be in university.”

(Madelin’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

“I wanted her to finish her studies, to go to university, which is her dream,

right, she said she wants to be a Portuguese teacher, it’s her dream to be a teacher and that’s ok: if you have a dream, you go after it, right?”

(Sofia’s mother, Brazil, 2018)

“I think we all share that dream; her mum would like that to happen and she would also like to see both of them [going to university].” (Susana’s uncle, El Salvador, 2018)

However, some family members do not see university as a necessary, or practical option:

“If she goes to university, sometimes they study and then there is no work, so why waste money on it, because she would have to travel all the way... so why waste time on travel? So completing secondary school is enough for us.”

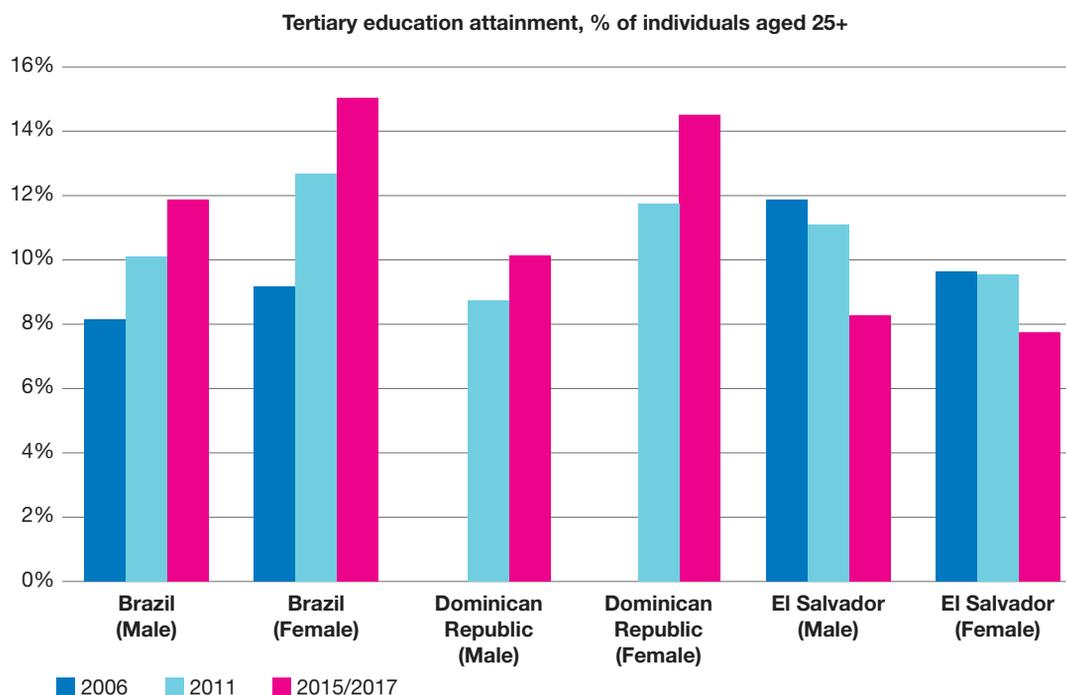
(Mariel’s grandmother, El Salvador, 2018)

While enrolment and completion rates for tertiary education have increased in Brazil and the Dominican Republic over the past decade, overall access remains low, and in El Salvador completion rates have dropped for both males and females (see Figure 10). Lower secondary education completion rates are relatively high in the three countries; however, this contrasts with much lower rates of upper secondary education completion,

in El Salvador in particular where just 28 per cent of girls graduate from secondary school (see Figure 10). The overall quality of primary and secondary education in these contexts also remains low, with access inequity for those coming from low-income households, minorities, and those with illiterate parents/carers, as well as unsafe school environments, and a lack of teachers or extended teacher absences.⁸⁶

Figure 10 Education statistics in Brazil, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador⁸⁷

Country	Lower secondary completion (female)	Upper secondary completion (female)	Lower secondary completion (male)	Upper secondary completion (male)
Brazil	87% (2015)	46% (2015)	78% (2015)	42% (2015)
Dominican Republic	88% (2017)	38% (2015)	82% (2017)	31% (2015)
El Salvador	79% (2017)	28% (2017)	77% (2017)	31% (2017)



2.4.2 Employment

The majority of the LAC Cohort parents, carers, and girls envisage employment for the girls' futures, with a particular emphasis on aspirations for "professional" work – which is generally defined as non-manual work requiring specific training.⁸⁸ Youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) levels have increased over the past decade and are significantly higher for girls than for boys in all three countries – 29 per cent in Brazil, 31 per cent in the Dominican Republic, and 41 per cent in El Salvador (see Figure 11).

Family members in the Dominican Republic in particular express their wish for the girls to become "professionals" so that they can be independent:

"Well, my dream is for her to become a professional, not to let anyone humiliate her, to have a job so that she improves herself in many ways, so that she doesn't have to depend on anyone."

(Katerin's mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

"She shouldn't do what lots of girls are doing these days. They go to a house with a man, just to say they

went with a man, and they don't aspire to an education, they don't aspire to anything. I tell her she has to try hard and see, God willing, if she can become a professional, so that she doesn't have to live like most women these days, who have to live for the sake of others. For example, a woman is with a man and she has to live for that man, because she doesn't... They don't know how to live if it's not with that man, understand?"

(Valerie's mother, Dominican Republic, 2018)

The extent to which these are 'practical' or 'realistic' aspirations for the Cohort girls who largely come from low-income households is underlined in the rates of employment of females in 'vulnerable work' in the three contexts, which in 2015 were 30 per cent of those female adults in work in the Dominican Republic, 44 per cent of those in El Salvador, and 22 per cent of those in Brazil.⁸⁹ Further, while there is no gender disaggregated data available, by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) definition of a 'professional' occupation just 10.9 per cent of Brazil's employed population, 8 per cent of the Dominican Republic's, and 5.4 per cent of El Salvador's were in 'professional' employment in 2018.⁹⁰

Figure 11 Young people not in education, employment or training⁹¹

Country	Female NEET rate (%), 2009	Female NEET rate (%), 2017	Male NEET rate (%), 2009	Male NEET rate (%), 2017
Brazil	25	29	12	19
Dominican Republic	28	31	15	18
El Salvador	42	41	15	15

How and why are girls challenging these norms?

As the Cohort girls get older and closer to the critical age between lower and upper secondary education where many of their peers drop out of school and girls in particular remain out of any form of education, employment, or training, we look at how and why the girls may be challenging the norms that see limited progress for girls in these contexts. All of the girls, like their families, emphasise the importance of education:

“[School is important for girls] so that they can be someone in life.”

(Natália, Brazil, 2017)

“[School is important for girls] because that’s how we learn and we can finish our grade to learn more... [I want to continue studying] until I finish everything... finish university, do courses.”

(Katerin, Dominican Republic, 2017)

“[School is important for girls] because that’s how we get a diploma, then when we grow up we can be whatever we want, become a lawyer, doctor, secretary, all those things. In

contrast if you don’t go to school you don’t know anything and you end up like a widow without doing anything.”

(Valeria, El Salvador, 2017)

This includes girls who themselves do not enjoy school or studying, like Doris in El Salvador (see case study on p30) whose academic progress lags behind that of her siblings, and who says she finds school **“very boring”** (2015), yet is very aware of the importance of education for girls to escape the traps of traditional gender roles: **“Girls also have to get an education so they can get ahead in life and not be left stuck at home just doing housework”** (2017). Here, on the **Individual Level** Doris demonstrates an awareness of what ‘not’ to do and how to avoid it, reflecting exposure to **Social Level** reproduction of gendered norms which see girls without education left with limited options, as well as potentially exemplifying **Social Level** influences of family, peers, and school which warn girls of the consequences of dropping out of school. Aside from awareness that lack of education can lead to being restricted to the home, the LAC Cohort girls also highlight the types of employment that would be available to them without education: **“If they [girls] don’t study there’s no future: the only option left for them is to work in the cane field, fetch**



Helping on the family plot in the Dominican Republic, 2018

wood or rear animals to sell them” (Gabriela, El Salvador, 2018). In the Dominican Republic, many girls and family members particularly emphasise the objective of becoming a “professional” worker, like Leyla (see case study on p50): **“[School is important for girls] because we have to become professionals, because if we don’t go to school and leave school we have to end up working as maids, and things like that, and that’s not good”** (2018). The low level of education achieved by parents and grandparents is also provided by some girls as an example of what ‘not’ to do: **“[My life will be different to my mother’s] because she didn’t have opportunities to study, to learn.”** (Bianca, Brazil, 2017).

Leyla (see case study on p50) expresses the aspiration to do something different and better than her mother **“I mean [I want] not to end up like she [my mother] did – she only studied until Grade 8; unlike her I want a career, a good life”** (2018). Leyla’s mother has worked full-time as a domestic worker, taking time off only to have children, and has stated a number of times that she tells her children she works so that they can have an education: **“I tell them that their job is to study, and [it] is me who has to work for them”** (2014) and about her concerns about a future without education: **“Children who don’t learn today, who won’t know anything tomorrow, they won’t be anyone in the future”** (2017). Leyla’s grandmother highlights the generational gap between her daughters and granddaughters, wherein she felt she wasn’t able to ensure an education for her own daughter who became pregnant in secondary school but does whatever she can for Leyla and her siblings: **“I used to say that I wanted the best for my daughters. I would have done anything to be able to afford to educate my daughters”; “I am an exemplary grandmother; they even gave me a merit because I’m always keeping an eye on my [grand]children at school”** (Leyla’s grandmother, 2011).

Choosing to do something ‘practical’

While many of the LAC Cohort girls and family members cite university as a future ambition, this is often expressed as an indistinct aspiration or “dream” alongside girls’ plans to follow traditional career paths such as medicine, veterinary science, law, and teaching. In this way, education and school attendance is sometimes viewed as a sure way to access a wide range of opportunities:

“It’s important for girls to go to school because it can be useful [for] them in the future; they can get university degrees, be police officers, lawyers, soldiers or study generally and apply for work anywhere they like.”

(Gabriela, El Salvador, 2018)

High aspirations and determination are undoubtedly important, as long as the means to access opportunities are provided by government and society. As is shown by Figure 10, progress in equal access to higher education remains limited in these contexts, with significant regional, social class, income, and race disparities in enrolment and completion – taking Brazil as an example, just 8 per cent of young adults in the Cohort’s Maranhão region have completed tertiary education, compared with 33 per cent of those in the capital’s region Distrito Federal.⁹² Within the context of the relative inaccessibility of tertiary education opportunities, it could be said that these – to some extent unrealistic – aspirations distract from more accessible and equally progressive opportunities for girls. A number of the LAC Cohort girls, who previously expressed more ‘traditional’ aspirations, demonstrate an awareness of more ‘practical’ or ‘realistic’ career paths. Juliana in Brazil (see case study on p64) offered an example of this in 2016: **“Sometimes I close my eyes and I think that when I’m 20 I will finish college**

and then I will start a computer course.”

On the **Social Level**, Juliana’s grandmother has been very concerned about the poor quality of education Juliana is receiving and is determined to ensure she has a positive future by seeking out opportunities for Juliana:

“When she finishes high school, I want her to take a course... The other day we knew of a good one, but it was just a quick little thing. She went to take a course, and then she said: ‘Grandma, I really wanted to do another course.’ She took a computer course... From time to time they offer some courses, but it was only for two days, three days. I mean, just a beginning. So, I want to, because she’s very hard-working, I want to send her, I want to invest in her, you know?”

(Juliana’s grandmother, 2017)

In Doris’ case, her apparent lack of interest in studying has led to her family voicing low expectations for her academic future and career: **“I have told her... they are going to send you to... they’ll give you a job in a cafeteria or something”** (Doris’ aunt, 2017); **“[I think she will continue studying until] high school maybe... We don’t all have the same intelligence or the same thoughts”** (Doris’ mother, 2016). In 2017, Doris herself, however, appears to have some clear ideas of what she could achieve: **“[I plan to study] until the second year of high school (Grade 10). To do teacher training”** and while this changes in 2018, unlike most of the LAC Cohort girls Doris is specific about the kind of work she envisages doing when she is older: **“Would you like to have a job?”** **“Yes... Making tortillas, working at the hair salon...”**. A small number of other girls also indicate more ‘practical’ career paths and some knowledge of what is required in order to achieve this:

“[I want to study] until the second year [of high school: Grade 10] ... not university, because I want to train to become a beautician.”

(Mariel, El Salvador, 2017)

“I’d like to be a teacher. But I’d also like to be self-employed, like, to have my own shop.”

(Sofia, Brazil, 2018)

The provision of technical and vocational education training (TVET) has seen some progress in Brazil where initiatives are being implemented to integrate secondary education and vocational training to boost youth access to the job market,⁹³ while similar projects have been funded by foreign aid in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador.⁹⁴ However, there is a lack of gender disaggregated data available on the accessibility of such qualifications for adolescent girls from low-income households, and as TVET requires graduation from lower or upper secondary education, the same socio-economic barriers exist in terms of enrolment and completion of TVET as they do for university.

In some cases, the LAC Cohort girls explicitly state the inspiration behind their future aspirations, whether from relatives who are attending university, relatives who live and work in the city, or people they know who have migrated abroad to the USA or Europe:

“[A friend of mine] is working as a flight attendant in the airport; she comes to visit me every three years... She goes to Spain, Honduras, Nicaragua and all sorts of countries. Yes, that has been my dream since I was very young... The moment I finish Grade 9 grade, I’m off. To the United States.”

(Stephany, El Salvador, 2018)



A girl thinks about who makes up her social network at home in the Dominican Republic, 2018

3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the *Real Choices, Real Lives* data from the three LAC countries – Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador – highlights the strength of gendered expectations, alongside the potential for these to be questioned, challenged, or resisted by girls and their families. As with the first and second reports in the series, this third regionally-focused report provides insight into moments where girls verbally express an attitude or describe a behaviour that reflects a deviance from the norm and/or aspirations towards “something different”. This was prominently expressed in terms of girls’ future aspirations, behaviour, household responsibilities, and interactions with boys. Here, the longitudinal view of our data and its emphasis on girls’ own experiences provides a unique perspective in exploring the gender socialisation process. Whilst we recognise that these expressions may not always translate into ‘disruptive’ action or behaviour in practice, identifying ‘glitches’ is important because they represent the first step, and a degree of ‘consciousness raising’, in the process of disrupting gendered social norms.

- All 35 girls from the Latin America and Caribbean Cohort show some level of ‘resistance’ to gendered norms and to what is expected of them as girls, demonstrating the potential for gender socialisation to be disrupted.
- The onset of adolescence sees girls regarded increasingly as young adults rather than children. In the LAC context, this has heightened girls’ awareness of and critique of gendered norms but has also ‘sped up’ the gender socialisation process in some cases – limiting the window of opportunity to influence

alternative, more equitable outcomes for girls.

- **Social Level** influences are prominent in reinforcing what girls should not do in order to avoid negative outcomes; this is particularly evident at the household level in mothers’/female carers’ emphasis on the importance of girls not following the same path as they did, especially related to early pregnancy and education. However, as the girls start making their own decisions, and their social networks widen, other **Social Level** influences outside the household become increasingly significant.
- **Structural Level** influences can have an impact on broader gender dynamics at the household level, for example, where economic changes lead to shifts in traditional gender roles out of necessity. However, **Structural** and **Social Level** discourse which suggests that gender equality has already been achieved can mask the realities of persistent inequalities and inhibit further progress.
- Shifting gendered attitudes on the **Structural Level** related to ‘acceptable’ behaviours, activities, and career paths for girls do not always translate to the **Social** and **Individual Levels** (and vice versa), evidencing the complexity of social norm change and the importance of looking at the multiple layers of influence in a girl’s life.
- High levels of gender-based and community violence in these contexts have an increasing impact on girls’ freedoms as the onus is placed on them to protect themselves from boys and men, perpetuating harmful gendered associations of violence with ‘masculinity’ without addressing the root causes of violence.



Reflecting on her future plans at school in the Dominican Republic, 2018

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Drawing on our evidence, we provide a number of recommendations which are broadly framed, but relevant to those working in relation to gender and

adolescence. Additionally, we outline a number of specific research areas to support the design of future gender transformative programming.

3.2.1 Recommendations for donors and practitioners

Types of intervention

- **Intervene earlier:** recognising the significance of adolescence as a period of identity formation and of a heightened awareness of both gender development and the expectations related to gender development during this time, pre-adolescent intervention provides opportunities to influence development before these are ingrained.
- **Continue to support authorities to develop legislation and increase investment in key public services to ensure they are gender responsive:** identifying those that have an impact on realising gender equality outcomes for youth in particular, such as, for example, encouraging access to education and prohibiting child and early marriage, as well as increasing access to sexual and reproductive health services.
- **Employ adaptive programming approaches that allow for risk, failure, and learning:** recognising that social norm change is complex and multi-faceted, and that interventions will need to be responsive to changing dynamics.
- **Commit to sustained, long-term interventions throughout adolescence:** recognising that social norm change takes time and is unlikely to be accomplished in short-term project cycles.
- **Invest in and allow time for formative research:** to aid understanding of which norms are most relevant for particular behaviours, who are the key reference

groups, and which norms may be most susceptible to influence or change.

Programme components

The below recommendations point to more sector-specific components of interventions to support gender transformative change. We acknowledge that there are other components that are important for supporting gender transformative change within and across specific sectors/types of intervention. However, these are drawn from evidence presented by the Latin America and Caribbean Cohort girls and in response to the framing of the *Real Choices, Real Lives* areas of enquiry.

- Invest in comprehensive sexuality education for adolescents **and parents** to enable girls to challenge gender norms and build healthy relationships with their male peers without risk.
- Ensure the provision of contraception and safe and legal abortion for adolescents to enable them to have control over their bodies, and access to family planning services.
- Work with communities and authorities to ensure freedom from violence, safe mobility, and access to spaces for girls and women, and promote communication at both family and community level to question/challenge the links between gendered norms and gender-based violence (GBV).
- Work with parents and carers of adolescents to develop parenting skills which do not use violent discipline, are not overly dependent on parental 'authority',

and do not perpetuate gender stereotypes in communicating the risks of GBV, early pregnancy, and dropping out of school.

- Provide opportunities and safe spaces in schools and communities for girls and boys to take part in non-gendered activities such as sports, as well as engaging families in support for adolescents' participation in extra-curricular activities.
- Work with schools and local/regional/national authorities to ensure that opportunities are available and accessible

for girls to undertake vocational training and gain non-academic qualifications and promote greater accessibility to higher education institutions for individuals from low-income households.

- Work with family members, and fathers in particular, on the translation of attitudes towards gender equality into changed behaviours so that girls have full access to the 'rights' and 'equality' that these family members claim to support.
- Prioritise girls' education and promote gender equal practices in schools.

3.2.2 Building the evidence base for future programming

- Explore the role of wider **Social Level** influences in the girls' lives as they get older, including peers, institutions such as school and church, and spaces where they are able to express themselves outside the constraints of gendered norms.
- Explore the role of **Structural Level** influences in terms of where law and policy may, or may not, have a 'trickle down'

impact on equality and rights discourse and gender equality attitudes, and the extent to which language can impact behaviours.

- Look more closely at the complex gendered aspects of community and gang violence and their impact on adolescent girls' and boys' control over their life choices and freedoms.



PLAN INTERNATIONAL BRAZIL

A girl in Brazil reflects on the important relationships in her life, 2019

ANNEX ONE: BACKGROUND OF THE REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES STUDY AND SUMMARY OF DATA

Background and study design

Overview: *Real Choices, Real Lives* is a longitudinal cohort study tracking the lives of girls from their birth in 2006, until they turn 18 in 2024. The study is being conducted in nine countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, South East Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. It is embedded in a feminist research perspective and builds on a life-course approach exploring critical junctures in girls' lives and the influences of early childhood as they enter early adolescence and beyond.

Approach and methodology: The flexibility inherent in the qualitative approach has enabled us to adapt lines of enquiry in each data collection round, reflecting and building on issues present in girls' lives as they grow up. However, our methodology has remained consistent and is based around a core approach which has drawn, from the beginning, on in-depth interviews with caregivers and, since 2013 when they reached age seven, with the girls themselves. The interviews are supported by participatory and age-appropriate methods, and we have also sought wider perspectives: through life histories with parents and interviews with other household members. We primarily focus on the girl and her immediate family but, in seeking to explore and understand gendered social norms, also include broader evidence to inform our analysis of her community and wider influences. Over the years, we will look to strengthen this – as social networks become increasingly defined in girls' lives.

To date, data collection has been undertaken on an annual basis, coordinated from Plan International UK working alongside Plan International country offices and nationally-based research teams. Data is analysed using

NVivo, using a case study approach for each of the girls to support longitudinal analysis.

Sampling: *Real Choices, Real Lives* is a relatively small cohort study, with a total of 146 girls forming the original selection across all nine countries. However, there were immediate dropouts as well as deaths – reducing the number to 142 in the first years. Further, due to around half of the girls in Brazil having migrated by 2013, an additional five girls were added to the Cohort. As such, accounting for all girls (including those that have died, migrated or left the study) a total of 156 girls (and/or their families) have at some point been involved. By 2018, a total of 119 girls were actively participating in the study (ranging from between ten and 20 in each country).

Across the nine countries, girls were sampled firstly based on their year of birth (2006). Secondly, the household context was considered with girls selected from among the lowest income households in each country context. There is rural/urban variation across the countries, which is reflective of wider urbanisation dynamics: for example, in Brazil the majority of the girls are from urban/peri-urban contexts, while in Benin, Togo, and Uganda the girls are from rural locations.

Ethics: Ethical principles guide our research practices and process from design through to analysis. All research activities are undertaken in line with Plan International's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies. Anyone undertaking the study is required to adhere to strict codes of conduct and additional safeguarding measures are put in place including in the handling of data. Ethical clearance for the

research has been sought and obtained from Plan International Global as well as from national ethics review authorities (where these apply to social research), as part of an ongoing commitment to continually strengthen ethics practices. Principles of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent have been applied, with caregivers asked for consent on an annual basis and girls asked to provide assent (annually, since 2013).

Limitations of the data: The sample size is relatively small. However, this is offset by the depth of data as well as the length of time – 12 years – over which it has now been collected. Further, the data does not claim to be ‘representative’ but highlights the generalised experiences of girls across contexts which we know are marked by gender inequality. Its value lies in the nuance and depth of the analysis.

In addition, we acknowledge that not directly engaging boys (i.e. a male cohort) is a limitation in terms of how we explore and understand gendered social norms. However, the study was

specifically designed to focus on girls and their experiences. Through our design we seek to understand girls’ own perceptions of relations with both other females and males, as well as to take account of broader perspectives, where feasible: in some years we have undertaken wider analysis with communities, looking at schools for example, and conducting focus group discussions with older girls (mainly relatives). Drawing analysis from these components also relates to understanding the girls’ wider social reference group, which is important for our consideration of norms. It is an ongoing priority to develop approaches that will enable us to explore wider perspectives in a systematic and meaningful way.

Lastly, whilst the value of the study comes from taking account of girls’ lives broadly – in terms of a range of dimensions, including education, health, household economy, and relationships – this is simultaneously a limitation. The study’s breadth means there are some areas where we do not have sufficient detail to draw conclusions.

Future direction of Real Choices, Real Lives

Given the complex and highly context-specific nature of gender social norms, qualitative data, of the kind which *Real Choices, Real Lives* captures, remains valuable in providing the ‘stories’ and nuance behind the numbers, building understanding of what cannot be explained by statistics alone.⁹⁵

As we take the study forward, we are in a unique position to track the progress of the girls until they turn 18 and to develop our analysis of *where, when, how* and – importantly – *why, or why not*, ‘glitches’ in the gender socialisation process translate into ‘disruption’ in their lives.

In the coming years, we will look to explore further the significant areas of interest which

have emerged from this in-depth examination of data from the LAC countries including:

1. The influence of positive/negative relationships with family members on disruption or reproduction of gendered norms; specifically, to identify who the ‘disrupters’ are – generation, sex, relationship to the girl – as well as where and how they disrupt and why;
2. The obstacles which prevent the transformation of ‘glitches’ into disruption of norms and whether these obstacles are:
 - a. *structural, social, or individual*
 - b. *rooted in context-specific conditions and conceptualisations*
 - c. *changeable, or would any intervention have to work within their constraints?*

Overview of the Brazil, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador girls' contexts and data

In the 2018 LAC Cohort there are 34 girls in total: nine in Brazil, 12 in the Dominican Republic, and 13 in El Salvador. The table below provides a summary of both the girls' household

structure (based on information from 2018), as well as their participation over the study, indicating where they have died, migrated, or left the study, either temporarily or permanently.

Table 3 Brazil, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador: Summary of Cohort girls' household structures (in 2018) and participation

Name	Summary of household context (2018)	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Brazil														
Amanda	Mother (fisherwoman, 38), mother's partner (self-employed, 29) and her two sisters (15, three).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Beatriz	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bianca	Father (field worker, 54), mother (field worker, 35), brothers (15, ten) and sisters (17, six). <i>Brother (19) left the household after getting married.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Camila	Mother (hair stylist, 32), uncles (butchers, 45, 40), great-grandmother (75) and brothers (13, nine). <i>Two uncles (50, 30) left the household for work.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Catarina	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Elena	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Feliciana	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Fernanda	Father (farmer, 36), mother (farmer, 33) and sisters (14, eight, six months).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Florencia	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Juliana	Grandfather (janitor, 48), grandmother (domestic worker, 47) and sister (11). Uncle (23), aunt (18) and cousin (four) left the household. <i>Juliana lived with her mother for one year, 2010-2011.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Larissa	Mother (cook, 31), grandfather (night guard, 65), grandmother (cook, 57), aunt (unemployed, 21) and brother (three).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Luiza	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

KEY

● Participated ● Temporary absence ● Died ● Migrated ● Withdrew from study ● Data not captured

Name	Summary of household context (2018)	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Margarida	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Natália	Father (field worker, 53), mother (field worker, 49), brothers (janitor, 21, 15), nephew (six) and sisters (19, 17). <i>Sister (23) left the household.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Patrícia	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pietra	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sancia	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sofia	Father (painter, 33), mother (housekeeper, 33) and brothers (11, 6).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Tatiana	Father (bricklayer's assistant, 40), mother (field worker, 50) and brother (14). <i>Three sisters (28, 27, 20) left the household to work in other states.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Valentina	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Dominican Republic														
Ana	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cara	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chantal	Father (farmer, 33), mother (housekeeper, 29), aunt (12), sister (eight) and brother (four months).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Dariana	Father (farmer, 34), mother (housekeeper, 33), brother (15) and sister (eight).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Griselda	Father (farmer, 54), sister (23), brother (22) and niece (two). Stepmother (38) is working abroad. <i>Father and mother are divorced – mother is in contact with Griselda.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Katerin	Father (scrap metal collector, 32), mother (housekeeper, 32) and sisters (nine, six). <i>Half-sister (17) and half-brother (17) do not live in the household.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Leyla	Mother (domestic worker, 33), stepfather (farmer, 35), brothers (19, 15, three, five months) and sister (17). <i>Siblings' father died.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Madelin	Father (carpenter, 43), mother (housekeeper, 32) and brother (six).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

KEY

● Participated ● Temporary absence ● Died ● Migrated ● Withdrew from study ● Data not captured

Name	Summary of household context (2018)	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Nicol	Father (public transportation official, 40), mother (housekeeper, 34), brother (17) and sister (seven).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Oria	<i>Data not held for 2018.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Raisa	Father (surveyor, 33), mother (housekeeper, 32), sister (three) and twin siblings (15 days).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Rebeca	Father (septic tank constructor, 46), mother (merchant, 37) and sisters (16, 14). <i>Cousin (23) left the household.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Saidy	Grandfather (farmer, 63), grandmother (farmer, 58) and younger brother (eight). <i>Mother (32) does not live in the household.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sharina	Father (farmer, 33), mother (housekeeper, 27), sisters (10, three) and brother (seven).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Valerie	Father (farmer), mother (housekeeper, 35), brothers (17, 15, 11, nine) and sister (seven). <i>Brother (23) and sister (22) do not live in the household.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

El Salvador

Andrea	Grandmother and uncle (tailor, 40). <i>Uncle (17) left the household for the United States.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bessy	Grandfather (day labourer, 48), grandmother (58) and sister (14). <i>Mother (cosmetician, 27) does not live in the household.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Doris	Mother (works in garden centre, 29) and brother (seven).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Gabriela	Father (driver, 34), mother (merchant, 27) and sister (11).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Gladys	Mother (merchant, 28), stepfather (shop owner, 30), brother (nine) and sister (five).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hillary	Mother (housekeeper, 29), father (farmer, 32), uncles (farmers, 18, 16), brother (13) and sisters (10, five).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Karen	Mother (29) and sister (two). <i>Mother and father (32) are separated.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

KEY

● Participated ● Temporary absence ● Died ● Migrated ● Withdrew from study ● Data not captured

Name	Summary of household context (2018)	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Maríel	Grandfather (65), grandmother (housekeeper, 61), uncle (tailor, 32), aunts (merchant, 32, merchant, 24) and cousin (15).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Raquel	Father (40), grandmother (housekeeper, 71), aunt (50) and cousins (22, 20, 20, nine, nine).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Rebecca P	Mother (housekeeper, 25), stepfather (merchant, 40), brother (eight) and sister (seven).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stephany	Father (day labourer, 30), mother (housekeeper, 28) and brother (seven).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Susana	Mother (merchant, 29), uncle (26) and sister (ten). <i>Father (baker) and mother are separated.</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Valeria	Mother (merchant, 26), grandmother (58), aunts (28, merchant, 22), sister (nine), brother (two) and cousins (11, six, five).	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

KEY

● Participated ● Temporary absence ● Died ● Migrated ● Withdrew from study ● Data not captured

ANNEX TWO: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: INDICATORS AND POLICY/LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Area	Country					
	Brazil		Dominican Republic		El Salvador	
Population (millions) (2017)	209.3		10.8		6.4	
Population aged 15-64 (millions) (2017)	145.9		6.9		4.1	
Life expectancy (2017)	F	M	F	M	F	M
	79.3	72.1	77.3	71.0	78.1	69.1
Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2011 PPP\$ – purchasing power parity)	F	M	F	M	F	M
	10,073	17,566	8,909	18,975	5,226	8,722
HDI score (2017)	0.759		0.736		0.674	
HDI rank (2017)	79		94		121	
HDI (2017)	F	M	F	M	F	M
	0.755	0.761	0.728	0.736	0.663	0.684
Gender Development Index (2017)	0.992		0.989		0.969	
GII score (2017)	0.407		0.451		0.392	
GII rank (2017)	94		103		91	
Years of schooling (expected) (2017)	F	M	F	M	F	M
	15.9	14.9	14.5	13.0	12.5	12.8
Mean years at schooling (2017)	F	M	F	M	F	M
	8.0	7.7	8.1	7.5	6.7	7.3
Population with at least some secondary education (% aged 25 and older) (2017)	F	M	F	M	F	M
	61.0	57.7	58.6	54.4	42.2	47.9
Children in employment (% of children ages 7-14) ⁹⁶	F	M	F	M	F	M
	1.5 (2015)	3.5 (2015)	10.3 (2014)	15.7 (2014)	4.6 (2013)	10.9 (2013)
SIGI – Social Institutions & Gender Index (2019) ⁹⁷	21% (low)		18% (very low)		23% (low)	

Area	Country		
	Brazil	Dominican Republic	El Salvador
CEDAW ratification	1984	1982	1981
CRC ratification⁹⁸	1990	1991	1990
Gender equality⁹⁹	The Constitution (1988) affirms the principle of equality between men and women.	The amended Constitution (2010) incorporated the principle of gender equality.	Gender equality is enshrined in the 2011 Law of Equality, Fairness, and the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
Political participation¹⁰⁰	15% of parliamentary seats and 9.1% of ministerial positions are held by women.	26.8% of parliamentary seats and 16.7% of ministerial positions are held by women.	31% of parliamentary seats and 33.3% of ministerial positions are held by women.
Child marriage¹⁰¹	Minimum legal age of marriage is 16. Brazil has the fourth highest number of child brides in the world. 36% of girls are married before the age of 18, and 11% before the age of 15.	Minimum legal age of marriage is 18 for boys and 15 for girls. 36% of girls are married before the age of 18, 12% before 15. Although women and men require parental consent until a certain age, child marriages usually occur within informal unions.	Minimum legal age for marriage is 18; however 26% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 6% are married before the age of 15.
Marriage laws	The Civil Code (2002) affirms equality in marriage, including in responsibilities, between men and women. However, widowed or divorced women must wait 10 months before pursuing a new marriage. Women are still restricted to the domestic sphere and are expected to be responsible for the majority of the care and productive work.	The Civil Code establishes the necessity of consent to marriage, recognition of civil and religious marriages as well as recognition of <i>de facto</i> unions that are imbued with certain protections. Amendments to the Constitution (2010) stated that men and women share responsibility for childrearing, even after separation or divorce. The law dictating that widowed or divorced women must wait 10 months before pursuing a new marriage was repealed in 2015.	Gender equality is an underlying principle in the Family Code, which governs marriage. The code stipulates equal rights and duties between spouses, including in guardianship and the home. Nevertheless, women do the lion's share of unpaid care and domestic work.
Inheritance rights	Under the Constitution (1988) and Civil Code (2002), girls and women have equal inheritance rights. However, implementation of these rights in rural areas is imperfect.	Girls and women have equal inheritance rights, although inheritance is completed under forced heirship in which the estate is divided into equal shares (Civil Code).	Under the Civil Code, girls and women have equal inheritance rights. However, patriarchal attitudes privilege boys and men in inheritance. Many girls and women are unaware of their rights with respect to property.
Abortion¹⁰²	Abortion is permitted to save a woman's life, in cases of rape and other limited grounds.	Abortion is prohibited altogether.	There is a total criminal ban on abortion in El Salvador, which has led to arrest and imprisonment.

Area	Country		
	Brazil	Dominican Republic	El Salvador
Legal status on FGC/M ¹⁰³	FGC/M is not known to be practiced in Brazil.	FGC/M is not known to be practiced in the Dominican Republic.	FGC/M is not known to be practiced in El Salvador.
Violence against women	Brazil has numerous policies in place regarding violence against women (VAW), including the ratified Belém do Pará Convention and the Lei Maria da Penha. In 2013 femicide was defined as a criminal offence; domestic violence and rape (the statutory age of consent is 14) are also criminal offences. There are also two key federal programmes to address VAW, including Mulher: Viver sem Violência (2013), and a chapter of the National Policies for Women Plan (2013). These institutional mechanisms are inconsistently budgeted and implemented.	In addition to ratifying the Belém do Pará Convention, the Constitution and two procedural laws prohibit domestic and gender-based violence. These laws are backed by the National Gender Equality and Equity Plan to eradicate VAW. However, VAW persists and has increased in some cases. These institutional mechanisms are inconsistently budgeted and implemented. Indeed, despite criminal and financial penalties for rape, as well as the right to press charges against a spouse, the justice system seems reluctant to handle rape cases.	El Salvador has the highest rate of femicides in the world, primarily due to gang violence rather than intimate partner violence. Relatedly, rape is widespread with high rates of impunity. The Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence against Women (2012) has 61 articles addressing all aspects related to VAW and obliges the state to budget for the law's implementation. In 2017, US\$58 million was dedicated to VAW programmes. Despite the government's efforts to receive complaints, judicial system responses to VAW are low.
Corporal punishment ¹⁰⁴	Corporal punishment is prohibited.	Prohibition has not been achieved for the home, alternative care settings or day care. Legal provisions on violence and abuse are not generally applied to corporal punishment in childrearing.	Prohibition has not been achieved for the home, alternative care settings or day care. The 1994 Family Code, 1997 Criminal Code and 2009 Law for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents permit parents to 'correct' their children.
Movement ¹⁰⁵	Brazilians have freedom of movement, though movement may be restricted by violence, such as gang violence in <i>favelas</i> .	Dominicans generally enjoy freedom of movement, but asylum seekers or migrants may be deported, particularly Haitians. Crime may also influence movement.	Salvadorans experience limited freedom of movement due to MS-13 and Barrio 18 gang activity, which has displaced many in the country.

ENDNOTES

1. Based on the data collection completed in 2018, there were 119 families actively participating across the study (in one case in Togo, the girl herself had migrated but her family continued to participate). The original sample in 2006 included 146 girls, however, there were a number of deaths in the first year and there have been dropouts. Over the years, some girls and/or their families have been unavailable (for example through migration). Annex One presents tables summarising the data held for the cohort girls in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador.
2. Plan International (2018) *Getting it Right: A Guidance Note for Gender Transformative Programming and Influencing* provides an overview of Plan International's approach to gender transformative change, and our broader recognition that change takes time, is highly context specific, and cannot be achieved by one intervention alone.
3. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Reports*, Table 1: Human Development Index and its components, 2018 Statistical Update. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2018-update>
4. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Reports*, Table 5: Gender Inequality Index. Data is for 2017. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>
5. Plan International UK (2019) *Real Choices, Real Lives. Girls Challenging the Gender Rules: Benin, Togo, and Uganda*. London: Plan International UK. Full report: <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-real-choices-real-lives-report-2019pdf/download?token=1XZdZ07F> and Executive Summary: <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-real-choices-real-lives-report-executive-summary-2019pdf/download?token=1WO-8m7>
6. Plan International UK (2019) *Real Choices, Real Lives. Girls Challenging the Gender Rules: Cambodia, the Philippines and Vietnam*. London: Plan International UK. Full report: <https://plan-uk.org/file/rcrl-girls-challenging-the-gender-rules-cambodia-the-philippines-and-vietnam-full-reportpdf/download?token=5h8Q8s4Q> and Executive Summary: <https://plan-uk.org/file/rcrl-girls-challenging-the-gender-rules-cambodia-the-philippines-and-vietnam-executive/download?token=Nu1PGdho>
7. Ten in 2017, nine in 2018. In large part due to migration, many of the original Cohort girls in Brazil left the study, with five new girls introduced in the 2015 data collection (see Annex One for further detail).
8. Data collection took place in 2018 for the Dominican Republic and El Salvador and in 2019 for Brazil – however, in this report we refer to 2018 for all three countries to indicate the round of data collection.
9. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>
10. A major study, the Global Early Adolescent Study, looks to explore the transitions from childhood into adolescence and provides valuable evidence related to how gender norms, relationships, and empowerment are constructed and play out. <https://www.geastudy.org/>
11. Young Lives (2016) *Adolescence, Youth and Gender: The Research Challenges*. Young Lives Briefing Note, October 2016. Oxford: Young Lives. <https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-ConferenceBriefingNote-Oct16.pdf>
12. Basu, S., X. Zuo, C. Lou, R. Acharya and R. Lundgren (2016) Learning to Be Gendered: Gender Socialisation in Early Adolescence Among Urban Poor in Delhi, India, and Shanghai, China. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 61, Issue 4, Supplement, p. S25.
13. John, N. A., K. Stoebenau, S. Ritter, J. Edmeades and N. Balvin (2017) *Gender Socialization During Adolescence in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Conceptualization, Influences and Outcomes*. Innocenti Discussion Paper 2017-01. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.
14. Research has highlighted that the significant cognitive and social development that takes place during adolescence represents an opportunity for effective intervention on concepts previously understood to be set in early childhood. See, for example: Balvin, N. and P. Banati (2017) *The Adolescent Brain: A Second Window of Opportunity: A Compendium*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.
15. John, N. A. et al., (2017), and Young Lives (2015) *How Gender Shapes Adolescence: Diverging Paths and Opportunities*. Policy Brief 22. Oxford: Young Lives. https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-PolicyBrief-22_Gender%20and%20adolescence.pdf
16. Reavley, N. J. and S. M. Sawyer (2017) *Improving the Methodological Quality of Research in Adolescent Wellbeing*. Innocenti Research Brief 2017-03. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. However, it should be noted that in the anthropological literature, adolescence, life cycle events, and transitional states etc. have been addressed in ethnographies across countries and regions.
17. Young Lives (2015), p. 1.
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In 2006, Plan International UK began a study following a group of 146 girls from nine countries across three continents. *Real Choices, Real Lives* will follow the lives of the girls involved from birth until 2024, when they will reach the age of 18. The study is undertaken across Sub-Saharan Africa (Benin, Togo, Uganda), South East Asia (Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam) and Latin America and the Caribbean (Brazil, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador). The information from the cohort study provides real insight into the daily experiences of girls and their families and fosters a clearer understanding of the root causes of gender inequality and of the social norms, attitudes and cultural practices which are embedded at home and in community life. Plan International UK strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. As an independent development and humanitarian charity, we work alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

Cover photo: Two girls hold hands in Brazil, 2019

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