The Voice of Adolescents and Young People in Timor-Leste:
A Consultation Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

APFTL	Alumni Parlamento Foin-Sa'e Timor-Leste (Alumni of the Timor-Leste Youth Parliament)
CNJTL	Conselho Nacional da Juventude de Timor-Leste (National Youth Council of Timor-Leste)
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communications Association
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, and Queer
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PNTL	Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste (National Police of Timor-Leste)
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RAEOA	Região Administrativa Especial de Oecusse-Ambeno (Special Administrative Region of Oecusse-Ambeno)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEJD	Secretaria do Estado de Juventude e Desporto (Secretary of State for Youth and Sport)
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
TOMAK	To'os ba Moris Di'ak (Farming for Prosperity)
UN	United Nation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNTL	Universidade Nasional Timor Lorosa'e (National University of Timor-Leste)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programmes
WHO	World Health Organization

© UNICEF TLCO - UNICEF/TimorLeste/2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of consultative research with adolescents and young people across four municipalities—Dili, Baucau, Bobonaro, and RAEOA—conducted by the Alumni of the Timor-Leste Youth Parliament (APFTL) in collaboration with UNICEF Timor-Leste. The consultation aimed to better understand the lived realities, challenges, and aspirations of adolescents in Timor-Leste, focusing on eight (8) thematic areas: civic engagement, education, health, violence and crime, early marriage, access to clean water and sanitation, employment and employability, and climate change. Importantly, the consultation ensured the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as adolescents with disabilities, married adolescents, and those out of school.

A distinctive feature of this consultation was the application of an innovative participatory method known as the "Real-Life Likert Scale". This visual and interactive approach enabled participants to physically position themselves in response to key statements, fostering deeper reflection and facilitating richer, more accurate data collection. The process spanned from October 2024 to January 2025, involving preparatory meetings, facilitator training, multi-site consultations, data analysis, and validation sessions.

The consultation results reveal that despite despite policy progress in Timor-Leste, adolescents continue to face significant structural barriers to their well-being and development. In the education sector, adolescents reported limited access to textbooks, digital learning tools, and inclusive learning environments. These challenges are compounded by high levels of bullying and insufficient teacher training. Adolescents with disabilities and girls in rural areas face particular disadvantages. The perceived disconnect between school curricula and life skills preparation further exacerbates dropout rates.

Early marriage remains a deeply rooted issue. Many adolescents, particularly girls, shared that cultural expectations, poverty, and limited reproductive health education contribute to early unions, often at the cost of their schooling, autonomy, and future aspirations. While some adolescents described these decisions as voluntary, they also revealed a lack of critical information to fully understand the long-term consequences.

In terms of health and nutrition, adolescents face severe limitations in accessing basic services. Many health facilities lacked adequate medical personnel, while emergency services often responded late. Furthermore, many school environments lack reliable access to clean water, and safe sanitation, especially for girls and adolescents with disabilities. Mental health and emotional safety also emerged as critical concerns. Many adolescents reported experiencing bullying at school and domestic violence but lacked access to adequate counselling and psychosocial support services.

This resulted in intense feelings of fear, isolation, and emotional distress, which limit students' ability to thrive physically and academically.

On employability, the findings revealed a dual reality: while many adolescents expressed strong interest in volunteering, vocational training, and digital skills acquisition, access to such opportunities remains uneven. Urban-based adolescents benefit from better infrastructure and information, while those in rural areas, especially young women, people with disabilities, and early school leavers, often face geographic, financial, and informational barriers. Many adolescents noted that the gap between education and job market demands left them underprepared to compete and pursue meaningful livelihoods, often keeping them trapped in cycles of poverty and economic uncertainty.

Lastly, climate change knowledge and awareness among adolescents remain critically low. Most participants reported receiving little to no information about climate change from schools, textbooks, or media. The lack of curriculum integration, limited internet access, and absence of structured training to foster climate literacy and critical thinking skills limit adolescents' ability to engage in environmental advocacy and resilience-building efforts. However, many adolescents also acknowledged that peers and social networks have influenced their attitudes toward environmental responsibility.

Strategic Recommendations

Addressing these interlinked challenges requires a multi-sectoral and inclusive response. This report outlines eight strategic recommendation areas:

Improving Accessibility and Inclusion by establishing youth-friendly information hubs and financial support for marginalized adolescents.

Strengthening Educational Resources and Teacher Training to ensure all schools are equipped for inclusive, safe, and supportive learning.

Enhancing School-Based Health and Nutrition programs, including emergency preparedness, school meals, and hygiene promotion.

Expanding Violence Prevention and Mental Health Support through anti-bullying campaigns, school-based counseling services and incorporating conflict resolution into school curricula.

Tackling Early Marriage by transforming harmful social norms, expanding reproductive health education, and providing scholarships for adolescent girls.

Investing in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Infrastructure, particularly in schools and public facilities, with a focus on menstrual hygiene.

Developing Vocational and Digital Skills Training that link adolescents to emerging labor market demands and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Mainstreaming Climate Change Education and Youth Engagement by integrating climate literacy into curricula and promoting youth-led environmental action.

Adolescents in Timor-Leste are eager to contribute meaningfully to their families, communities, and nation. To realize this potential, decision-makers must take bold steps to remove the barriers that hold them back. This report calls for a national commitment to adolescent-responsive planning, investment, and action, ensuring that no young person is left behind in Timor-Leste's path toward inclusive and sustainable development.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of consultation and processes conducted by the Alumni of the Youth Parliament of Timor-Leste (APFTL) as a contribution to the Analysis of the Situation of Adolescents and Youth in Timor-Leste. The research was carried out in collaboration with UNICEF–Timor-Leste to explore the conditions, challenges, and aspirations of adolescents and young people in Timor-Leste.

This consultation initiative, led by UNICEF Timor-Leste, in partnership with APFTL, involved adolescents from four municipalities: Dili, Baucau, Bobonaro, and RAEOA. The consultation included adolescents and young people from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities, those who had experienced early marriage, and those who were out of school. Its primary objective was to directly capture adolescents and young people's perspectives on various challenges, with findings intended to contribute to the Development of UNICEF Timor-Leste Country Programme 2026-2030.

This report documents and interprets data collected by researchers in the field, supplemented by existing secondary data to strengthen the findings of the study. APFTL introduced an innovative method, the "Real-Life Likert Scale," which has not been previously applied in research practices in Timor-Leste. Traditionally, the Likert Scale is used in quantitative research and is limited to interviews and survey forms. The application of this method provided APFTL with valuable insights into improving future research methodologies.

II. OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this research is to gather the perspectives of adolescents and young people based on their lived realities and context. The findings of this consultative study aim to support the development of evidence-based strategic programs to better serve young people, particularly by:

Collecting perceptions and views on civic participation, education, health and nutrition, violence, early marriage, access to clean water, sanitation, livelihood employability and climate change in the four municipalities: Dili, Baucau, Bobonaro, and RAEOA.

Ensuring the inclusion of diverse groups such as adolescent girls and boys, youth with disabilities, out-of-school youth, young married individuals, and those who lead households.

Guaranteeing representation across different genders, individuals with special needs, socio-economic backgrounds, marital statuses, and rural and urban areas within each municipality.

III. METHOD AND PROCESS

A. Method

This consultation research employed a participatory approach using the "Real-Life Likert Scale". In this method, the facilitator or researcher reads a statement, participants listen, and position themselves on a scale that reflects their level of agreement (Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree). The process of gathering perceptions from adolescents and young people involved the following step:

- The researcher reads the statement and explains it to the participants.

- Participants step onto the scale, positioning themselves according to their opinion.

- The researcher records the results of each participant's position on the scale.

- The researcher engages participants in a discussion about the reasons for their chosen position.

Participants

This consultative study has engaged adolescents and young people aged 10–24 from a variety of backgrounds, including:

Municipality	Adolescents and young people with disabilities		Students		Uneducated		Early marriage or household leader	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Baucau	3	-	11	12	2	-	-	1
Bobonaro	2	1	9	16	2	-	-	-
Dili	1	2	11	28	-	-	-	-
RAEOA	1	1	12	26	-	-	3	-
TOTAL	**7**	**4**	**43**	**82**	**4**	**-**	**3**	**1**

B. Process

Preparation

- APFTL held an initial meeting with UNICEF in early October 2024 to discuss consultative research.
- The draft data collection methodology was presented at the workshop and reviewed by the consultant.
- On 27 October 2024, APFTL organized a briefing for facilitators and researchers to prepare the research and consultation with adolescents and young people.
- On 29 October 2024, facilitators met with UNICEF to receive a detailed briefing on methodology, data collection processes, research ethics, prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation, the principles of "do no harm", and safeguarding policies. This session also covered data processing and analysis methods.
- By early November 2024, local mobilizers identified participants based on pre-defined target groups, including students, those with disabilities, those who have experienced early marriage heads of households, and out-of-school youth.

Consulting Research

- APFTL facilitated research consultation with adolescents and young people on 25 and 26 November 2024, in the municipalities of Dili, Baucau, Bobonaro and RAEOA.
- After the consultation, the APFTL team reviewed and analyzed the data, ensuring the quality and reliability of the information collected.

Analysis

- The consultant began analyzing the entered data.
- On December 9, 2024 preliminary findings were submitted to UNICEF.
- A validation and review workshop was conducted and the final report was completed by 31 January 2025.

Lessons learned

Participant engagement

Participants were active during the consultation workshop. When the facilitator read out a statement, participants reflected on their own conditions and immediately moved to the marked scale to indicate their level of agreement. They also actively explained the reason for their choices. However, Participants came from different age groups and educational backgrounds, which posed a challenge during the facilitation process. To address this, the facilitator had to repeat and explain the statements in detail after participants positioned themselves on the scale. The duration of the consolation research was not long enough to achieve more effective engagement from all participants.

Awareness of social Disparities

APFTL learned that even at a young age, participants were well aware of their condition and freely expressed their thoughts. All statements made during the consultation resonated with their lived experiences. When making decisions, participants provided clear reason for their choices on the scale. This consultation also helped participants better understand each other's social situations. Despite living in the same municipality, they recognized the differences in their social and economic conditions.

Participation challenges

APFTL identified age differences as a limitation, as younger participants tended to defer to older ones. Similar, individuals with disabilities and out-of-school youth were less active in discussions related to school-based questions. The mixed group composition presented challenges during the consultation process, highlighting the need for more targeted approaches in future consolations.
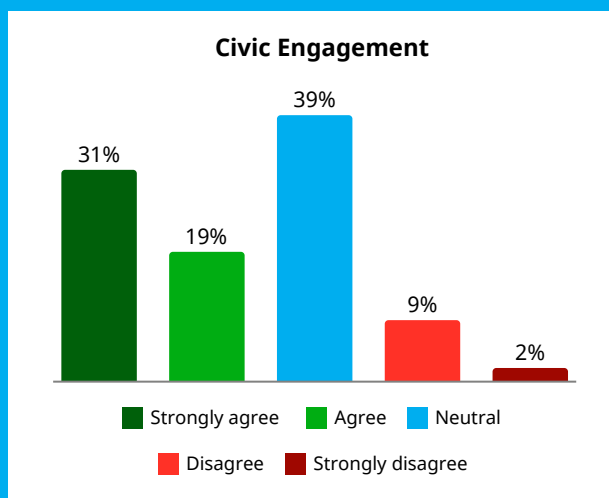
IV. CONSULTATION RESULTS

A. Civic Engagement

Statement 1A - *I have the opportunity to participate in civic activities, such as youth councils, student council volunteer programs, and community service.*

Civic Engagement

- Strongly agree: 31%
- Agree: 19%
- Neutral: 39%
- Disagree: 9%
- Strongly disagree: 2%

Most adolescents (39%) positioned themselves as "Neutral" on the Likert scale, indicating uncertainty about their ability to participate in civic activities. This ambiguity stems from a lack of clear information, limited transparency in participants selection process, and barriers such as distance or domestic responsibilities, especially among adolescent girls. Adolescents in RAEOA and Dili most commonly expressed this uncertainty. Adolescents' girls often had household responsibilities, such as taking care of their siblings, while others found the activities inaccessible due to distance or simply uninterested. For instance, a student from Baucau stated, *"Sometimes we participate, but I chose Neutral because I have to help my father with housework from the morning until noon."* Similarly, a student from Bobonaro mentioned that their home responsibilities limit participation opportunities.

The uncertainty in adolescents' opinions is further supported by a previous study conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Arts and Culture, which identified low youth engagement in village-level decision-making due to insufficient funding, weak representation awareness, and limited understanding of civic participation among village leaders.[1]

Nevertheless, 50 percent of adolescents responded positively (31 percent "Strongly Agree" and 19 percent "Agree"). These responses came mostly from Dili, RAEOA, and Baucau. An urban youth cited, *"They always have opportunities and also participate in volunteer activities and beach clean-up*

---

[1] Ministry of Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture (MJDAC), Government of Timor-Leste, & UNICEF. (2023). Youth participation in decision making at the village level. UNICEF Timor-Leste.
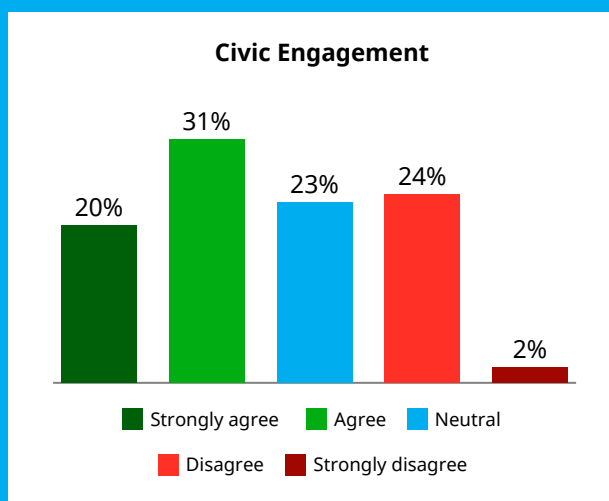
efforts," with one student noting, *"There are many opportunities, it just depends on our time."* This positive response may stem from their experiences living in urban areas, which are often close to or connected with organizations like CNJTL, Youth Centers, various NGOs, and programs implemented by relevant government entities that are easily accessible to them.

In contrast, only 11 percent of adolescents responded negatively, primarily coming from adolescents in Bobonaro. This clearly indicates that not all adolescents have the same opportunities to participate in civic activities. Key barriers included distance, disability, and domestic duties. For example, a student from Ritabou, Bobonaro, said, *"I did not receive information because of the distance,"* while, a disabled student explained, *"I could not participate because the activity location was not accessible."*

❝ I could not participate because the activity location was not accessible ❞

These responses underscore a significant opportunity gap. Civic engagement is not equally accessible to all adolescents due to structural inequalities in geography, gender roles, disability, and household responsibilities. The effectiveness of civic engagement initiatives depends on how well they are communicated, promoted, and adapted to meet diverse adolescent needs. In conclusion, while adolescents value civic participation and recognize its developmental benefits, real and perceived barriers continue to limit full and equal access—particularly among rural, disabled, and economically disadvantaged youth.

Statement 1B - *I can access information about opportunities to participate in courses such as Korean language, English, Portuguese, computer, etc., and village church activities and other volunteer activities.*

Civic Engagement

- Strongly agree: 20%
- Agree: 31%
- Neutral: 23%
- Disagree: 24%
- Strongly disagree: 2%

Just over half of adolescents (51 percent) responded positively, with 31 percent selecting "Agree" and 20 percent "Strongly Agree." These responses primarily came from adolescents in RAEOA, Dili, and Bobonaro, indicating that a notable portion of adolescents have access to relevant information but not without limitations. Despite the positive responses, many adolescents clarified that access is often partial, inconsistent, or delayed. Some mentioned that the available information doesn't always match their interests or needs. Barriers such as limited digital infrastructure, socio-economic disadvantages, and poor targeting of adolescent-focused information reduce overall accessibility.

A student from Baucau shared, *"There are courses, such as Korean like Korean and church activities in the village, but it depends on how students manage their time."* Another student in Dili commented: *"This is the era of technology, so it's easy to get information."* Meanwhile, adolescents in Bobonaro said, *"I access information through school, friends, social media, the nuns, and local authorities",* indicating that they utilize various channels to obtain information and opportunities for themselves.
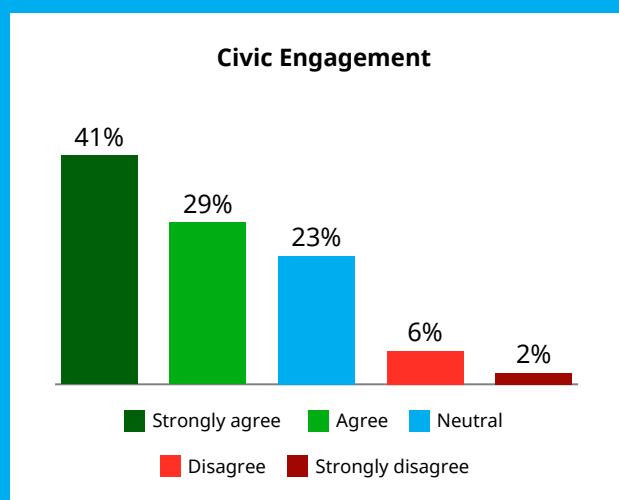
However, 24 percent of adolescents disagreed with the statement, with most of these responses concentrated in Baucau and Bobonaro. These respondents cited geographic remoteness, economic hardship, and physical disability as key barriers. A student in RAEOA stated, *"I received the information, but I have financial difficulties for participating."* Another adolescent added, *"I am disabled, I cannot walk far, and I don't know how to read or write, it's difficult to access information."* A married adolescent noted, *"I have many household responsibilities, and the village is far away, so I can't receive any information."*

❝ I received the information, but I have financial difficulties for participating ❞

A significant proportion of adolescents (23%) stood in the "Neutral" category, indicating uncertainty about their access to information. This uncertainty may arise from a lack of knowledge about how to access information or from the unequal distribution of information. A student from Bobonaro mentioned, "Sometimes I get information from family, friends, and local authorities."

In summary, while more than half of adolescents feel they can access opportunities, a substantial minority remains excluded due to economic, geographic, digital, and social barriers. This signals the need for stronger, more inclusive communication systems to ensure that all adolescents—especially those in remote or vulnerable situations—are equally informed and empowered.

Statement 1C - *I can participate in all activities regardless of color, race, gender, religion, social status, and party/I can participate in all activities regardless of social status, including race, gender, religion, and political party affiliation.*

Civic Engagement

41%	29%	23%	6%	2%

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral
■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Respondents largely shifted to the "Strongly Agree" category (41%) on the Likert Scale regarding the given statement. This signifies that they have overall acceptance and also indicates that they participate in activities without any limitations. This response mostly comes from adolescents in Dili and Bobonaro. In these two municipalities, adolescents express that when participating in activities, there is no difference based on social status or political affiliation. This is not the case for adolescents in Baucau and RAEOA.

When combining the responses of "Strongly Agree" with "Agree" (29%), the percentage of agreement increases to more than half (70%) of the total participants. From this, it can be said that adolescents have a strong sense of inclusivity, and social barriers do not limit their participation. This positive response occurs in large numbers in the municipalities of RAEOA and Dili.

This sentiment reflects growing awareness and acceptance around non-discrimination and youth inclusion, possibly influenced by urban exposure to NGOs, public campaigns, and state efforts to promote gender and social equity. A survey by the International Republican Institute (2023) shows

that the public attaches importance to the inclusion of women, youth, people with disabilities and LGBTQI people in the political decision-making process.[2]

Twenty-three percent of adolescents were "Neutral", highlighting ongoing barriers in some areas, particularly for girls and adolescents in rural communities. These responses were more common in RAEOA and Baucau. A teenage girl from RAEOA shared, *"Sometimes there are limitations, it depends on which political party you're associated with".* Another adolescent added, *"Even if activities claim to be inclusive, discrimination still exists."*

❝ Sometimes there are limitations, it depends on which political party you're associated with ❞

It can also be noted that of these respondents, 8 percent of respondents expressed disagreement with 6 percent disagreed and 2 percent strongly disagreed. These views were mostly shared by adolescents with disabilities and those who had dropped out of school. One adolescent with a disability shared, *"I feel excluded because of physical inaccessibility."* In Baucau, a teenager reported, *"I want to attend martial arts training, but my brother won't allow me."* Another added, *"Participation depends on your family's party or political connection."* In the four municipalities where the Likert Scale workshop was conducted, in each municipality there was a percentage of the population with disabilities of about four percent.[3] These findings are consistent with national data: the 2022 Survey of People with Disability and Inclusion revealed that nearly 25 percent of people with disabilities who had voter cards (8,030) did not participate in the presidential election in 2022, indicating systemic barriers to full participation.[4]

In conclusion, although the high level of agreement suggests progress toward inclusive civic spaces, inequities based on geography, ability, gender norms, and political influence remain key barriers. Continued policy and community efforts are essential to ensure equitable participation for all adolescents, regardless of their identity or background.

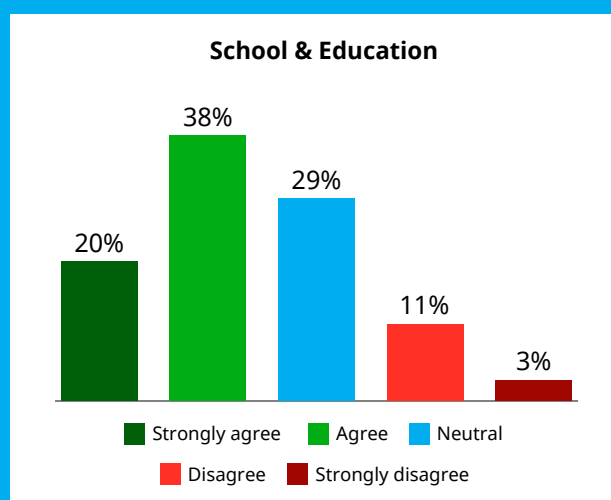[2] International Republican Institute. (2023). Public Opinion Survey: Timor-Leste. Feb-March 2023. IRI.

[3] TOMAK. (2022). Gender and social inclusion analysis. https://tomak.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/TOMAK-gender-and-social-inclusion-analysis.pdf

[4] UNDP. (2022). Survey of People with Disability and Inclusion in Timor-Leste. Disability and Inclusion Report. United Nations Development Programme.

B. School and Education

Statement 2A - *My school has resources, and I can access these resources, including access to books, technology, library, and extracurricular materials.*

School & Education

20% Strongly agree
38% Agree
29% Neutral
11% Disagree
3% Strongly disagree

- ■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral
- ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Most adolescents answered Agree (38%) on the Likert Scale indicating that they have partial access to school resources such as books, technology, library, and extra-curricular materials, but also recognize limitations. The majority of these responses came from Dili and Bobonaro, where adolescents noted both strengths and shortcomings. Adolescents recognized that while resources may be present, they are not always sufficient in quality, quantity, or accessibility. One student in Dili said, *"Our school resources are complete."* Another added, *"The Ministry of Education put books and libraries in our school."* A teenager from Bobonaro shared, *"My school has good accessibility for students with disabilities and has volleyball and a drum band, but there is no practice."* However, others pointed out gaps, *"There is a library, but students do not use it,* and s*chool has books, but there is no library and there is no internet."*

When combining the positive responses, 38% "Agree" and 20% "Strongly Agree", it can be concluded that a majority of respondents attend schools with some level of resource availability. However, this still leaves a significant proportion of adolescents (42%) who experience challenges in accessing resources, particularly in rural areas and underfunded schools.
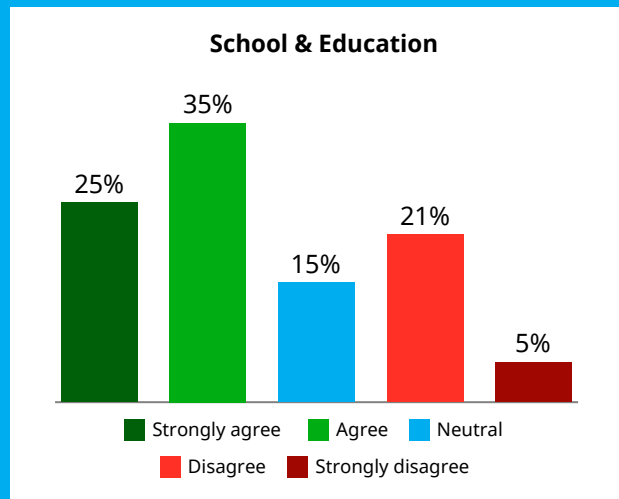
The number of respondents selecting "Neutral" (29%) was also significant, trailing closely behind "Agree" by just 9 percentage points. This suggests many adolescents either lack reliable access to resources or are unsure of what's available. RAEOA contributed the largest share to the "Neutral" response, with fewer such responses in Baucau. A student explained, *"The school has books, but can only be accessed when the teacher orders."* Another added, *"There is a library, but we don't have access to it."* A teenager in Baucau said, *"My school does not have a laboratory and computer, so we do not practice."* These responses reflect a recurring theme: resources may exist but are often insufficient, outdated, or poorly managed. In many schools, books are not well maintained, are few in number, or are kept in locked rooms. Inconsistent access is particularly problematic for students with disabilities, who face additional barriers.

❝ My school does not have a laboratory and computer, so we do not practice ❞

Negative reactions amounted to 14% of the majority of respondents from this percentage are from adolescents with disabilities and early married adolescents. The issue of accessibility is particularly poor for these groups. A respondent noted that even if schools have resources, they are often not adapted for students with disabilities.

In summary, while some schools are well-equipped, significant disparities remain, especially in rural areas and for vulnerable students. These disparities must be addressed through improved infrastructure, better management of existing resources, and policies that ensure inclusive access for all students.

Statement 2B - *My school has qualified teachers who are qualified, motivated, supportive, create a safe environment and do not discriminate.*

School & Education

- Strongly agree: 25%
- Agree: 35%
- Neutral: 15%
- Disagree: 21%
- Strongly disagree: 5%

Most respondents selected Agree (35%), indicating a general sense of satisfaction with teacher quality, but also signaling room for improvement. This response reflects moderate acceptance of the statement. The majority came from RAEOA and Dili, with some from Bobonaro. A female student from Dili shared, *"Teachers always explain well to make students understand."* A student from Bobonaro added, *"My school has teachers who are motivated, supportive and qualified."* When combining positive responses—35% "Agree" and 25% "Strongly Agree"—more than half of adolescents report being taught by quality teachers in supportive, non-discriminatory environments.

However, 21% disagreed, with most of these responses coming from RAEOA and Bobonaro. In RAEOA, students noted, *"Teachers explain according to the subject class that they teach."* In Bobonaro, a student shared troubling experiences: *"Teachers committed physical violence against us, they smoked cigarettes at school, and harbored hatred towards students."* Another added, *"Teachers ask us to write only the material but do not explain."*

In Baucau, adolescents provided more critical feedback. An adolescent with a disability reported, *"Teachers do not create dignified conditions for us, and they also use harsh terminology for us."* A student from Dili said *"Teachers teach without being interested in whether students understanding or not."* There is also a practice of discouragement to *"Take one student to lower another student."* Another noted, *"The teacher teaches too many classes, so other classes are abandoned."* Even in schools with otherwise supportive teachers, discrimination persists. A student from a minority religion said, *"The teacher gave me motivation, but I was discriminated against by my peers."*

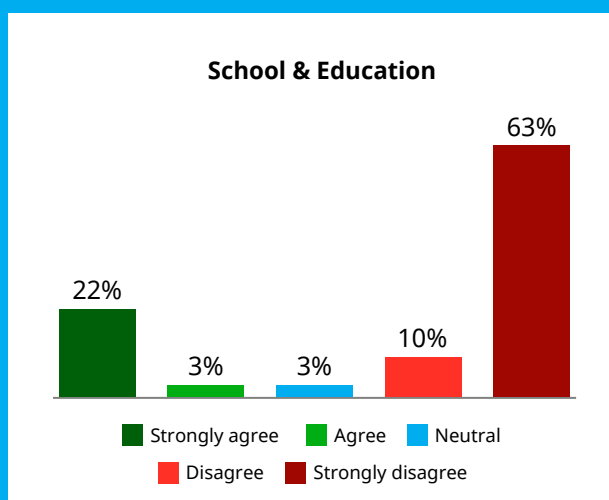## ❝ The teacher teaches too many classes, so other classes are abandoned ❞

Neutral responses accounted for 15%. This suggests that some adolescents remain uncertain about teacher quality. A student in Bobonaro observed, *"Teachers create activities after asking for students' contributions."* Another mentioned that some teachers handle two subjects but in one subject, *"They only give a copy of the subject but do not explain."*

These results reflect broader challenges in the teaching environment in Timor-Leste, particularly in under-resourced rural areas. There are gaps in teacher training, limited opportunities for continued professional development, and classroom conditions (e.g., overcrowding) that reduce the effectiveness of even well-intentioned teachers. In some cases, societal norms around hierarchy also limit open student-teacher interaction.

In conclusion, while many adolescents experience supportive learning environments, structural and systemic weaknesses—including discrimination, inadequate training, and poor teacher behavior— still prevent others from enjoying a safe and inclusive education.

Statement 2C - *The council of parents in my school actively participates in decisions about school activities (Note: with the assumption that every school has PTA) – PTA in my school actively participates in decision making process about school activities.*

School & Education

Most respondents (63%) selected "Strongly Disagree", indicating a widespread lack of parental involvement in school decision-making. These responses were especially concentrated in RAEOA, Dili and Bobonaro, with fewer from Baucau. This suggests that Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) are either inactive or invisible to students. In Dili, adolescents expressed sentiments such as: *"Our parents do not participate in decisions about school activities."* Many students admitted they were not even sure whether a PTA existed. One said, *"We hear the name, but we don't know if it exists. During this time, we have not seen parents present to us about any decisions they have made with teachers at school"*. When combining negative responses—10% "Disagree" and 63% "Strongly Disagree"—the data clearly shows that adolescents perceive minimal PTA engagement in most schools. This absence may be due to poor school-parent communication or a lack of formal structures to facilitate participation.

❝ Our parents do not participate in decisions about school activities ❞

Positive responses combining Strongly Agree (22%) and Agree (3%) mostly came from RAEOA and Dili, with some from Baucau. A teenager from RAEOA noted, *"Our school has a Council of Parents and always meets."* Two students from Baucau shared that *"Parents and schools have good collaboration."* Another student added, *"In the Marist school, the parents' council structure motivates and collaborates between parents and the place of internship, so we go to the place where the internship is easy for us."* In Dili, a student shared, *"When creating regulations, they always invite the parents' council to meet."*

Only 3% responded "Neutral." These students indicated that their schools had PTAs, but that they rarely met or were not visibly active. This suggests a lack of clear communication between school leaders and students about the role of PTAs. The findings point to a systemic disconnect between schools and families. It is possible that some parents are unaware of their role, are not invited to participate, or are excluded by school leadership practices. In other cases, schools may view

governance as an internal matter, reducing transparency and trust. This ultimately limits students' opportunities to benefit from collaborative school governance.

In summary, adolescents in Timor-Leste report mixed experiences with their education environment. While many acknowledge the presence of qualified and motivated teachers, significant gaps exist in resource accessibility and parental engagement. Students with disabilities and those in rural areas face particular disadvantages. A more inclusive and transparent school governance model—paired with improved infrastructure and teacher training—is critical to ensuring quality, equitable education for all.

C. Health

Statement 3A - *I have easy access to health facilities in my villages/administrative post.*

Health

26% 19% 19% 25% 11%

- ■ Strongly agree
- ■ Agree
- ■ Neutral
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Strongly disagree

Adolescents' responses to this statement are highly polarized, with 26% selecting Strongly Agree, while 25% selected Disagree and 11% Strongly Disagree. The percentage of those in the middle (Neutral – 19%) mirrors the numbers of respondents who selected Agree (19%), indicating a wide range of experiences in accessing health facilities. Those who responded Strongly Agree side noted that they had easy access to health facilities. Most of these came from Dili and Bobonaro, with a few from Baucau. In Dili, adolescents said that *"Access to good health services and good care was available."* In RAEOA, a teenager said, *"The health center is nearby, the service is also good."* These respondents likely live in close proximity to health centers or administrative posts where services are functional and staff are present.

When combining Strongly Agree (26%) and Agree (19%), nearly half of adolescents (45%) expressed a positive experience accessing health care. These responses may reflect either geographical proximity to services or greater awareness of local health programs. However, the high percentage of adolescents selecting Neutral (19%) reveals a layer of uncertainty, often tied to inconsistent access or knowledge of service availability. A student from Baucau illustrated this by saying, *"The health center is nearby, some medicines and facilities are sometimes available, and sometimes not available."*

On the other end, 36% of adolescents selected negative responses—25% Disagree and 11% Strongly Disagree—indicating significant barriers to access. This group was largely composed of adolescents from RAEOA, Baucau, and to a lesser extent, Bobonaro, including adolescents with disabilities, those out of school, or married early. One teenager from RAEOA stated, *"There is a hospital, but the road to access the hospital is not good in the rainy season because you have to cross the river."* Another said, *"It is far from the health center and difficult to access."* In Bobonaro, a student shared, *"Health centers sometimes lack medicines, few health personnel, and poor care."* Another added, *"Our place of residence is far from health services, and sometimes emergency contacts such as ambulances do not come on time. We have to be picked up by private cars to Bobonaro Hospital."*

❝ Health centers sometimes lack medicines, few health personnel, and poor care ❞

These negative responses underscore geographical, infrastructural, and service delivery barriers. Adolescents in rural areas may face long travel distances, limited transportation options, or inconsistent services even when facilities exist. Facilities may be under-resourced, lacking doctors, essential medicines, or proper equipment. In some cases, adolescents also described lack of
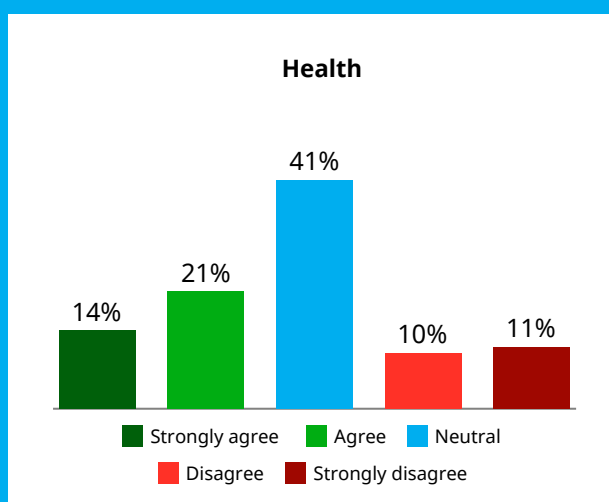
confidence in the system, stemming from negative past experiences or cultural factors. Economic hardship was also cited as a barrier to accessing transportation to clinics or hospitals.

The polarization of responses shows that adolescents have very different lived realities depending on where they live. While some experience proximity and good service, others face isolation, underinvestment, and significant delays during emergencies. Perceptions of access are shaped not only by distance but also by expectations of care, service quality, and past encounters with the health system.

Additionally, national data reflects ongoing gaps in adolescent health services. For instance, adolescent girls aged 14–19 are particularly vulnerable to anemia, linked to poor diet and the physiological demands of adolescence. According to the World Food Program (WFP), 23% of women aged 15–49 suffer from anemia, a condition that can reduce energy, focus, and memory, and contribute to early school dropout. To address this, UNICEF, in partnership with the Government of Japan, is supporting nutrition programs to provide supplementary assistance for adolescents.[5]

In conclusion, while many adolescents have access to health facilities, a significant proportion remain underserved due to a combination of physical, economic, systemic, and informational barriers. These disparities must be addressed through infrastructure development, community outreach, and improved availability of adolescent-friendly health services.

Statement 3B - *In my school we have programs that promotes physical health and nutritional.*

Health

Most adolescents (41%) selected Neutral, indicating mixed or unclear perceptions about the presence of physical health and nutrition programs in their schools. This response likely reflects irregular program implementation, lack of visibility, or varying degrees of access among students. The majority of "Neutral" responses came from adolescents in Dili and RAEOA, with fewer from Bobonaro. Some students stated they had access to school meal programs, but no physical education or health lessons. In RAEOA, a teenager noted, *"We always get school lunch, eat cotton, sugar, meat, but only occasionally do physical exercise."* In Bobonaro, a student said, *"We always have school food but do not understand about the nutrition of the food we get."*

❝ We always have school food but do not understand about the nutrition of the food we get ❞

[5] UNICEF. (2023, October 24). Government of Timor-Leste, Japanese Government and UNICEF join hands to improve health. UNICEF Timor-Leste. https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/press-releases/government-timor-leste-japanese-government-and-unicef-join-hands-improve-health

This suggests that programs may be sporadic, unequally distributed, or not accompanied by educational components. Even where physical activity is offered, participation may be limited to certain students, or programs may lack regular schedules. In many cases, students reported that not all adolescents had access to physical education or nutrition-related lessons.

Despite this uncertainty, 35% of adolescents gave positive responses with 21% Agree and 14% Strongly Agree (14%), indicating that many do have access to structured health and nutrition programming. These responses came mainly from Baucau, Dili, and RAEOA. In Baucau, adolescents described doing physical activities on their own, following the school's program. In Dili, a female student said, *"At school we always do sports activities twice a week."* In RAEOA, a student reported, *"We always have physical activity and school lunch."* These experiences may reflect schools with better-trained teachers or improved infrastructure.

However, 22% of adolescents reported negative experiences—10% "Disagree" and 11% "Strongly Disagree." Most of these responses came from Baucau, and many were from adolescent girls, including those who had dropped out or married early. One student in Baucau said, *"My school does not program physical education, nutrition and school meals."* Other students echoed similar concerns, noting that they did physical activity independently because no program was in place.

Evidence from national research supports these concerns. The TOMAK Adolescent Nutrition Study (2022) and a 2015 WHO survey found that 21.8% of adolescents aged 13–17 are underweight, with higher prevalence among boys. A 2015 Ministry of Health study found that 33.4% of adolescents aged 15–19 were underweight, and 21.5% had anemia.[6] However, these data often exclude out-of-school adolescents, a group especially vulnerable to malnutrition.

A recent study by Filomeno Amaral et al. (2024) on physical education curriculum in secondary schools in Dili municipality revealed that teachers lack understanding of the national PE curriculum and often do not use official guidebooks. Facilities and infrastructure were identified as major limitations, further reducing student participation and learning outcomes.[7]

Data from the WHO's Physical Activity Profile for Timor-Leste also show concerning trends. The prevalence of physical inactivity among adolescents (aged 11–17) is 86% for females and 93% for males. Physical inactivity increases risks for chronic conditions including heart disease, obesity, and diabetes. WHO guidelines recommend at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day for adolescents.

Complementary findings from Yong Keong Cheah on (2023) revealed that of 3,704 adolescents surveyed, 29.8% rarely engaged in physical activity, while only 3.5% reported being active every day. Alarmingly, most adolescents reported low intake of fruits, vegetables, and high consumption of sugary drinks.[8]

On a positive note, the Government of Timor-Leste, with support from WHO and Cuba, has taken steps to address these issues. Public fitness facilities have been installed across urban areas, and a new Department of Physical Education and Sports at UNTL has been created to train physical education teachers for national deployment.

In summary, while some schools have taken steps to provide physical health and nutrition programs, access remains uneven, and implementation is inconsistent. To meet adolescent health needs, these programs must be institutionalized, resourced, and delivered equitably, especially for girls, rural students, and those at risk of school dropout.
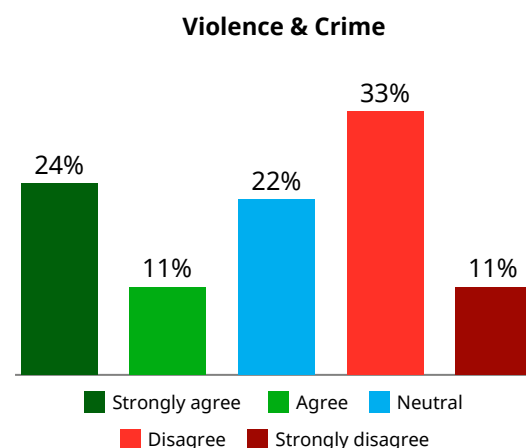
[6] TOMAK. (2022). Adolescent nutrition in Timor-Leste: A formative research study. World Food Programme (WFP), Australian Aid, and TOMAK Programme.
[7] Bria, F. A., Rahayu, T., & Sumartiningsih, S. (2024). Implementation of the physical education curriculum at secondary school level in the Dili District of Timor-Leste. Jurnal Review Pendidikan dan Pengajaran, 7(2).
[8] Cheah, Y. K. (2023). Demographic, lifestyle and mental health factors associated with physical activity among school-going adolescents in Timor-Leste. College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia.

D. Violence and Crime

Statement 4A - *I have experience witnessing or facing violence at home by family members.*

Violence & Crime

24% — Strongly agree
11% — Agree
22% — Neutral
33% — Disagree
11% — Strongly disagree

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The majority of adolescent participants (33%) selected Disagree on the Likert Scale, representing a significant proportion of those who reported not having experienced or witnessed domestic violence. Most respondents in this category were from Dili and Bobonaro, with the majority being female. These responses suggest that many adolescents do not perceive violence within their households, although such perceptions should be considered within the broader socio-cultural context. For example, a teenage girl from Dili stated, *"I have never witnessed domestic violence."* Similarly, a male adolescent said, *"Parents never show it in front of their children."* However, another teenage boy acknowledged, "Verbal violence happens." A teenager from Bobonaro shared, *"I have never faced or seen such problems at home."*

Meanwhile, a combined 35% of adolescents responded Strongly Agree (24%) and Agree (11%), indicating a substantial proportion who have witnessed or experienced violence at home. These responses were more common in RAEOA and Baucau, with fewer from Dili.

In RAEOA, a teenager explained *"We always face economic problems at home, which results in arguments in the family about our studies and we feel sad."* Some adolescents also shared that financial stress leads to physical violence. One early-married teenager said, *"When my wife left without informing me, I hit her, and we argued."* In Dili, a female adolescent said, *"My family often beats me, and gets angry with me."* Another teenage girl shared, *"At home, my brother always beats us and argues with my mother."*

> ❝ We always face economic problems at home, which results in arguments in the family about our studies and we feel sad ❞

In Baucau, a student reported, *"Parents shout at each other because of financial problems; it happens once or twice, sometimes three times a month. I also saw neighbors fighting each other in our neighborhood."* Another student described his experience, *"I am in 6th grade of elementary school. My parents are divorced, and I have to take care of my brothers. I faced violence such as beatings and pressure. They told me I was never allowed inside the house, so they always beat me."*
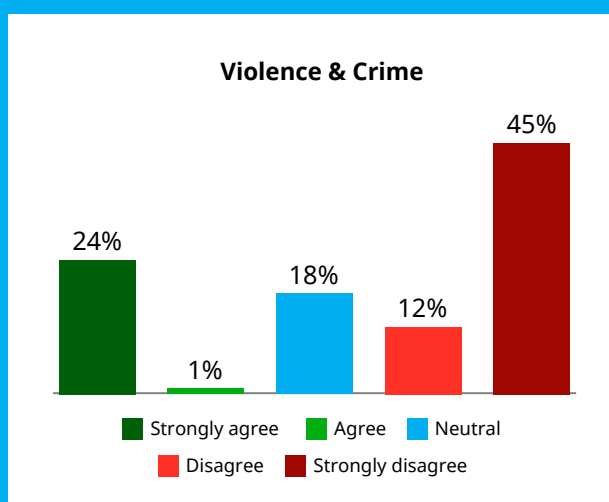
Neutral responses accounted for 22% of adolescents, many of whom were from RAEOA, including adolescents with disabilities and those who had dropped out of school. One participant from RAEOA shared, *"We experience violence, but not often or every time, and it's not physical violence."*

The data aligns with previous studies, including a UN Women report which found that 28% of women aged 15–49 in Timor-Leste had experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner in the past year.[9] According to UNFPA, 59% of women and girls aged 15–49 reported similar experiences at some point in their lives.[10]

However, these figures may underrepresent the true extent of domestic violence. Cultural and social norms often create barriers to reporting, and many survivors—especially adolescents—fear stigma, retaliation, or family dishonor. In some communities, violence is normalized or justified, particularly against women and children, making it difficult for adolescents to recognize or label abuse. While the 33% who selected Disagree may reflect genuine non-exposure to violence, it could also indicate limited awareness or misunderstanding of what constitutes violence, particularly emotional, verbal, or economic abuse.

In conclusion, the data reveals a significant presence of domestic violence in adolescents' lives, particularly in economically strained households. Efforts to raise awareness, offer psychosocial support, and create safe reporting mechanisms are essential to protect adolescents and shift social norms around violence.

Statement 4B - *I have experience of getting influenced by friends or social groups to promote violent behavior.*

Violence & Crime

- Strongly agree: 24%
- Agree: 1%
- Neutral: 18%
- Disagree: 12%
- Strongly disagree: 45%

A large majority of adolescents (45%) selected Strongly Disagree category, indicating they do not feel influenced by peers or social groups to engage in violent behavior. Most responses in this category came from Dili and Bobonaro. A female adolescent in Dili said, *"I have not experienced peers influencing bad behavior".* In Bobonaro, a teenager stated, *"I have never been influenced by others to commit violent acts."* These responses suggest that peer influence on violent behavior is limited, especially among certain groups. Notably, adolescents who selected Strongly Disagree often included adolescent girls, those with disabilities, and school dropouts—groups that are often less engaged in peer-led violence, particularly public or physical forms.

On the other hand, 24% of adolescents responded Strongly Agree, acknowledging that peer influence plays a role in promoting violence. These respondents were mostly from Baucau and RAEOA, with a smaller share from Dili, and included a mix of male and female participants. In RAEOA, a teenager recounted, *"I drank alcohol with my friends, then they started beating the police, and in the end, I got involved."* A student from Dili noted, *"At school, students are often influenced by their peers to fight with students from another schools."* These narratives show that peer dynamics can escalate into violence, especially in environments with weak adult supervision, low accountability, or when alcohol and social pressure are involved.

[9] UN Women. 2018. Timor-Leste. UN Women Data Hub, retrieved from https://data.unwomen.org/country/timor-leste
[10] UNFPA. Ending gender-based violence. UNFPA Timor-Leste.
UNFPA. Ending Gender Based Violence. Retrieved from https://timor-leste.unfpa.org/en/topics/ending-gender-based-violence-0?utm_source=chatgpt.com

❝ At school, students are often influenced by their peers to fight with students from another schools ❞

Interestingly, the 18% Neutral and 12% Disagree responses reflect adolescents who may be uncertain or unwilling to fully admit peer influence, possibly due to social desirability bias or fear of judgment. Very few adolescents (1%) selected Agree, suggesting that perceptions on this issue are highly polarized.

Interestingly, the 18% Neutral and 12% Disagree responses reflect adolescents who may be uncertain or unwilling to fully admit peer influence, possibly due to social desirability bias or fear of judgment. Very few adolescents (1%) selected Agree, suggesting that perceptions on this issue are highly polarized.

When comparing responses between Statements 4A and 4B, a correlation can be inferred: exposure to violence at home (Statement 4A) may increase the likelihood of externalizing behavior or susceptibility to peer influence (Statement 4B). Adolescents accustomed to violence in the household may normalize such behavior in school or community settings.

While most respondents do not report being influenced by peers to engage in violence, global research and anecdotal evidence suggest that public violence in Timor-Leste often involves young men, and self-directed violence (e.g., substance abuse, suicide) is rising among adolescents. When violence is understood in a broader sense, including self-harm, risky behaviors, and emotional distress, adolescent exposure extends beyond physical altercations. Substance use (including cigarettes and alcohol) may serve as indirect expressions of violence toward the self, often facilitated by peer dynamics.
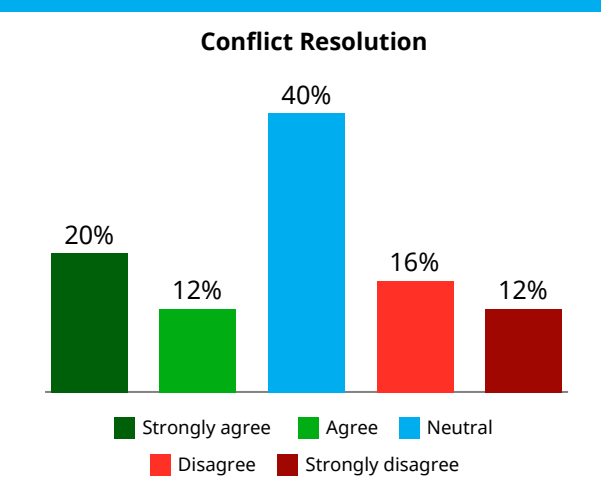
A study by Abigail Esinam Adade et al. (2022) suggests that both peer and family environments in Timor-Leste contribute to youth violent behavior.[11] While direct encouragement of violence may be rare, indirect social reinforcement (e.g., drinking, gang-like solidarity, or toxic masculinity) can promote harmful actions.

In conclusion, while many adolescents report resisting peer pressure, a considerable number still experience peer-influenced or situational violence, especially in under-supervised or economically vulnerable communities. Addressing these risks requires comprehensive youth outreach, life skills education, anti-violence campaigns, and school-based prevention programs.

---

[11] Abigail Esinam Adade et. all. 2022. Exposure to substance and current substance among school-going adolescents in Timor-Leste

E. Conflict Resolution

Statement 4C - *My school environment and its surroundings are safe from bullying.*

Conflict Resolution

Legend:
- ■ Strongly agree
- ■ Agree
- ■ Neutral
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Strongly disagree

The largest proportion of adolescents (40%) selected the Neutral on the Likert Scale, indicating uncertainty about whether their school environments are free from bullying. The majority of these respondents came from RAEOA and Dili, with fewer from Baucau. This ambiguity reflects adolescents' mixed experiences or limited confidence in their schools' ability to effectively prevent or address bullying. In RAEOA, a teenager noted, *"At school, sometimes you can solve problems, and sometimes you can't."* In Dili, the responses were In Dili, responses were varied. Some adolescents reported no bullying, while others shared personal experiences, including a female student who said she was bullied because of her short height.

This uncertainty suggests that adolescents may lack clear information or trust in their schools' ability to address bullying. It also reflects possible gaps in communication, enforcement of school policies, and access to safe complaint mechanisms. In many cases, students avoid reporting bullying due to fear of retaliation or disbelief in school intervention.

This response to neutrality also reflects less confidence of adolescents in the ability of the school to respond effectively to bullying that occurs at school. Adolescents are sometimes reluctant to report to school or do not trust that schools can take action to prevent and manage bullying at school.

When combining the positive responses, Strongly Agree (20%) and Agree (12%), only about one in three adolescents (32%) felt their school environment was safe from bullying. Most of these responses came from RAEOA and Dili, and to a lesser extent, Bobonaro, and were often shared by female adolescents, adolescents with disabilities, and those who married early. A teenager from RAEOA said, *"The problems that arise are often solved by our parents and teachers."* While this sense of safety is encouraging, the relatively low percentage highlights that most adolescents do not fully trust that their school is a bullying-free environment.

> ❝ **Everywhere, people with disabilities are often bullied, being called crippled hands, or poor eyesight** ❞

In contrast, the combined negative responses—Disagree (16%) and Strongly Disagree (12%)—reveal that 28% of adolescents feel unsafe or have directly experienced bullying. These responses were most common in Bobonaro and Baucau. In Bobonaro, one student said, *"At school, my classmates*
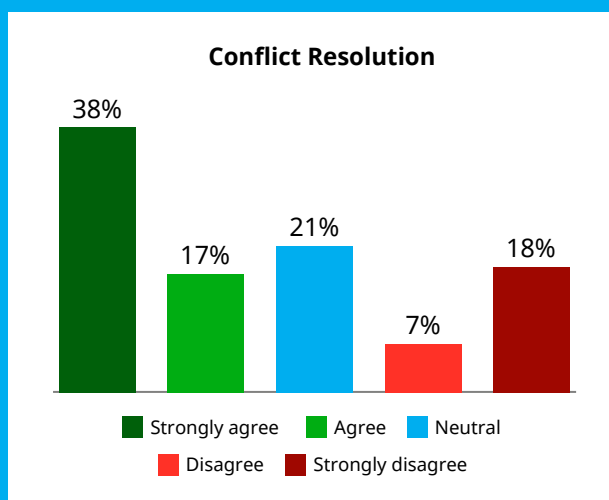
used to enjoy calling me 'teeth sticking out' or 'gay'." In Baucau, a teenager with a disability reported, *"Everywhere, People with disabilities are often bullied, being called crippled hands, or poor eyesight"* Another student added, *"In martial arts, we don't like each other; we always bully each other and create problems."*

One of the most poignant stories came from a female student in Baucau: *"I decided to live and adapt to the bullying situation because my mother was sick and I had to wait for my mother, so I decided to live with my mother in Samalari, Baucau Villa post. The distance from my mother's house to my school is almost 5 kilometers (Samalari-SMA2 Baucau Villa), and walk through the island. Every day I go to and return from school. I always encounter bullying on the way home from school. Young people on the street bully me saying bad face, village kid, speaking with a regional accent, sexual harassing me or catcalling me."* However, *"I have to adapt in order to care for my mother, who is still sick."* This narrative highlights the intersection of bullying, gender-based harassment, and socioeconomic vulnerability, especially for girls in rural areas.

A study by Derrick et al. (2022) found that 28% of adolescents were bullied at school, and 36% had skipped school due to bullying or threats.[12] Bullying not only disrupts attendance but also inflicts long-term psychological harm, diminishing self-esteem, academic achievement, and emotional resilience.

In conclusion, although some students feel safe at school, a significant number face bullying, especially those with disabilities, girls, and youth from poorer or rural communities. More proactive anti-bullying programs, awareness campaigns, and confidential reporting systems are needed to foster a safer and more inclusive school environment.

Statement 4D - *In my community and my school we have peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms.*

Conflict Resolution

- 38% Strongly agree
- 17% Agree
- 21% Neutral
- 7% Disagree
- 18% Strongly disagree

A positive trend was observed in response to this statement, with 38% of adolescents selecting Strongly Agree and 17% selecting Agree, totaling a combined 55% who affirm the existence of peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms in their communities or schools. Responses were well-distributed across all four municipalities: Dili, Baucau, Bobonaro, and RAEOA. This result suggests that many adolescents are aware of, or have benefitted from, formal or informal structures—such as school mediation efforts or community-based approaches—designed to address conflict without violence. The responses reflect familiarity with non-violent dispute resolution, as well as some trust in community and institutional leaders.

However, 25% of adolescents expressed disagreement, including Strongly Disagree (18%) and Disagree (7%), suggesting that in many areas, mechanisms may be absent, ineffective, or inaccessible. These adolescents may live in contexts where public disputes or violence are common,

---

[12] Derrick, J., et al. (2022). Bullying and truancy amongst school-going adolescents in Timor-Leste: Results from the 2015 Global School-Based Health Survey

and mechanisms for resolution—while perhaps present—do not function reliably or fail to involve youth. Meanwhile, 21% of adolescents remained Neutral, likely due to uncertainty about the availability or role of these mechanisms. Their responses may reflect limited engagement, lack of awareness, or mixed experiences in applying conflict resolution systems.

Some adolescents' responses also indicated that they are aware of the diverse community conflict resolution practices, often led by Lia Nain (spiritual elders) and guided by Customary Law. This method typically focuses on reconciliation and restoring social harmony. However, many young people may not fully understand the effectiveness or scope of these mechanisms—especially in cases involving youth violence, bullying, or inter-group disputes in schools.
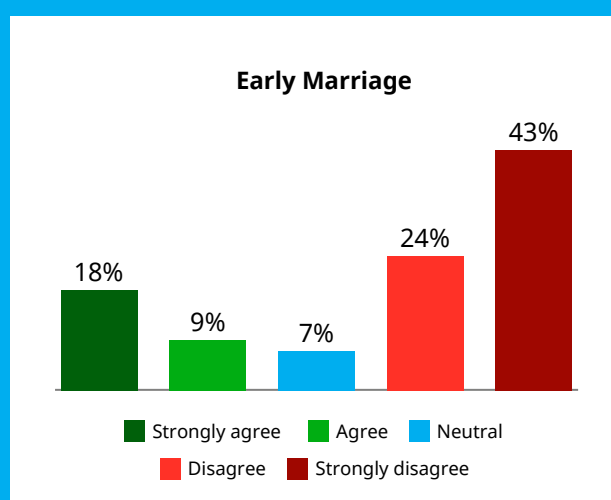
Data from the Asia Foundation's 2022 Safety, Security and Justice survey reinforces these findings. The report shows that most people in Timor-Leste see local community leaders as the primary authority in conflict management: the Village chief (48%), Lian Nain (20%) and Suco Head (13%) and only 5% of respondents viewed the PNTL as their first resort. The survey also highlighted the most pressing security concerns with 23% of land disputes, 12% Youth-related problems and 8% fighting or violence in general.[13] These results suggest that while structures exist, their effectiveness and inclusivity—especially for adolescents—may vary.

In conclusion, although over half of adolescents recognize the presence of peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms in their schools and communities, awareness, trust, and access remain uneven. To strengthen peacebuilding and social cohesion, schools and community actors must ensure that mechanisms are youth-friendly, participatory, and actively implemented, while raising awareness among adolescents about how to engage with them.

---

[13] McLeod, A., & Denney, L. (2022). Timor-Leste Safety, Security and Justice Perceptions Survey. The Asia Foundation.

F. Early Marriage

Statement 5A - *I believe that early marriage happens due to limited access to education and due to societal expectation for early marriage rather than education and personal autonomy.*

Early Marriage

18% — Strongly agree
9% — Agree
7% — Neutral
24% — Disagree
43% — Strongly disagree

Legend:
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The largest proportion of adolescents (43%) selected Strongly Disagree, rejecting the statement that early marriage results primarily from limited access to education and societal expectations favoring early marriage over personal autonomy. When combining this with Disagree (24%), a substantial 67% disagreed with the premise. Most of these responses came from adolescents in Dili and RAEOA. Many adolescents shared that early marriage was their personal choice rather than a result of pressure or lack of access. An early married teenager from RAEOA said, *"I have the right to access education. We were able to meet our needs even though we were in two different environments, as students and married couples. I can sell goods during school hours."* A female student from Dili added, *"Now this is the modern world, parents want their children to go to school, and young people want to decide for themselves to form a family because they look at other colleagues."* These perspectives challenge common assumptions that early marriage is solely rooted in external structural barriers. Instead, adolescents emphasized individual agency, romantic relationships, and peer influence as key drivers. Some noted that families often prefer their children to remain in school, and early marriage is not necessarily a cultural expectation but rather a personal decision shaped by emotion and perceived maturity.

Nevertheless, a smaller but significant group (Strongly Agree 18% and Agree 9%), primarily from Baucau, Bobonaro, and Dili, expressed the view that early marriage is influenced by poverty, limited educational opportunities, and societal constraints. A teenager from Dili explained, *"Early marriage happens because parents cannot afford to pay for school, and they continue to uphold this patriarchal system."* Another teenager from RAEOA shared, *"There are limitations because Catholic schools are not authorized, and Kafe schools are not authorized, while public schools allow students to continue their studies. Often, even our own families do not authorize education because they want us to earn money for the family and not be given opportunities to continue our education."* This group highlighted that structural barriers still exist, particularly in rural areas, where economic hardship, gender bias, and limited access to quality education create conditions that push adolescents, especially girls, into early marriage.

❝Early marriage happens because parents cannot afford to pay for school, and they continue to uphold this patriarchal system❞
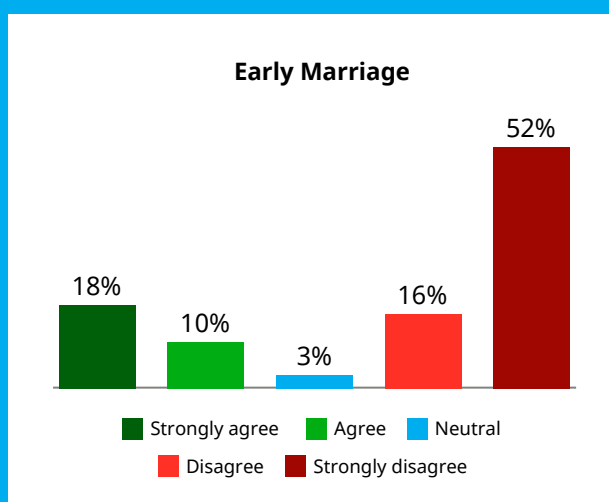
Education data reported from the 2015 Census confirms this divide: school life expectancy at age 15 was 7.6 years for boys and only 6.7 for girls. By age 18, males had 5.2 years of education compared to 4.3 for females. Futhermore, 22.8% of adolescent girls with children were out of school, compared to

9.5% without children. These data indicate the importance of education to contribute to reducing early pregnancy or early marriage among adolescents.[14]

The UNFPA 2017 report reinforces this, showing that early marriage and early pregnancy reduce educational and economic opportunities for women and exacerbate poverty and dependency. It reported that 24% of women aged 20–24 were married before 18 and often had children by age 20. These unions are sometimes arranged post-pregnancy through family pressure or traditional norms, where consent is assumed rather than sought. Households formed by women who have just become pregnant are more common due to family arrangements or the influence of traditional customs, where parents often decide on household formation during courtship.[15]

The report also identifies insufficient reproductive health knowledge, low contraceptive use, and limited access to services as contributors to early pregnancy and marriage. In many cases, adolescent girls face power imbalances in relationships, with decisions about sex and family planning driven by male partners or family expectations, undermining their autonomy.

Statement 5B - *I believe that members of a family coerce and influence decisions about early marriage.*

Early Marriage

Strongly agree	18%
Agree	10%
Neutral	3%
Disagree	16%
Strongly disagree	52%

A majority of adolescents expressed disagreement with this statement—52% Strongly Disagree and 16% Disagree—suggesting they do not perceive family pressure as a primary influence in early marriage decisions. This reflects a shift in adolescent perspectives toward greater individual autonomy in personal decisions, particularly regarding marriage. A teenage girl from Dili said, *"Family does not put pressure, but sometimes the decision to get pregnant leads to marriage."* Another adolescent girl shared, *"Sometimes parents may pressure me, but I have to think for myself because I have the right to choose."*

These responses suggest that many adolescents believe that early marriage is not forced upon them, and that pregnancy, rather than family coercion, often becomes the trigger for marriage. Families, in turn, may encourage marriage after the fact, more as a response to a situation than as a proactive influence.

However, 28% of respondents gave positive reactions—Strongly Agree (18%) and Agree (10%)—indicating that a significant number do still experience or observe familial pressure. A teenage girl from Dili explained, *"Families prioritize men, so they put pressure on their daughters to form families."* In RAEOA, a teenager said, *"Parents force their children because of financial difficulties. There is no money to support the family, which leads to early marriage."* These reactions reflect economic drivers, gendered household roles, and patriarchal family dynamics that persist in some communities, influencing adolescents' decisions either directly or indirectly.

---

[14] General Directorate of Statistics. (2015). Timor-Leste population and housing census 2015. Government of Timor-Leste.
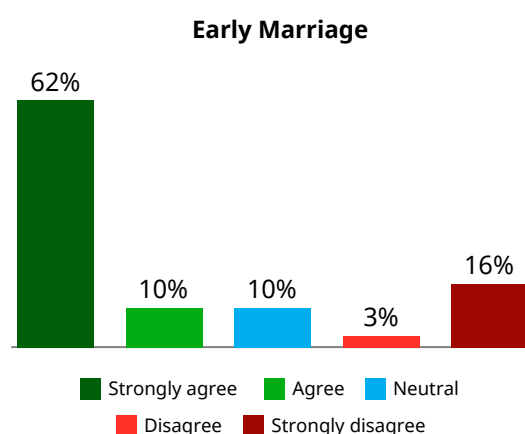[15] Cummin, D., & Fonseca, Z. (2017). Teenage Pregnancy and Early Marriage in Timor-Leste. UNFPA.

❝ Families prioritize men, so they put pressure on their daughters to form families ❞

A 2017 UNFPA report by Deborah Cummin and Zulmira Fonseca found that early household formation in Timor-Leste is frequently guided by family arrangements and expectations. While adolescents may perceive themselves as having a choice, their decisions are often shaped by familial and societal norms.[16]

The World Bank's 2018 Timor-Leste Systematic Country Diagnostic also found that early pregnancy and marriage are major causes of school dropout among adolescent girls, reinforcing cycles of gender inequality. These outcomes are often rooted in lack of family support, inadequate social protection, and weak enforcement of girls' rights.

Statement 5C - *I am aware that lack of knowledge about reproductive health and lack of understanding about social consequences contributed to early marriage decisions.*

Early Marriage

62% Strongly agree
10% Agree
10% Neutral
3% Disagree
16% Strongly disagree

In contrast to the previous two statements, the majority of adolescents strongly agreed with this one. 62% selected Strongly Agree, and another 10% Agree, with the strongest responses coming from adolescents in Dili and RAEOA. This response reveals a clear understanding among adolescents that inadequate reproductive health education contributes to early marriage decisions. A teenager from Dili said, *"Because parents lack knowledge, they send their children to marry early."* Similarly, a female student added, *"I lack knowledge about the menstrual cycle and reproductive health."* Another female student also expressed that she lacked knowledge about how to make decisions.

❝ Because parents lack knowledge, they send their children to marry early ❞

These responses suggest that many adolescents recognize the consequences of poor sexual education and how it can impact their life choices. Early marriage is seen, in part, as a result of knowledge gaps, unintended pregnancies, and limited ability to make informed decisions.

Nevertheless, 19% of respondents gave a combination of negative reactions (Disagree 3% and Strongly Disagree 16%), showing that although there is awareness of social consequences, they may not see the connection between the parties involved. A teenager from Dili said, *"I don't agree because some people have access to good education, but they marry early, and it's up to each person."* Another adolescent added, *"Some parents have the capacity to support, but they still want to marry early, engage*

---

[16] Cummin, D., & Fonseca, Z. (2017). Teenage Pregnancy and Early Marriage in Timor-Leste. UNFPA.

in promiscuity, and want to try everything." A teenager from Baucau remarked, *"Using technology, watching porn, and then putting it into practice."* These responses point to behavioral and moral concerns, suggesting that even when education is accessible, curiosity, risk-taking, or peer pressure can still lead to early marriage or pregnancy. Some adolescents perceive early marriage as a result of choices, not just lack of information.
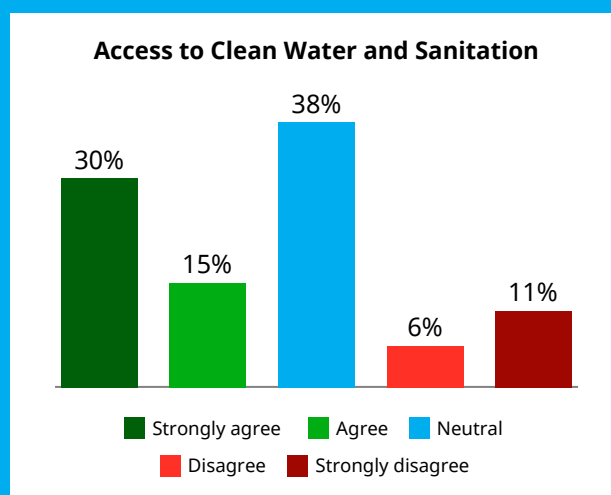
According to the UNFPA (2017) Country Assessment on Sexual Reproductive Health Rights, although early pregnancies are declining, the rate remains high—51 out of every 1,000 births are to adolescent girls. UNICEF's Situation Analysis (2020) shows that 5% of girls aged 15–19 have a child, with rural adolescents (6.6%) three times more likely to experience early childbearing than those in urban areas (3%).[17]

The National Youth Policy also highlights gaps in critical thinking and life skills among youth, which hinders their ability to understand the social consequences of early pregnancy and marriage. Limited autonomy, combined with peer influence and unequal family dynamics, reinforces cycles of poverty and gender inequity.

---

[17] UNFPA. (2017). Country Assessment on Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in Timor- Leste. UNFPA.

G. Access to Clean Water and Sanitation

Statement 6A - *I can access clean toilets, which are safe and functional at home, in schools, and in public spaces, and they are accessible to adolescents.*

Access to Clean Water and Sanitation

Legend:
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The majority of adolescents (38%) selected the Neutral response, reflecting mixed or uncertain perceptions about the safety, cleanliness, and functionality of toilets in homes, schools, and public spaces. Most of these responses came from Dili, Bobonaro, and Baucau. The neutral stance highlights varying levels of access and infrastructure quality across locations. A teenager from Bobonaro commented, *"The bathrooms and toilets at school are not clean and are unsafe for women."* A male student added, *"The teachers' toilets are clean, ours are not."* A student from Baucau noted, *"There are public toilets, but the facilities are poor. People who use the toilets throw water around, and people with disabilities cannot access public toilets because they are not accessible."* A student who had dropped out of school stated, *"There is no water in the terminal, and also there is no door."*

> ❝ There are public toilets, but the facilities are poor. People who use the toilets throw water around, and people with disabilities cannot access public toilets because they are not accessible to them ❞

Despite these concerns, 45% of adolescents responded positively (Strongly Agree 30% and Agree 15%), indicating that many have access to clean and functioning toilets, particularly in homes. These positive responses were mostly from urban areas such as Dili, where students acknowledged having safe sanitation at home but noted that schools and public areas still face challenges. This finding highlights disparities between urban and rural settings and emphasizes that access to safe sanitation remains uneven across communities.
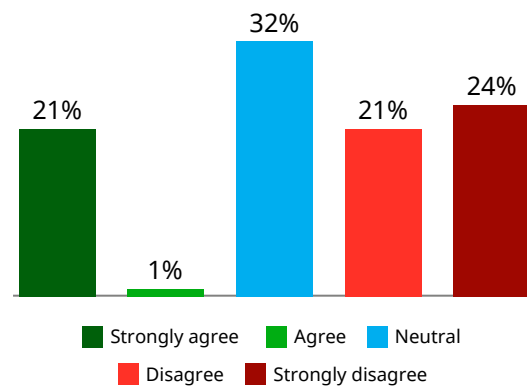
A combined 17% of respondents selected Disagree (6%) or Strongly Disagree (11%). These adolescents, mainly from Bobonaro and some from Dili, described significant sanitation issues. One student from Dili said, *"At school, the toilet is dirty, the water is scarce, and in public places, it is locked and inaccessible."* A female student with disability remarked, *"In public places, people with disabilities do not have good or accessible bathrooms."* Another teenage girl added, *"Toilets are overcrowded, and women feel unsafe."*

Sanitation access in Timor-Leste remains a major public health concern. The UNSDCF 2021–2025 reports that only 54% of households have access to basic sanitation and just 28% have access to hygiene facilities nationwide—22% in rural areas and 43% in urban areas. UNICEF data indicates that 66% of primary schools have non-functional toilets and 40% lack access to clean drinking water. Inadequate sanitation particularly affects girls during menstruation and students with disabilities who require accessible infrastructure.[18]

---

[18] UNFPA. (2017). Country Assessment on Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in Timor- Leste. UNFPA.

Statement 6B - *In my house, at my school and in public spaces I have regular access to clean water in order to maintain hygiene sanitation practices.*

Access to Clean Water and Sanitation

- Strongly agree — 21%
- Agree — 1%
- Neutral — 32%
- Disagree — 21%
- Strongly disagree — 24%

A significant portion of adolescents (32%) selected Neutral in response to this statement, indicating uncertainty or inconsistent access to clean water. Respondents from RAEOA and Dili explained that while some had clean water at home, access at schools or public places was irregular. An adolescent from Baucau mentioned, *"In some areas, households have good access to clean water, while in others, they do not."* Additionally, adolescents noted that schools and public places continue to face challenges, the water supply is inconsistent even when facilities exist. The neutral response also reflects that adolescents have inconsistent experiences with access to portable water and maintaining hygiene, particularly when using sanitation facilities in public places and schools. The quality and reliability of clean water access remain a concern for many adolescents, as these issues are closely linked to health risks.

❝ In some areas, households have good access to clean water, while in others, they do not ❞

Only 22% of adolescents responded positively (Strongly Agree 21%, Agree 1%). These participants, mostly from RAEOA and Baucau, reported regular access to clean water at home, school, or in some public spaces. This response suggests that a minority of adolescents benefit from improved water infrastructure, often in urban households, private schools, or better-resourced areas.

Conversely, 45% of respondents expressed negative reactions (Disagree 21%, Strongly Disagree 24%). Adolescents from Dili, Bobonaro, and Baucau—particularly girls and adolescents with disabilities—highlighted limited or non-existent access to clean water. In rural areas, households often depend on unreliable sources such as rainwater, rivers, or wells, which can be unsafe. Schools face similar challenges, particularly regarding drinking water and hygiene for students. Similarly, in markets or areas where communities gather for business activities, there is often no access to clean water facilities. These conditions pose a significant public health risk.
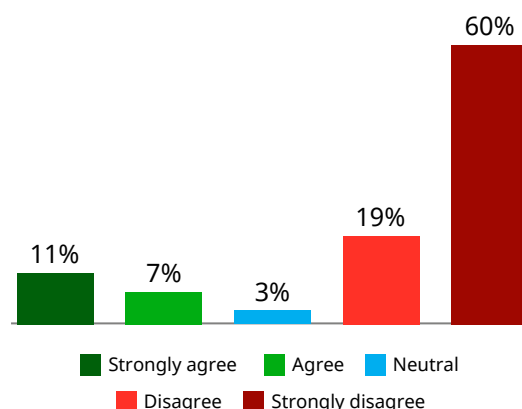
The lack of consistent access to clean water in schools significantly impacts student attendance and participation in classrooms. This challenge is particularly pronounced for adolescent female students during their menstrual periods. In public spaces, adolescents' access to sanitation is often limited and in poor condition. In Dili, access to clean government tap water is only available three times a week, while the challenge of ensuring continuous access is even greater in rural areas.

A 2018 UNICEF publication reported that 40% of primary schools lack access to water sources. While 70% have toilets, many of these are either partially or non-functional. Poor access to clean water directly impacts school attendance, especially for girls during menstruation, and hinders proper hygiene practices among students in public and school settings.[19]

[19] UNICEF. Water, sanitation and hygiene in schools: Bringing communities together in Timor-Leste. UNICEF Timor-Leste. UNFPA. (2017). Country Assessment on Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in Timor- Leste. UNFPA.

Statement 6C - *In my observation adolescents are practicing educational hygiene such as properly wash their hands, throwing rubbish into rubbish beans, either at home, in schools or in public space.*

Access to Clean Water and Sanitation

11%	7%	3%	19%	60%

- ■ Strongly agree
- ■ Agree
- ■ Neutral
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Strongly disagree

The majority of adolescents (60%) Strongly Disagreed with the statement, indicating that good hygiene practices are not widely observed. These responses were concentrated in RAEOA, Bobonaro, and Baucau. A teenager from Bobonaro said, *"Many adolescents are unaware of the importance of proper waste disposal, and public places lack garbage bins."* In Baucau, a student with a disability commented, *"Sometimes students throw garbage around."* A male student added, *"Although students learn about handwashing, they do not always put it into practice. At school, students also dispose of garbage carelessly."* This highlights a significant challenge in promoting and maintaining education on hygiene among adolescents. The responses suggest that knowledge about the health impacts of proper handwashing and waste disposal remains weak. However, this issue may also be influenced by limited access to soap and clean water, particularly in rural areas.

> ❝...Although students learn about handwashing, they do not always put it into practice. At school, students also dispose of garbage carelessly...❞

When combining Disagree (19%) and Strongly Disagree (60%), nearly 80% of adolescents expressed concerns about hygiene behaviors. These negative views may stem from limited hygiene education, lack of clean water, and inadequate waste disposal facilities. One adolescent explained that poor hygiene practices raise concerns about infectious disease prevention, particularly in schools and public spaces.

Only 18% responded positively (Strongly Agree 11%, Agree 7%). These students, mostly from RAEOA and Dili, described consistent hygiene practices such as handwashing and proper waste disposal. A female student said, *"In our school, we always practice throwing garbage in place and doing recycling."* Another student from Bobonaro added, *"Information on hygiene education practices we hear and see on television, and sometimes me and my brothers at home practice accordingly."*
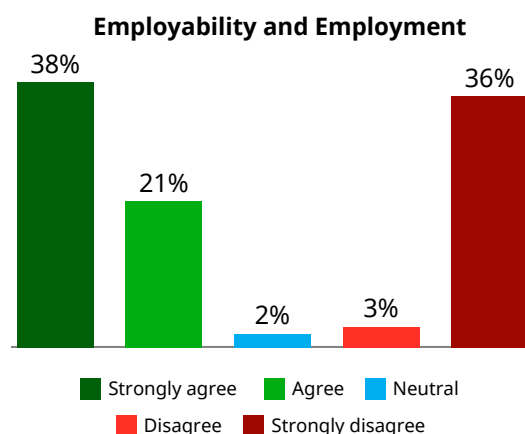
Despite the availability of some facilities, awareness and behavior around handwashing remain low. A UNICEF report states that only 28% of the population uses soap and water for handwashing, and 94% fail to do so at critical moments such as before eating or after using the toilet. Furthermore, 65% of child deaths in Timor-Leste are linked to diarrhea, a preventable disease tied to poor hygiene.[20]

Public waste management remains inadequate. In Dili, an estimated 20,000 kilograms of garbage are generated daily, but disposal systems are limited and poorly organized. While some villages have designated dumping points, this system does not extend to rural municipalities, where waste is often discarded indiscriminately. Many adolescents lack knowledge or awareness of appropriate garbage disposal practices, and events commonly result in litter being left everywhere.

[20] The Borgen Project. (2023, November 3). Water sanitation in Timor-Leste. https://borgenproject.org/water-sanitation-in-timor-leste/

H. Employability and Employment

Statement 7A - *I have access to vocational training near where I live.*

Employability and Employment

38%	36%
21%	
2%	3%

Legend:
- Strongly agree (dark green)
- Agree (green)
- Neutral (light blue)
- Disagree (red)
- Strongly disagree (dark red)

Adolescents responded with polarized views on access to vocational training in their communities. A large portion strongly agreed (38%) with the statement, while a nearly equal proportion strongly disagreed (36%). Adolescents from Dili and RAEOA made up the majority of those who strongly agreed. They cited firsthand experience participating in trainings offered by NGOs, health institutions, or religious groups. One adolescent girl shared, *"I access the courses provided by the nuns."* In contrast, adolescents from Baucau and Bobonaro were more likely to strongly disagree, citing barriers such as geographic distance or scheduling conflicts. One adolescent explained, *"Our place is far from the vocational training place"*, while another added, *"Vocational places are near me, but I don't have time to attend activities."*

❝ Our place is far from the vocational training place ❞

This division in responses highlights that not all adolescents have equal access to vocational training opportunities. Factors such as location, infrastructure, and socio-economic status contribute significantly to the disparity. When combining the positive responses, Strongly Agree (38%) and Agree (21%), 59% of adolescents indicated that they have access to training near their homes. However, this likely reflects the experiences of those in urban centers like Dili, where more training programs are available and supported by government and NGO initiatives. These programs often include language courses, computer skills training, and other job-readiness programs.
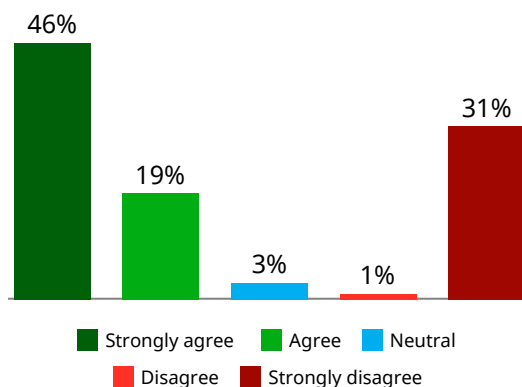
The combined negative responses (Disagree and Strongly Disagree) totaled 39%, revealing that a substantial number of adolescents—particularly those in rural and remote areas—continue to face significant barriers. These challenges include poor infrastructure, lack of public transportation, and the financial burden of training fees or transport costs. As a result, adolescents living in underserved areas are often excluded from vital capacity-building opportunities that could improve their employability.

According to the 2021 Labor Market Survey, 82,000 young people (35% of the 15–24 age group) were not in employment, education, or training (NEET). This highlights a significant risk of youth exclusion from the labor market due to limited access to skills development. A 2022 report from UNESCO and ILO puts the NEET rate at 29.1% among young Timorese. There are currently 32 formal vocational programs offered across public and private vocational institutions, but accessibility remains unevenly distributed.[21]

[21] UNESCO – UNEVOC. 2022. Timor-Leste TVET Country Profile. UNESCO (https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/Dynamic+TVET+Country+Profiles/country=TLS)

Statement 7B - *I have the opportunity to become volunteer in order to enhance my employability.*

Employability and Employment

- Strongly agree: 46%
- Agree: 19%
- Neutral: 3%
- Disagree: 1%
- Strongly disagree: 31%

Nearly half (46%) of adolescents strongly agreed that they have opportunities to volunteer and see it as a way to prepare for future employment. These responses were mostly from adolescents in Dili and Bobonaro, with some from Baucau. Adolescents shared positive experiences with school-based internships or youth programs. One teenage girl reflected, *"Volunteering is a time to prepare our basic skills."* In Baucau, adolescents said that their school's internship program helped them learn practically. In RAEOA, adolescents mentioned that the youth center and APFTL program provide opportunities for them to learn and improve their soft skills and employability.

However, a significant number of adolescents (31%) strongly disagreed, indicating they lack access to volunteer opportunities. Most of these responses came from adolescents in Baucau and Bobonaro—primarily men, out-of-school youth, persons with disabilities, and early married adolescents. They cited challenges such as distance, lack of transportation, limited family support, or not receiving relevant information. A teenager from Bobonaro said, *"I never received information about volunteering. If there is, I want to join."*
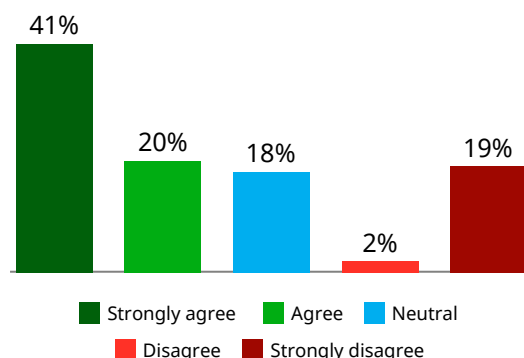
❝ I never received information about volunteering. If there is, I want to join ❞

When combining the Strongly Agree (46%) and Agree (19%) responses, a total of 65% showed a positive perception of volunteering. Many female respondents, in particular, noted how volunteering helped them build professional skills and confidence. These positive responses suggest better access to volunteer programs in urban centers.

The National Youth Policy acknowledges the importance of volunteerism and refers to past practices in the struggle for independence as good examples. Various organizations—including UN Volunteers, Youth Parliament Alumni, the Red Cross, and NGOs—provide diverse volunteer opportunities in education, health, media, and environmental sectors. These platforms offer adolescents valuable experience, social networks, and a sense of civic responsibility, especially for those seeking to enter the labor market.

Statement 7C - *I have the opportunity to participate in life skills education program.*

Employability and Employment

- 41% Strongly agree
- 20% Agree
- 18% Neutral
- 2% Disagree
- 19% Strongly disagree

A majority of adolescents responded with Strongly Agree (41%) to the statement about the opportunity to participate in life skills programs. Most of the adolescents who gave this answer came from RAEOA and Dili. This indicates a positive perception of the program. Life skills education is a key to empowering adolescents with the ability to meet the challenges of everyday life, make good decisions, and actively and effectively engage in their communities. One adolescent stated, *"I always get the opportunity to attend this program."*

Positive reactions can also be seen in the Agree result (20%), and when combining the Strongly Agree and Agree results, more than half (61%) of the total participants showed a positive reaction to life skills education. They have had the opportunity to participate in life skills education programs and have had a positive impact from this program, especially developing their communication skills, problem solving, critical thinking, time management, anger management, and these contribute to their personal development and increase their soft skills for employment opportunities.

Those who decided to show a Neutral reaction (18%) indicated that they were not convinced. The 18% of respondents who showed a Neutral reaction indicated that they were either unconvinced about the life skills education program or had no knowledge of its existence. This may be due to a lack of access, insufficient information, or being geographically distant from opportunities to participate in the program.

The answer with almost the same percentage came from those who reacted Strongly Disagree (19%). This may also suggest that they have substantial barriers to accessing life skills education programs, perhaps due to economic, geographical, and informational barriers. A teenage girl from Baucau said, *"There is an opportunity but there is no time because I have to take care of the children"*. Another teenager added, *"Not everyone has the opportunity to attend programs such as life skills because of difficult access to information, living far from the village headquarters and youth centers".*

❝ There is an opportunity but there is no time because I have to take care of the children ❞

The SEJD & UNICEF Formative Report on the Youth Parliament Program (2010–2018) provides clear evidence that life skills education programs have a positive impact on young people's personal development and career growth.[22] A notable example is UNICEF's support for life skills education ollowing the 2021 floods, which benefited 300 adolescents and young people in evacuation centers. Participants reported increased confidence, improved communication skills, and a stronger
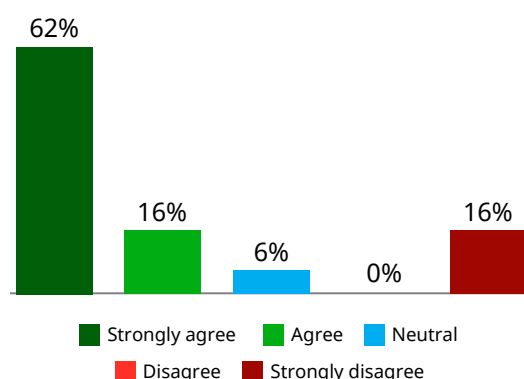
[22] Secretariat of State for Youth and Sports (SEJD) & UNICEF. (2018). Formative evaluation of the Timor-Leste Youth Parliament Program 2010–2018.

understanding of violence prevention.[23]

Life skills education complements the challenges of the education system and also narrows the education achievement gap in Timor-Leste. The data on the situation of unemployment, education and training of young people is very worrying. In 2021, there were 31% of young people aged 15–24 who did not enter employment, education, and training. This indicator is higher than that of other regions. The rate of adolescent girls aged 15–19 is 34 per 1,000 women giving birth. This number is high in this region.[24] World Bank data also show that 36% of the population over the age of 15 is functionally literate, 27% is semi-literate, and 37% of the adult population is totally illiterate.[25]

Statement 7D - *I have access to digital tools and other resources to increase my knowledge and ability to better prepare myself for responding to modern job market demand.*

Employability and Employment

The majority of adolescents (62%) strongly agreed that they have access to digital tools and resources that help them build knowledge and prepare for the labor market. These responses came mainly from Dili, Baucau, and Bobonaro, with both female and male participants represented. Adolescents shared how they use technology for schoolwork, freelancing, and informal business. One student shared, *"I use canva and ChatGPT, they help me at school and for freelance work"*. Some teenagers also use applications, including social media to sell goods. Another teenager in Baucau noted, *"Sometimes I zoom with lecturers when I'm away. Google translate really helps me translate my subjects."*

Combining Strongly Agree (62%) and Agree (16%), a total of 78% of adolescents expressed positive views on digital accessibility. These responses suggest increasing digital literacy and connectivity among youth, particularly in urban areas. Adolescents mentioned using online platforms to access training, connect with job opportunities, and build digital skills—critical for 21st century careers.

However, 16% strongly disagreed. These adolescents, mostly from Baucau and RAEOA, cited poor connectivity, lack of devices, or limited understanding of how to use digital tools for employment. In Baucau, a teenager said, *"Right now, we have not learned how to use technology. Our internet site is broken".* Another teenager from RAEOA added, "There is no access because there is no phone". A teenager in Dili reflected, *"He uses technology but does not know how to use it to make money, and the internet 'slowly' does not work well."*

---

[23] UNICEF. Life skills-based education has positive impact for flood-affected adolescents and youth. UNICEF Timor-Leste. https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/stories/life-skills-based-education-has-positive-impact-flood-affected-adolescents-and-youth

[24] World Bank. (2023). Timor-Leste Human Capital Index 2023 update. https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/64e578cbeaa522631f08f0cafba8960e-0140062023/related/HCI-AM23-TLS.pdf

[25] World Bank. (2018, August 23). A second chance at education in Timor-Leste. https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2018/08/23/a-second-chance-at-education-in-timor-leste

❝ He uses technology but does not know how to use it to make money, and the internet 'slowly' does not work well ❞

USAID's 2022 Digital Divide Report (using evidence from the 2022 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)) confirms disparities in digital access. It found that 80% of men and 60% of women own mobile phones. The number of people with access to the internet is also mostly male, about 30% and female about 20%. The number of people watching television is also mostly men, 40% and women 37%, the number of people listening to radio is about 20% men and 14% women.[26]

Digital readiness is vital for youth inclusion in modern economies. According to the International Telecommunications Union, 73% of youth aged 15–24 in Asia-Pacific use digital technology. By 2030, an estimated 80% of jobs will require digital literacy. However, Timor-Leste still lags in infrastructure. As of 2024, internet penetration is only 54.2%. Average mobile speeds are 4.85 Mbps, and fixed broadband 6.10 Mbps. Social media users represent 42.2% of the population, with males accounting for 56.9% and females 43.1%. Furthermore, statistics indicate that the total number of mobile phone users registered under GSMA (Global System for Mobile Communications Association) is 1.67 million.[27]
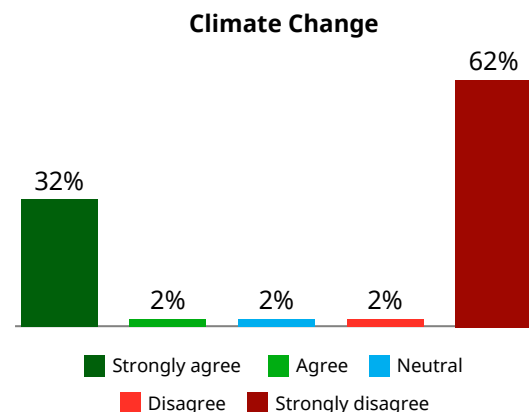
These trends highlight a growing awareness among Timorese youth of the importance of digital skills. Expanding equitable access to digital tools will be essential for strengthening the employability of all adolescents, especially those in underserved communities.

[26] USAID. 2022. The Gender Digital Divide From the Evidence of DHS Survey, 2022. USAID.
[27] DataReportal. (2024). Digital 2024: Timor-Leste. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-timor-leste

I. Climate Change

Statement 8A - *I get information regarding climate change in my school and in other training places.*

Climate Change

- 32% Strongly agree
- 2% Agree
- 2% Neutral
- 2% Disagree
- 62% Strongly disagree

Currently, the educational infrastructure related to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and environmental education is limited in Timor-Leste. Only a few schools offer access to digital resources, and many still rely heavily on manual teaching methods. Although some students own smartphones, most school materials are provided in print, and many teachers lack the skills to incorporate digital tools or climate-related topics into the classroom.

A significant majority of adolescents (62%) strongly disagreed and 2% disagreed with the statement that they receive information about climate change in their schools or training places. Most of these negative responses came from students in Dili and Baucau, with a few from Bobonaro. A student in Dili declared, *"Climate change is not in the curriculum, and teachers never discuss it".* Similarly, a student in Baucau said, *"I never learn about it in school."* Others noted that their exposure to climate change topics occurred only in informal settings.

❝ Climate change is not in the curriculum, and teachers never discuss it ❞

These findings highlight a major gap in climate change education across formal and informal systems in Timor-Leste. This lack of awareness is concerning, as climate change is a pressing global issue that directly affects youth. Without proper knowledge, adolescents are less prepared to engage in mitigation, adaptation, and community-based action. The gap may be attributed to a weak curriculum, lack of access to extracurricular initiatives, and disparities in geographic access to awareness campaigns.
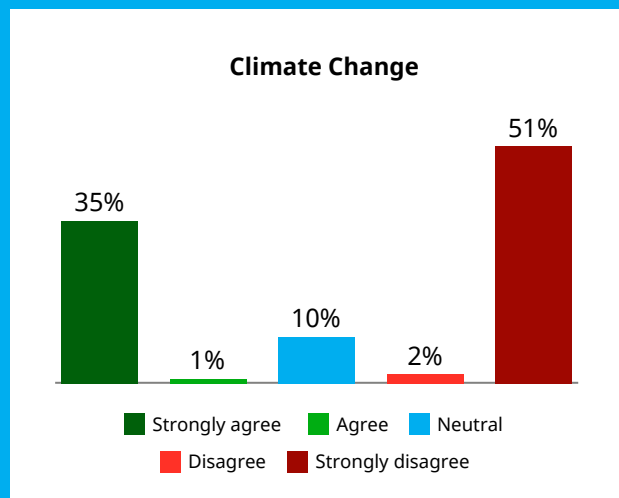
Conversely, 32% of adolescents strongly agreed and 2% agreed that they had received information about climate change in other educational or informal learning spaces. These positive responses were primarily from adolescents in Dili. One adolescent girl said, *"We have received information about climate change. We also participated in climate-related activities".* Another student said, *"We learn geology, biology, and other natural sciences".*

Although access to climate change education is inconsistent and often fragmented across regions and schools, some adolescents are gaining awareness through extracurricular activities or subject-based learning. These insights suggest a need to strengthen curriculum integration and extracurricular initiatives on climate and environmental education.

A UNDP program called Youth Engagement reveals that while many young people in Timor-Leste

may not understand the concept "climate change", they are more familiar with terms like "natural disasters".[28] This underscores the need to bridge conceptual and linguistic gaps in climate communication. Additionally, media reporting often fails to connect environmental events—such as floods or droughts—with broader climate change dynamics.

Statement 8B - *I get information from sources such as textbooks, documentaries, online contents that provide reliable information about climate change.*

Climate Change

- 35% Strongly agree
- 1% Agree
- 10% Neutral
- 2% Disagree
- 51% Strongly disagree

The majority of adolescents (51%) strongly disagreed and 2% disagreed with the statement that they access reliable information about climate change through various media sources such as textbooks, documentaries, or online content. Most of these responses came from Bobonaro, including adolescents with disabilities and those who had dropped out of school. These findings underscore a critical lack of access to informative materials and digital literacy. This challenge is amplified by the digital divide in Timor-Leste. Many adolescents lack consistent internet access or do not use available digital tools to seek out information about environmental issues. The absence of a climate-focused curriculum and the unavailability of school libraries also contribute to this information gap.

However, more than half of these adolescents, 35%, strongly agreed, indicating that many have moderate engagement with available resources such as books, online platforms, school materials, and training programs. Most of the adolescents who gave these responses were from Dili and Baucau. Disparities in access to information between those with good access and those without may be due to socio-economic conditions, the infrastructure of information providers, and the interests of the adolescents themselves.

Currently, it is evident that Timor-Leste faces several challenges in building and improving its education system, including the need to provide comprehensive education on climate change. Many schools lack libraries, and even those that have them often do not provide students with access. Furthermore, books available in libraries rarely cover climate change topics. The situation is even more dire for schools in rural areas.
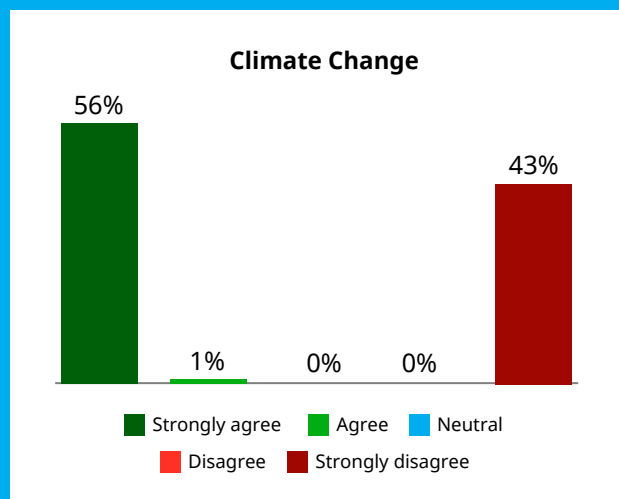
> ❝...Timor-Leste faces several challenges in building and improving its education system, including the need to provide comprehensive education on climate change...❞

28 UNDP. (2023, August 11). Co-learning with youth about the impact of climate change in Timor-Leste. UNDP Timor-Leste.
https://www.undp.org/timor-leste/blog/co-learning-youth-about-impact-climate-change-timor-leste

The National Climate Change Policy highlights the principle of 'equity and social inclusion', particularly in mobilizing youth to become ambassadors for change and sustainable development. This policy advocates the inclusion of climate change education at all school levels within the curriculum.[29]

Nevertheless, major challenges persist. Many rural schools do not have libraries, internet access, or reliable electricity. Even when digital tools are available, language barriers prevent some adolescents from fully engaging with climate-related content.

Statement 8C - *I get positive influence from friends and other social networks about attitudes towards climate change and environmental responsibility.*

Climate Change

56% Strongly agree
1% Agree
0% Neutral
0% Disagree
43% Strongly disagree

Over half of adolescents (56%) strongly agreed that they receive positive peer influence about climate change and environmental responsibility. These responses were primarily from adolescents in Dili and Baucau. This is a promising trend, especially considering that previous statements showed major gaps in access to formal climate education. This positive influence of peers helps strengthen adolescents' perspectives on environmental behavior. Young people and adolescents spend a significant amount of time with their peers, during which they are often influenced by each other's behaviors and thoughts. This positive influence can be leveraged to promote climate action. Additionally, social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp also play a role in shaping adolescents' attitudes, as peer influence on these platforms can further encourage positive change.
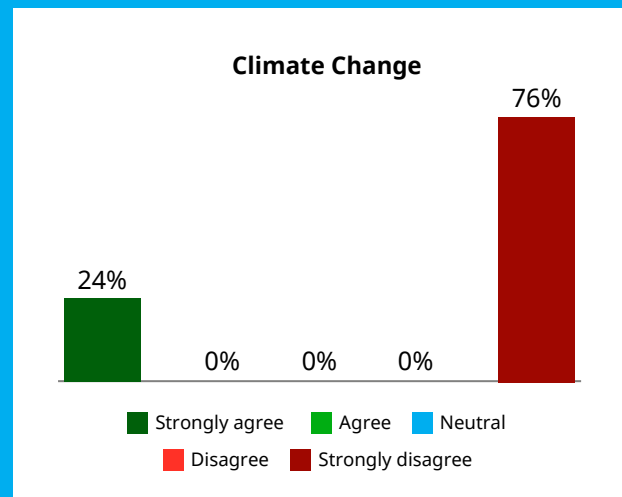
> ❝...Social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp also play a role in shaping adolescents' attitudes...❞

However, the percentage of adolescents who strongly disagreed with the statement, *"Being positively influenced by friendships and social networks on attitudes related to climate change and environmental responsibility"*, is quite high at 43%. This clearly indicates that many adolescents feel the lack of information and knowledge about climate change affects their peer circle. In such situations, it becomes challenging to foster a positive influence on pro-environmental behavior.

These findings point to both an opportunity and a challenge. While some adolescents are influenced positively by their social circles, others remain disconnected from conversations and actions around climate responsibility. Supporting youth networks and creating platforms for peer-led climate action could help fill this gap.

---

[29] Government of Timor-Leste. (2022, March 1). Resolution No. 8/2022 on the National Climate Change Policy.

Statement 8D - *I have the opportunity to participate in training that develop critical thinking ability about climate change.*

Climate Change

Legend:
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

A substantial majority of adolescents (76%) strongly disagreed with the statement that they have access to training that builds their critical thinking skills around climate change. Most of these responses came from Dili and other municipalities, especially from female adolescents. This reaction illuminates a significant gap in educational programs related to critical thinking skills. Only a small number (24%) said Strongly Agree and that adolescents should be exposed to quality education and training that includes elements of critical thinking skills in these educational programs.

Critical thinking skills about climate change focus on the ability to evaluate, analyze, interpret information, policies, and the impact of development programs, and develop evidence-based reasoning. This skill is important for adolescents to approach information through careful consideration of sources, content and understanding the complexity of climate change issues. While some efforts have been made by civil society organizations and international agencies, these initiatives are often fragmented or too localized. Expanding training that focuses on inquiry-based learning and climate literacy is essential for fostering informed, active youth.

Continuation of UNICEF's 21st Century Skills Training may help improve adolescents' critical thinking skills. With the situation of quality of education, and continuous training for teachers is being conducted, it is important to consider and integrate critical thinking skills in learning processes, including in non-formal training, in order to increase the knowledge of adolescents so as not to be passive to the information received.

❝...UNICEF's 21st Century Skills Training may help improve adolescents' critical thinking skills...❞

V. FINAL CONSIDERATION

In Timor-Leste, young people face challenges so great that it feels like their futures are being robbed from them. Poverty, limited access to education, and systemic discrimination create thick walls that limit their opportunities to thrive. Young people with disabilities are the most forgotten group, trapped in isolation due to lack of financial support and access to community resources.

The education sector is in a rather worrying condition, especially in rural areas. Many schools lack teaching materials, have inadequate facilities, and educators who are not trained in dealing with students with special needs. Bullying and teacher indifference worsen the situation, causing many students to choose to leave school.

Beyond education, access to health services is a serious concern. Adolescents suffer from malnutrition, lack of sanitation facilities, and a lack of hygiene and health services in schools. Health centers are under-resourced, while emergency services are slow to respond to crises. Without real interventions to build health infrastructure and nutrition programs in schools, we will see a generation of young people growing up physically weak and vulnerable to disease.

Another major challenge is violence and emotional trauma. Bullying at school, domestic violence due to economic pressures, and the lack of counseling services have left deep scars on the hearts of many young people. They are forced to endure in silence, without support or a place to seek help. Unless family support systems and violence prevention programs are strengthened, these scars will continue to linger and damage their futures.

For girls, the greatest threat is early marriage—a decision often not of their own choosing but forced upon them by poverty and the shackles of patriarchal norms. Forced to forego education and economic opportunity, they face a life of hardship, trapped in roles they should not have been in at such a young age.

Meanwhile, the failure of basic infrastructure further worsens the living conditions of young people. Many schools lack access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities, forcing students to endure unhealthy environments and high risk of disease. Youth unemployment is on the rise, with many lacking job skills due to a lack of vocational training and digital education.

More worryingly, awareness of climate change is still very low. Formal education does not integrate this issue, while misinformation continues to spread unchecked. This lack of preparedness will have a negative impact on community resilience, weakening the capacity of young people to face increasingly real environmental challenges.

VI. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving Accessibility & Inclusion for Youth
- Establish Community Information Centers to provide access to education, health, and employment opportunities.
- Develop financial assistance programs for underprivileged youth and people with disabilities to access education and social services.
- Strengthen policies to eliminate discrimination and ensure inclusive participation in youth programs.

Improving Educational Resources & Teacher Training
- Providing textbooks, digital resources, and assistive technology for students with special needs.
- Conducting comprehensive teacher training to promote inclusive education and reduce bullying and negligence in teaching.
- Ensure that every school has a safe and supportive environment for all students.

Improving Health & Nutrition Programs
- Improve health infrastructure in schools, including access to medical personnel and basic medicines.
- Launch school-based nutrition programs and educate students about healthy eating and personal hygiene.
- Develop an emergency response system to expedite health services for students in need.

Strengthening Mental Health & Violence Prevention Programs
- Implement mandatory anti-bullying programs in schools to create safer learning environments.
- Expand family and mental health counseling services to address domestic violence and emotional trauma.
- Incorporate conflict resolution training into school curricula to teach nonviolent problem-solving.

Tackling Early Marriage through Education
- Conducting a national awareness campaign on the negative impacts of early marriage on the future of adolescent girls.
- Providing financial assistance and scholarships to ensure that adolescent girls stay in school and are not forced into marriage.
- Strengthening community engagement to change cultural perceptions and fight for girls' rights.

Improving Access to Clean Water, Sanitation, & Hygiene
- Prioritize the development of adequate sanitation facilities in schools, including access for students with special needs.
- Implement hygiene education programs to teach the importance of good sanitation.
- Improve clean water supply systems in educational institutions to ensure sustainable access.

Develop Vocational Training & Youth Economic Empowerment Programs
- Establish vocational training centers with a focus on agriculture, technology, and business.
- Enhance digital literacy and internship programs to prepare youth for the modern workforce.
- Provide support for young entrepreneurs, including training and access to venture capital.

Integrating Climate Change Education & Youth Engagement in Environmental Action
- Incorporate climate change materials into school curricula to raise environmental awareness.
- Conduct community workshops to educate youth on sustainable practices and disaster preparedness.
- Support youth-led environmental initiatives, encouraging their involvement in conservation and climate advocacy.

REFERENCES

Adade, A. E., et al. (2022). Exposure to substance and current substance use among school-going adolescents in Timor-Leste.

Amaral Bria, F., Rahayu, T., & Sumartiningsih, S. (2024). Implementation of the physical education curriculum at secondary school level in the Dili District of Timor-Leste. Journal Review Pendidikan dan Pengajaran, 7(2).

Asia Foundation. (2022). Safety, Security and Justice in Timor-Leste: Public Perceptions Survey. The Asia Foundation.

Bria, F. A., Rahayu, T., & Sumartiningsih, S. (2024). Implementation of the physical education curriculum at secondary school level in the Dili District of Timor-Leste. Jurnal Review Pendidikan dan Pengajaran, 7(2).

Cheah, Y. K. (2023). Demographic, lifestyle and mental health factors associated with physical activity among school-going adolescents in Timor-Leste. College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Cummin, D., & Fonseca, Z. (2017). Teenage Pregnancy and Early Marriage in Timor-Leste. UNFPA.

DataReportal. (2024). Digital 2024: Timor-Leste. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-timor-leste

Derrick, J., et al. (2022). Bullying and truancy amongst school-going adolescents in Timor-Leste: Results from the 2015 Global School-Based Health Survey

General Directorate of Statistics. (2015). Timor-Leste population and housing census 2015. Government of Timor-Leste.

GSMA. (2021). The Mobile Gender Gap Report. Global System for Mobile Communications Association.

Government of Timor-Leste. (2022, March 1). Resolution No. 8/2022 on the National Climate Change Policy.

International Republican Institute. (2023). Public Opinion Survey: Timor-Leste. Feb-March 2023. IRI.

McLeod, A., & Denney, L. (2022). Timor-Leste Safety, Security and Justice Perceptions Survey. The Asia Foundation.

Ministry of Health, Timor-Leste. (2015). Adolescent Nutrition Survey.

Ministry of Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture (MJDAC), Government of Timor-Leste, & UNICEF. (2023). Youth participation in decision making at the village level. UNICEF Timor-Leste.

National Youth Policy of Timor-Leste. (2021). National Youth Policy 2021–2025. Government of Timor-Leste.

Secretariat of State for Youth and Sports (SEJD) & UNICEF. (2018). Formative evaluation of the Timor-Leste Youth Parliament Program 2010–2018.

The Borgen Project. (2023, November 3). Water sanitation in Timor-Leste. https://borgenproject.org/water-sanitation-in-timor-leste/

TOMAK. (2022). Adolescent nutrition in Timor-Leste: A formative research study. World Food Programme (WFP), Australian Aid, and TOMAK Programme.

TOMAK. (2022). Gender and social inclusion analysis. https://tomak.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/TOMAK-gender-and-social-inclusion-analysis.pdf

UNDP. (2022). Survey of People with Disability and Inclusion in Timor-Leste. Disability and Inclusion Report. United Nations Development Programme.

UNDP. (2023). Youth Engagement and Natural Disaster Awareness Program Reports. United Nations Development Programme.

UNDP. (2023, August 11). Co-learning with youth about the impact of climate change in Timor-Leste. UNDP Timor-Leste. https://www.undp.org/timor-leste/blog/co-learning-youth-about-impact-climate-change-timor-leste

UNESCO-UNEVOC. (2022). Timor-Leste TVET country profile. UNESCO. https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/Dynamic+TVET+Country+Profiles/country=TLS

UNFPA. (2017). Country Assessment on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in Timor-Leste. UNFPA.

UNFPA. Ending gender-based violence. UNFPA Timor-Leste. https://timor-leste.unfpa.org/en/topics/ending-gender-based-violence-0

UNICEF. (2020). Situation Analysis of Children in Timor-Leste (SitAn 2020). UNICEF Timor-Leste.

UNICEF. Water, sanitation and hygiene in schools: Bringing communities together in Timor-Leste. UNICEF Timor-Leste. https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/stories/water-sanitation-and-hygiene-schools-bringing-communities-together-timor-leste

UNICEF. (2023, October 24). Government of Timor-Leste, Japanese Government and UNICEF join hands to improve health. UNICEF Timor-Leste. https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/press-releases/government-timor-leste-japanese-government-and-unicef-join-hands-improve-health

UNICEF. Quality education. UNICEF Timor-Leste. https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/quality-education

UNICEF. Life skills-based education has positive impact for flood-affected adolescents and youth. UNICEF Timor-Leste. https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/stories/life-skills-based-education-has-positive-impact-flood-affected-adolescents-and-youth

UN Women. 2018. Timor-Leste. UN Women Data Hub, retrieved from https://data.unwomen.org/country/timor-leste

USAID. (2021). Labor Market Survey: Timor-Leste.

UN Women. (2022). Study on Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Timor-Leste.

World Bank. (2018, August 23). A second chance at education in Timor-Leste. https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2018/08/23/a-second-chance-at-education-in-timor-leste

World Bank. (2018). Timor-Leste Systematic Country Diagnostic: Pathways for a New Economy and Sustainable Livelihoods.

World Bank. (2023). Timor-Leste Human Capital Index 2023 update. https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/64e578cbeaa522631f08f0cafba8960e-0140062023/related/HCI-AM23-TLS.pdf

World Food Programme (WFP). (2021). Nutrition and Anemia in Women and Adolescents in Timor-Leste.

World Health Organization (WHO). (2015). Physical activity profile and nutrition indicators for Timor-Leste.

Yong Keong Cheah. (2023). Adolescent Physical Activity Patterns in Timor-Leste.

for every child,

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.

unicef

for every child