



Until we are all equal

A photograph of three young women of diverse backgrounds standing in front of the United Nations Secretariat Building. They are all smiling and have their right arms raised in a gesture of solidarity. The woman on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and a black skirt. The woman in the middle is wearing a black jumpsuit. The woman on the right is wearing a patterned long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. A large yellow graphic line loops around the women. The background shows the UN building with its name in English and French, and a row of international flags.

Strengthening Girls' Rights as Human Rights

Technical Report



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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| GIRLS' RIGHTS IN INTERNATIONAL POLICY-MAKING: A DETAILED ANALYSIS | 4 |
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| GENERAL ASSEMBLY | 5 |
| COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN..... | 12 |
| HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL..... | 17 |
| UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW | 33 |
| SPECIAL PROCEDURES..... | 43 |
| Key trends amongst Special Procedures thematic mandates on women, children and gender | 45 |
| Key trends amongst other thematic mandate holders..... | 52 |
| Key trends in relation to cross-cutting themes..... | 57 |
| SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL | 60 |
| TREATY BODIES' GENERAL COMMENTS & GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS | 63 |
| General Comments and General Recommendations about girls' rights | 64 |
| General Comments that include language on girls' rights..... | 68 |
| General Comments and Recommendations that do not discuss girls' rights..... | 70 |
| TREATY BODIES' CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS | 71 |
| CONCLUSION: THE CHALLENGES AHEAD | 83 |
| ANNEX: METHODOLOGY..... | 84 |
| Database research and desk review of documents..... | 84 |
| Consultations with key stakeholders..... | 86 |
| Specific methodology and limitations for each mechanism studied..... | 86 |
| List of affected groups identified via keyword searches | 102 |
| List of areas of discrimination identified via keyword searches..... | 102 |
| List of girls' rights issues identified via keyword searches..... | 102 |

Girls' Rights In International Policy-Making: A Detailed Analysis

Introduction

In the first half of 2024, Plan International conducted in-depth research into the status of girls in international policy making, building on, and updating our groundbreaking 2018 report, *Girls' Rights Are Human Rights*¹. This research has resulted in two key products: the main analysis report and a concise executive summary can be found [here](#). This third and current report, is a more comprehensive breakdown of the key research findings, providing a detailed analysis of the human rights of girls across UN bodies and mechanisms: it highlights progress, recognises gaps, and identifies the challenges lying ahead.

The 2018 research analysed existing references to girls and their rights in more than 1,300 international policy documents, covering a period of 87 years from 1930 to 2017. It revealed the extent to which international law overlooks girls' rights, effectively rendering girls invisible. Throughout the history of girls' rights, up to the point of publication of the 2018 report, girls were rarely mentioned as a specific demographic in international law and where they were, there was a failure to fully reflect the barriers that they face. The 2018 report found that too often, girls were falling between the dominant agendas of

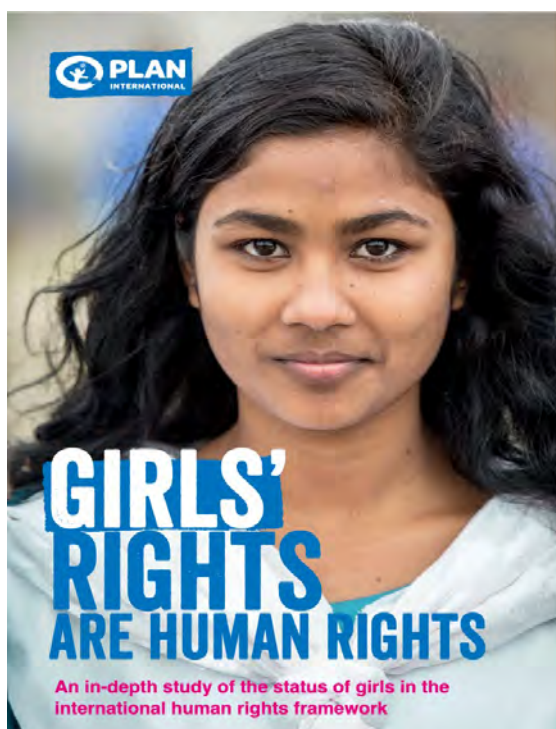
women's and children's rights, and that gender-neutral and age-neutral approaches were shaping international law-making, shifting attention away from girls.

For the 2024 project, we analysed policy developments from 2018 to the end of 2023, to shed light on improvements, gaps and trends related to girls' rights in key parts of human rights law and policy.

In this current study, the various UN policy making bodies are scrutinised in detail to reveal more precisely where progress is most marked, and where attention needs to be focused to consolidate gains made and pursue girls' human rights, as we attempt further progress towards gender equality.

By conducting quantitative and qualitative analysis of the language in policy documents developed by these UN bodies since 2018, including terminology that is age- gender- and diversity- sensitive and promotes and protects the specific rights of girls, we have sought to

understand not only where but how progress has been made. The analysis also identifies, across a range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and within key international mechanisms, where there are gaps and shortfalls in policy language when addressing girls' rights.



Scope of this research project

The timeframe covered by this study is **1 January 2018 to 31 December 2023**.

The key mechanisms and their outputs examined in this study are:

- UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolutions
- Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Agreed Conclusions
- Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolutions
- Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Recommendations
- Special Procedures thematic report recommendations
- Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) report recommendations
- Treaty Body General Comments (GCs) and General Recommendations (GRs)
- Treaty Body recommendations in Concluding Observations to State Periodic Reviews

General Assembly

A sample set of 20 selected resolutions of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), covering a range of topics related to girls, women, children or youth, were examined.¹

Key Findings:

- **The scope of girls' rights addressed by UNGA has expanded from 2018 to 2023, and resolutions now include more language specifically on girls.**
- **The texts mention specific rights of women and girls such as: right to education, right to health, right to non-discrimination and elimination of all forms of violence.**
- **The texts often do not unpack the content or application of rights in relation to girls specifically.**
- **The texts describe the intersecting forms of discrimination that women and girls face, clearly spelling out how intersecting identities can exacerbate discrimination.**
- **Despite the texts describing the obstacles that women and girls face, they often omit the specific needs of girls, which differ from those of women. The different forms of discrimination that affect girls are also not often outlined specifically.**
- **References to 'women and girls' were found to characterise the majority of mentions to 'girls.' Most often, 'women and girls' are referred to in the context of discrimination or violence that they face. Often, reference to girls will disappear in relation to specific topics such as participation, political life, access to justice and human rights defenders.**
- **Girls are still mentioned and considered as a homogenous group, with very little reference to different ages or differentiation among members of the group. However, the presence of some quantifiers exists, for example resolutions use language such as 'young women' or 'adolescent girls' on occasion.**

Resolution on the girl child (2019, 2021, 2023)²

Over recent years, there has been an expansion in the range of human rights issues addressed in the preambular paragraphs of the UNGA biennial consensus resolution on 'the girl child.'

¹ For a full overview of the methodology used to identify and analyse these resolutions, see in Annex.

² Adopted by consensus each year. A full analysis of all amendments tabled in relation to the various resolutions studied was beyond the scope of this project.

The preambular paragraphs of this resolution mention a growing assortment of topics that are of relevance to girls and girls' rights, including: poverty; social protection; education; adequate healthcare; nutrition; full access to clean water, including safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene; skills development; combating all forms of discrimination (including against girls with disabilities); all forms of violence against girls; armed conflict; climate-related and other hazards; natural disasters; disease outbreaks, including the impact of the HIV and AIDS epidemic (and the impact these has on creating child-headed families, with the burden often falling on girls); child and forced labour; and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM). However, very little mention of intersectional discrimination can be found in the biennial iterations of this resolution.

Despite references to the ways in which poverty, for example, can exacerbate girls' inequality, in terms of intersectional identities that girls possess, only rural girls and girls with disabilities are mentioned. Some references are made to age-related differences among girls, for example in relation to sexual and reproductive health education for adolescent girls or to *"promote access to skills and entrepreneurship training for young women and to tackle gender stereotypes"* in order to enter the labour market.³ However, apart from mentions that young women may experience different or exacerbated forms of discrimination, the resolutions do not outline how or why the experiences and needs of girls and young women of different ages differ from each other.

Development of language

The various iterations of this resolution on the girl child identify that across the board, girls experience barriers to the full realisation of their rights. **In recent years the resolution has emphasised extreme poverty as one of the biggest obstacles to meeting the needs and promoting and protecting the rights of the child, including the girl child.**⁴ The resolution has drawn a strong link between the occurrence of harmful practices, child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), and unpaid care-work (often ending education), as further limiting girls' opportunities.⁵ Therefore, the eradication of poverty is established as one of the most pressing priorities to realise girls' rights and expanding the exploration of girls' rights to ensure the inclusion of a wider spectrum of girls' realities.

In 2023, the resolution also expanded upon the rights of girls living in rural and remote areas, and girls with disabilities, outlining the increased barriers that they face in accessing education, healthcare, and nutrition, leaving them more vulnerable *"to the consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations, early pregnancies and often being subjected to harmful practices, such as female infanticide, child, early and forced marriage, prenatal sex selection and female genital mutilation, and to various forms of cultural, social, sexual and economic exploitation and violence, abuse, rape, incest and honour-related crimes."*⁶

Additionally, language on the digital divide has been strengthened since 2021, with specific reference to the gender digital divide being added over the course of the iterations. For example, in 2019, the only mention of technology referred the benefits for girls to expand *"the scope of education and training opportunities ranging from basic digital fluency to advanced technical skills"*,⁷ but in 2023, the language expanded to discuss the *"gender digital divide"* and the ways in which closing this gap can strengthen girls' capacities, competencies, and empower them to report and seek help for online violence and bullying.⁸

³ UNGA, 'Resolution 78/188 on the girl child', 19 December 2023, UN Doc. A/RES/78/188, operative para (OP) 15.

⁴ UNGA, 'Resolution 76/146 on the girl child', 16 December 2021, UN Doc. A/RES/76/146.

⁵ *Ibid.*, preambular paragraph (PP) 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, PP 22.

⁷ UNGA, 'Resolution 74/134 on the girl child', 18 December 2019, UN Doc. A/RES/74/134, OP 10.

⁸ UNGA, 'Resolution 78/188 on the girl child', 19 December 2023, UN Doc. A/RES/78/188, PP 9.

Resolution on the rights of the child (2018, 2019, 2021, 2023)⁹

Change over time

The consensus resolution on the rights of the child has significantly evolved since 2018, especially relating to the marked increase in references to girls' rights and intersections with more human rights issues. In 2018, girls were only mentioned in the context of non-discrimination including violence, freedom of expression, education, health, maternal mortality, and armed conflict.¹⁰ These references were sparse and general, mostly featuring girls' experiences as an addition. For example, most references to girls were characterised by language such as "...particularly girls" or "...disproportionately affects girls" without much explanation on the specific impact the issue in question has on girls.¹¹

Starting in 2021, the resolution has begun to include girls more extensively in areas in which they were completely omitted previously. This continued in 2023: in relation to economic growth and poverty, the resolution recognised the importance of empowering and investing in children, and in particular girls. This was acknowledged as critical to economic growth, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and eradicating poverty, which is at the root of *"breaking the cycle of all forms of discrimination and violence, including multiple and intersecting forms, and in promoting, respecting and protecting the full and effective enjoyment of their human rights."*¹² The disproportionate impact of discrimination and violence on children with disabilities, particularly girls has also been expanded upon, with the resolution also discussing the need to ensure that the digital environment responds to the additional risks that girls with disabilities face.

The 2023 resolution focused more heavily on digital technologies and how these have been shown to increase the risk of girls to discrimination, violence including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), harmful practices including CEFM, and child labour, and how gender stereotypes and negative social norms undermine the ability for women and girls to access these technologies. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls was also mentioned, especially considering long-distance learning and the obstacles faced primarily by rural girls in accessing education online. While the resolution does not expand upon the reasons girls are specifically more at risk of discrimination and violence in the context of digital technologies, since 2021, it does reaffirm the importance of *"partnering with men and boys, as an important strategy for advancing full enjoyment of human rights"* to achieve greater equality and *"ensure a just and equitable world for all girls."*¹³

While completely omitted in the 2018 resolution, the most recent iterations of 2023 have outlined the importance of children's, including girls and adolescent girls', inclusive and meaningful participation in decision-making processes, as well as the inclusion of children's organisations and child-led initiatives to ensure that *"policy measures are developed on the basis of participatory, evidence-based decision-making processes that take into account the views of children."*¹⁴

Education and violence as a focus for girls' rights issues

Girls' right to education is elaborated upon in depth in the 2018 resolution.¹⁵ Similarly, violence against women and girls (GBVAWG) feature heavily throughout the iterations of the resolution. The 2018 Plan International report found that both areas dominate the discourse of girls' rights, and the research for this current report has yielded the same conclusion. On a positive note, the approach to girls' right to education has been fairly intersectional, and the resolution outlines the importance of ensuring school

⁹ Adopted by consensus each year.

¹⁰ UNGA, 'Resolution 73/155 on the rights of the child', 17 December 2018, UN Doc. A/RES/73/155, PP 22 and OP 7(b); OP 7(c); OP 16, 17, 19, 20; OP 21; PP 21; OP 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, PP 22; OP 47.

¹² UNGA, 'Resolution 78/187 on the rights of the child', 19 December 2023, UN Doc. A/RES/78/187, PP 41.

¹³ UNGA, 'Resolution 76/147 on the rights of the child', 6 December 2021, UN Doc. A/RES/76/147, PP 37.

¹⁴ UNGA, 'Resolution 78/187 on the rights of the child', 19 December 2023, UN Doc. A/RES/78/187, OP 18.

¹⁵ UNGA, 'Resolution 73/155 on the rights of the child', 17 December 2018, UN Doc. A/RES/73/155, OPs 15-20.

attendance for girls, adolescent girls, pregnant and or married girls, as well as Indigenous, minority, children in vulnerable situations, or children with disabilities.¹⁶

Pushback language

There are some examples of language in this UNGA resolution that are typical of the pushback being experienced in girls' rights. **The addition of 'family rights' language reflects the anti-movement's advocacy strategies to water down protections enshrined in children's rights, diminish girls' autonomy as individual rights-holders, and attempt to recognise parents and/or the family as rights-holders. One of the main ways in which this pushback is exemplified is through attempts to increase the role that parents have in children's decision-making, especially regarding restricting girls' right to bodily autonomy.** Attacks on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) are often characterised by a push to include the role of parents in the teaching of, and access to information on sexual reproductive and health rights. The 2023 iteration of this resolution includes the same language as the 2018 resolution, on ensuring that comprehensive education is scaled up and is *"consistent with [adolescent girls and boys and young women and men's] evolving capacities, and with appropriate direction and guidance from parents and legal guardians, with the best interest of the child as their basic concern."*¹⁷ While it is promising to see that age considerations are being made and that girls' ages are quantified in the form of references to adolescents and young women, the emphasis on the role and rights of parents and guardians in the acquisition of information on SRHR, gender equality and women's empowerment, must be understood as a symptom of the pushback existing from anti-rights and anti-gender groups. Additionally, the lack of change and improvement in the language from 2018 to 2023 may also be an indication of the consistency of this pushback, and the continued difficulty for negotiators to include progressive language.

Resolution on the intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (2018, 2020, 2022)¹⁸

While the biennial resolution on 'the intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls' replicates most of the trends identified in this research, it has also expanded further upon areas of human rights which are not often discussed in relation to girls' rights. Generally, girls do not feature as a stand-alone group in this recurring resolution, and mostly appear in the phrases 'violence against women and girls' or 'discrimination against women and girls,' owing partly to the topic of this resolution, but also due to the overwhelming focus on violence in the ambit of girls' rights compared to other human rights issues.

Girls, for example, did not feature in paragraphs on participation, nor on the effect of poverty and marginalisation resulting from their exclusion from social and economic policies.¹⁹

However, the 2022 iteration of this resolution, which focused on gender stereotypes and negative societal attitudes, highlighted several issues such as marriage, motherhood and care, expanding greatly on the scope of the previous resolutions.²⁰ For example, it reaffirmed the right to enter a marriage with free and full consent, the importance of not portraying women solely as mothers, rectifying the unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work and reiterating men's responsibilities, concluding that these are all key to eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women.²¹ The recognition of unpaid care and domestic work is a relatively new topic of discussion in the UN, with the UNGA passing a

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, OP 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, OP 18; UNGA, 'Resolution 78/187 on the rights of the child', 19 December 2023, UN Doc. A/RES/78/187, OP 17.

¹⁸ Adopted by consensus in 2018, adopted by vote in 2020 and 2022. Vote results in 2022: 166 in favour, 0 against, 14 abstentions. Vote results in 2020: 170 in favour, 0 against, 11 abstentions.

¹⁹ UNGA, 'Resolution 75/161 on the intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls', 16 December 2020, UN Doc. A/RES/75/161, PP 28; PP 11.

²⁰ UNGA, 'Resolution 77/193 on the intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls', 15 December 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/77/193.

²¹ *Ibid.*, PP 17.

resolution on the International Day of Care and Support in mid-2023, and the Human Rights Council adopting the 'Resolution on centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective' at the 54th session late 2023.²² It is therefore significant that this UNGA resolution argues that measures must be taken to *"recognise, reduce and redistribute women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care, informal and domestic work and to tackle the persisting feminisation of poverty"* in order to address gender inequality.²³

The resolution also recognises, in little detail, several important human rights issues, in which girls are often not considered, that constitute major impediments to the full meaningful and effective participation of women and girls in society such as: laws restricting access to *"property and landownership, inheritance, nationality, health care and services, education, justice, women's employment and access to credit."*²⁴

While it is positive that these areas were identified, the resolution refers to girls simply as part of the 'women and girls' formulation and does not expand upon how gender stereotypes or negative societal attitudes related to girls may impact their enjoyment of these rights, nor other forms of discrimination and violence that girls may uniquely face in these contexts. While the visibility of girls in relation to these rights is an important sign of progress, and should be celebrated, it is important to move past mere references to girls and begin to produce soft law which ensures that their needs, challenges, and rights are effectively respected, protected and fulfilled.

Resolutions on trafficking in women and girls (2022, 2020, 2018)²⁵

While the consensus resolution on trafficking in women and girls only ever references girls as part of the phrase 'women and girls', the need to incorporate gender- and age-sensitive approaches to policies combatting trafficking is acknowledged.²⁶ Interestingly, the phrase 'women and girls' is not used consistently and the resolutions use the phrase 'women and children' in some contexts, for example in relation to the use of communications technologies for the purpose of exploitation and for child sexual abuse material, or child, early and forced marriage.²⁷ While mentioning 'children' does nonetheless implicitly include girls, it does not recognise the gender- and age-specific risks that girls face, nor that they are often disproportionately impacted by these abuses, and therefore does not outline the specific protections that should be installed.

The failure to specifically emphasise on girls' lived realities in relation to these topics adds to the inconsistency in which they are considered by these resolutions and contributes to the lack of detailed analysis accorded to girls' rights.

Resolutions on child, early and forced marriage (2022, 2020, 2018)²⁸

The consensus resolution on CEFM expands more deeply on how the practice impacts girls specifically, not just as a corollary to women.²⁹ **The resolution makes some references to girls' intersectional**

²² UNGA, 'Resolution 77/317 on the International Day of Care and Support', 24 July 2024, UN Doc. A/RES/77/317; Human Rights Council (HRC), 'Resolution 54/6 on centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective', 11 October 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/54/6.

²³ UNGA, 'Resolution 77/193 on the intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls', 15 December 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/77/193, OP 5(h).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, PP 20.

²⁵ Adopted by consensus.

²⁶ UNGA, 'Resolution 73/146 on trafficking in women and girls', 17 December 2018, UN Doc. A/RES/73/146, PP 19; UNGA, 'Resolution 75/158 on trafficking in women and girls', 16 December 2020, UN Doc. A/RES/75/158, PP 19; UNGA, 'Resolution 77/194 on trafficking in women and girls', 15 December 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/77/194, PP 20.

²⁷ UNGA, 'Resolution 77/194 on trafficking in women and girls', 15 December 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/77/194, PP 28.

²⁸ Adopted by consensus.

²⁹ UNGA, 'Resolution 77/202 on child, early and forced marriage', 15 December 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/77/202; UNGA, 'Resolution 75/167 on child, early and forced marriage', 16 December 2020, UN Doc. A/RES/75/167; UNGA, 'Resolution 73/153 on child, early and forced marriage', 17 December 2018, UN Doc. A/RES/73/153.

identities, such as *“girls with disabilities, Indigenous girls and girls in vulnerable situations, including girls facing social and economic exclusion, and those living in rural and remote areas,”* and also include references to widowed girls, women who were married as girls, and pregnant adolescent girls.³⁰ Some age-sensitive language is present and references to adolescent girls can be found in various paragraphs relating to their specific vulnerability to CEFM and poverty linked with rurality.³¹

Other references to adolescent girls are linked to their right to meaningful participation and consultation, their right education, right to health including SRHRs, and access to CSE.³² In fact, throughout the course of this research, this has emerged as a trend: when girls’ age is defined, it is mostly in relation to these rights. These are the only references to a specific phase in girls’ lives and thus girls remain mostly an undefined and seemingly homogenous group. At times, the resolution uses the phrase *“girls and women”*, which may be a way to highlight girls as the main group in the related issue, however the difference between the experiences of the two, or the reason why girls are explicitly referenced first, are not expanded upon.³³ The more unique addition by this resolution, is a paragraph dedicated solely to girls’ participation, without reference to women, as well as the importance of including girls-led organisations in eliminating negative social norms and harmful traditional or customary practices.³⁴ Additionally, the resolution explicitly recognises girls as *“agents of change in their own lives,”* which represents a shift from the weaker language present in the other resolutions’ discussions on participation.³⁵

Resolutions on climate change (2020-2023)³⁶

The topic of climate change has been tackled in several resolutions at the UNGA (largely adopted by consensus) and is where some of the common trends identified throughout the course of this research can be seen, particularly the recognition of the need to identify girls as an affected group in relation to this issue, but a lack of detailed analysis of girls’ rights in the context of climate change.

The 2020 resolution on the ‘protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind’ mentions girls inconsistently.³⁷ The resolution calls for the integration of a gender perspective in environmental and climate change policies.³⁸ It only includes language around women’s full and equal participation in decision-making regarding policies, omitting the participatory role that girls should play.³⁹

Similarly, an opportunity to further expand on girls’ rights is missed in a newly added operative paragraph recognising *“the role of children and youth as agents of change in addressing and responding to climate change.”*⁴⁰

³⁰ UNGA, ‘Resolution 73/153 on child, early and forced marriage’, 17 December 2018, UN Doc. A/RES/73/153, OP 25; OP 3; OP 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, OP 32; PP 26.

³² *Ibid.*, OP 9; OP 18; OP 23; OP 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, PP 19, 32, OPs 3, 15, 17, 19, 43.

³⁴ UNGA, ‘Resolution 77/202 on child, early and forced marriage’, 3 January 2023, UN Doc. A/RES/77/202.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ UNGA, ‘Resolution 76/300 on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment’, 1 August 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/76/300, adopted with a vote (161-0-8); UNGA, ‘Resolution 78/153 on the protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind’, 21 December 2023, UN Doc. A/RES/78/153, adopted by consensus; UNGA, ‘Resolution 76/205 on the protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind’, 5 January 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/76/205, adopted by consensus; UNGA, ‘Resolution 75/217 on the protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind’, 29 December 2020, UN Doc. A/RES/75/217, adopted by consensus.

³⁷ UNGA, ‘Resolution 75/217 on the protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind’, 29 December 2020, UN Doc. A/RES/75/217.

³⁸ UNGA, ‘Resolution 75/217 on the protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind’, 29 December 2020, UN Doc. A/RES/75/217, OP 20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ UNGA, ‘Resolution 78/153 on the protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind’, 21 December 2023, UN Doc. A/RES/78/153, OP 32.

In 2022, in the resolution on the ‘human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment’, it was recognised that environmental damage and climate change have acute consequences on women and girls, including Indigenous people and persons with disabilities.⁴¹ This resolution, similarly to the above resolution, outlines the ways in which climate change disproportionately impacts women and girls and exacerbates gender inequality.⁴² It further recognises the importance of gender equality and establishes the need for a gender-responsive approach to tackling climate change and environmental degradation, ensuring the empowerment and full, real and meaningful participation of women and girls, recognised as agents of change in the safeguarding of the environment.⁴³

While girls are present, references to them are inconsistent, and these mentions are not adequately accompanied by an exploration of the intersections between girls’ rights and climate change. These resolutions are, however, quite limited in scope, and do not necessarily represent the best place for this exploration to occur, yet recognition of the need for girls’ full, equal and meaningful participation should be recognised and included in the recurring resolution on the topic.

⁴¹ UNGA, ‘Resolution 76/300 on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment’, 1 August 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/76/300, PPs 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, PPs 11, 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, PP 12.

Commission On The Status Of Women

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Agreed Conclusions contain an analysis of an annual priority theme and a set of concrete recommendations for governments, intergovernmental bodies, civil society actors, and other relevant stakeholders, for implementation at the international, regional, national and local levels. Between 2018 and 2023, the CSW produced five documents of Agreed Conclusions on various thematic areas. In 2020, due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CSW issued a more limited 'Political Declaration', as it was unable to convene for its regular session.⁴⁴

In analysing these five sets of Agreed Conclusions, this study found:

- **In the first half of the period under review, CSW Agreed Conclusions often grouped girls into the phrase 'women and girls,' potentially obscuring age-specific impacts of issues.**
- **Starting in 2021, CSW Agreed Conclusions began providing greater visibility and nuance to girls' issues through more targeted, age-specific observations and recommendations.**
- **The CSW has increasingly emphasised the need to include girls in leadership and decision-making processes, particularly regarding climate change impacts. However, the use of qualifying language in recommendations about girls' participation raises concerns about potential subjective interpretation by Member States.**
- **There is an opportunity to reduce ambiguity in recommendations related to girls' participation, especially for adolescent girls, to prevent potential pushback against progress in girls' rights.**

The thematic topics that were the focus of each year's Agreed Conclusions provided additional perspectives on common underlying themes of women's and girls' inequality that have remained largely consistent over time. Issues of unequal access to education, health care, and clean water and sanitation; the feminisation of poverty; gender-based discrimination and stereotyping; the disproportionate impacts of conflict and other crises on women and girls; and persistent violence against women and girls continued to dominate much of the discussion.

Insofar as these issues arise from structural and social power imbalances that affect women and girls, both were frequently mentioned together. **The most common iteration found in these documents is in fact 'women and girls', and in this sense, girls remained visible throughout the CSW documents, yet lacking age-specific nuance, and most often accompanying women.**

Similarly, whether through explicit reference to 'intersectionality' or by implication through the enumeration of various groups experiencing the compounded impacts of discrimination based on gender and other status (such as indigenous women and girls; women and girls with disabilities; members of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities; or displaced women and girls), the Agreed Conclusions generally recognised the complex and differing impacts on women and girls with intersecting identities, and in one case, were devoted to the rights of rural women and girls (2018).⁴⁵

At the same time, some of the issues impacting the representation of girls in other United Nations mechanisms, such as the UPR and Treaty Body committees, appear in the documents produced by the CSW. By and large, the language of the Agreed Conclusions is not as progressive as some of that produced by other UN human rights mechanisms, such as the reports of the Special Rapporteurs.⁴⁶ This is to be expected based on the more political considerations inherent in the CSW's composition including Member States.

⁴⁴ Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), 'Political declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women', 2020, E/CN.6/2020/L.1.

⁴⁵ CSW, 'Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: 2018 Agreed Conclusions', 2018.

⁴⁶ See section on [Special Procedures](#).

For example, there is no explicit reference to gender-diverse women and girls in discussions of intersectionality during the period under review; the enumeration of groups experiencing intersectionality simply includes a catch-all category of ‘other status’ which is left open to interpretation.

In addition, when referring to issues that the CSW appears to have perceived as being relevant only to adult women (such as many economic rights), the term ‘girls’ is omitted from discussion of the issue. While there may be practical reasons for some of these omissions (e.g., in the case of labour rights, to avoid the perception that child labour is legitimised), in other instances, the omission of girls appears to be based on assumptions made by adults about their capacities. This is particularly pronounced in the discussion of various forms of participation, involvement in decision-making, and the exercise of civil and political rights, which, at least during the first half of the period under review, is heavily skewed towards women.

Both the 2018 and 2019 documents, for instance, while describing the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis on women and girls, focus solely on increasing the participation of women in leadership and decision-making capacities in response to these issues.⁴⁷ The 2020 Political Declaration, which is relatively brief, does not expand on this topic.

However, beginning in 2021, the CSW makes explicit reference to girls’ and young women’s empowerment and participation in political and other decision-making contexts, particularly in relation to the climate crisis. The Agreed Conclusions of 2021,⁴⁸ which focus on the theme of ‘women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls’, acknowledges the contributions of girls and young women as agents of change and the need for their participation in a variety of contexts, as well as the role of mentorship in facilitating these opportunities: *“The Commission recognises that young women are particularly underrepresented in public life and disproportionately excluded from consultations on issues that affect them, despite being involved in activities that call for broader change and address, inter alia, structural inequalities, climate change and poverty.”*⁴⁹

Expounding upon this, the CSW recognises the need to protect girls’ civic engagement, noting that *“early exposure to women leaders as role models, as well as to legislative and policymaking spaces, motivates young women and girls, broadens networks and strengthens their opportunities to become fully engaged citizens.”* The CSW also looks to the development of girls and young women as future leaders, providing that *“measures are needed to enable young women and girls to successfully grow into leadership positions in public and private spheres....”*⁵⁰

The 2021 Agreed Conclusions, while discussing the need to bridge the digital gender divide (also highlighted in previous years), make explicit reference to the role of digital literacy and access to technology in enhancing the participation of both ‘women and girls’ in public life. The CSW *“recognises that digital platforms can become public spaces in which new strategies to influence policy and politics are forged and where women and girls can exercise their right to participate fully and effectively in public life.”*⁵¹ The document acknowledges the agency of girls as well, by recognising the contributions of girls’ and youth-led organizations in advocating for their rights.⁵²

⁴⁷ CSW, ‘Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: 2018 Agreed Conclusions’, 2018; CSW, ‘Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls: 2019 Agreed Conclusions’, 2019, UN Doc. E/CN.6/2019/L.3.

⁴⁸ CSW, ‘Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: Agreed Conclusions’, 30 March 2021, UN Doc. E/CN.6/2021/L.3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 22.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 22.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, para. 41.

⁵² *Ibid.*, para. 58.

The recommendations of the 2021 Agreed Conclusions also contain the first direct reference during the period under review to the participation of girls in various decision-making processes, though the extent and nature of girls' participation in these processes is frequently qualified by the phrase, 'as appropriate'. For instance, the 2021 Agreed Conclusions call for "*the perspectives of women, and girls as appropriate, [to be] taken into account in armed conflict and post-conflict situations and in humanitarian emergencies.*"⁵³ In a similar vein, the CSW urges that "*the perspectives of all women and girls [be] taken into account, that women, and girls as appropriate, fully and equally participate in the design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of policies and activities that affect their livelihoods, well-being and resilience...*"⁵⁴ The 2021 Agreed Conclusions further emphasise the need to provide capacity-building and mentorship opportunities to both women and girls, but also provides a targeted recommendation to enhance girls' participation in public life specifically, "*in a manner consistent with their evolving capacities and that develops their full potential...*"⁵⁵ As in previous references to girls within the same document, their participation is qualified on the ground of age, with emphasis placed on their development in terms of future participation as adults.

The 2022 Agreed Conclusions⁵⁶ — dedicated to 'achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes' — build upon the gains made in the previous year. While initially discussing women's participation in public life, the CSW specifically "*calls for the creation of space for youth, especially young women and girls, to participate in shaping the decisions on climate change, environmental degradation and disasters that will affect their future...*"⁵⁷ It also "*acknowledges the important role of women and girls as agents of change ... in safeguarding the environment,*"⁵⁸ and "*recognises that women's and, as appropriate, girls', full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in multilateral, national and local policy processes are vital for achieving sustainable development and climate, environmental and disaster risk reduction goals...*"⁵⁹

The 2022 document takes note of girls' and young women's climate activism, underscoring "*the important role of young women and girls in accelerating climate and environmental action and disaster risk reduction and that tackling these challenges requires coordinated action between Governments and other stakeholders, including women- and youth-led organizations.*"⁶⁰ Similarly, the CSW "*recognizes that young women are too often excluded from consultations on issues that affect them and encourages Member States to further promote the participation and perspectives of youth in climate and environmental action and disaster risk reduction.*"⁶¹

In recognition of both their growing role in climate activism, as well as the barriers they continue to face at the intersection of both gender- and age-based discrimination, the CSW makes several recommendations specifically targeted at enhancing the civic engagement of girls and young women. In the case of girls, these recommendations continue to be frequently tempered by the term, 'as appropriate;' the inclusions of this qualifier, however, appears to have enabled the CSW to significantly expand the scope of its recommendations to include "*the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership*" of young women and girls in areas where it had previously only referenced

⁵³ *Ibid.*, para. 61(n).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 61(y).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 61(eee).

⁵⁶ CSW, 'Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes: Agreed conclusions', 29 March 2022, UN Doc. E/CN.6/2022/L.7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 33.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 37.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, para. 37.

'women', such as decision-making processes on climate change and on the management of water and sanitation resources.⁶²

Other notable developments in the 2022 Agreed Conclusions include recommendations to increase funding to young women's, girls' and youth-led organizations,⁶³ and to ensure access to education, particularly in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) disciplines, for women and girls, including "pregnant adolescents and young mothers."⁶⁴

The 2023 Agreed Conclusions⁶⁵ — which focus on 'innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls' — build further on the trends observed in the preceding two years. The impacts of technological developments on girls are explicitly referenced, with the CSW "*recognis[ing] that adolescent girls are part of the most digitally connected generation in history and can disproportionately face discrimination, violence that occurs through or is amplified by the use of technology, and other barriers...*"⁶⁶ A recommendation to address some of these issues is also included, as the CSW calls on Member States and other stakeholders to:

"Develop effective gender- and age-responsive strategies, while bearing in mind the best interests of the child, for **preventing and combating sexual exploitation and abuse of girls in digital contexts**, including by ensuring that institutions providing services to girls are equipped with appropriate safeguards to prevent and intervene early, and for **building protective factors in families, households and communities** to impede offenders' efforts, both online and offline, taking into account the roles and responsibilities of their parents, legal guardian or other individuals legally responsible for them."

CSW, 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: Agreed conclusions', 20 March 2023, UN Doc. E/CN.6/2023/L.3, para. 86(sss).

As in the preceding two years, the 2023 Agreed Conclusions promote the participation of girls 'as appropriate', including a new recommendation to involve girls in conflict-affected zones in peacebuilding activities.⁶⁷ And, in a similar vein to the recommendation cited above on preventing and combating online sexual abuse and exploitation of girls, the CSW solicits further involvement of families and communities in supporting girls' participation, urging Member States and other stakeholders to:

"Promote the **full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of young women and, as appropriate, adolescent girls, in decision-making processes** in the context of innovation and technological change, including by addressing gender-specific barriers and **involving all those who shape young women's and girls' interests and choices**, including parents and other family members, teachers, school counsellors and peers, and increasing access to different women role models."

CSW, 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: Agreed conclusions', 20 March 2023, UN Doc. E/CN.6/2023/L.3, para. 86(yy).

The 2023 Agreed Conclusions also continued to recognise the importance of girls' organisations, and called for the "*participatory, gender-responsive, age- and disability-inclusive approaches for technology design, development and deployment, including community-based approaches involving women's and girls' rights organizations, to create products and services ... catering to the needs of women and girls throughout the life cycle.*"⁶⁸

⁶² *Ibid.*, paras. 62(p), 62(t) and 62(cc).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, para. 62(aa).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 62(ee)

⁶⁵ CSW, 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: Agreed conclusions', 20 March 2023, UN Doc. E/CN.6/2023/L.3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 86(III).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 86(ccc).

In sum, therefore, while girls were visible in the CSW Agreed Conclusions during the first half of the period under review, in the sense that they were explicitly referenced throughout these documents, the age-specific impacts of certain issues remained less visible as girls and women were frequently cited together with the implication that they are subjected to the same (or similar) forms of violence and discrimination — masking to a certain extent the differing and specific impacts that such violence and discrimination may have on girls. However, beginning in 2021, the CSW Agreed Conclusions began to provide a greater degree of visibility and nuance in relation to girls’ issues through the use of targeted, age-specific observations and recommendations.

At the same time, the CSW attributed greater agency to girls by emphasising the need to include them in leadership and decision-making processes, including with regard to the impacts of climate change on their lives, albeit with qualifying language. The use of the term, ‘as appropriate,’ in this context, may reflect practical realities; however, it also raises concerns that this is a political compromise that may be interpreted subjectively and inconsistently by Member States, and potentially influenced by the very gender-based stereotyping and discrimination that the CSW seeks to eradicate. An opportunity, therefore, exists to reduce the ambiguity attached to this term and to more narrowly tailor recommendations related to girls’ participation in decision-making, particularly in relation to adolescent girls, to close loopholes that may enable those seeking to push back against progress made in advancing the rights of girls.

Human Rights Council

This study analysed 26 resolutions of the Human Rights Council (HRC), selected from a broader group of 70 resolutions related to issues relevant to girls' rights.⁶⁹ This sub-set of sample resolutions analysed were selected based on relevance, with a particular focus on resolutions related specifically to the rights of girls (and women). The resolutions analysed included the main recurring resolutions at the HRC which discuss child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), girls' right to education, the various resolutions on violence against women and girls (VAWG), and the resolutions on discrimination against women and girls (DAWG). Additionally, the new resolutions on menstrual hygiene, care and support and discrimination in sport were also analysed.

Key Findings:

- **Since 2017, girls have become much more visible, and the phrase 'women and girls' is commonplace in all resolutions analysed.**
- **There is still no resolution on 'the girl child,' however, several resolutions mention 'girls' in the title, illustrating an increased focus, at least in the nomenclature, on girls.**
- **References to 'girls' as a stand-alone group have increased, but these are minimal compared to the 'women and girls' formulation.**
- **Despite this, the situation and needs of girls, and how they differ from those of women, are barely discussed, as the two (women and girls) are almost always conflated as one group.**
- **'Girls' continues to remain an undefined and seemingly homogeneous group with little meaningful discussion on girls at different stages of their life-cycle. However, age-specific references, in the form of language such as 'young women' and 'adolescent girls,' have increased.**
- **There have been increases in references to intersectionality, and more resolutions feature more intersectional identities beyond women and girls from rural areas and women and girls with disabilities (the main intersectional identities previously identified). However, references to Indigenous women and girls, or women and girls from minorities, including racial and ethnic minorities, remain less common.**
- **There are new thematic resolutions discussing human rights issues that have not received much attention, such as the resolution on menstrual management and care and support, expanding soft law on girls' rights. New resolutions on the environment and climate change also acknowledge girls' rights.**
- **There is a significant overlap between the HRC and UNGA resolutions. This was also a finding in the 2018 'Girls' Rights are Human Rights' report. There are various examples of paragraphs from UNGA resolutions being adapted in HRC resolutions, with stronger language, or to add language around girls specifically.**
- **There is still a significant discrepancy between the expansiveness of the human rights of women compared to the human rights of girls. The right to education, non-discrimination, non-violence, and the right to health dominate the discussion when it comes to girls' rights. There are some references to girls' right to participation, but these are often tempered by anti-rights language or generally weak. Girls are rarely, if ever, discussed in relation to political participation or some socio-economic rights such as the rights to property or social protection, instead. Resolutions at the HRC acknowledge these rights only in relation to women.**
- **The impact of the anti-rights and anti-gender pushback is evident in the language of the resolutions. Language on girls' SRHRs and right to participation is often weak or quantified. Language on 'family rights' for example often tempers discussion on girls' SRHRs.**

⁶⁹ For a full list of all resolutions analysed, and the methodology related to their selection and analysis, see Annex. A full analysis of voting records and amendments tabled in relation to these resolutions was beyond the scope of this project.

Resolution on the realisation of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl (2021, 2023)⁷⁰

Unlike the UNGA, the HRC does not have a resolution specifically on the girl child. However, it does discuss girls as a stand-alone group in the context of their right to education.

The resolution on ‘the realisation of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl’, adopted by consensus in 2021 and 2023, reaffirms the principle of non-discrimination and recognises the importance of education as a *“multiplier right that supports the empowerment of all women and girls to claim their human rights, including the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs as well as in economic, social and cultural life, and to fully, equally and meaningfully participate in the decision-making processes that shape society, and the transformative potential of education for every girl.”*⁷¹

This resolution discusses the ways in which the disproportionate risks and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, human trafficking, child labour, and negative social norms and stereotypes all have an effect on girls’ right to education. Additionally, it makes reference to the *“disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work performed by girls,”* the *“feminisation of poverty”*, and the importance of access to information on menstruation and menstrual hygiene, all issues that have begun to emerge more often in the past few years.⁷²

In 2023, wording was added to recognise that climate change disproportionately impacts girls who are already suffering as a result of ingrained gender inequalities and structural discrimination, preventing many from finishing all twelve years of education.⁷³

The ways in which girls’ intersectional identities have an impact on their ability to access their rights was only superficially discussed in this resolution in 2021, with attention only given to the specific barriers that rural girls and girls with disabilities face.⁷⁴ However, **in 2023 new references were added about ensuring the fulfilment of the right to education for girls, adolescent girls, those living with disabilities, those living in poverty and those on the move.**⁷⁵ Additionally, references to *“married and/or pregnant adolescents and young mothers”* was also added, further expanding the recognition of girls of different ages and situations.⁷⁶ The 2023 iteration establishes the need to ensure that these categories of girls can continue and complete their education, that they must be allowed to remain and return to school and be provided with access to *“sexual and reproductive health-care services, as well as social services and financial and psychosocial support.”*⁷⁷ Including specific language on girls, such as was done in this resolution, has become more common in HRC resolutions: without mentioning age as a category of intersectionality, they are nonetheless able to ensure the inclusion of girls in various stages of their lifecycle.

This resolution, especially in its 2023 iteration, emphasises just how important and transformative access to safe, free, inclusive and quality education can be for girls, developing them into “powerful leaders and agents of change.”⁷⁸ Additionally, progressive language was added in 2023 which recognises the power that education has to strengthen *“the voice, agency*

⁷⁰ Human Rights Council (HRC), ‘Resolution 47/5 on Realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, 12 July 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/5; HRC, ‘Resolution 54/19 on Realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, 12 October 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/54/19. Both adopted by consensus.

⁷¹ HRC, ‘Resolution 47/5 on Realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, 12 July 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/5, PP 10.

⁷² *Ibid.*, PP 15, 16, 17.

⁷³ HRC, ‘Resolution 54/19 on Realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, 12 October 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/54/19, PP 13.

⁷⁴ HRC, ‘Resolution 47/5 on Realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, 12 July 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/5, PP 15, PP 19.

⁷⁵ HRC, ‘Resolution 54/19 on Realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, 12 October 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/54/19, PP 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, OP 5(d).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, OP 5(e).

and leadership of women and girls in climate, environmental and disaster risk reduction action.”⁷⁹

Language on participation was also strengthened between 2021 and 2023. The 2023 iteration includes reference to girls’ agency and autonomy, reading: “*increasing all girls’ agency and autonomy and empowering their full, equal and meaningful participation in society.*”⁸⁰ The addition of ‘agency and autonomy’ is notable, as this phrase is often the subject of amendments inputted by the anti-rights movement, especially in relation to girls’ right to participation. This type of strong language is not common across the board in HRC resolutions, and it is also noteworthy to see girls feature as a group of their own.

It is promising to see the addition of this progressive language, especially in relation to girls’ right to participation, which is one of the main battlegrounds of the anti-rights pushback. However, inclusion of this language is rare, progress is not guaranteed and negotiators are constantly fighting to maintain the status quo.

Resolutions on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (2018, 2019, 2021, 2023)⁸¹

HRC resolutions specifically about women and girls primarily address the themes of violence and discrimination, as demonstrated by the biannual resolutions on VAWG and DAWG. This represents another common trend identified by this research and the research published in 2018. **Violence and discrimination are at the forefront of the examination of women’s and girls’ rights, as is appropriate given the serious nature of the many human rights violations that happen in these areas. However, this is potentially at the expense of other rights.** In addition, within these topics, girls are too often only referred to as an appendix to women, without their unique situations and risks being fully considered.

The recurring resolution on ‘Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls’ illustrates this trend well. Most years, this resolution takes on a different thematic area, from VAWG in digital contexts in 2018,⁸² to VAWG in the world of work in 2019,⁸³ VAWG with disabilities in 2021,⁸⁴ and VAWG in criminal justice detention in 2023.⁸⁵ When examining the language of each of these resolutions, the references to ‘women and girls’ far outweigh the number of references to ‘girls’ alone.

Figure 1: Comparing resolutions on VAWG and the references to ‘women and girls’ versus ‘girls’

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, PP 18.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, OP 2.

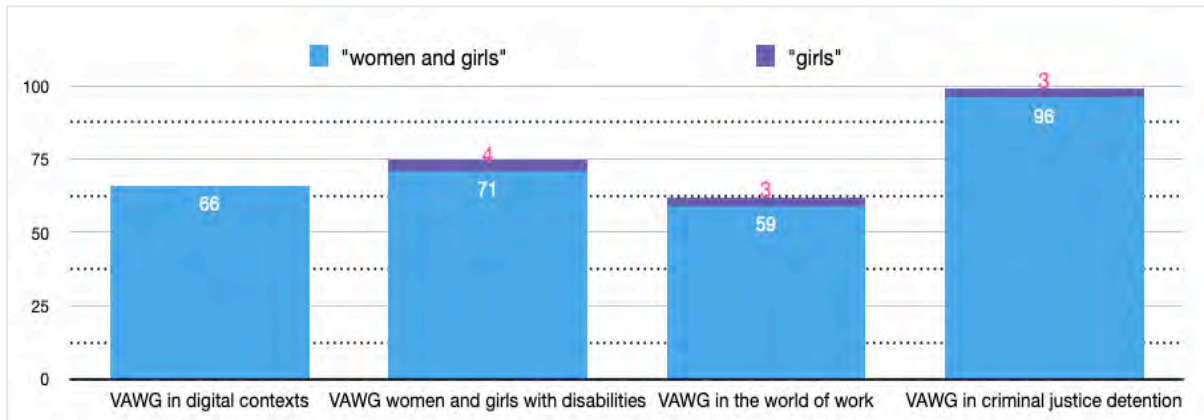
⁸¹ HRC, ‘Resolution 38/5 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts’, 5 July 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/38/5; HRC, ‘Resolution 41/17 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in the world of work’, 12 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/17; HRC, ‘Resolution 47/15 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities’, 13 July 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/15; HRC, ‘Resolution 53/27 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls in criminal justice detention’, 14 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/27. All adopted by consensus.

⁸² HRC, ‘Resolution 38/5 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts’, 5 July 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/38/5.

⁸³ HRC, ‘Resolution 41/17 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in the world of work’, 12 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/17.

⁸⁴ HRC, ‘Resolution 47/15 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities’, 13 July 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/15.

⁸⁵ HRC, ‘Resolution 53/27 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls in criminal justice detention’, 14 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/27.



Despite including almost no references to girls as a stand-alone group, these resolutions have nonetheless contributed to the development of soft law and expanded the breadth of women’s and girls’ rights. For example, the resolutions have always acknowledged intersectionality, and since 2023 have adopted broad a definition of intersectionality and intersectional discrimination, discussing “*age, gender, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, religion or belief, physical and mental health, disability, civil status, socioeconomic and migration status*” as well as “*women and girls belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups, Indigenous women and girls, women and girls of African descent and women and girls with disabilities.*”⁸⁶ Since 2021, the resolutions also emphasise the need to take “*age- and gender-responsive*” measures to address discrimination against women and girls with disabilities: crucial language which implicitly includes girls throughout their lifecycle.⁸⁷

The 2018 resolution on VAWG in digital context emphasised the role that “*digital technologies can play an important role in empowering women and girls to exercise all human rights, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and in their full, equal and effective participation in political, economic, cultural and social life,*” giving recognition to some of the rights most often ignored in relation to girls.⁸⁸ This resolution also discusses the digital divide that disproportionately impacts women and girls, and advocates for their equal access to “*digital technologies, to science, technology, engineering and mathematics education,*” but falls short of categorising this issue as the ‘gender digital divide’, which is arguably a missed opportunity for using a contemporary and appropriate language label.⁸⁹ In other areas, pushbacks on progressive language can be seen in the framing of abortion, where the resolution states that there should be access to safe abortion as “*permitted by national law.*”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, PP 13.

⁸⁷ HRC, ‘Resolution 47/15 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities’, 13 July 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/15, PP 21; OP 8(e), (f), 9.; HRC, ‘Resolution 53/27 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls in criminal justice detention’, 14 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/27, PP 22, OP 5(h), (k).

⁸⁸ HRC, ‘Resolution 38/5 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts’, 5 July 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/38/5, PP 11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, OP 7.

⁹⁰ HRC, ‘Resolution 53/27 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls in criminal justice detention’, 14 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/27, OP 11(d).

HRC behind the scenes: Example of attacks to undermine women's and girls' rights

An amendment was proposed to remove the following sentence in the 2018 VAWG resolution on digital contexts. The paragraph ensures the promotion and protection of all human rights of women and their sexual and reproductive health and rights including developing and strengthening legal frameworks, health systems, preventing adolescent pregnancy and improving maternal health.

The amendment proposed to remove the only sentence about bodily autonomy:

11(d) "... and recognizing that human rights include the right to have control over and to decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free from coercion, discrimination and violence;"

(A/HRC/38/L.33 to A/HRC/38/L.6)

The amendment was withdrawn before being voted on.

Similarly, in 2018 amendments were brought to try to limit language around bodily autonomy, however they were withdrawn before a vote.⁹¹ These attacks are typical of the anti-right pushback which targets women's and girls' right to autonomy, including bodily autonomy.

Between 2018 and 2023, there has been increased inclusion of language on girls' rights organisations and the role of girls as agents of change. In 2018, no reference was made to girls' and

youth led organisations, and only women human rights defenders were mentioned.⁹² In 2019, the former were added in the preambular paragraphs, and by 2021, "*women and girl human rights defenders*" were added.⁹³ Additionally, during these years, women and girls are recognised as "*agents of change*" along with men and boys in the fight to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.⁹⁴ In 2023, however the reference to men and boys was improved to include their role as "*agents and beneficiaries of change and as strategic partners and allies*" in this fight which is a significant recognition and acknowledges the benefits that men and boys will gain with the achievement of gender equality.⁹⁵ While the 2023 iteration of the resolution maintains reference to girl-led organisations, it unfortunately lost the reference to both women and girls human rights defenders, illustrating that **progress is not guaranteed and the anti-rights pushback is strong.**

Resolution on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls (2018, 2019, 2020, 2022)⁹⁶

The recurring resolution on DAWG represents an important step forward and includes some rare and progressive language surrounding girls' and young women's participation and activism, with the

⁹¹ HRC, Amendment A/HRC/38/L.33 to A/HRC/38/L.6 was sponsored by the Russian Federation and co-sponsored by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but was withdrawn before a vote.

⁹² HRC, 'Resolution 38/5 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts', 5 July 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/38/5, OP 9(c).

⁹³ HRC, 'Resolution 41/17 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in the world of work', 12 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/17, PP 30; HRC, 'Resolution 47/15 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities', 13 July 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/15, PP 33.

⁹⁴ HRC, 'Resolution 38/5 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts', 5 July 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/38/5, PP 14; HRC, 'Resolution 41/17 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in the world of work', 12 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/17, PP 19; HRC, 'Resolution 47/15 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities', 13 July 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/15, PP 15.

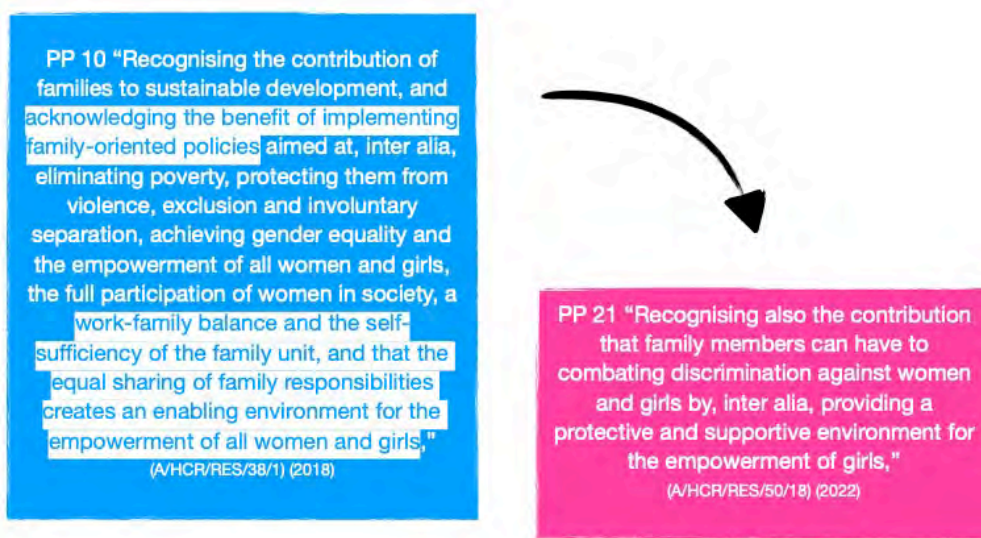
⁹⁵ HRC, 'Resolution 53/27 on Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls in criminal justice detention', 14 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/27, PP 30.

⁹⁶ HRC, 'Resolution 38/1 on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls', 5 July 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/38/1; HRC, 'Resolution 41/6 on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls', 11 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/6; HRC, 'Resolution 44/17 on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls', 17 July 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/44/17; HRC, 'Resolution 50/18 on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls', 8 July 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/50/18. All adopted by consensus.

adoption of the landmark 2022 resolution. Apart from containing a broad definition of intersectionality and intersectional discrimination, the 2022 resolution also discusses “*girls and young women activists,*” and girl human rights defenders who face particular challenges, such as violence and harassment for their participation in public life, impacting their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.⁹⁷ **Through this resolution, States have made a clear statement that girls and young women have the right to participate in decision-making, and that steps must be taken to make sure that no one – including governments – prevents them from exercising that right.** The resolution advocates for the creation and enhancement of “*safe and accessible spaces*” for girls and young women activists to allow them to participate and exercise their rights.⁹⁸

The resolution also expands upon topics which are rarely discussed such as the consequences faced by girls and young women because of stereotypes and negative cultural and social norms. For example, the resolution discusses the “*increase [in] the likelihood of confinement to the home, burdensome domestic and care work, [...] limited opportunities for leisure, sport and recreation, and lack of access to cultural life and the arts, and increase the gender digital divide.*”⁹⁹ This resolution is the only place we find such references to these topics and rights, with the exception of the gender digital divide, and DAWG in sport which, since 2019, has been the subject of a separate stand-alone resolution on the topic.¹⁰⁰

The various battles being fought between the progressive development of girls’ rights and the anti-rights pushback are also in plain sight in this resolution. Despite this, progress can be seen in relation to two of the most controversial topics in this ambit: the rights of the family and SRHR. From 2018 to 2022, positive steps forward can be seen in the language. For example, in relation to so-called ‘family rights’, the preambular paragraph used to emphasise the role of the family and advocated for ‘family-oriented policies’, but this has been significantly reduced and changed to minimise the influence of this rhetoric.



Similarly, SRHR is one of the battlegrounds where significant backlash is being experienced in international policy-making. However, the language in the DAWG resolution has improved significantly since 2018. In 2018, the resolution acknowledged only women’s “*right to have control over and to decide freely and responsibly on matters relating to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health,*”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ HRC, ‘Resolution 50/18 on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls’, 8 July 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/50/18, PP 19.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, OP 5(b).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, PP 18.

¹⁰⁰ HRC, ‘Resolution 40/5 on Elimination of discrimination against women and girls in sport’, 21 March 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/40/5.

¹⁰¹ HRC, ‘Resolution 38/1 on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls’, 5 July 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/38/1.

while the 2022 text urges States to “respect, protect and fulfil the right to sexual and reproductive health, including for adolescent girls and young women,”¹⁰² including “their right to bodily autonomy” and calls on States to “guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and evidence-based information and education,” which is an impressive step forward.¹⁰³

The resolution makes specific reference to the added value that girls and young women give and want to give to the world. The resolution recognises that “girls and young women have an interest in and engage in a wide and varied array of topics, [and] their engagement and initiatives contribute to positive transformative changes in the local, national and international contexts.”¹⁰⁴ Seeing a contribution such as this is unique. It illustrates the ebb and flow of human rights and should serve as a lesson that progress is not linear and, while there is a concerted effort to undermine girls’ rights, there are pockets of progress and hope such as these.

The 2020 and 2022 iterations of the resolution faced a barrage of amendments tabled by States attempting to undermine its strength and progressive language. This is becoming increasingly common in the HRC, with States turning to tabling amendments rather than negotiating, and forcing votes on proposed changes which are consistently on the same issues. None of the amendments were passed, and the text of the resolution was passed without a vote, but these attempts to subvert the resolution mean that more effort must go in to drafting, negotiating and passing resolutions on girls’ rights. These amendments illustrate well the general pushback and concerted attacks that girls’ rights are facing.

In 2020 and 2022, amendments were tabled to remove references to ‘gender’ in relation to discrimination, and replace it with ‘sex’¹⁰⁵—this is likely a consequence of the current wave of pushback arguing that gender language amounts to ‘ideological colonisation’ and/or transphobic forces that wish to preserve the sex-binary as much as possible.¹⁰⁶ **With the exclusion of ‘gender’, the text would favour biologically deterministic and binary interpretations of identities at the expense of identities which do not fall within the binary or are gender-neutral, undermining protection for transgender women and girls.**

¹⁰² HRC, ‘Resolution 50/18 on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls’, 8 July 2022, UN Doc. A/HCR/RES/50/18, OP 7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, PP 20.

¹⁰⁵ HRC, Amendment A/HRC/38/L.34 to A/HRC/38/L.1/Rev.1 was sponsored by Egypt, the Russian Federation and Saudi Arabia (but withdrawn before vote) to remove references to discrimination on the basis of gender and replace it with ‘on the basis of sex’; HRC, Amendment A/HRC/50/L.38 to A/HRC/50/L.22/Rev.1 Libya, Mauritania and Nigeria* to remove references to discrimination on the ‘basis of gender’ with ‘on the basis of sex’ this was voted on but was rejected (14-23-8). The voting was as follows: In favour: Benin, Cameroon, China, Eritrea, Gambia, Kazakhstan, Libya, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates; Against: Argentina, Armenia, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Honduras, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Montenegro, Nepal, Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Republic of Korea, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America; Abstaining: Brazil, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Namibia, Uzbekistan.

¹⁰⁶ WG DAWG, ‘Escalating backlash against gender equality and urgency of reaffirming substantive equality and the human rights of women and girls Report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls’, 15 May 2024, UN Doc. A/HRC/56/51.

PP 21 "Reaffirming that the full enjoyment of all human rights by women includes their right to have control over and to decide freely and responsibly on matters relating to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, and that equal relationships in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the dignity, integrity and bodily autonomy of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences;"
(A/HCR/RES/38/1) (2018)



OP 7 "Urges States to respect, protect and fulfil the right to sexual and reproductive health, including for adolescent girls and young women, free from discrimination, coercion and violence, including by addressing social and other determinants of health, the removal of legal barriers and the development and enforcement of policies, good practices and legal frameworks that respect dignity, integrity and the right to bodily autonomy and guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and evidence-based information and education, including for family planning; and to ensure timely access to maternal health services and emergency obstetric care, including treatment for pregnancy-related morbidities, respectful of individual privacy;"
(A/HCR/RES/50/18) (2022)

Other attacks were made against SRHR and related topics, such as women and girls' bodily integrity. **Amendments were brought to water down language on SRHR by pushing for including this right as an annexe to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, in order to move the focus away from SRHR and lessen its importance within the resolution.**¹⁰⁷ Within the same amendment, States proposed to delete reference to girls' and young women's right to bodily autonomy outright, and to replace the mention of "*bodily integrity*" with "*personal integrity*" in order to reduce the effectiveness of the protections afforded by a concept which is entrenched in decades of international human rights law.¹⁰⁸

Requests to remove references to autonomy were also made outside the context of SRHR and in relation to girls' activism, such as by adding references to the "*rights and duties of their parents, legal guardians [...] responsible for them.*"¹⁰⁹ **The push to present parents and/or family as rights-holders, despite this not being established in international human rights law, is also a common feature of the pushback that girls' rights are facing.** Girls' civil and political rights were similarly attacked with attempts to incorporate a guiding role for parents within mentions of girls' and young women's rights to

¹⁰⁷ Amendment A/HRC/50/L.43 to A/HRC/50/L.22/Rev.1 was sponsored by Bahrain,* Egypt,* Iraq,* Libya, Mauritania and Saudi Arabia* and was voted on but rejected (13-25-7). The voting was as follows: In favour: Cameroon, China, Eritrea, Indonesia, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates; Against: Argentina, Armenia, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Honduras, India, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Montenegro, Nepal, Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Republic of Korea, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America; Abstaining: Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Kazakhstan, Namibia, Uzbekistan.

¹⁰⁸ Amendment A/HRC/50/L.43 to A/HRC/50/L.22/Rev.1; Amendment A/HRC/38/L.34 to A/HRC/38/L.1/Rev.1.

¹⁰⁹ Amendment A/HRC/50/L.47 to A/HRC/50/L.22/Rev.1 was sponsored by Egypt* and Russian Federation* and was voted on but was rejected (12-22-10). The voting was as follows: In favour: China, Eritrea, India, Indonesia, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan; Against: Argentina, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Honduras, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Montenegro, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Republic of Korea, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America; Abstaining: Armenia, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Kazakhstan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan.

take part in the conduct of affairs, their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and to receive and impart information. The phrasing furthermore seemed to allow parents the ability to decide if girls and young women should be able to exercise these rights at all.¹¹⁰

References to CSE were also consistently attacked in 2020 and 2022, and there were several requests to remove the concept completely or to severely temper the language. For example, some States called to replace references to CSE (highlighted below) in emphasizing “*scientifically accurate and age-appropriate education,*” relevant to “*cultural contexts*” and on which parents and legal guardians would play a role in accessing such knowledge about relationships and sexuality.

4(e) “To promote long-term awareness-raising initiatives in education, in communities in the media and online, engaging men and boys, through the incorporation of curricula on all women’s and girls’ rights into teacher training courses, on topics including the root causes of gender-based discrimination and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, and by ensuring universal access to evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education;”
(A/HRC/RES/50/18) (2022)



4(e) “To promote long-term awareness-raising initiatives in education, [...] including domestic violence, and by ensuring universal access to scientifically accurate and age-appropriate education that is relevant to cultural contexts, that provides adolescent girls and boys and young women and men, in and out of school, consistent with their evolving capacities, and with appropriate direction and guidance from parents and legal guardians, with information on sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention, gender equality and the empowerment of women, human rights, physical, psychological and pubertal development [...], in full partnership with young persons, parents, legal guardians, caregivers, educators and health-care providers;”
(A/HRC/50/L.43) (2022)

Mentions of girls’ participation, girl human rights defenders and girl activists were also under heavy attack in amendments proposed to the 2022 resolution. Similarly to the above, attempts were consistently made to temper the language by removing references to these groups completely or introducing references to parents to weaken girls as rights holders. Mentioning adults and the role they play in making decisions for girls was found to be a common way in which girls’ rights language is weakened. Not only was this found often in references to girls’ SRHR especially regarding their right

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* The suggestion was for paragraph 5(b) to be amended from “To adopt national laws and policies that respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of girls and young women, including their rights to take part in the conduct of public affairs” to “...national laws and policies that respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of girls and young women, including, in the case of girls under appropriate direction and guidance of parents or legal guardians responsible for them and in a manner consistent with their evolving capacities, their rights to take part in the conduct of public affairs”.

and access to information, but it is also common regarding girls' right to participation. For example, an amendment was tabled to add at the end of the paragraph:

A suggestion to include this exact phraseology was also made in this amendment in relation to girl and

PP23 "Recognizing that the right to education, and access to inclusive and quality education, has a transformative potential and is a multiplier right that supports the empowerment of all women and girls to claim their human rights, including the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs as well as in economic, social and cultural life, and to fully, equally and meaningfully participate in the decision-making processes that shape society,"
(A/HRC/RES/50/18) (2022)

PP23 "Recognizing that the right to education, (...) supports the empowerment of all women and girls to claim their rights, including to (...) meaningfully participate in the decision making processes that shape society, in the case of girls under appropriate direction and guidance of parents or legal guardians responsible for them and in a manner consistent with their evolving capacities,"
(A/HRC/50/L.47) (2022)



young women activists' right to participate and express their views freely. This could have been further weakened by the suggestion to quantify these rights and give their participation and expression "*due weight*", "*according to their evolving capacities*."¹¹¹ References to girls' leadership were also requested to be removed completely and be replaced with language similar to the above.¹¹² A common and similar phrase used is "*according to [girls'] age and maturity*" which was included in the final version of the resolution and often accompanies discussion on girls' participation. However, the amendment sought to weaken the language further by making girls' participation a choice. The amendment proposed the replace the sentence "[*Remove barriers to*] participation, in all fields, of women, and of girls in accordance with their age and maturity" with "[*Remove barriers to*] participation, in all fields, of women and, as appropriate, of girls in accordance with their age and maturity," giving States the ability to choose whether girls are granted their right to participation.¹¹³

The attempts to weaken existing language further illustrate the strain the UN diplomats are under to maintain girls' rights, even in text that is not the most progressive. In fact, through focus group discussions that were conducted for this study, participants voiced their concern at the amount of effort diplomats are having to put in to maintaining the status quo, which is taking opportunities away from introducing new and progressive language to advance girls' rights.

While progress has been made in recent years, it is under threat by a coordinated effort to undermine international human rights law and strip girls of the protections they are afforded.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Resolution on child, early and forced marriage (2019, 2021, 2023)¹¹⁴

The biennial resolution on CEFM at the HRC borrows heavily from the UNGA CEFM resolution, with significant areas of overlap, as well as areas where it has improved upon the UNGA language.

This recurring resolution has, over the years, improved language on women and girls and increasingly included girls specifically, including stronger language explicitly about girls, with some mentions of girls in different stages of their lifecycle and a slight widening of the recognition of more intersectional identities.

The 2019 HRC resolution on CEFM¹¹⁵ used a large proportion of paragraphs from the 2018 UNGA CEFM resolution¹¹⁶ and expanded upon some of the interrelated rights which are at risk of being violated in the context of these marriages. Both resolutions acknowledge that CEFM is the result of “*deep-rooted and intersecting gender inequalities, patriarchal values, discriminatory gender norms, stereotypes, perceptions and customs*” which disproportionately impact women and girls.¹¹⁷ However, the HRC resolution also includes reference to adolescent pregnancy as one of the main drivers of this harmful practice well as poverty and insecurity, referencing its heightened occurrence in “*rural areas, in humanitarian settings and among the poorest communities.*”¹¹⁸ Additionally, it emphasises the importance of “*ensuring the autonomy of these women and girls and their access to social services, counselling, shelter, education, lifelong learning and vocational training, to formal employment and economic independence for women and economic empowerment for girls, to adequate health services, information and education, including for sexual and reproductive health, mental health, psychosocial support and rehabilitation services, to nutrition, housing, clean water, sanitation and hygiene, and to justice, [and] legal services.*”¹¹⁹ This preambular paragraph builds significantly from the 2018 UNGA resolution, and is much more explicit in detailing the rights that girls have (as well as women) that must be protected and guaranteed.

It is promising to see mention of girls’ access to food, water and justice, as these rights seldom feature in resolutions related to girls.

In the 2021 and 2023 iterations of the resolution,¹²⁰ references to women’s and girls’ rights regarding the “*acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property and to inheritance*” were also added.¹²¹ Additionally, throughout the resolution, women’s and girls’ “*participation and leadership in society, as well as economic and political life*” is mentioned as a key element in the fight to eliminate CEFM and gender inequality, including that the former is a major impediment to their “*economic empowerment, [and] their social and economic development.*”¹²² Importantly, the resolution also mentioned the importance of ensuring the full and meaningful participation of “*women’s and girls’ organizations, [and] organizations led or initiated by young people and feminist groups.*”¹²³ This is a

¹¹⁴ HRC, ‘Resolution 41/8 on Consequences of child, early and forced marriage’, 11 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/8; HRC, ‘Resolution 48/6 on Child, early and forced marriage in times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic’, 8 October 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/48/6; HRC, ‘Resolution 53/23 on Child, early and forced marriage: ending and preventing forced marriage’, 13 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/23. All adopted by consensus.

¹¹⁵ HRC, ‘Resolution 41/8 on Consequences of child, early and forced marriage’, 11 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/8.

¹¹⁶ UNGA, ‘Resolution 73/153 on child, early and forced marriage’, 17 December 2018, UN Doc. A/RES/73/153.

¹¹⁷ HRC, ‘Resolution 41/8 on Consequences of child, early and forced marriage’, 11 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/8, PP 14; UNGA, ‘Resolution 73/153 on child, early and forced marriage’, 17 December 2018, UN Doc. A/RES/73/153, PP 12.

¹¹⁸ HRC, ‘Resolution 41/8 on Consequences of child, early and forced marriage’, 11 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/8, PP 14.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, PP 16.

¹²⁰ HRC, ‘Resolution 48/6 on Child, early and forced marriage in times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic’, 8 October 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/48/6; HRC, ‘Resolution 53/23 on Child, early and forced marriage: ending and preventing forced marriage’, 13 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/23.

¹²¹ HRC, ‘Resolution 48/6 on Child, early and forced marriage in times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic’, 8 October 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/48/6, OP 5(a); HRC, ‘Resolution 53/23 on Child, early and forced marriage: ending and preventing forced marriage’, 13 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/23, OP 5(a).

¹²² HRC, ‘Resolution 53/23 on Child, early and forced marriage: ending and preventing forced marriage’, 13 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/23, PP 22, 24.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, PP 28.

significant addition that contributes to strengthening the soft law on girls' right to participation.

Importantly, in 2023, the resolution included mention of the “*disparate impact of poverty, global economic crises, austerity measures, climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, conflict and natural hazards on women's and girls' human rights,*” including the right to health and wellbeing, the right to equal pay for equal work, as well as women's and girls' access to “*social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure*” which is also an important contribution to an emerging and increasingly important area of human rights.¹²⁴

While the 2019 HRC resolution makes some reference to the intersectional identities of girls,¹²⁵ and mostly includes them as a corollary to women, over the years more specific references to girls have been added. For example, in 2021, the resolution added the need to develop and enforce policies to strengthen healthcare systems, including sexual and reproductive health-care services and make them more gender-responsive and “*adolescent-friendly*”.¹²⁶ This was complemented by more language in 2023 on “*adolescent pregnancy and widowhood among women and girls of reproductive age*”, explaining that this “*may lead to the forced marriage of women and girls*” as a result of discriminatory norms and values.¹²⁷ Seeing specific mentions of the risks that girls face as a result of the life stage that they are in is rare and welcomed.

The resolution also advocates for the expansion of the right to education of pregnant adolescents, single mothers and young mothers to ensure that they can “*remain in and return to school and to develop livelihood opportunities through access to technical and vocational education and training and life skills education,*” as well as have access “*to health-care services, and social services and support, including childcare and breastfeeding facilities and crèches, and to education programmes with accessible locations, flexible schedules and distance education.*”¹²⁸

Since 2021, the resolution has included references to women and girls with disabilities and recognised them as being at a higher risk of CEFM.¹²⁹ However, the resolution does not expand further nor does it outline what States must do to address the common and differing needs of women and girls with disabilities apart from calling for the implementation of “*comprehensive, rights-based, age-, gender- and disability-responsive, survivor- and victim-centred and multisectoral approach(es)*” to respond to women and girls who have been forced to marry, are already married, divorced or widowed.¹³⁰ While new mentions of partnerships with “*women, young women, young people and survivors, persons with disabilities, marginalised racial, ethnic and Indigenous communities,*” were added in 2023,¹³¹ the resolution does not contain a comprehensive list of the different forms of intersectional discrimination, or the intersectional identities which face heightened risk of CEFM, making these additions lack real substance.

Lastly, in relation to SRHR, the resolution contains more language on women's and girls' control over their bodies, their ability to “*decide freely and responsibly on, matters relating to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, and with respect to bodily*

¹²⁴ HRC, 'Resolution 53/23 on Child, early and forced marriage: ending and preventing forced marriage', 13 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/23, PP 21.

¹²⁵ HRC, 'Resolution 41/8 on Consequences of child, early and forced marriage', 11 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/8, OP 2.

¹²⁶ HRC, 'Resolution 48/6 on Child, early and forced marriage in times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic', 8 October 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/48/6, OP 6(a).

¹²⁷ HRC, 'Resolution 53/23 on Child, early and forced marriage: ending and preventing forced marriage', 13 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/23, PP 19.

¹²⁸ HRC, 'Resolution 48/6 on Child, early and forced marriage in times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic', 8 October 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/48/6, PP 20.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, OP 6(h)(i).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, OP 2.

¹³¹ HRC, 'Resolution 53/23 on Child, early and forced marriage: ending and preventing forced marriage', 13 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/23, OP 14.

integrity, autonomy and agency,” without mention of the role of family, parents and guardians in these decisions.¹³² Positive change can also be seen by comparing the use of less progressive language in the 2018 UNGA resolution, to the adaptation of this language in the 2019, 2021 and 2023 iterations of the HRC resolution. The UNGA resolution advocates to:

OP 14 “promote and protect the right of women and girls [...] including through [...] comprehensive education [...] that provides adolescent girls and boys and young women and men, [...] with appropriate direction and guidance from parents and legal guardians [...] information on sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention [...].” (A/RES/73/153)

The HRC resolution instead gives young people a seat at the table and has diminished the role of family and placed it in the wider context of other groups who are better placed to advise on decisions relating to SRHR. It reads:

OP 4(b) “promote and protect the right of women and girls [...] including through [...] comprehensive education [...] that provides adolescent girls and boys and young women and men, (...) information on sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention [...] in full partnership with young persons, parents, legal guardians, caregivers, educators and health-care providers, in order to contribute to ending child, early and forced marriage.” (A/HRC/RES/53/23)

It is unsurprising that language on SRHR is qualified by the inclusion of family members: as has been illustrated throughout this report, this area is experiencing some of the strongest backlash from the anti-rights and anti-gender movements. It nonetheless promising to see the role of parents and guardians is not singled-out but rather appropriately contextualised.

Resolution on menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality (2021)¹³³

There are several other resolutions which tackle women’s and girls’ rights and as well as cover new topics which have never been discussed. For example, in 2021, the new resolution on ‘menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality’ was passed by consensus, acknowledging the “*lack of access to adequate water and sanitation services, including for menstrual hygiene management, especially in schools, workplaces, health centres and public facilities, negatively affects gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and their enjoyment of human rights,*” including the right to health and education.¹³⁴ It further emphasised the barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities, rural women and girls and internally displaced women and girls, whose lack of access to menstrual hygiene compounds the discrimination they face.¹³⁵

However, this resolution does not expand at all upon the specific situation of girls and how this differs to women, especially considering how menstruation begins in pre-teenage and teenage years, making girls of this age range specifically relevant in the scope of this resolution and vulnerable to stigma and discrimination surrounding menstruation. It is critical that women and girls are differentiated, and that girls stop being conflated with women to effectively work towards the fulfilment and enjoyment of all of their rights.

Resolution on the elimination of discrimination against women and girls in sport (2019)¹³⁶

In 2019, a resolution on the ‘elimination of discrimination against women and girls in sport’ was passed by consensus, which has made some interesting contributions to the discourse on women’s and girls’

¹³² *Ibid.*, OP 3(c).

¹³³ HRC, ‘Resolution 47/4 on Menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality’, 12 July 2021, UN. Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/4. Adopted by consensus.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, PP 1.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, PP 14; OP 1(c); OP 2.

¹³⁶ HRC, ‘Resolution 40/5 on ‘Elimination of discrimination against women and girls in sport’, 21 March 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/40/5. Adopted by consensus.

rights. For example, while it has established that “*women and girls face multiple and intersecting forms of stigma and discrimination in sport*,”¹³⁷ it has gone beyond and nuanced this, discussing how certain forms of discrimination, such as racial discrimination, do not affect women and men equally and that there must be an “*explicit recognition and acknowledgement of the different life experiences of women*.”¹³⁸ While this is an important recognition, it typically omits the ways in which age also plays a role in compounding discrimination. Additionally, it begins to break ground but nonetheless falls short of discussing discrimination faced by transgender athletes in sports.

It manages regardless to incorporate a new facet to intersectionality, namely “*women and girl athletes with differences of sex development, androgen sensitivity and levels of testosterone*” when discussing discriminatory regulations and rules which may contravene international human rights norms and standards including but not limited to, the right to work in favourable conditions, the right to privacy, the right to freedom from torture and the full respect of bodily autonomy.¹³⁹ Additionally, it recognises that these regulations and practices discriminate on the “*basis of race, gender or any other ground of discrimination can lead to the exclusion of women and girls from competing as such on the basis of their physical and biological traits [...] and infringe upon the [...] bodily integrity and bodily autonomy of women and girls*.”¹⁴⁰

The admission of ‘any other ground’ and the mention of physical and biological traits, could be fertile ground for the inclusion of transgender women and girls and/or gender non-conforming athletes of all ages. This would complement women’s and girls’ rights, as well as expand the recognition and inclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC, which has been absent throughout the resolutions studied.

Resolution on promoting, protecting and respecting women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian situations (2020)¹⁴¹

The 2020 consensus resolution on ‘promoting, protecting and respecting women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian situations’, is the only resolution that explicitly tackles girls’ rights in emergencies. **While it never discusses girls as a stand-alone group, it does emphasise certain human rights which are often neglected in relation to girls, such as the rights to housing, water and employment in the context of how the enjoyment of these rights is impacted by humanitarian situations and the heightened risks of violations that women and girls face.**¹⁴² **Additionally, it discusses women’s and girls’ access to justice and remedies for these violations during humanitarian situations, which is very rare to see in relation to girls.**¹⁴³

The language on participation is also progressive and unqualified, emphasising the importance of “*women’s and girls’ meaningful participation, empowerment and leadership, including that of survivors and victims, in efforts to prevent, reduce the risk of, prepare for, resolve and rebuild from humanitarian emergencies*.”¹⁴⁴ References such as this are rare, as girls’ participation is often tempered by language such as ‘in accordance with their age and maturity/evolving capacities’ which functions to undermine the full integrity of this right.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, PP 7.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, PP 4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, OP 1.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴¹ HRC, ‘Resolution 45/29 on Promoting, protecting and respecting women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian situations’, 7 October 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/45/29. Adopted by consensus.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, PP 8.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, PP 12.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Resolution on the centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective (2023)¹⁴⁵

The 2023 consensus resolution on the ‘centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective’ is a new resolution which is of deep relevance to the rights of women and girls who are disproportionately represented in care work, whether paid or unpaid, and domestic work.

The resolution had potential to expand upon the rights of girls in this context and provide States with frameworks to address this issue. However, the resolution is somewhat inconsistent with its inclusion of girls, and mostly uses the ‘women and girls’ formulation, at times excluding girls. For example, in relation to their economic, social and cultural rights, including the “*right to education, the right to work, the enjoyment of just and decent conditions of work, freedom of association, the right to organise and to bargain collectively, an adequate standard of living, the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the right to take part in cultural life, and civil and political rights, such as the right to participate in political and public life,*” only women are referenced.¹⁴⁶ In another paragraph however, resolution acknowledges the need to adopt measures with an “*intersectional approach, to recognize, value and redistribute on an equal and fair basis paid and unpaid care work, and to reduce unpaid care work, currently still disproportionately performed by women and girls,*” including by ensuring their access to “*sustainable and accessible infrastructure, transport, social protection policies, affordable and quality social services, including care and support services and products, child care, and labour standards that provide for decent work and gender equality for all workers, including maternity, paternity or parental leave, equal pay for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions and freedom from violence and harassment in the world of work, [and] freedom of association.*”¹⁴⁷ This inconsistency may have arisen during negotiations on the text, especially considering the omission of girls in relation to the right to participation (also absent in other preambular and operative paragraphs mentioning participation¹⁴⁸), which is one of the rights suffering most under the pushback. Reference to girls’ right to participation may have been traded off for the inclusion of other girls’ rights which are oft omitted, such as the above references to social protection policies, equality in the workplace, and freedom of association, which is complementary to the right to participation.

Girls were omitted in the wide range of intersectional identities being mentioned, such as “*migrant women, rural women, Indigenous women, women of African descent, women with disabilities, older women, single mothers and widows, women deprived of liberty and refugee women,*” leaving girls’ specific intersectional identities unaddressed.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, the resolution itself does not address the disproportionate impacts of care and support on girls, or girls as rights-holders with their own needs when it comes to care and support. More needs to be done to meaningfully and explicitly include girls in this resolution and strengthen their rights.

Resolutions on the rights of the child: realising the rights of the child through a healthy environment (2020), on human rights and the environment (2018, 2021) and human rights and climate change (2018, 2020, 2021 2022, 2023)¹⁵⁰

Over the last six years, climate change is a topic that has been explored more by the UN mechanisms

¹⁴⁵ HRC, ‘Resolution 54/6 on the centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective’, 11 October 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/54/6. Adopted by consensus.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, PP 9.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, PP 14.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, PP 11; OP 4(d).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, PP 11.

¹⁵⁰ HRC, ‘Resolution 53/6 Human rights and climate change’, 12 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/6; HRC, ‘Resolution 50/9 Human rights and climate change’, 7 July 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/50/9; HRC, ‘Resolution 47/24 Human rights and climate change’, 14 July 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/47/24; HRC, ‘Resolution 46/7 Human rights and the environment’, 23 March 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/46/7.; HRC, ‘Resolution 44/7 Human rights and climate change’, 16 July 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/44/7; HRC, ‘Resolution 45/30 Rights of the child: realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment’, 13

as it increasingly becomes a threat. However, **the effects of climate change on girls' rights and the risks girls face have been inconsistently analysed throughout the mechanisms.** There are now several resolutions at the HRC on the environment and climate change, as well as a specific resolution on the *'rights of the child: realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment.'*¹⁵¹ Girls feature minimally in these resolutions, however both resolutions specifically recognise the disproportionate impact that *"environmental harm"*¹⁵² and *"the adverse effects of climate change"*¹⁵³ have on their enjoyment of various rights and stresses the importance of protecting girls from violence and harmful practices, as well as ensuring their full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making in accordance with their *"evolving capacities."*¹⁵⁴ Despite this, the resolution also calls for *"creating space for young people to participate in shaping the decisions that will affect their future"* including to protect *"human rights defenders and environmental activists, particularly young people, women and girls, and raising awareness and enhancing education that prepares young people for the future they face,"*¹⁵⁵ drawing from the 2018 resolution on human rights and the environment.¹⁵⁶ Similar language is included in the resolution on human rights and the environment in 2021, which, despite having few references to women and girls, does recognise the importance of *"gender equality, gender-responsive action to address climate change and environmental degradation, the empowerment, leadership, decision-making and meaningful participation of women and girls, and the role women play as managers, leaders and defenders of natural resources and agents of change in safeguarding the environment."*¹⁵⁷ Omitting girls in references to their role as leaders and human rights defenders is common throughout the documents studied, but the inclusion of language such as this is promising.

Lastly, the resolutions on human rights and climate change acknowledge the role that Indigenous women and girls play in their participation in disaster risk reduction policy and decision-making processes,¹⁵⁸ which is an improvement compared to the resolutions on human rights and the environment and on the rights of child resolutions which omit them.¹⁵⁹ However, these references are not very substantive and do not contribute very much to the expansion of their rights.

Throughout all of these resolutions, more targeted attention needs to be paid to girls and their rights, as well as their specific situations as a result of their age and other intersecting identities, and how the experiences of girls differ from women.

October 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/45/30; HRC, 'Resolution 41/21 Human rights and climate change', 12 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/21; HRC, 'Resolution 38/4 Human Rights and climate change', 5 July 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/38/4.; HRC, 'Resolution 37/8 Human rights and the environment', 22 March 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/37/8; All adopted by consensus.

¹⁵¹ HRC, 'Resolution 45/30 Rights of the child: realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment', 13 October 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/45/30.

¹⁵² HRC, 'Resolution 45/30 Rights of the child: realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment', 13 October 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/45/30, PP 22.

¹⁵³ HRC, 'Resolution 53/6 Human rights and climate change', 12 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/6, PP 23.

¹⁵⁴ HRC, 'Resolution 45/30 Rights of the child: realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment', 13 October 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/45/30, PP 22.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, PP 10.

¹⁵⁶ HRC, 'Resolution 37/8 Human rights and the environment', 22 March 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/37/8.

¹⁵⁷ HRC, 'Resolution 46/7 Human rights and the environment', 23 March 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/46/7, PP 21.

¹⁵⁸ HRC, 'Resolution 53/6 Human rights and climate change', 12 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/53/6, PP 26.

¹⁵⁹ HRC, 'Resolution 37/8 Human rights and the environment', 22 March 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/37/8; HRC, 'Resolution 46/7 Human rights and the environment', 23 March 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/46/7.

Universal Periodic Review

Key Findings:

- A small minority of UPR recommendations are about girls' rights.
- Girls are usually only mentioned in UPR recommendations as a corollary to women, in most recommendations via use of the phrase 'women and girls.'
- The main rights covered in girls' rights recommendations are the right to education and the rights to non-discrimination and non-violence.
- There is an overall underrepresentation of girls' intersectional identities. However, discrimination based on race and disability are often referenced as the most common forms of discrimination girls can face.
- Civil and political rights, especially the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, are some of the rights which feature the least when addressing girls' rights.
- Socio-economic rights, such as housing, water and sanitation, and nutrition, are also rarely the topic of girls' rights recommendations.

Of the 58,112 recommendations made by States in the 3rd and 4th cycles of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), girls' rights recommendations made up 3.2 per cent of the total.

Out of these 1,826 recommendations regarding girls:

- 71 per cent (1,288) reference 'girls' as part of the phrase 'women and girls'
- 14 per cent (256) refer to 'children', implicitly including 'girls'
- 3.2 per cent (58) reference persons who are 'young', 'young women' or 'youth'
- 2.3 per cent (42) reference 'women and girls with disabilities', or 'girls with disabilities'
- 41 per cent (757) reference different forms of 'violence'
- 20 per cent (364) reference 'discrimination' which includes various forms
- 18 per cent (334) reference 'education'
- 1.2 per cent (20) reference 'climate change' or issues related to the 'environment'
- 0.2 per cent (4) reference 'forced displacement' or 'internal displacement'

Figure 2: Breakdown of how girls are mentioned in UPR Recommendations related to girls

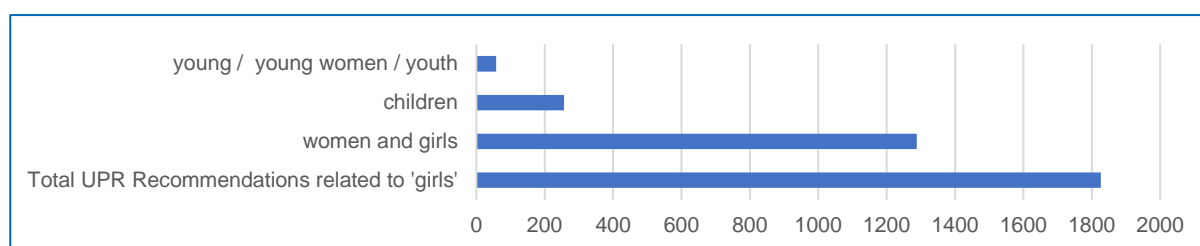
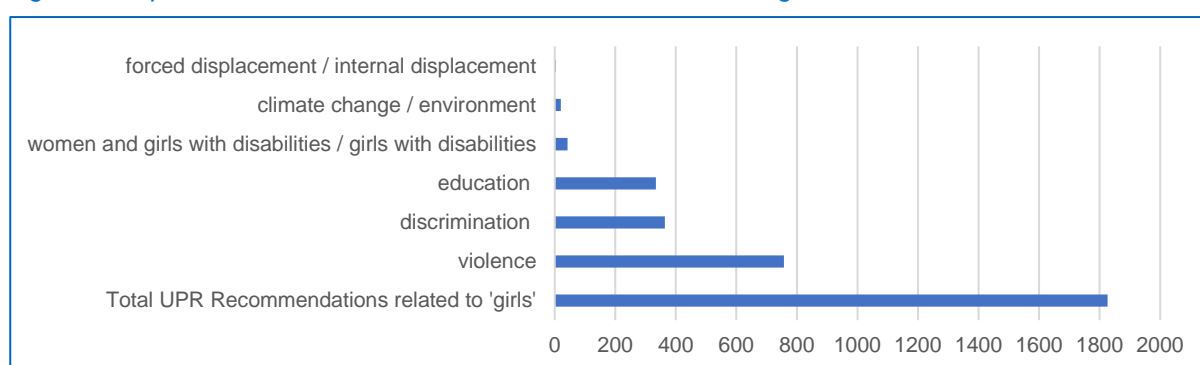


Figure 3: Topics addressed in UPR Recommendations related to girls



Identifying the States that made and received UPR Recommendations regarding girls' rights

The 1,826 recommendations made related to girls' rights were made by 159 States (see Figure 4 below) and directed towards 188 States (see Figure 5 below), demonstrating that almost every State under review received a recommendation regarding girls' rights.

Figure 4: States making more than 20 UPR Recommendations each regarding girls' rights (in Cycle 3 and to date in Cycle 4)

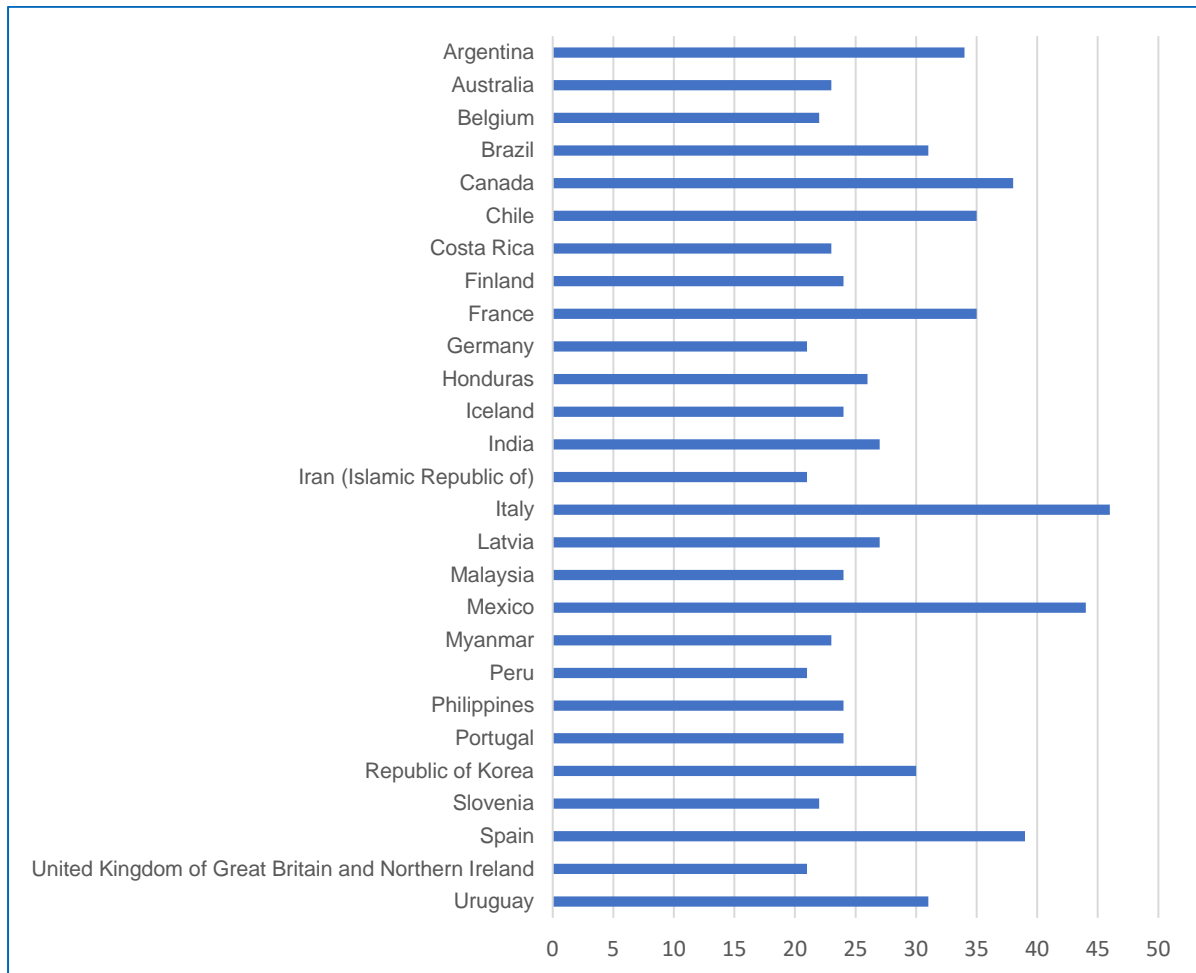
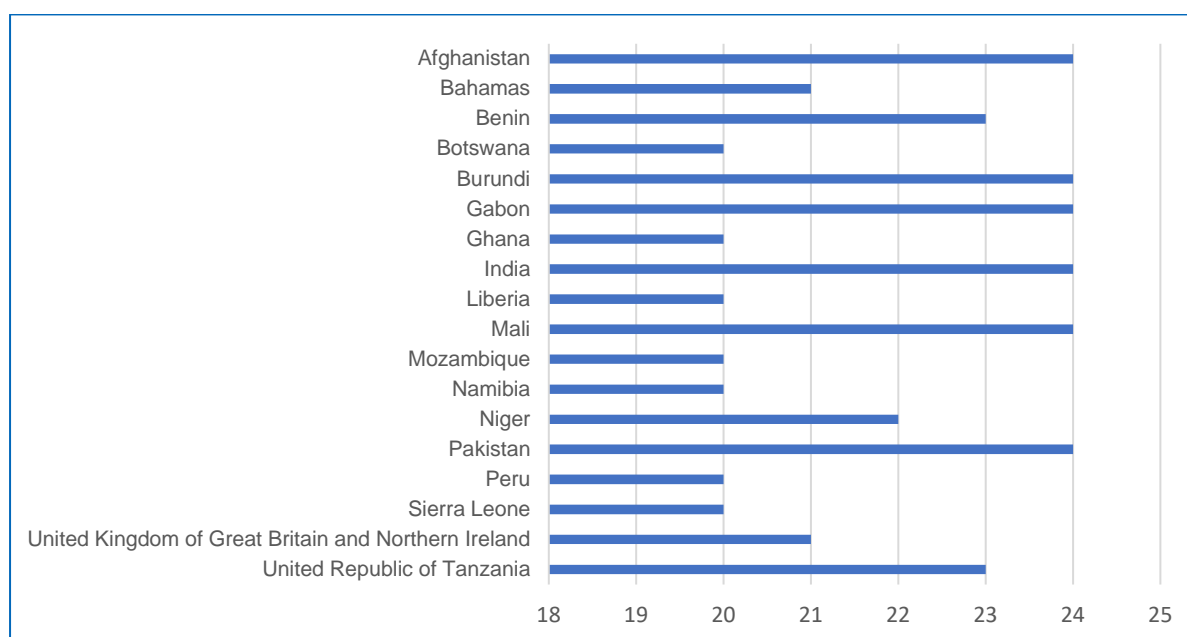


Figure 5: States receiving more than 20 UPR Recommendations each regarding girls' rights (in Cycle 3 and to date in Cycle 4)



Mentions of affected groups in UPR recommendations

Analysing the 1,826 girls' rights recommendations emanating from the UPR during the Third and Fourth Cycles reveals a significant focus on 'women or 'women and girls', with only a small minority addressing 'girls' as a distinct group. Specifically, 1,288 out of 1,826 recommendations about girls, or 71 per cent, mentioned 'women and girls', while 1,480 out of 1,826 recommendations, or 81 per cent, included the word 'woman'. This overlap indicates that less than 20 per cent of the recommendations referred to 'girls' independently, excluding instances where other groups such as children or minors were referenced. The actual figure for standalone references to girls is likely to be even lower.¹⁶⁰

When utilising the search term 'especially girls,' 22 recommendations were identified out of 1,826, or 1.2 per cent of all recommendations related to girls. These recommendations elucidate which human rights are viewed by international policymakers to be of most relevance to girls. Out of the 22 recommendations, 14 concern the right to education, and the others address trafficking, harmful practices and SGBV. This is in line with one of the main trends identified in Plan International's 2018 'Girls Rights Are Human Rights' report, and throughout this current research.

Positively, many of the recommendations made about education recognise intersectionality and mention girls with disabilities, and girls in various contexts such as in rural communities, or conflict areas. These recommendations use various formulations to include girls, for example:

*"Continue taking effective measures to facilitate access to education for all children, especially girls"*¹⁶¹
*"Continue efforts to provide inclusive education for all, especially girls, minorities and students with disabilities"*¹⁶²
*"Adopt additional measures to ensure the right to education of children and adolescents, especially girls, and the effective implementation of the 2012 Education Act"*¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Due to the limitations and complexity of searching UPR recommendations, it was not possible to identify exactly how many recommendations use the term 'girls' only.

¹⁶¹ UPR Recommendation 137.201, Islamic Republic of Iran to Botswana, Accepted, A/HRC/54/9.

¹⁶² UPR Recommendation 130.170, Qatar to Serbia, Accepted, A/HRC/54/18.

¹⁶³ UPR Recommendation 136.212, Brazil to Gabon, Accepted, A/HRC/53/6.

“Further intensify efforts, including under the inclusive and special education programme, to increase access to quality education for children, especially girls and those with special needs”¹⁶⁴

“Continue its efforts to make education accessible for all, especially girls and others in vulnerable situations”¹⁶⁵

“Continue efforts to ensure access to education for all, especially girls and forcibly displaced persons”¹⁶⁶

“Take additional measures to continue efforts to strengthen the right to education and to ensure the schooling of children, especially girls, in conflict areas”¹⁶⁷

“Redouble efforts to combat school dropout by addressing its social and economic causes, including the refusal of parents to send their children, especially girls, to school”¹⁶⁸

“Take targeted and comprehensive measures to prevent children, especially girls in rural areas, from dropping out of school”¹⁶⁹

The use of age-specific language was found to be quite limited. References to ‘minors’ were minimal, occurring in 68 out of the 1,826 girls’ rights recommendations, or 3.8 per cent of all recommendations related to girls. References to ‘young women’ were even less common, arising only 23 times, making up 1.3 per cent of the recommendations.

One of the trends identified relates to the absence of specificity accorded to girls. The lack of age-specific language contributes to their homogenisation, which is often compounded by the lack of focus on intersectionality. In fact, none of the recommendations identified discuss other forms of intersectionality, such as young women and girls with disabilities, or Indigenous young women.

Despite this, recommendations which mention ‘young women’ (often paired with ‘girls’) do elucidate several trends, primarily that VAWG/SGBV and education are the predominant focus. Out of the 23 recommendations mentioning ‘young women,’ 14 discussed VAWG/SGBV, 13 discussed education, three discussed SRHR, and three discussed pregnant young women, maternal mortality in young women and adolescent girls, as well as services for adolescents (topics overlapped within the recommendations).

Examples of language from these recommendations include:

“Redouble its actions to ensure equal access and representation of girls and young women at all levels of education, applying a policy of zero tolerance against sexual violence and harassment”¹⁷⁰

“Strengthen systems to assist survivors of sexual violence, especially girls and young women, and facilitate their access to medical, economic, legal and psychosocial services”¹⁷¹

“Continue strengthening access to education, in particular of girls and young women, supporting their entry at all educational levels”¹⁷²

“Take steps to effectively ensure the equality of girls and young women at all levels of education, and their retention in schooling”¹⁷³

“Promote more integrated youth and adolescent services, involving multiple agencies, to improve the availability of and access to complementary services, with a particular focus on access to such services for girls and young women”¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁴ UPR Recommendation 149.213, Philippines to Ghana, Accepted, A/HRC/53/7.

¹⁶⁵ UPR Recommendation 145.144, Singapore to Philippines, Accepted, A/HRC/52/13.

¹⁶⁶ UPR Recommendation 137.210, Lebanon to Sudan, Accepted, A/HRC/50/16.

¹⁶⁷ UPR Recommendation 135.243, Djibouti to Mali, Accepted, A/HRC/54/8.

¹⁶⁸ UPR Recommendation 136.235, Colombia to Benin, Accepted, A/HRC/53/10.

¹⁶⁹ UPR Recommendation 57.136, Viet Nam to Morocco, Accepted, A/HRC/52/7.

¹⁷⁰ UPR Recommendation 144.134, Honduras to Senegal, Accepted, A/HRC/40/5.

¹⁷¹ UPR Recommendation 125.223, Mexico to Uganda, Accepted, A/HRC/50/11.

¹⁷² UPR Recommendation 76.34, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Monaco, Accepted, A/HRC/40/13.

¹⁷³ UPR Recommendation 121.159, Portugal to Cameroon, Accepted, A/HRC/39/15.

¹⁷⁴ UPR Recommendation 140.130, Republic of Moldova to Azerbaijan, Accepted, A/HRC/39/14.

Additionally, SRHR and related issues tend to illicit use of age-specific language. In fact, there were 58 recommendations (3.2 per cent) related to ‘pregnancy/pregnant’, which commonly refer to: adolescent pregnancies, pregnancies among girls and teenagers, teenage/adolescent mothers, and young mothers. Out of these, 32 focus on ensuring these groups’ right to education, including sexual and reproductive health education, and school retention. Education is therefore seen as the primary right which is at risk and should be protected in the face of early pregnancies, with only a few mentions of the heightened risk of CEFM, or other concerns such as maternal health.

Some examples of these recommendations include:

*“Refrain from imposing a ban on **pregnant girls and young women attending schools** or taking exams”¹⁷⁵*

“Guarantee the access to education of pregnant girls and their unconditional reintegration into school after childbirth”¹⁷⁶

*“Redouble efforts towards the **reduction of adolescent pregnancy, especially for girls between 10 and 14 years of age**, through the implementation of a strengthened programme of **comprehensive sexuality education**”¹⁷⁷*

“Strengthen measures to combat school dropout, especially of pregnant girls, girls from rural areas and girls belonging to communities discriminated against on grounds of their language, caste, race, religion and any other status”¹⁷⁸

*“Develop strategies to ensure sexual education in schools aiming, inter alia, at **reducing the number of teenage pregnancies and ensuring that girls continue to have access to education without discrimination**”¹⁷⁹*

References to specific groups of women and girls were rare in the UPR recommendations. The only group that is included in recommendations with some frequency, yet still quite rarely, are ‘women and girls with disabilities’, which arose 42 times (2.3 per cent), and ‘children with disabilities’ which arose 32 times (1.8 per cent) amongst the recommendations related to girls. Other groups are almost completely omitted.

For example, references to Indigenous women and girls were notably scarce. The analysis found that mentions of intersectionality rarely included Indigenous women and girls, with only 14 out of 1,826 girls’ rights recommendations, or 0.8 per cent, including these identities. Quite strikingly, **there were only four references to refugee children/girls/women within the recommendations related to girls (0.2 per cent), and no references at all to displaced girls/women within these girls’ rights recommendations.** This data underscores a broader trend of minimal intersectional language within the recommendations, highlighting areas for potential improvement in addressing the needs of diverse groups.

Some examples of recommendations include:

*“Continue efforts to strengthen awareness raising on the rights of persons with disabilities, in particular with regard to **women and girls with disabilities**”¹⁸⁰*

*“Continue to promote education cause and protect the right to education for vulnerable groups such as **girls and children with disabilities**”¹⁸¹*

*“Enact a comprehensive law on sexual and gender-based violence, ensuring inclusion of **indigenous women and girls and those living with disabilities**”¹⁸²*

*“Enhance the efficiency of measures aiming at better preventing all forms of **violence against indigenous women and girls**”¹⁸³*

¹⁷⁵ UPR Recommendation 147.111, Armenia to United Republic of Tanzania, Accepted, A/HRC/49/13.

¹⁷⁶ UPR Recommendation 145.199, Iceland to Burundi, Accepted, A/HRC/54/11.

¹⁷⁷ UPR Recommendation 104.108, Belgium to Panama, Accepted, A/HRC/46/8.

¹⁷⁸ UPR Recommendation 158.62, Peru to Bhutan, Noted, A/HRC/42/8.

¹⁷⁹ UPR Recommendation 125.208, Portugal to Nicaragua, Accepted, A/HRC/42/16.

¹⁸⁰ UPR Recommendation 131.47, Islamic Republic of Iran to Serbia, Accepted, A/HRC/54/18.

¹⁸¹ UPR Recommendation 145.197, China to Burundi, Accepted, A/HRC/54/11.

¹⁸² UPR Recommendation 147.40, Denmark to the United Republic of Tanzania, Noted, A/HRC/49/13.

¹⁸³ UPR Recommendation 142.186, Kazakhstan to Canada, Accepted, A/HRC/39/11.

Areas of discrimination mentioned in UPR recommendations

Out of the 1,826 recommendations related to girls that were analysed, 364 (or 20 per cent), referenced discrimination. Within these 364 recommendations regarding discrimination and girls, the main form of discrimination that was identified was gender-based: there were 100 recommendations about gender-based discrimination, or 28 per cent of the discrimination-related recommendations. The use of the phrase ‘sex discrimination’ was rarely used (2 out of 364 recommendations, or 0.5 per cent). Both recommendations in fact used this terminology to advocate for the elimination of ‘sex/sexual violence and discrimination, which, as shown below is the most common pairing identified in recommendations on discrimination.

Besides gender-based discrimination, other identities or characteristics are rarely discussed in UPR recommendations.

Examples of these recommendations include:

*“Deepen measures aimed at recognizing the **rights of women and girls against discrimination** and gender disparities, in particular by amending legislation that does not yet fully guarantee their rights”¹⁸⁵*

*“Continue efforts to achieve gender equality and **eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls**”¹⁸⁶*

*“Further strengthen its legislation to ensure respect for women’s and girls’ human rights and to **fully outlaw gender-based discrimination**”¹⁸⁷*

*“Ensure consistent **implementation of enforcement of the laws on sex discrimination and violence against women and girls**, including consequences for those who discriminate against women and girls or engage in abuse”¹⁸⁸*

When the term ‘discrimination’ was further filtered with ‘violence,’ it was found that 171 out of the 364 recommendations regarding discrimination and girls, or 47 per cent, included references to violence. This indicates a strong tendency to pair the concepts of discrimination and violence together. For instance, many recommendations advocate for eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. The phrase ‘discrimination and violence’ appears 95 times in the recommendations regarding discrimination and girls, further reinforcing the connection between these two issues. In fact, 62 recommendations regarding discrimination and girls feature phrasing which incorporates all three terms together, such as by advocating for the *“elimination of all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls.”*

Examples of these recommendations include:

*“Strengthen the efforts to prevent and combat **any form of sexual and gender-based violence or discrimination against women and girls**, including by adopting federal legislation criminalizing violence against women”¹⁸⁹*

*“Continue to promote legislative and public policy measures to **combat all forms of violence against women**, including gender stereotypes and **intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls**”¹⁹⁰*

*“Take necessary measures for **combating discriminatory practices against women and girls, including gender-based violence**”¹⁹¹*

*“Continue to intensify efforts to **eradicate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls**, in*

¹⁸⁴ UPR Recommendation 100.28, Denmark to Ecuador, Accepted, A/HRC/52/5.

¹⁸⁵ UPR Recommendation 137.221, Argentina to Botswana, Accepted, A/HRC/54/9.

¹⁸⁶ UPR Recommendation 145.20, Tunisia to the United Republic of Tanzania, Accepted, A/HRC/49/13.

¹⁸⁷ UPR Recommendation 137.61, Lithuania to Jordan, Noted, A/HRC/40/10.

¹⁸⁸ UPR Recommendation 119.190, United States of America to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Accepted, A/HRC/42/5.

¹⁸⁹ UPR Recommendation 86.138, Italy to Micronesia (Federated States of), Accepted, A/HRC/47/4.

¹⁹⁰ UPR Recommendation 109.184, Plurinational State of Bolivia to Romania, Accepted, A/HRC/54/7.

¹⁹¹ UPR Recommendation 138.89, India to Namibia, Accepted, A/HRC/48/4.

Intersectionality

The analysis of the recommendations revealed a significant gap in addressing intersectional discrimination. Out of 364 recommendations regarding discrimination and girls, only 17 mentioned intersectional discrimination (4.7 per cent), highlighting a lack of consideration for the compounding effects of various discriminatory grounds.

Age-based discrimination, which particularly impacts girls and is crucial for protecting their rights, was notably underrepresented. Only one recommendation addressed this form of discrimination directly. The other three age-related references were limited to establishing minimum marriage age or age of consent. This omission underscores the widespread trend of age-blindness in children’s and women’s human rights discourse. Other forms of intersectional discrimination were also rarely featured. For instance, only five recommendations (1.4 per cent) discussed discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This underrepresentation extends to LBTQI+ girls and the discrimination they may face, reflecting a broader lack of attention to SOGIESC issues in UN mechanisms.

Recommendations addressing economic forms of discrimination primarily focused on eliminating discrimination and advocating for women’s economic empowerment. These were often framed through the lens of ‘equality,’ such as advocating for equal remuneration or access to credit. Notably, none of the recommendations discussed unpaid labour, including domestic work or unpaid care work. Overall, only eight out of 364 recommendations regarding discrimination and girls (2 per cent) addressed discrimination in the economic context.

Disability, race, and ethnicity featured more frequently in discrimination-related recommendations. Disability-based discrimination was mentioned in 30 recommendations (8.2 per cent of recommendations regarding discrimination and girls), while race and ethnicity-based discrimination appeared in 20 recommendations (5.5 per cent of recommendations regarding discrimination and girls). Discrimination on the grounds of religion or religious belief was addressed in 15 recommendations (4.1 per cent). This is in line with trends identified in other UN mechanisms, namely that these two areas are among the more commonly identified as compounding discrimination, over other identities.

Examples of the recommendations include:

*“Establish an inclusive regulatory framework that promotes equal opportunities and **non-discrimination** and the eradication of hate speech, **especially for women, girls, youth and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex populations**”¹⁹³*

*“Address **intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls with disabilities** and ensure their access to justice, protection from gender-based violence, inclusive education, employment and health services”¹⁹⁴*

*“Make further efforts to advance gender parity and protect the rights and freedoms of **women and girls, including by considering ways to address economic** discrimination”¹⁹⁵*

*“Increase efforts aimed at combating **intersectional discrimination against women and girls based on their belonging to ethnic minority groups** or on gender”¹⁹⁶*

*“Ensure the **inclusion of women and girls with disabilities** in all policies and programmes on equality and gender discrimination”¹⁹⁷*

¹⁹² UPR Recommendation 112.114, Uruguay to Cabo Verde, Accepted, A/HRC/39/5.

¹⁹³ UPR Recommendation 131.33, Costa Rica to Serbia, Accepted, A/HRC/54/18.

¹⁹⁴ UPR Recommendation 111.130, Croatia to Peru, Accepted, A/HRC/53/8.

¹⁹⁵ UPR Recommendation 107.123, Australia to Argentina, Accepted, A/HRC/37/5.

¹⁹⁶ UPR Recommendation 131.147, Paraguay to Netherlands, Noted, A/HRC/36/15.

¹⁹⁷ UPR Recommendation 111.102, Paraguay to Guatemala, Accepted, A/HRC/37/9.

Girls' rights issues mentioned in UPR recommendations

Generally, the focus of the UPR recommendations related to girls is on violence, discrimination and education. Harmful practices, especially CEFM, and trafficking follow close behind. This is unsurprising as this research has identified that the former three areas seem to overwhelm discourse on girls' rights.

Another trend identified throughout this research has been the exclusion of some rights which are relevant to girls' but rarely mentioned in negotiated instruments, including some civil and political rights, particularly political participation rights, freedoms of association and expression, and certain socio-economic rights, particularly those related to water, nutrition, property, inheritance, and social protection. This trend is also reflected in the UPR recommendations, which only discuss 'participation' 42 times (2.3 per cent of the recommendations related to girls), most of which are advocating for girls' equal participation in education, not in public and political life.

In fact, there are only two recommendations that explicitly discuss 'political participation.' Other civil and political rights are almost never discussed, with the rights to freedom of expression and assembly only featuring seven times in total, making up 0.4 per cent of the recommendations.

In terms of socio-economic rights, housing, water and sanitation, and nutrition rarely feature, with recommendations on the right to adequate housing featuring three times, water and sanitation nine times, and food and nutrition four times, making up a combined 0.8 per cent frequency in the UPR recommendations related to girls. In fact, most of the references to these rights were included together in the form of a list, with very little individual consideration. Other related rights, such as the rights to social protection and security, property and inheritance, also featured very rarely, making up only a combined 0.7 per cent of the recommendations related to girls. Two key areas of interest in terms of girls' rights, climate change and displacement, featured rarely in UPR recommendations: only 20 recommendations related to girls concerned climate change, and a mere four discussed displacement.

Some examples of these recommendations include:

*"Step up efforts to promote gender equality and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, including harmful practices, like **child, early and forced marriage**"¹⁹⁸*
*"Pursue **efforts to combat trafficking in children, especially girls**, and ensure the protection of victims"¹⁹⁹*
"Improve the protection of women's and girls' rights by improving access to health care, education, housing, sanitation and the labour market, notably by increasing the budgetary allocation"²⁰⁰
*"Ensure that a **gender perspective is integrated into all climate change and disaster risk reduction policies**, bearing in mind that disasters not only disproportionately affect women and girls but also exacerbate existing economic and social inequality across gender"²⁰¹*
*"Strengthen initiatives that encourage and elevate the **participation of women and girls in political and public life**"²⁰²*

Focus on violence and education

As identified throughout this research, 'violence' dominates discourse on girls' rights, and the UPR is no exception. When the recommendations were filtered for 'violence,' it was found that these make up 42 per cent of the recommendations related to girls. The most common formulation used is 'violence against women and girls,' which makes up over half of the recommendations on the topic, compared to 'sexual

¹⁹⁸ UPR Recommendation 100.121, Italy to Ecuador, Accepted, A/HRC/52/5.

¹⁹⁹ UPR Recommendation 136.224, Lebanon to Gabon, Accepted, A/HRC/53/6.

²⁰⁰ UPR Recommendation 151.248, Germany to India, Accepted, A/HRC/52/11.

²⁰¹ UPR Recommendation 101.108, Republic of Korea to Tuvalu, Accepted, A/HRC/39/8.

²⁰² UPR Recommendation 122.141, Samoa to Bahamas, Accepted, A/HRC/54/10.

and/or gender-based violence,' which accounts for a quarter. There is a lack of specific focus on girls, who rarely feature as a stand-alone group within these recommendations, with 738 out of the 757 recommendations on violence and girls also mentioning 'women.'

There is very little differentiation made within 'women and girls' in the context of violence, with only two recommendations highlighting the need to support girl and young women survivors of sexual violence, and only nine recommendations advocating for the implementation of policies to prevent violence against girls and young women.

Diversity within these groups is also rarely identified, with only ten recommendations specifically highlighting the need to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons from violence. **None of the recommendations ever acknowledge the rights of girls with diverse SOGIESC explicitly, in any context.**

Other intersectional identities are acknowledged slightly more often, for example 17 recommendations discuss violence against minority women and girls, including against ethnic minorities, and 25 recommendations discuss women and girls with disabilities. **Interestingly, however, many of the same recommendations also refer to women and girls as 'vulnerable,' which exemplifies the underlying impetus behind the strong focus on violence: it arises from the persisting perception of girls simply as vulnerable and helpless victims, rather than as empowered rights-holders.** As identified in the above section, the prevalence of recommendations on discrimination, and its strong overlap with violence, further bolsters this point.

Some examples of these recommendations include:

*"Continue efforts to adopt measures to eliminate violence against girls, boys and adolescents, especially Indigenous children, children in rural areas and children with disabilities"*²⁰³

*"Take steps to prevent sexual and gender-based violence against women, girls, men, boys, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, persons with disabilities and ethnic and religious minorities, and hold perpetrators thereof accountable"*²⁰⁴

*"Implement effective and coordinated measures to prevent violence against women, especially against young women and girls"*²⁰⁵

*"Adopt a comprehensive national plan to address comprehensively the problem of gender-based violence, whether physical, psychological or sexual, providing to all relevant public services sufficient resources to implement these policies, taking into account the specific circumstances of women and girls who suffer from the most serious vulnerability"*²⁰⁶

Education is also one of the primary areas of focus in the UPR recommendations, with 336 recommendations out of 1,826 (or 44 per cent) related to girls, focused on this topic.

Out of these, 13 address formal and non-formal education, or vocational training. Within these 336 recommendations, the main way that girls feature is through the phrase 'women and girls.' In fact, in the 336 recommendations on education, 103 (or 31 per cent) contain this phrase. Girls are also implicitly recognised in recommendations on children's education, which make up 79 recommendations out of the 336. Girls are therefore rarely singled out in these recommendations, for example only 13 discuss the need to protect or strengthen the right to education 'especially (for) girls.'

The recommendations touch upon certain areas: schooling in conflict areas, inclusive education for girls with disabilities, access to education for adolescent girls, access to education for girls and forcibly

²⁰³ UPR Recommendation 111.159, State of Palestine to Peru, Accepted, A/HRC/53/8.

²⁰⁴ UPR Recommendation 133.83, Albania to Syrian Arab Republic, Noted, A/HRC/50/6.

²⁰⁵ UPR Recommendation 111.110, Iceland to Guatemala, Accepted, A/HRC/37/9.

²⁰⁶ UPR Recommendation 139.208, Chile to South Africa, Accepted, A/HRC/36/16.

displaced persons, and the elimination of harmful practices to ensure access to education. However, some of these topics are rarely discussed in the recommendations in any detail - for example, only five address education in times of conflict, and only two discuss displacement. Education for girls with disabilities is more common, with 61 recommendations advocating for inclusive access to quality education for children, including girls, with disabilities. **There is also some focus on ensuring access to and continuation of education for pregnant teenagers and adolescent mothers. This is the most age-specific language that can be found in recommendations on education.** These advocate for ensuring the right to education without discrimination against pregnant teenagers and young mothers, as well as incorporating sexuality education in schools to reduce the prevalence of early pregnancy.

Examples of these recommendations include:

“Ensure the right to education of children, especially girls”²⁰⁷

“Ensure the effective retention and reintegration of pregnant girls and young mothers into the school system, including by reviewing the teenage pregnancy policy to include out of school educational support for teenage mothers UPR Recommendation”²⁰⁸

“Further intensify efforts, including under the inclusive and special education programme, to increase access to quality education for children, especially girls and those with special needs”²⁰⁹

“Put in place action policies in favour of the education of girls, in order to guarantee gender equality and contribute to the development of the latter”²¹⁰

“Continue to make efforts to provide educational facilities and opportunities to girls and women and advance equal access to vocational training facilities”²¹¹

²⁰⁷ UPR Recommendation 131.170, China to Haiti, Accepted, A/HRC/50/15.

²⁰⁸ UPR Recommendation 112.72, Guyana to Seychelles, Accepted, A/HRC/48/14.

²⁰⁹ UPR Recommendation 149.213, Philippines to Ghana, Accepted, A/HRC/53/7.

²¹⁰ UPR Recommendation 145.198, Mauritius to Burundi, Accepted, A/HRC/54/11.

²¹¹ UPR Recommendation 138.237, India to Belarus, Accepted, A/HRC/46/5.

Special Procedures

Of the total of 297 reports by 46 Special Procedures thematic mandates of the HRC that were issued during 2018-2023, 66 reports by 18 mandate holders were identified as the most relevant for analysis. These included the majority of thematic reports by Special Procedures with child- and gender-specific mandates; thematic reports of Special Procedures mandates in areas frequently cited in connection with girls' rights (such as education, health, water and sanitation²¹²); and thematic reports with a specific focus on gender and/or children produced by other mandate holders, or which otherwise touched upon these topics in a noteworthy manner.²¹³

Key Findings:

- **Throughout the period of study, the visibility of girls increased in Special Procedures reports, notably with the change of mandates' titles. Since 2021, the term 'girls' seems to be used with greater intentionality, however the use of the phrase 'women and girls' continues to be used, often obscuring girls' specific situations and needs.**
- **While references to girls were often framed through the lens of 'vulnerability,' since 2021, girls have increasingly been presented as rights-holders and as agents of change, with more attention paid to their civil and political rights.**
- **The organised and well-funded backlash against critical human rights areas, including girls' SRHRs, and more broadly the universality of rights, has proven to be a significant challenge in advancing girls' rights.**
- **Along with some mandate holders explicitly working on the rights of women and girls, the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (IE SOGI), have increased the visibility of lesbian, bisexual and transgender girls, addressing existing gaps which lead to their exclusion. However, other mandate holders, such as the Special Rapporteur who tackle child rights issues, often omit analysis of girls' rights, representing an opportunity for greater engagement on this topic going forward.**
- **On issues of growing importance, such as internal displacement and climate change, girls have become more visible across the period of study, however the analysis conducted by mandate holders remains superficial.**

Of the five thematic Special Procedures mandates on women, children and/or gender,²¹⁴ the Human Rights Council added the term 'girls' to the titles of two mandates during the period under review. In 2019, the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice (WG DAW) was renamed as the 'Working Group on discrimination against women and girls' (WG DAWG) during the renewal of its mandate.²¹⁵ Similarly, in 2022, the mandate of the 'Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences' (SR VAW) was amended to include both 'women and girls' (SR VAWG).²¹⁶

As compared with the previous reporting period, the visibility of girls increased in Special Procedures reports issued between 2018 and 2023. Over the course of the reporting period, the effectiveness of references to 'girls' continued to vary, with the most notable developments occurring by and large from

²¹² N.B. As all three reports of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe water and sanitation during the reporting period were dedicated to climate change and displacement, they appear in this analysis under these thematic sub-headings.

²¹³ See Annex for a complete list.

²¹⁴ WG DAWG; SR VAWG; Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (IE SOGI); Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children; and Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material.

²¹⁵ HRC, 'Resolution 41/6 Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls', 11 July 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/41/6.

²¹⁶ HRC, 'Resolution 50/7 Mandate of Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences', 7 July 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/50/7.

2021 onwards. An increasing number of reports appeared to utilise the term with greater intentionality to describe the situation of girls; while in other cases, the use of terms such as ‘women and girls’ referenced girls inconsistently and without a discernible link to their specific needs.

As in the prior reporting period, girls were often included or subsumed into the categories of ‘women’ and ‘children.’ **The mere inclusion of the word ‘girls’ did not increase their visibility per se: in actuality, the reports that provided the most visibility to girls’ rights were not necessarily those that included the greatest number of references to girls, but which instead contextualised the term.**

One approach was to explicitly note the use of ‘women’ to be inclusive of girls, with specific reference to girls only where there were (or were perceived to be) distinct impacts that set their situation apart from that of women. This formulation was often used in conjunction with discussions of intersectionality and gender diversity, and to express an intent to be inclusive, and did not necessarily result in diminished visibility for girls’ issues. Likewise, references to ‘children’ in general did not necessarily obscure the human rights interests of girls — depending on the context in which the term was used.

Increased references to girls in the context of intersectionality and structural inequalities also provided greater nuance to analysis of the situation of girls—with a notable shift towards this language between 2021 and 2023. Analysis of the situation of girls continued to be framed primarily through the lens of ‘vulnerability,’ particularly with regard to sexual and gender-based violence. However, some progress was made over the course of the reporting period in shifting this narrative to portray girls as rights-holders and agents of change, with increasing attention paid to the civil and political rights of girls.

Of particular note was the 2022 report by the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, dedicated solely to the activism of girls and young women, which highlights barriers they face to equality as well as their active role in effectively challenging these barriers.

Several reports referred to an organised and well-funded backlash from ultra-conservative interests against, inter alia, the use of more expansive and inclusive language reflecting gender diversity, as well as in opposition to girls’ sexual and reproductive health rights, and more broadly, challenging the universality of human rights.²¹⁷ These reports identified this pushback as a major challenge in advancing girls’ rights and gender equality going forward.

“Girls and young women are mobilising worldwide to demand and catalyse change on critical global issues. They are at the forefront of initiatives aimed at transforming societies towards social justice, gender equality and sustainability. This is occurring despite, and frequently in reaction to, the barriers that they continue to face in participating in public and political life, as a result of persistent gender-based discrimination and violence within families, communities and society at large.”

WG DAWG, “Girls’ and young women’s activism”, 2022, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/50/25, para 8.

²¹⁷ See, e.g., SR VAW, ‘Twenty-five years of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences: an analysis of its evolution, current challenges and the way forward’, 20 June 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/41/42, paras. 20-22; WG DAWG, ‘Women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive health rights in crisis’, 28 April 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/47/38, paras. 47-49; Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, ‘Sexual and reproductive health rights: challenges and opportunities during Covid-19’, 16 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/172, para. 82; and WG DAWG, ‘Escalating backlash against gender equality and urgency of reaffirming substantive equality and the human rights of women and girls’, 15 May 2024, UN Doc. A/HRC/56/51, para. 15.

Key trends amongst Special Procedures thematic mandates on women, children and gender

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

The SR VAWG²¹⁸ issued 12 reports between 2018 and 2023.²¹⁹ While the mandate was expanded to explicitly include girls in 2022, **the visibility of girls in the reports of the mandate holder has been somewhat inconsistent**, varying in large part based on the degree to which the topic of a thematic report is relevant to girls, as well as the varied approaches of the respective Special Rapporteur mandate-holders within the period under review.²²⁰ Girls are largely invisible, for example, in two out of four reports issued by the mandate holder in 2018 and 2019.²²¹ However, the 2018 report, 'Online violence against women and girls', attempts to address the absence of specific reference to girls by providing that the Special Rapporteur is "*mindful that many forms of online violence covered in the report are perpetrated against both women and girls,*" and that she therefore "*uses the term "women" in an inclusive manner, which includes girls whenever applicable, while recognising that girls are a frequent target of this form of violence.*"²²²

Similarly, in her 2019 retrospective report on the mandate's history,²²³ the SR by-and-large references 'women', with only the occasional use of the term 'girls'. Read against her previous comments,²²⁴ it can be inferred that the term 'women' is meant to be inclusive of girls as well.

However, while the occasional reference to 'women and girls' provides a certain amount of visibility to girls, there are missed opportunities in the report to include age-specific analysis of impacts on girls. The final three reports of the mandate holder that were examined in this study, two from 2020 and one from 2021,²²⁵ do not depart significantly from this trend.

Following the appointment of a new Special Rapporteur mandate-holder in August 2021, some of the mandate's thematic reporting resulted in greater visibility for girls, though this trend was not consistent over time. Three of the five reports issued by the new mandate-holder (including two released in 2023) focus on issues primarily affecting women.²²⁶ However, two of the reports (both issued in 2022, the same year that the mandate was amended to explicitly include girls) contain noteworthy references to girls, with more nuanced, age-specific analysis, discussion of intersectionality, and efforts to shift prevailing narratives about girls' 'vulnerability'. The report on 'Violence against Indigenous women and girls,' for instance, assesses a wide range of impacts of the climate crisis on the economic and social rights of women and girls, calling for greater inclusion of education on gender-based violence at the school level, access to justice, truth and reparations for women and girls, and a more expansive

²¹⁸ Until 2019, known as the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (SR VAW).

²¹⁹ See Annex for a complete list.

²²⁰ The mandate holder from August 2015-July 2021 was Ms. Dubravka Simonovic (Croatia); the current mandate holder, Ms. Reem Alsalem (Jordan), began her tenure in August 2021.

²²¹ SR VAW, 'Violence against women in politics', 6 August 2018, UN Doc. A/73/301, and 'A human rights-based approach to mistreatment and violence against women in reproductive health services with a focus on childbirth and obstetric violence', 11 July 2019, UN Doc. A/74/137.

²²² SR VAW, 'Online violence against women and girls', 18 June 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/38/47, para. 15.

²²³ SR VAW, 'Twenty-five years of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences: an analysis of its evolution, current challenges and the way forward', 20 June 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/41/42.

²²⁴ SR VAW, 'Online violence against women and girls', 18 June 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/38/47, para. 15.

²²⁵ SR VAW, 'Violence against women journalists', 6 May 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/44/52, deals entirely with adult professionals; 'Intersection between the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the pandemic of gender-based violence against women, with a focus on domestic violence and the "peace in the home" initiative', 24 July 2020, UN Doc. A/75/144, contains occasional references to girls, including in a brief discussion on intersectionality, but generally subsumes them into the category of 'women'; 'Taking stock of the femicide watch initiative', 12 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/132, alternately references 'women' and 'women and girls' in an assessment of the effectiveness of a specific strategy to address gender-related killings.

²²⁶ SR VAWG, 'Custody, violence against women and violence against children', 13 April 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/53/36, focuses on issues surrounding women's custody of their children, with a largely gender-neutral assessment of the best interests of the child; 'Violence against women and girls, nationality laws and statelessness', 28 July 2023, UN Doc. A/78/256, primarily evaluates the situation of women who are unable to pass on their nationality to their children due to gender-discriminatory national laws; 'Rape as a grave, systematic and widespread human rights violation, a crime and a manifestation of gender-based violence against women and girls, and its prevention', 19 April 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/47/26, makes very few references to girls specifically.

implementation of laws on discrimination against ‘women’ to protect ‘Indigenous women and girls.’ It also pushes back against narratives dominated by themes of victimhood or the feminisation of vulnerability: *“All stakeholders must, rather than continuously perceiving and portraying Indigenous women and girls as primarily victims or vulnerable groups, recognise them for being resilient, survivors, change makers and important leaders in the movement and struggle for the rights of Indigenous peoples.”*²²⁷

In a similar vein, **the 2022 report on ‘Violence against women and girls in the context of the climate crisis, including environmental degradation and related disaster risk mitigation and response’ is also more inclusive of girls, with analysis of the impacts of climate change on adolescent girls’ access to education, health care, water and sanitation, and recommendations for greater inclusion of ‘girls and young women’ in decision-making processes related to the climate crisis.** *“All stakeholders”, the report provides, “should ensure that women and girls participate fully and effectively in all processes that are intended to design, implement, monitor and evaluate mitigation and response to climate change, environmental degradation and disaster risk reduction at the international, regional and national levels...”*²²⁸ The report also uses a rights-based approach when underscoring that *“climate change and biodiversity-related treaties and processes need to explicitly call for enabling conditions to be made available for women and girls to participate fully and effectively in creating a knowledge base on climate change and engage in decision-making, including by enjoying equal rights and control over land and resources and the fair sharing of benefits arising from genetic and biological resources.”*²²⁹ Again, the mandate holder emphasises that *“women and girls need to be seen as resilient change makers rather than only vulnerable victims.”*²³⁰

Both reports from 2022 therefore include a marked increase in the visibility of issues affecting girls’ rights, as well as progressive language on girls’ agency and participation, pushing back against prevailing narratives of ‘vulnerability’.

The fact that girls feature much more prominently in the reports issued in 2022 appears to be a direct consequence of the expansion of the mandate to explicitly include them. However, as indicated above, girls were less visible in both reports issued by the mandate holder in 2023 despite tackling issues of great importance for girls (i.e. violence, custody, and nationality laws). This suggests that sustained advocacy may be necessary to maintain and build upon the relative increase in girls’ visibility seen in 2022.

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

The WG DAWG²³¹ issued five thematic reports between 2018 and 2023.²³² Over the course of the reporting period, there was a marked increase in the visibility of girls in these reports (particularly after the change in its mandate to explicitly include girls), as well as a growing use of more progressive language and analysis in relation to girls’ rights — shifting away from essentialist or reductive stereotypes, underscoring the agency and resilience of women and girls, and exploring a broader range of human rights issues, including economic, civil and political rights. Arguably the most expansive report on girls’ rights produced by any mandate holder during the entire reporting period, the WG DAWG’s

²²⁷ SR VAWG, ‘Violence against indigenous women and girls’, 21 April 2022, A/HRC/50/26, para. 83.

²²⁸ SR VAWG, ‘Violence against women and girls in the context of the climate crisis, including environmental degradation and related disaster risk mitigation and response’, 11 July 2022, A/77/136, para. 84.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Until 2019, known as the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice.

²³² WG DAW, ‘Reasserting equality, countering rollbacks’, 14 May 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/38/46; WG DAWG, ‘Women’s human rights in the changing world of work’, 16 April 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/44/51; WG DAWG, ‘Women’s and girls’ reproductive health rights in crisis’, 28 April 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/47/38; WG DAWG, ‘Girls’ and young women’s activism’, 9 May 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/50/25; WG DAWG, ‘Gendered inequalities of poverty: feminist and human rights-based approaches’, 26 April 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/53/39; WG DAWG, ‘Gendered inequalities of poverty: feminist and human rights-based approaches’, 26 April 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/53/39.

2022 report, 'Girls' and young women's activism', breaks new ground by centring girls and young women — and the intersectional discrimination they face — in its analysis. "*Girls and young women experience unique challenges to their activism, rooted in the intersection of gender and age,*" notes the report, adding that these are "*exacerbated by factors including, but not limited to, economic insecurity; lack of access to education; restrictions on access to sexual and reproductive health goods, services and information; unequal access to quality education; narrowing civic spaces, both online and offline; rising fundamentalism in many countries; armed conflict; environmental disasters; and health crises.*"²³³

By dedicating a report to the topic of girls' and young women's activism, the WG DAWG insists that their civic engagement be taken seriously. It challenges assumptions that would dismiss the seriousness of girls' activism, in part by highlighting the sheer range of issues on which girls' and young women's activism has been engaged.²³⁴

Notably, during the preparation of the report, the WG DAWG met with a diverse group of girl and young women activists, who "*identified the critical challenges they have been facing at many levels*"²³⁵ and whose voices directly informed many of the report's findings and recommendations. These consultations were carried out as part of concerted efforts on the part of the WG DAWG in recent years to ensure the inclusion of girls' perspectives in its reporting through meaningful and direct engagement with girls from a broad spectrum of intersecting identities.²³⁶

Emphasising a rights-based approach, the report further emphasises that "*the empowerment of girls and young women through the respect, protection and fulfilment of their fundamental human rights is an indispensable precondition for just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies and the achievement of gender equality.*"²³⁷ However, the report notes that more broadly, "*while in recent years their participation has increasingly been promoted, major gaps persist,*" and that "*despite the importance of their participation, research on girls in public and political life is scarce and has not predominantly focused on their civic space and activism.*"²³⁸

"For too long, the focus of most international and national economic policies has been on how to integrate women and girls more effectively into existing, unequal economic systems, rather than on **challenging and remaking those systems so that they promote and protect the full range of human rights for everyone.**"

WG DAWG, 'Gendered inequalities of poverty: feminist and human rights-based approaches', 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/53/39, para 14.

In a similar vein, the 2023 report of the WG DAWG, 'Gendered inequalities of poverty: feminist and human rights-based approaches',²³⁹ challenges more conventional approaches that attempt to fit women and girls within existing economic systems, arguing instead for the need to remake these systems to eliminate inherent structural inequalities. The report further observes that "*many interventions that address the feminisation of poverty use a narrow concept of poverty as a simple lack of*

²³³ WG DAWG, 'Girls' and young women's activism', 9 May 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/50/25, para. 9.

²³⁴ These issues, per the SR VAWG, "*encompass, among others, gender equality, gender-based violence, harmful practices, children's rights, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, climate justice, social and economic inequalities, inclusive development, racial justice, good governance, defence of territories, land and resources, and peace-building and conflict resolution.*" *Ibid.*, para. 20.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 10.

²³⁶ Similarly, in its report, 'Gendered inequalities of poverty: feminist and human rights-based approaches', 26 April 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/53/39, the WG DAWG consulted a wide range of women and girls, including those with direct experience of poverty. Participants in these consultations included "*women and girls from ethnic minority groups, such as Roma and Indigenous women, women and girls with disabilities, girls and young women in poverty, illiterate women and girls, women and girls of African descent, internally displaced, migrant (especially undocumented), stateless, asylum-seeking and refugee women, women living in situations of conflict and occupation, rural women, older women, self-employed women, women domestic workers, and women waste pickers and street vendors, [who] described the distinct ways in which poverty and inequalities shaped their lives.*" *Ibid.*, para. 31.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ WG DAWG, 'Gendered inequalities of poverty: feminist and human rights-based approaches', 26 April 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/53/39.

economic resources, and [...] have also tended to view women as a homogenous group.”²⁴⁰ This lack of nuanced analysis has meant that, “rather than challenging and transforming intersectional forms of inequality, mainstream poverty-reduction strategies may be further entrenching essentialist gender stereotypes and the structural inequalities that flow from them.”²⁴¹

The 2021 report, ‘Women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive health rights in crisis’,²⁴² also takes a more targeted approach in its analysis of girls’ rights, with reference to the need for both intersectional and gender-responsive responses to address the health needs of women and girls: “A radical shift in the approach to identifying and addressing situations of crisis is needed,” the report observes, “one that is gender responsive, intersectional and acknowledges the hidden, yet deep, trauma associated with the non-fulfilment of the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls, as well as the life-long and intergenerational impact thereof...”²⁴³ The report also addresses issues affecting adolescent girls, noting that “during a crisis, arranged and forced marriages increase, driven by harmful traditional practices in the context of aggravated poverty. Married-off girls face a higher risk of pregnancy-related mortality and obstetric fistula, a preventable and devastating pregnancy-related injury which causes incontinence and can lead to stigma, abandonment and social exclusion. Nevertheless, child marriage and adolescent girls’ sexual and reproductive health needs remain largely unaddressed in humanitarian settings.”²⁴⁴

Girls receive less focus in reports by the WG DAWG prior to 2021. The 2020 report, ‘Women’s human rights in the changing world of work’,²⁴⁵ for instance, is dedicated primarily to adult women and the right to work — referencing girls largely in terms of their access to educational and training opportunities to prepare them for future career paths. In the 2018 report, ‘Reasserting equality, countering rollbacks’²⁴⁶ — reviewing the first six years of the WG DAW’s mandate, and released prior to the 2019 revision to include girls in its title — girls are also largely invisible, as they are absorbed into the category of ‘women’ and into concepts such as ‘women’s rights’ and ‘gender equality’. Therefore, while the report contains an extensive and progressive gender-based analysis, age-based analysis is largely absent.

Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity

Established just before the publication of Plan International’s 2018 ‘Girls Rights Are Human Rights’ report, the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (IE SOGI) has made several notable developments through its thematic reports over the last few years, which saw important gains in the visibility of gender-diverse girls. In a two-part series — ‘The Law of inclusion’ and ‘Practices of exclusion’ — published in 2021²⁴⁷ the IE SOGI analysed both broad-based gender norms and stereotypes underlying violence and discrimination against ‘women’,²⁴⁸ ‘women and girls’ and gender-diverse persons more broadly, as well as the harmful impacts of this framework on girls. Both reports, for instance, discuss discrimination against transgender girls in the context of school sports programmes, which has become a political touchstone in ultraconservative narratives pushing back against progress in gender equality and perpetuating “the harmful and offensive contention that trans girls are not girls.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 14.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² WG DAWG, ‘Women’s and girls’ reproductive health rights in crisis’, 28 April 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/47/38.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, para. 4.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 56.

²⁴⁵ WG DAWG, ‘Women’s human rights in the changing world of work’, 16 April 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/44/51.

²⁴⁶ WG DAW, ‘Reasserting equality, countering rollbacks’, 14 May 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/38/46.

²⁴⁷ Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (IE SOGI), ‘The Law of inclusion’, 3 June 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/47/27; and ‘Practices of exclusion’, 15 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/152.

²⁴⁸ As in other SP reporting, and based on the expansive definitions provided elsewhere in the IE’s report, the use of the term ‘women’ in this case is shorthand for ‘women and girls’, and is not intended to be exclusive of girls.

²⁴⁹ IE SOGI, ‘The Law of inclusion’, 3 June 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/47/27, para. 40.

The phrasing, ‘trans girls,’ is itself an important shift in enhancing the visibility of gender-diverse girls, as the category of ‘women and girls’ and that of ‘LGBTQI+’ or ‘gender non-conforming persons’ often appear as separate groups without overlap in much reporting — subtly eroding the visibility of girls who are lesbians, bisexual and transgender.

For this reason, it is noteworthy that the IE SOGI uses this terminology when addressing related gaps in data and public policy, arguing that “*the concerns of all women must be reflected in data gathering and analysis — and lead to consequences in public policy, including in evidence-based approaches to ensure that inclusion through sports and other realms of social life fulfils the objective of promoting the development of all girls, including lesbian, bisexual and trans girls.*”²⁵⁰

The 2018 report of the IE SOGI, ‘Legal recognition of gender identity and depathologisation,’²⁵¹ also increases the visibility of girls’ issues, though it accomplishes this primarily through gender-neutral language, with an entire section devoted to gender identity issues of children more broadly. The autonomy and decisional power of children is at the centre of this analysis — a point often overlooked in other discussions involving girls’ rights. The report also adopts a rights-based approach when examining the denial of legal recognition of gender identity, including through the lens of the rights of the child.²⁵²

Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children

Between 2018 and 2023, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children (SR on trafficking in persons) issued ten thematic reports, of which six held the greatest relevance to the rights of girls and were reviewed in depth for the purposes of this report.²⁵³ As compared with the first three SPs with age- and gender-related mandates discussed above, the reporting of the SR on trafficking in persons did not vary or expand significantly in terms of its treatment of the rights of girls. For instance, a report issued in 2018 on the gender dimension of trafficking in persons in conflict and post-conflict settings frequently refers to ‘women and girls’ but this is also interchanged occasionally with ‘women and children.’²⁵⁴ The report does refer substantially to the gendered dimensions of trafficking in the context of conflict, and a degree of intersectionality is implied, for example, when the report describes the exacerbating effect that conflict may have on “*pre-existing conditions and vulnerabilities, such as structural gender-based and other forms of discrimination affecting women, children and non-citizens.*”²⁵⁵

The SR on trafficking in persons underscores the “*highly gendered*” nature and forms of trafficking in conflict, noting that “*abduction into military forces affect males and females differently*” and that while “*men and boys are typically forced into being soldiers, women and girls are generally forced into support roles, such as domestic servitude...and face sexual assault and sexual slavery.*”²⁵⁶ Notably, the report highlights the fact that “*security policies in post-conflict countries...have traditionally focused on other crimes and forms of violence, overlooking trafficking in women and girls*” and calls for post-conflict measures evaluating “*the risks of further forms of violence and exploitation when a ‘traditional armed force’ withdraws from a territory...leaving a vacuum for other armed groups to take control over the territory*” leading to increased vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking,²⁵⁷ and observing that “*the*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 46.

²⁵¹ IE SOGI, ‘Legal recognition of gender identity and depathologisation’, 12 July 2018, UN Doc. A/73/152.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, para. 23.

²⁵³ See full list in Annex. One of these six reports, dedicated to the impacts of climate change on trafficking in persons, is addressed under the climate change heading in this section of the report.

²⁵⁴ Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children (SR on trafficking in persons), ‘The Gender dimension of trafficking in persons in conflict and post-conflict settings and the importance of integrating a human rights-based approach to trafficking in persons into the women and peace and security agenda of the Security Council’, 17 July 2018, UN Doc. A/73/171.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 21.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 66.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 26.

bodies of women and girls [are used] as a form of currency in the political economy of war."²⁵⁸ However, while the report emphasises the gendered nature of victimisation in trafficking in conflict and post-conflict settings, all relevant recommendations are made in relation to 'women and girls' alone. While this may represent a degree of progress in terms of the increased visibility of girls vis-à-vis the 'Women, Peace and Security' agenda, there are opportunities for even more nuanced and targeted language regarding the rights of girls in this context.

Two succeeding thematic reports on other topics in 2019 and 2020 do not expand upon this language, with girls largely subsumed under the category of 'women' or 'children', or referenced in connection with women but without a nuanced analysis of the specific impacts of trafficking on the girl child.²⁵⁹

Beginning in 2022, with the publication of a report 'addressing the gender dimensions of trafficking in persons in the context of climate change, displacement and disaster risk reduction',²⁶⁰ there is a marginal increase in the visibility of girls in the thematic reports under this mandate.²⁶¹ In 2023, when the SR on trafficking in persons revisited the topic of trafficking in persons in situations of conflict,²⁶² she described conflict-related trafficking as gender-based persecution of women and girls, and placed greater emphasis on intersectionality such as displaced status, racial or ethnic minorities, and women and girls with disabilities. However, girls are almost exclusively referenced either in connection to women ('women and girls') or subsumed under the category of 'children', and the term 'girls' does not appear in the recommendations, which solely reference 'women' and 'children'. Notably, however, in the same report, the SR on trafficking in persons calls for a shift in narrative with regard to "*stereotypes associated with identifying victims of trafficking*" with an emphasis on "*discrimination, structural inequalities and failures of protection*" that are the root cause of the vulnerability of certain groups to trafficking in conflict situations, including women and children.²⁶³

Similarly, the 2023 thematic report on 'refugee protection, internal displacement and statelessness' makes multiple references to 'women and girls' and includes references to intersectionality.²⁶⁴ The report expounds upon the concept of the targeting of girls for trafficking based on ethnicity or race in the context of conflict as a form of persecution that may be grounds for gender-related asylum claims as well as the crime against humanity of persecution on the grounds of gender.²⁶⁵ Once again, however, 'girls' do not appear in the report's recommendations per se, as these refer to 'women' and 'children.'

In sum, therefore, there are gaps and missed opportunities to address the specific situation of girls in the context of the thematic reporting of the Special Procedures on trafficking in persons.

Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material

Five thematic reports of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material (SR on the sale of children) were reviewed for the purposes of this study.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 32.

²⁵⁹ SR on trafficking in persons, 'Access to remedy for victims of trafficking for abuses committed by businesses and their suppliers', 2019, UN Doc. A/74/189; SP on trafficking in persons, 'Beyond law enforcement, towards social justice: proposals on the way forward for an effective implementation of a human rights-based approach to trafficking in persons', 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/44/45.

²⁶⁰ SR on trafficking in persons, 'Addressing the gender dimensions of trafficking in persons in the context of climate change, displacement and disaster risk reduction', 15 July 2022, UN Doc. A/77/170; discussed in greater detail under the climate change and displacement headings of this section.

²⁶¹ It also followed the appointment of a new mandate holder: Ms. Siobhan Mullally (Ireland) was appointed Special Rapporteur in 2020, replacing Ms. Maria Grazia Giammarinaro (Italy) who held the position from 2014-2020. Notably, since the inception of the mandate in 2004, all mandate-holders have been women.

²⁶² SR on trafficking in persons, 'Strengthening accountability for trafficking in persons in conflict situations', 13 July 2023, UN Doc. A/78/172.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, para. 41.

²⁶⁴ SR on trafficking in persons, 'Refugee protection, internal displacement and statelessness', 3 July 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/53/28.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, paras. 49 and 61.

The first three²⁶⁶ — published between 2018 and 2021 — do not provide particular visibility to girls' rights, and where girls are referenced, this is done in relation to issues that have been frequently

"The importance of children's participation in discussions and processes cannot be understated. Paying attention to age, gender and cultural contexts helps ground more effective, transformative and sustainable responses. The agency of the child should be respected within the procedures, as rights holders whose interests and wishes should be accounted for across the normative framework and institutional machineries. This in itself may be an important form of reparation. Without such participation from child victims and survivors on a wide range of issues, initiatives are less likely to reflect their experiences, concerns, priorities and needs."

SR on sale of children, 'Reparation for child victims and survivors of sale and sexual exploitation', 26 January 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/52/31, para. 85

highlighted in the past (such as harmful traditional practices, sexual and gender-based violence, and unequal access to education) or framed in terms of girls' vulnerability. In one report, the mandate holder posits that boys and non-binary children are relatively invisible by comparison with girls in terms of gender-sensitive approaches to the sexual exploitation of children.²⁶⁷ A fourth report issued in 2022 ('A practical approach to addressing the sale and sexual exploitation of children')²⁶⁸ frames the situation of girls in similar terms, with the exception of a call for greater inclusion of girls (among others) in community engagement to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation: "*Besides involving children directly, community participation is also crucial to ending child marriage and child sexual exploitation. That participation involves girls and women, elders and religious and community leaders, but must also actively engage boys and men. No group exists in a vacuum and to be effective the entire community must be involved in the process of change...*".²⁶⁹

The 2023 report ('Reparation for child victims and survivors of sale and sexual exploitation') expands somewhat upon this theme, calling for a child-friendly approach to reparation, including the participation of children in the process.²⁷⁰ **While overall the report is relatively gender-neutral, there are noteworthy references to the rights of girls, as well as a shift in the discussion of children away from mere vulnerability and towards a portrayal of children as rights-holders and potential agents of change.** For instance, the report notes that:

*"The importance of children's participation in discussions and processes cannot be understated. Paying attention to age, gender and cultural contexts helps ground more effective, transformative and sustainable responses. The agency of the child should be respected within the procedures, as rights holders whose interests and wishes should be accounted for across the normative framework and institutional machineries. This in itself may be an important form of reparation. Without such participation from child victims and survivors on a wide range of issues, initiatives are less likely to reflect their experiences, concerns, priorities and needs."*²⁷¹

Moreover, the report references civil society advocacy to elevate the issue of gender-sensitive reparations on national and international agendas, citing amongst other laws, legal decisions and

²⁶⁶ Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material (SR on sale of children), 'Sale and sexual exploitation of children in the context of sports', 27 December 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/40/51; SR on sale of children, 'Impact of coronavirus disease on different manifestations of sale and exploitation of children', 22 January 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/46/31; SR on sale of children, 'Thematic study on the gender dimension of the sexual exploitation of children and the importance of integrating a child-centred and gender-inclusive approach to combating and eradicating it', 19 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/144.

²⁶⁷ SR on sale of children, 'Thematic study on the gender dimension of the sexual exploitation of children and the importance of integrating a child-centred and gender-inclusive approach to combating and eradicating it', 19 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/144, para. 10.

²⁶⁸ SR on sale of children, 'A Practical approach to addressing the sale and sexual exploitation of children', 10 January 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/59/41.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 64.

²⁷⁰ SR on sale of children, 'Reparation for child victims and survivors of sale and sexual exploitation', 26 January 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/52/31.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, para. 85.

instruments like the Murad Code²⁷² as “*the best expression of this transnational growing concern to provide women and girls with a survivor-centred response*” to sexual violence and abuse.²⁷³

These calls for a survivor-centred, gender-sensitive response to child survivors of sale and sexual exploitation, combined with an increasing recognition of the centrality of their participation as rights-holders with agency, is in line with developments observed amongst other mandate holders highlighted in the present report, and represents an opportunity for greater engagement on the rights of girls in the context of the mandate going forward.

Key trends amongst other thematic mandate holders

Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Two of the thematic reports of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (SR on the right to health) during the period under review contained notable developments in relation to the rights of girls:²⁷⁴ ‘Sexual and reproductive health rights: challenges and opportunities during COVID-19’²⁷⁵ (2021) and ‘Violence and its impact on the right to health’ (2022)²⁷⁶ include progressive, rights-based and targeted language on girls, and also address pushback against girls’ rights in the area of sexual and reproductive health (SRHR). It is noteworthy that both reports were issued following the appointment of a new mandate holder in 2020 — the first female Special Rapporteur on the right to health in the eighteen years of the mandate’s existence up until that point.²⁷⁷

The 2021 report on sexual and reproductive health rights devotes an entire section to ‘adolescents’ and takes an intersectional approach, while at the same time utilising gender-neutral language as appropriate to reference adolescents in all their gender diversity. The report pushes back against conservative backlash, underscoring the fact that “*adolescents have a right to express views on all matters related to health and sexuality, and to access free, confidential and adolescent-responsive sexual and reproductive health services...*”,²⁷⁸ and that, “*while adolescents themselves have the capacity to contribute to their own well-being, they can achieve this goal only if States respect and protect their rights.*”²⁷⁹

²⁷² The Murad Code, also known as the ‘Global Code of Conduct for Gathering and Using Information About Systemic and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence’, “is a global consultative initiative aimed at building and supporting a community of better practice for, with and concerning survivors of systematic and conflict-related sexual violence (SCRSV)”, 13 April 2022, available at: www.muradcode.com

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, para. 19.

²⁷⁴ Out of a total 12 thematic reports issued between 2018 and 2023.

²⁷⁵ Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health (SR on the right to health), ‘Sexual and reproductive health rights: challenges and opportunities during COVID-19’, 16 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/172.

²⁷⁶ SR on the right to health, ‘Violence and its impact on the right to health’, 14 April 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/50/28.

²⁷⁷ Ms. Tlaleng Mofokeng, a physician from South Africa, was appointed Special Rapporteur on the right to health by the HRC in July 2020. From the inception of the mandate in 2002, until Ms. Mofokeng’s appointment in 2020, all three prior mandate holders were male.

²⁷⁸ SR on the right to health, ‘Sexual and reproductive health rights: challenges and opportunities during COVID-19’, 16 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/172, para. 44.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 83.

The rights of girls are captured both in this gender-neutral terminology, as well as by specific, targeted reference. The report uses quite progressive language when it stresses “*the importance of access to dignified gender affirming treatment for trans and gender-diverse children and adolescents....*”²⁸⁰ However, it also references impacts specific to girls in other contexts, for instance by noting that “*lack of access to [sexual and reproductive health] services contributed to adolescent girls being the group most at risk of dying or suffering serious lifelong injuries in pregnancy and childbirth.*”²⁸¹

The SR on the right to health identifies both

practical barriers (such as reduced access to non-COVID-related health care during the pandemic) and stigma, discrimination and backlash affecting women and girls in particular. For example, she notes that “*much of the discrimination faced by women and girls in relation to their sexual and reproductive health rights can be ascribed to the instrumentalisation and politicisation of their bodies.*”²⁸²

“The Special Rapporteur observes a global patriarchal culture, a regressive climate and pushback in the area of sexual and reproductive health rights and opposition to gender equality. Gains made in the past decades in these areas are at risk of being rolled back, with the rights and perspectives of women, girls and LGBTIQ+ persons sidelined.”

SR on the right to health, ‘Sexual and reproductive health rights: challenges and opportunities during COVID-19’, 2021, UN Doc. A/76/172, para. 82.

Similarly, in her 2022 report on the impact of violence on the right to health, the SR on the right to health addresses both more conventional forms of gender-based violence that have been identified for some time as impacting girls (such as early and child marriage), while also calling for “*the need to expand the scope of the definition of gender-based violence to include violence based on sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, thereby including all cisgender, queer, intersex and transgender women and feminine presenting people.*”²⁸³

Special Rapporteur on the right to education

Between 2018 and 2023, girls received inconsistent attention in thematic reporting of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education (SR on education). In contrast to several of the other mandate-holders described above, girls’ visibility did not increase over time, and in fact, the most significant discussions of girls’ rights appear in three reports issued in the first half of the period under review.²⁸⁴

The 2018 thematic report on the right to education of refugees includes an entire subsection on ‘barriers to the education of refugee girls’, which examines the intersecting challenges of displacement, gender-based violence and discrimination, and domestic obligations (such as fetching water and tending to younger siblings) on girls’ access to education.²⁸⁵ The report underscores that “*secondary education can be life-changing for girls, with potential gains for host countries and overall development*”²⁸⁶ and, therefore, specifically recommends that “*special attention should be paid to ensuring that refugee girls have access to and are not prevented from attending school at all levels. This may include the elaboration, in collaboration with civil society and other stakeholders as appropriate, of special programmes and projects to eliminate obstacles to the education of the refugee girl child.*”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 47.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, para. 44.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, para. 81.

²⁸³ SR on the right to health, ‘Violence and its impact on the right to health’, 14 April 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/50/28, para. 27.

²⁸⁴ Special Rapporteur on the right to education (SR on education), ‘The right to education for refugees’, 27 July 2018, UN Doc. A/73/262; SR on education, ‘Governance and the right to education’, 22 November 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/38/32; SR on education, ‘Interrelations between the right to education and the rights to water and sanitation’, 20 July 2020, UN Doc. A/75/178.

²⁸⁵ SR on education, ‘The right to education for refugees’, 27 July 2018, UN Doc. A/73/262, paras. 83-86.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 87.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 124.

A thematic report issued the same year on ‘Governance and the right to education’ also highlights the need for more disaggregated data on education in relation to disenfranchised groups, including “the poor, girls, persons with disabilities, minority groups and other vulnerable people.”²⁸⁸ The report also calls for decentralisation of educational systems to “ensure that education is more equitable, inclusive and responsive to local learner needs by empowering local communities to adjust the delivery of education to meet local demands,” noting that this is especially important for “minorities, girls, the poor and people living in rural areas, and marginalized communities that may otherwise be ignored in centralized systems.”²⁸⁹ While not stated explicitly, these observations suggest the need for greater input from girls themselves in assessing the delivery of education, as the report underscores the disenfranchisement that girls and other groups have faced in this regard.

In addition, a 2020 thematic report highlights the barriers that girls face in accessing education due to insufficient water and sanitation facilities in schools, particularly as it relates to a lack of gender-segregated toilets and facilities to support menstrual hygiene.²⁹⁰ Notably, the report addresses the situation of gender-diverse children, and while it asserts the right of all individuals to non-discrimination, providing that “individuals should be allowed to use toilets in a manner consistent with their chosen gender identity,” it also notes that solutions for ensuring accessibility “should never affect women and girls’ access to gender-segregated toilets.”²⁹¹ It also characterises women and girls as a separate category from “gender-diverse and transgender persons” — rather than recognising gender-diverse and transgender girls. The final report of the previous mandate holder,²⁹² issued in 2022, takes a similar approach, citing a lack of gender-segregated toilet facilities as well as insufficient access to menstrual hygiene care as major causes of girls’ absenteeism from school.²⁹³

The relative absence of girls from thematic reports under this mandate means that there is an opportunity to increase girls’ visibility on this topic, given that this is one of the most addressed human rights issues for girls by other UN human rights mechanisms, as well as for the use of more progressive language with greater emphasis on intersectionality and girls’ participation and empowerment.

Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association

A notable development in Special Procedures thematic reports during the reporting period has been an increased recognition of girls as activists and agents of change. In addition to the report of the WG DAWG dedicated to the activism of girls and young women, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association (SR on freedom of assembly) made noteworthy contributions to increasing the visibility of the issues surrounding girls’ civil and political rights. In a 2020 report, ‘Celebrating women in activism and civil society: the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association by women and girls,’²⁹⁴ the mandate holder recognises girls’ activism specifically, noting that “young women and girls have been leading and actively participating in youth movements drawing attention to democracy gaps and deficits.”²⁹⁵ Accordingly, the report includes a formal recommendation to support girls’ civic engagement, calling on all stakeholders to “Enable the formation of girl-led groups and young feminist associations and encourage and facilitate girls’

²⁸⁸ SR on education, ‘Governance and the right to education’, 22 November 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/38/32, para. 18.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 70.

²⁹⁰ SR on education, ‘Interrelations between the right to education and the rights to water and sanitation’, 20 July 2020, UN Doc. A/75/178, paras. 25, 28, 76 and 78.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, paras. 25 and 28.

²⁹² Ms. Koumba Boly Barry of Burkina Faso held the position of Special Rapporteur from 2016 to 2022; since 2022, the position has been held by Ms. Farida Shaheed of Pakistan.

²⁹³ SR on education, ‘Early childhood care and education’, 2 September 2022, UN Doc. A/77/324, e.g. para. 95.

²⁹⁴ Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association (SR on freedom of assembly), ‘Celebrating women in activism and civil society: the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association by women and girls’, 20 July 2020, UN Doc. A/75/184.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 20.

participation in public life, including by providing them with relevant role models of women in civil society and activism and creating, in partnership with civil society, mentoring programmes.”²⁹⁶

The report highlights the social factors that continue to undermine women’s²⁹⁷ and girls’ civic engagement, noting that “some of the most significant barriers to women’s enjoyment of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are deeply rooted at home, in the family and in the community, where women and girls continue to live under patriarchal control and experience wrongful stereotyping, both of which prevent and punish participation in public life.”²⁹⁸ The report further provides that “gendered norms and practices that perpetuate harmful stereotypes” lead women and girls to be “discouraged from or targeted for participating in collective public actions or movements.”²⁹⁹ The report also recognises the intersectional nature of discrimination that often compounds these barriers.³⁰⁰ Accordingly, the mandate holder makes an additional formal recommendation targeting these harmful norms and stereotypes, calling on all stakeholders to:

“Establish effective policies, public campaigns and educational programmes to combat discriminatory social norms, attitudes and harmful stereotypes about women’s and girls’ roles and capabilities that discriminate and discourage their involvement in public life and the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. This includes engaging with institutions that most frequently convey and confirm patriarchal views and harmful gender stereotypes, including schools, religious institutions and the media”.

Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association (SR on freedom of assembly), ‘Celebrating women in activism and civil society: the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association by women and girls’, 20 July 2020, UN Doc. A/75/184, para. 81(b).

The 2021 thematic report, ‘Exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association as essential to advancing climate justice’,³⁰¹ explicitly mentions the important role of girls and young women in leading climate activism,³⁰² while also reviewing age-based discrimination against children more generally in this context. The SR on freedom of assembly finds that “*children attempting to exercise their right to peaceful assembly have faced limitations placed on their access to information as well as threats of violence, including threats by adults ‘who disapprove of their civic engagement and human rights activism’,*” and that “*such rights violations have often been condoned and supported by authorities.*”³⁰³ In this instance, the use of the gender-neutral term of ‘children’ does not detract from the visibility of girls, as the report also highlights the particular contributions of girls and young women, as well as the gender-based discrimination they face — so, does not subsume them into the gender-neutral category of children overall.

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

In 2021, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 85(d).

²⁹⁷ Notably, while referencing ‘girls’ with some regularity throughout the text, the report also clarifies that references to ‘women’ are meant to be inclusive, not only of girls but also of “*transgender and intersex persons who identify as women and gender non-conforming persons affected by social constructions of women.*” *Ibid.*, para. 5.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 40.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 41.

³⁰⁰ “Women who belong to marginalized populations, in terms of race, class, ethnicity, religion or belief, health, disability, status, age, class, caste and sexual orientation and gender identity, face multiple stereotyping that negatively affects their enjoyment of the rights to peaceful assembly and of association.” *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ SR on freedom of assembly, ‘Exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association as essential to advancing climate justice’, 23 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/222.

³⁰² See section on climate change for a detailed discussion of this topic as well as key climate-related findings of the report.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, para. 45.

opinion and expression (SR on freedom of expression) issued the first thematic report in the mandate’s 27-year history to be devoted exclusively to gender, stressing that she had identified gender equality as a priority. This coincides with the appointment of the first female mandate holder for this mandate. While the report, ‘Gender justice and freedom of opinion and expression,’³⁰⁴ largely references ‘women’ and ‘gender non-conforming’ individuals, the SR on freedom of expression explicitly notes that the term ‘women’ is meant to be inclusive of girls, and that the girls are clearly referenced in contexts that are age- and gender-specific. The report takes an intersectional approach and “*adopts a feminist analytical framework that is attentive to the lived realities and needs of women and gender nonconforming people, and in so doing addresses traditionally neglected forms of speech relevant to their lives, including freedom of gender, sexual and cultural expression.*”³⁰⁵ The SR on freedom of expression also places an emphasis on women and girls as rights-holders: “*Looking at freedom of opinion and expression through a feminist lens, she notes the power imbalances in society that feed sexism, gender-based discrimination and misogyny, and constrain women’s enjoyment of human rights.*”³⁰⁶

By virtue of the fact that this was the first report of the mandate holder to focus solely on gender, the visibility of girls was, by implication, necessarily increased. Indeed, **the report opens with an epigraph quoting the Nobel Peace Prize-winning former girl (and now young woman) activist, Malala Yousafzai — recalling the importance of girls’ and young women’s activism and political participation, as well as of the risk of violence they may face in defying patriarchal norms.** “*It is high time to talk about what freedom of opinion and expression means for women and girls;*” the SR on freedom of expression notes at the outset of the report. “*The road has been bumpy, but much has been achieved. From Beijing in 1995 to Paris in 2021, women have raised their voices to speak truth to power, make visible what had been rendered invisible and demand equality and justice. Through their words and actions, women have demonstrated the mutually reinforcing nature of gender equality and freedom of expression, offline and online.*”³⁰⁷

The report examines the concept of “*gendered censorship,*” driven by “*sexism and misogyny, combined with direct discrimination through laws and policies,*” which have erected barriers to women’s and girls’ expression, including through self-censorship: “*Many women fear the consequences of challenging existing norms and practices or lack the support mechanisms needed to take action. In some contexts, the fact that a woman, especially a young woman, is expressing her views is enough for her ideas to be discredited, and for the speaker to be socially sanctioned.*”³⁰⁸ The SR on freedom of expression takes note of the fact that “*survey results show that high percentages of young women and girls who are active online face intense gender-based trolling and harassment.*”³⁰⁹ She also underscores the backlash against female human rights defenders due to “*growing trends of populism, authoritarianism, nationalism and fundamentalism worldwide.*”³¹⁰

The 2023 report of the SR on freedom of expression, ‘Gendered disinformation and its implications for the right to freedom of expression,’³¹¹ also applies a feminist and intersectional approach, and builds upon analysis contained in the 2021 thematic report. As in the earlier report, while the term ‘girls’ is frequently subsumed into that of ‘women,’ there are occasional age-specific references that enhance girls’ visibility, such as the discussion of “*online attacks, including gendered disinformation, [which] are a daily reality for many young women and girls in the global South...*”³¹² The SR on freedom of

³⁰⁴ Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (SR on freedom of expression), ‘Gender justice and freedom of opinion and expression’, 30 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/258.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 8.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 1.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 14.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 19.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 4.

³¹¹ SR on freedom of expression, ‘Gendered disinformation and its implications for the right to freedom of expression’, 7 August 2023, UN Doc. A/78/288.

³¹² *Ibid.*, para. 39.

expression notes that “most girls report their first experience of social media harassment occurring between 14 and 16 years of age,”³¹³ and consequently experience age-specific forms of harm. “Owing to their evolving capacities, children cannot always distinguish between reliable and unreliable information. As a result, not only can they be harmed by disinformation, but they may also spread it among their peers inadvertently.”³¹⁴

Key trends in relation to cross-cutting themes

Climate change

Climate change — and in particular, climate-related displacement — was a major area of focus and a cross-cutting topic of SP reports touching on the rights of women and children, with increasingly direct reference to girls over the course of the reporting period.

Discussion of climate change generally centred around two major themes, either (1) building on pre-existing trends emphasising the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls exacerbating vulnerabilities and gender inequality, but increasingly (2) highlighting the central role of girls and young women as impactful agents of change, whose participation in climate decision making must be enhanced.

In particular, SP reports assessed the impacts of climate-related migration and displacement, with an increased emphasis on the intersectional vulnerabilities of displaced populations across age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, indigeneity, ethnic and religious minority, and other factors. This trend has in some cases allowed for a more expansive discussion of girls’ rights. In 2022, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants issued a report on the impact of climate change on migrants, which recognises the “*exacerbated intersecting vulnerabilities*” of children including “*girls, indigenous children, children with disabilities and other children with heightened vulnerabilities [who] experience climate inequity at disparate levels*,”³¹⁵ and includes a section devoted to ‘women and girls’ who, the report notes, constitute an estimated 80 percent of those displaced by climate-related events.³¹⁶

Reflecting broader trends in the discussion of the vulnerability of women and girls, which focus heavily on sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, SP reports also emphasised the heightened risk of these forms of harm engendered by climate change. The SR on the human rights of migrants notes, for instance, that climate-related migration increases vulnerability to human traffickers, who may “*exploit migrant women and girls who take risks to find work and shelter*.”³¹⁷ The SR on the human rights of migrants also notes the economic impacts of climate change, which “*can worsen the cycle of poverty and exacerbate situations of vulnerability for women and girls, such as gender-based discrimination in access to land, natural resources, financial services, social capital and technology, leaving them with limited or no assets to utilise in the case of natural hazards or disasters*.”³¹⁸

Several reports also highlighted the need for gender and child perspectives in addressing the climate crisis, while underscoring the agency of women and children.

For instance, in two separate reports issued in 2022,³¹⁹ the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, ‘The Impact of climate change on migrants’, 19 July 2022, UN Doc. A/77/189, para. 51.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 47.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 49.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 47.

³¹⁹ Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (SR on the right to water), ‘Outlining the impacts of climate change on the human rights to water and sanitation around the world’, 28 January 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/climate-change-1-friendlyversion.pdf>; SR on the right to water, ‘The Impacts of climate change on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation of groups and populations in situations of vulnerability’, 28 January 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/climate-change-2-friendlyversion.pdf>

safe drinking water and sanitation (SR on the right to water) outlines the disproportionate impact of climate change on the human rights of women and girls, which is compounded by their absence from decision-making processes. “*The continued marginalization of women in decision-making steps,*” he writes, “*limits the ability of adaptation measures to include for the specific water and sanitation needs of women and girls, and the specific ways in which they are disproportionately impacted by the threats of climate change.*”³²⁰ He emphasises that “*participatory processes for the development and implementation of climate change adaptation plans must incorporate a gender perspective.*”³²¹ While the SR on the right to water does not use the term ‘girls’ specifically, he underscores the agency of “*children and young persons around the world [who] are taking to the streets and advocating for their rights in the face of slow and insufficient climate mitigation and adaptation*”, calling for their “*voices [...] to reach the arenas in which decisions on climate mitigation and adaptation are made.*”³²²

Notably, in a 2021 report dedicated to climate justice,³²³ the SR on freedom of expression underscores the role of children and youth in climate activism, girls’ and young women’s activism received particular emphasis: “*Girls and young women have been some of the most vibrant voices within this movement,*” the report notes, “*inspiring young activists around the world to join in. Such efforts have supported the development of more ambitious climate goals and important legislative and judicial achievements struggle, helping to shift negative narratives and elevating the rights of future generations.*”³²⁴ The report also notes that children have “*faced particular challenges in exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in the context of the climate crisis,*” and that, “*in addition to having to confront all of the barriers faced by adults, they often face barriers affecting children in particular, including limitations imposed based on discriminatory policies and practices.*”³²⁵ The SR on freedom of expression makes several recommendations for the effective participation of women, youth and children in climate-related decision making, and the protection of the right of children to peacefully assemble and associate, though without specific reference to girls.

Several reports also cited the need for more disaggregated data on the impacts of climate change, particularly with regard to women and children, and taking into consideration intersecting factors such as migration, displacement, disabilities and indigeneity.³²⁶ This research would have the potential of providing greater depth, nuance and specificity to the analysis of girls’ rights in the context of climate change, and to provide greater visibility to these issues going forward.

Internal displacement

As illustrated above, analysis of the age- and gender-specific impacts of climate change on the rights of girls in the Special Procedures thematic reports overlaps significantly with discussions of the effects of climate-related displacement. As the impacts of climate change are increasingly felt in many parts of the global South, discussions of the role of climate change in displacement appeared with greater frequency vis-à-vis more conventional forms of displacement, such as those triggered by conflict, forcible displacement or non-climate-related natural disasters.

In a 2020 report on ‘Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate

³²⁰ SR on the right to water, ‘The Impacts of climate change on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation of groups and populations in situations of vulnerability’, 28 January 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/climate-change-2-friendlyversion.pdf>, at p. 6.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³²³ SR on freedom of assembly, ‘Exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association as essential to advancing climate justice’, 23 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/222.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 16.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 45.

³²⁶ See, e.g., Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, ‘The Impact of climate change on migrants’, 19 July 2022, UN Doc. A/77/189.

change,³²⁷ the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (SR on IDPs) frequently enumerates the disproportionate impacts of climate change on ‘women and girls.’ These include the vulnerability of girls in particular to sexual violence/exploitation and early marriage, as well as infringements on the rights to access health and education. “*When men and boys migrate at the early stages of a crisis,*” the report observes in the context of climate-related displacement, “*women and girls often stay behind, living in an increasingly hazardous context,*” and adding that, “*as in other situations of internal displacement, when women and girls are displaced, they often have more limited livelihood opportunities and access to health care, and are exposed to a higher risk of sexual and gender-based violence, forced labour, exploitation, abuse and trafficking in persons [...] girls might drop out of school and women and girls might be subjected to child or forced marriage.*”³²⁸

In a similar vein, the SR on trafficking in persons observes that in the context of climate change-related displacement, “*women and girls from affected rural communities, in particular – given their more limited education and employment opportunities – may be at risk of trafficking*” and that “*migrant workers leaving the region to seek employment may also be at risk of trafficking for forced labour and sexual exploitation, with children, particularly girls in disaster-affected families, at risk.*”³²⁹

“The Special Rapporteur stresses the need for greater understanding of the gendered risks of trafficking in persons in the context of climate change that, in particular, goes beyond focusing on the potential vulnerabilities of women and girls and recognises that such vulnerabilities arise from failures to remedy systemic gender inequality and discrimination”.

SR on trafficking in persons, ‘Addressing the gender dimensions of trafficking in persons in the context of climate change, displacement and disaster risk reduction’, 2022, UN Doc. A/77/170, para. 23.

The SR on trafficking in persons concludes that it is therefore critical to address “*the gender and child rights dimensions of climate change in the context of heightened risks of trafficking arising from climate-related displacement and disasters.*”³³⁰ She explicitly references intersectionality including girls in assessing vulnerability, writing that “*the socioeconomic inequalities experienced by some women can be compounded as a result of intersecting dynamics such as discrimination, including on the grounds of race or ethnicity or migrant or disability status, worsening conditions for women living in poverty, women with disabilities, older women and girls.*”³³¹

However, in a notable departure from more traditional discussions of vulnerability, the SR on IDPs emphasises that while certain groups, including by implication women and girls, “*are particularly vulnerable to the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change and related displacement, they also have great agency. In many contexts they display remarkable strength, resourcefulness and resilience in the face of disasters and displacement, despite the challenges, barriers and discrimination that they face.*”³³²

While the role of climate change in displacement took on an increasingly central role in discussions of displacement during the reporting period, the impacts of displacement triggered by conflict and other sources remained an important point of analysis. However, girls received relatively less attention in these reports, which frequently included them in either ‘women’ or ‘children.’ For example, in a 2021 report of the SR on IDPs dedicated to ‘Prevention of arbitrary displacement in situations of armed conflict and generalized violence,’³³³ there is a single reference to ‘women and girls,’ noting that they are among multiple groups placed in situations of vulnerability in these contexts. Likewise, in another report issued

³²⁷ Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (SR on IDPs), ‘Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change’, 21 July 2020, UN Doc. A/75/207.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 32.

³²⁹ SR on trafficking in persons, ‘Addressing the gender dimensions of trafficking in persons in the context of climate change, displacement and disaster risk reduction’, 15 July 2022, UN Doc. A/77/170, para. 22.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 7.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, para. 26.

³³² SR on IDPs, ‘Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change’, 21 July 2020, UN Doc. A/75/207, para. 4.

³³³ SR on IDPs, ‘Prevention of arbitrary displacement in situations of armed conflict and generalized violence’, 16 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/169.

the same year, 'Housing, land and property in the context of internal displacement',³³⁴ there is a single reference to 'women and girls' in the context of gender-based discrimination in local dispute resolution mechanisms. A 2019 report released by the same mandate holder on 'protection of internally displaced children' provides greater visibility to the rights of displaced girls, particularly in relation to their vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, but also references their right to participation.³³⁵

Thus, **while girls enjoyed greater visibility in some aspects of reporting on displacement, particularly in relation to climate-related displacement, gaps and missed opportunities persisted.** Even though girls are mentioned and identified as a group with particular vulnerabilities, both regarding climate change and internal displacement, girls' rights are rarely, or not at all, analysed in-depth in such contexts by the SRs, nor are there specific paragraphs in their reports which contain deeper analysis of girls' rights, other than those acknowledging they are disproportionately affected by discrimination and violence.

Special Representatives of the Secretary-General

12 reports by two Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) were examined.³³⁶

Key Findings:

- **These mandate holders only mention girls separately from women when reporting on attacks targeting girls specifically. Otherwise, most often, girls are referenced together with women as the sexual violence committed against them is similar (SRSG SVC); or are encompassed into the use of gender-neutral language with only occasional acknowledgment of the gendered nature of violations (SRSG CAAC). There is an opportunity to enhance recommendations directed at issues most relevant to girls in armed conflict.**
- **The SRSG SVC's reports highlight how parents and guardians of girls in situations of armed conflict use child marriage and confinement as "negative coping mechanisms."**
- **The SRSG CAAV recognised the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on girls.**
- **In 2019 and 2020, the SRSG CAAV made recommendations to the donor community to specifically prioritise girls, however this language was changed to gender-neutral language in later reports.**

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG SVC), established under the United Nations Secretariat in 2009,³³⁷ serves as the chief advocacy mechanism on behalf of victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). One of the Office's chief outputs is the Annual Reports of the Secretary-General on CRSV, which contain profiles of countries where credible reports of CRSV have been documented by UN investigators. Notably, it includes an Annexe with detailed information regarding alleged perpetrators of CRSV in these locations, who may be subject to various sanctions.

For the purposes of this study, each of the Annual Reports of the Secretary-General on CRSV issued between 2018 and 2023 (covering the years 2017 to 2022) have been analysed in depth.³³⁸

Each country profile provides disaggregated data on the number of victims (women, girls, men and boys) and form of sexual violence (e.g., rape, gang rape, abduction for the purpose of sexual slavery, forced

³³⁴ SR on IDPs, 'Housing, land and property in the context of internal displacement', 21 April 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/47/37.

³³⁵ SR on IDPs, 'Protection of internally displaced children', 31 July 2019, UN Doc. A/74/261.

³³⁶ See Annex for a complete list.

³³⁷ Security Council Resolution 1888, 30 September 2009, UN Doc. S/RES/1888.

³³⁸ See Annex for a complete list.

marriage), as well as information on major trends and incidents documented. Over the course of the period under review, several patterns remained consistent. **Most often, girls are referenced together with women, as they are often targeted in similar acts of sexual violence.** In numerous cases, both women and girls have been subjected to CRSV in the same incidents and/or locations, by the same groups of perpetrators. In general, girls are only mentioned separately in cases where an attack has targeted them specifically (such as the 2014 kidnapping of school-age girls in Chibok, Nigeria, by Boko Haram elements³³⁹) or when very young girls are targeted in particularly brutal attacks aimed at terrorising, destroying and/or permanently displacing communities.³⁴⁰

The Annual Reports also highlight the “*negative coping mechanisms*” used by parents and guardians of girls in situations of conflict, particularly amongst displaced groups. For instance, the 2018 report references the practice of child marriage and the confinement of adolescent girls at home in Myanmar as examples of such negative coping mechanisms.³⁴¹ Similarly, the 2020 report highlights the practice of marrying off girl children as young as 10 in settings for internally displaced persons in Iraq, Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic.³⁴² The reports recognise “*intersectional inequalities*” as well, and emphasise the need to be inclusive and sensitive to their differing needs and wishes.³⁴³

Girls are somewhat less visible in the recommendations of the Annual Reports, particularly with regard to their participation and input into peacebuilding and other processes that may directly affect them. In the 2020 report, for example, girls are directly referenced, when the Secretary-General “*encourage[s] Member States, donors, regional and intergovernmental organizations to guarantee the full and meaningful participation of women, girls and survivors of sexual violence, including women-led organizations, in decision-making processes...to ensure that they are not left behind, including in terms of socioeconomic support measures.*”³⁴⁴ However, this terminology is not used consistently over the course of the reporting period. The 2023 report, for instance, is more ambiguous, calling for the “*full and meaningful participation of women and survivors*” in the peacebuilding process, and emphasises the political participation of women, in line with the ‘Women, Peace and Security’ Agenda.³⁴⁵ There are virtually no recommendations in any of the six reports dedicated solely to girls — they appear instead in recommendations targeting ‘women and girls’ as a group.

Thus, while girls enjoyed a degree of visibility in these reports—particularly with regard to the use of disaggregated data — opportunities exist to advocate for the inclusion of recommendations more directly targeted at the rights of girls in the context of CRSV.

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC) was established in 1996,³⁴⁶ and has a mandate to report on and conduct advocacy in relation to the six grave violations affecting children in armed conflict.³⁴⁷ The Office produces an Annual Report which includes an Annex listing alleged perpetrators, similar to that produced by the SRSG SVC. All of the Annual Reports of the SRSG CAAC issued between 2018 and 2023 (covering the years

³³⁹ SRSG SVC, ‘Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence’, 16 April 2018, UN Doc. S/2018/250, para. 94.

³⁴⁰ Citing an incident in which girls as young as four were targeted in a major attack in Unity State, South Sudan: SRSG SVC, ‘Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence’, 29 March 2019, UN Doc. S/2019/280, paras. 79-80.

³⁴¹ SRSG SVC, ‘Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence’, 16 April 2018, UN Doc. S/2018/250, para. 70.

³⁴² SRSG SVC, ‘Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence’, 3 June 2020, UN Doc. S/2020/487, para. 10.

³⁴³ See, e.g., *ibid.*, para. 71(b).

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 71(e).

³⁴⁵ SRSG CAAC, ‘Report of the SRSG CAAC’, 6 July 2023, UN Doc. S/2023/413, para. 92(c).

³⁴⁶ U.N. General Assembly Resolution 51/77, 12 December 1996, U.N. Doc. A/RES/51/77.

³⁴⁷ The six grave violations are: (1) recruitment and use of children, (2) killing and maiming of children, (3) sexual violence against children, (4) attacks on schools and hospitals, (5) abduction of children, and (6) denial of humanitarian access. See, e.g., <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/about/the-mandate/>

2017 to 2022) have been reviewed for the purposes of this study. As in the case of the Annual Reports of the SRSG SVC, the report focuses on locations where the UN is able to obtain credible evidence of the six grave violations. Each country is profiled, with data generally disaggregated by sex and type of violation, and key trends and incidents described.

Overall, the Annual Reports utilise gender-neutral language, referencing ‘children’, including in recommendations. **Some of the reports directly acknowledge the gendered nature of the violations: for instance, the 2021 report notes that “grave violations affect boys and girls differently,” with boys constituting 85 per cent of children used and recruited by armed groups, while girls are the vast majority of reported victims of sexual violence (98 per cent).**³⁴⁸ Similarly, the 2023 report observes that “gender norms shaped the exposure of children to grave violations,” with girls continuing to be disproportionately affected by CRSV, and adds that “gender, age and disability were among the many factors shaping the vulnerability of children to grave violations.”³⁴⁹

The 2022 report, moreover, underscores the particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls in situations affected by conflict, stating that “in some contexts, girls may never be able to go back to school, because they have to earn an income or were forcibly married to support their families,” and calls for added emphasis on the situation of girls in this respect: “We should continue monitoring and adapting programmatic and advocacy responses towards child protection, with a particular focus on girls.”³⁵⁰

At the same time, girls were not consistently visible in the formal recommendations of the SRSG CAAC Annual Reports. Notably, recommendations in two reports in the first half of the period under review (both pertaining to donor funding) contain language specifically targeting girls. The 2019 report calls for donors to address “funding gaps for the reintegration of children, thereby allowing child protection actors to react swiftly to the release of children and put in place long-term viable alternatives to military life, notably by placing a specific focus on girls, in particular on psychosocial support and on education programmes and vocational training for girls.”³⁵¹ In addition, a recommendation targeting the donor community in the 2020 report urges that “the specific needs of girls and of children with disabilities be prioritized” in programming for victims.³⁵²

However, beginning in 2021, recommendations made to the donor community contain more gender-neutral language. Between 2021 and 2023, all three Annual Reports contain language “call[ing] upon the donor community to provide long-term financial support for sustainable, timely, gender- and age-sensitive, survivor-centred and inclusive programmes.” The 2021 and 2022 reports specifically reference survivors of sexual violence in this context,³⁵³ the majority of whom are girls, while the 2023 report urges donors to “address the specific needs of children with disabilities.”³⁵⁴ This shift appears to represent a move towards more inclusive and intersectional language, including with regard to gender; however, the removal of a direct reference to girls in the recommendations risks making the situation of girls less visible in the longer term.

³⁴⁸ SRSG CAAC, ‘Report of the SRSG CAAC’, 6 May 2021, U.N. Doc. S/2021/437, para. 6.

³⁴⁹ SRSG CAAC, ‘Report of the SRSG CAAC’, 5 June 2023, U.N. Doc. S/2023/363, para. 11.

³⁵⁰ SRSG CAAC, ‘Report of the SRSG CAAC’, 23 June 2022, U.N. Doc. S/2022/493, para. 11.

³⁵¹ SRSG CAAC, ‘Report of the SRSG CAAC’, 20 June 2019, U.N. Doc. S/2019/509, para. 243.

³⁵² SRSG CAAC, ‘Report of the SRSG CAAC’, 9 June 2020, U.N. Doc. S/2020/525, para. 237.

³⁵³ SRSG CAAC, ‘Report of the SRSG CAAC’, 6 May 2021, U.N. Doc. S/2021/437, para. 286; SRSG CAAC, ‘Report of the SRSG CAAC’, 23 June 2022, U.N. Doc. S/2022/493, para. 299.

³⁵⁴ SRSG CAAC, ‘Report of the SRSG CAAC’, 5 June 2023, U.N. Doc. S/2023/363, para. 337.

Treaty Bodies' General Comments & General Recommendations

The 18 General Comments (GCs) / General Recommendations (GRs) that were published by the Treaty Bodies between 2018-2023 were analysed for this research.

Key Findings:

- The most references to girls in GCs/GRs were made by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee).
- Apart from the CEDAW Committee's GRs, UN Treaty Bodies make minimal explicit references to girls in their GCs.
- Even when girls are recognised and referenced, they are rarely considered as a stand-alone group and are usually included in the 'women and girls' formulation.
- References to women and girls remain overwhelmingly related to non-discrimination, illustrating the challenge of simply including recognition of intersectional discrimination without meaningful discussion on how women and girls are discriminated against in relation to specific rights, nor on how to ensure realisation of those rights.
- Despite the consistent recognition of intersectionality and intersectional discrimination, which implicitly recognises the rights of girls, the analysis in the text often goes no further and remains too superficial to be considered a meaningful recognition of girls' rights.
- As a result of the child's rights-based approach, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) uses a gender-neutral lens in its GCs, referring simply to 'children' and their rights. While this lens is welcomed for its inclusivity, it should be complemented by analysis on girl-specific needs and situations, in all their diversity, and how to ensure their protection.
- The CRC Committee explored new topics, namely climate change, the digital environment, and the child justice system. These GCs outline how children's rights interact with a variety of other human rights, including civil and political rights, which is important to continue to implicitly expand upon lesser developed and explored girls' rights jurisprudence.
- The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee) consistently recognises the rights of women and girls with disabilities and discusses a variety of civil and economic rights that are less commonly discussed.
- The Committee Against Torture (CAT Committee), Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD Committee), the Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED Committee) and the Human Rights Committee, have GCs which never reference girls.
- The Human Rights Committee's GC No. 36 on the right to life discusses women and girls with some consistency, outlining in detail their SRHRs in relation to abortion, which is uncommon, especially for a body mandated with monitoring civil and political rights.
- While the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR Committee) consistently discusses the economic, social, and cultural rights of women, it fails to do the same for girls, including them sporadically without supportive narrative and analysis on specific violations of their rights, nor how to ensure the enjoyment and realisation of these rights.

General Comments and General Recommendations about girls' rights

CEDAW Committee General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change (2018)³⁵⁵

Out of all the GRs the CEDAW Committee produced during this period, this GR is most representative of the approach the CEDAW Committee has usually employed over time. In fact, footnote 6 of the GR reads *“for the purposes of the present general recommendation, all references to “women” should be read to include women and girls, unless otherwise noted,”* illustrating an evolution in the approach taken by the Committee during the period studied.³⁵⁶ Despite this, girls, and their possible intersecting identities, are implicitly recognised.

The GR discusses the ways in which situations of crisis, including climate change, have the ability to exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities and compound the intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls.

It adopts a broad definition of intersectionality, recognising how *“women living in poverty, indigenous women, women belonging to ethnic, racial, religious and sexual minority groups, women with disabilities, refugee and asylum-seeking women, internally displaced, stateless and migrant women, rural women, unmarried women, adolescents and older women,”* are often disproportionately affected compared with men or other women.³⁵⁷

It is positive to see the change since this GR, and the progressive inclusion of girls in CEDAW soft law because despite the acknowledgement that girls are implicitly included in the term ‘women’, their specific needs and challenges are nonetheless overlooked, even in detailed descriptions of intersectional identities, as with the above.

“The categorisation of women and girls as passive “vulnerable groups” in need of protection from the impacts of disasters is a negative gender stereotype that fails to recognise the important contributions of women in the areas of disaster risk reduction, post-disaster management and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.” (CEDAW/C/GC/37, para 7)

One of the main ways in which girls cannot be effectively accounted for is due to the omission of age as a key factor in influencing their experiences and the form of discrimination they face, which is one of the main trends and findings that has been identified throughout the course of this research. In terms of contributing to the girls’ rights jurisprudence, the GR tackles certain issues that women and girls face because of climate change, that are often forgotten in relation to girls. For example, existing inequalities such as in *“access to resources such as food, water, agricultural input, land, credit, energy, technology, education, health services, adequate housing, social protection and employment”* and limited control over their own bodies and autonomy, are exacerbated.³⁵⁸ This leaves women and girls more *“exposed to disaster-induced risks and losses relating to their livelihoods,”* resulting in them being less able to adapt to changes in climate conditions, making the elimination of these inequalities crucial to improving women and girls’ robustness in times of crisis.³⁵⁹ Therefore, the CEDAW Committee establishes that States should ensure that their *“policies, legislation, plans, programmes, budgets and other activities relating to disaster risk reduction and climate change are gender responsive and grounded in human rights-based principles”* of equality and non-discrimination, and prioritise the most marginalised.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, 13 March 2018, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/37.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, fn 6.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 2.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 3.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 26.

Additionally, women and girls also face heightened risks of GBV during and after disasters, because “in the absence of social protection schemes and in situations in which there is food insecurity combined with impunity for gender-based violence, women and girls are often exposed to sexual violence and exploitation as they attempt to gain access to food and other basic needs for family members and themselves.”³⁶¹ The human rights issues of social protection and food insecurity are some of the most neglected areas of girls’ rights, as identified in this research.

Positively, however, the GR discusses women and girls’ leadership, another often overlooked issue: “participation of diverse groups of women and girls, and the development of their leadership capacity,” emphasising that this is “essential to ensuring that the prevention of and response to disasters and the adverse effects of climate change are effective and incorporate perspectives from all sectors of society.”³⁶² Therefore, the participation of young women and girls “in the creation, development, implementation and monitoring of policies and plans relating to climate change and disaster risk reduction is essential.”³⁶³

CEDAW Committee General Recommendation No. 38 on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration (2020)³⁶⁴

Compared to other UN soft law on trafficking, this GR somewhat recognises that the needs of women and girls differ by acknowledging “that the causes, consequences and experiences of trafficking differ for young girls, for adolescent girls and for adult women” because of intersecting characteristics of sex and age.³⁶⁵

“Recognising the gender-specific nature of the various forms of trafficking in women and girls and their consequences, including with regard to harms suffered, the Committee acknowledges that trafficking and exploitation of prostitution in women and girls is unequivocally a phenomenon rooted in structural, sex-based discrimination, constituting gender-based violence, and is often exacerbated in the contexts of displacement [and] migration.” (CEDAW/C/GC/38, para. 10)

The GR also emphasises the importance of age-appropriate and child-centred anti-trafficking measures to ensure that children’s and especially girls’ rights are less at risk of being violated.³⁶⁶ The GR spotlights girls in varying circumstances, such as those who have been displaced, are unaccompanied, or have been separated from their families or support systems, and are even more at risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation purposes.

While trafficking has been identified through the course of this research as one of the areas most discussed in girls’ rights, other mechanisms, such as UPR and Treaty Body Concluding Observations recommendations rarely discuss internally displaced girls (IDP girls) this GR does pay some attention to their rights.

In-line with the most common trend identified throughout UN mechanisms, overall, this GR mostly includes girls as an annexe to women in the form of the ‘women and girls’ formulation, and rarely singles out girls, and mostly discusses them in the context of their specific vulnerability and increased risk of facing violence and discrimination.

However, the recommendations made by the GR on the civil and political rights of trafficked women and girls do consistently include the need to ensure that policies and legal proceedings are put in place which

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, para. 5.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, para. 32.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 38 on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, 20 November 2020, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/38, para 7.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, para 7.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, para 7.

are age-sensitive and gender-responsive.³⁶⁷ **It also singles out girls' right to be heard and their right to information, along with women and girls' right to legal representation, fair trial and remedy, all rights which are less commonly explored in relation to girls' rights.** In its recommendations on socio-economic rights, the Committee contributes to trends identified throughout the course of this research. **For example, the lack of age-specific language used to discuss girls excludes them from consideration in recommendations on labour rights,** which only mention the rights of women to employment and economic empowerment.³⁶⁸ Girls are also omitted in recommendations on other key socio-economic rights where only women's rights to resources, land ownership, credit and participation are discussed.³⁶⁹

CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 39 on the rights of Indigenous women and girls (2022)³⁷⁰

This GR is a consequential addition to girls' rights jurisprudence: not only does it discuss human rights which are rarely explored as girls' rights, but it moves away from using CEDAW's approach of using 'women' as a catch-all category to include girls implicitly seen in GRs produced at the beginning of the period studied.

The GR takes an article-by-article approach to analysing CEDAW in relation to the specific dimensions of the rights of Indigenous women and girls. It discusses the right to non-discrimination and violence, the right to effective participation in political and public life, the right to education, the right to work, the right to health, right to culture (interpreted through articles 3, 5, 13 and 14), the rights to land, territories and natural resources (interpreted through articles 13 and 14), the rights to food, water and seeds and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (the last two are interpreted through articles 12 and 14). The goal of the GR is to extend CEDAW rights to Indigenous women and girls explicitly, and it is therefore a significant step in expanding the application of the treaty in a more intersectional manner. It takes an *"Indigenous women and girls perspective,"* recognising the *"distinction between their experiences, realities and needs in the area of human rights protection."*

"An Indigenous women and girls perspective entails understanding the distinction between their experiences, realities and needs in the area of human rights protection and those of Indigenous men, based on their sex and gender differences. It also involves considering the status of Indigenous girls as developing women, which requires interventions to be appropriate to their age, development and condition. An intercultural perspective involves considering the diversity of Indigenous Peoples, including their cultures, languages, beliefs and values, and the social appreciation and value of this diversity. Lastly, a multidisciplinary perspective requires an appreciation of the multifaceted identity of Indigenous women and girls and of how law, health, education, culture, spirituality, anthropology, economy, science and work, among other aspects, have shaped and continue to shape the social experience of Indigenous women and girls and to promote discrimination against them. These perspectives and approaches are key to preventing and eradicating discrimination against Indigenous women and girls and to achieving the goal of social justice when their human rights are violated."
(CEDAW/C/GC/39, para. 5)

³⁷¹ It views girls as *"developing women"*, calling for States to adapt their policies *"to the age, development, evolving capacities, and condition of Indigenous girls."* ³⁷² The GR explicitly outlines that *"States parties have an obligation to protect Indigenous girls from all forms of discrimination,"* and that the creation of *"a safe environment for the leadership and effective participation of Indigenous girls is paramount to the full enjoyment of their rights to territories, culture and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment."*³⁷³ While these are significant and new recognitions, the CEDAW Committee otherwise only discusses girls through the 'women and girls' formulation, without differentiating between their varying experiences.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, para 102.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, para 54.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, para 51.

³⁷⁰ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 39 on the rights of Indigenous women and girls, 31 October 2022, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/39.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, para 5.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, para. 2.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, para. 14.

The GR was written in with the participation of Indigenous women and girls who are importantly recognised as “driving actors” who play a “key role as leaders, knowledge-bearers and transmitters of culture among their peoples, communities and families, as well as society as a whole,”³⁷⁴ an acknowledgment which is not often afforded to girls.

Similarly, and importantly, the GR also raises the alarm on the risks and threats that Indigenous women and girl human rights defenders face when standing up for their rights, especially in relation to their activism on climate change. Therefore, the CEDAW Committee advocates for States to “adopt immediate gender-responsive measures to publicly recognize, support and protect the life, liberty, security and self-determination of Indigenous women and girl human rights defenders, and to ensure safe conditions and an enabling environment for their advocacy work, free from discrimination, racism, killings, harassment and violence.”³⁷⁵ While this progressive language has been found to be more common in non-negotiated texts compared to negotiated texts such as resolutions, references like these are nonetheless significant for the advancement of girls’ rights jurisprudence. Girls, in all their diversity, and all their capacities and abilities should be acknowledged and protected.

Significantly, the GR also recognises the historical and structural discrimination which sets apart the experiences and barriers that Indigenous women and girls uniquely face. This is crucial to ensure the full realisation and protection of the rights of girls in all their diversity.

The GR acknowledges the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in order to meaningfully consider how Indigenous women and girls are, and have been, impacted by discrimination as a result of discriminatory norms, social practices and stereotypes, both throughout time, and at the hands of structures.³⁷⁶ Additionally, Indigenous women and girls also suffer from intersectional discrimination, based on factors such as “sex; gender; Indigenous origin, status or identity; race; ethnicity; disability; age; language; socioeconomic status; and HIV/AIDS status,” which have a compounding effect.³⁷⁷ The legacy of colonialism is also recognised as continuing to impact Indigenous women and girls, whose rights are directly and indirectly violated by “laws and policies that impede the access of Indigenous women and girls to land use and ownership, the exercise of their rights over their territories, natural and economic resources, and their access to credit, financial services and income-generating opportunities.”³⁷⁸ This legacy can also be found in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and forms of racism which stem from it. Acknowledging the context in which Indigenous women and girls exist, and how this differently impacts them, is crucial for States to respond to their needs and fulfil their obligations.

The CEDAW Committee discusses at length Indigenous women’s and girls’ civil and political rights in the justice system, which have been found to be some of the most neglected areas of girls’ rights.

It emphasises its alarm regarding the disproportionate levels of GBV committed against Indigenous women and girls, and violations of their rights in relation to the justice system.³⁷⁹ In the face of this, it establishes that all justice systems must ensure protection to various key rights such as: the right to non-discrimination, the right to a fair trial, and to effective and timely remedies to Indigenous women and girls who are survivors of discrimination and SGBV.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 2.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, para 45.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 4.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 2.

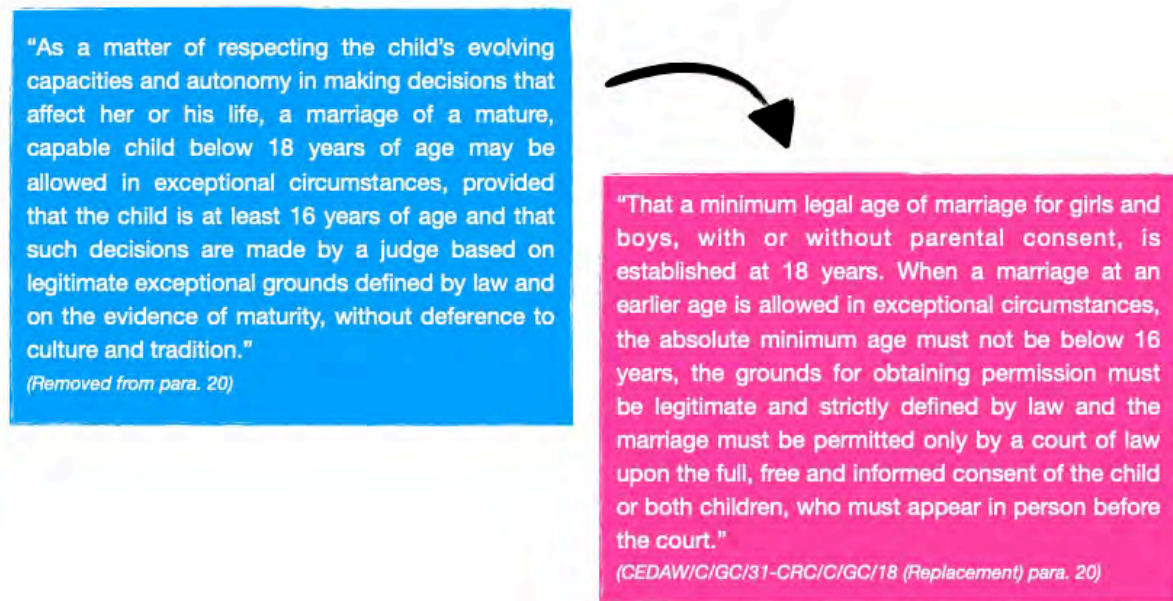
³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 20.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 32.

CEDAW Committee General Recommendation No. 31 / CRC Committee General Comment No. 18 on harmful practices³⁸⁰

Originally written in 2014, the joint GC/GR on harmful practices was revised in 2019 to change language related to child marriage and to remove a sentence that permitted marriage at 16 years old in exceptional circumstances, marking a significant win for girls' rights. This sentence removed all references to children's evolving capacities and maturity which functioned as qualifiers to allow early marriage, and replaced it with an explicit prohibition of marriage below the age of 16.

The change is as follows:



General Comments that include language on girls' rights

The Human Rights Committee's GC No. 36 on Article 6 (the right to life) addresses how women's and girls' rights are recognised and covered within Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by: identifying the need of certain groups to special protection; by discussing the violations of their right to life because of femicides; and by reiterating the link between Article 6 and their SRHRs.³⁸¹

It is important that the Human Rights Committee continue to include, and step-up the inclusion of girls in their analysis of ICCPR rights, to break the silos within which they are relegated and give due consideration to the full range of girls' civil and political rights.

The CESCR Committee's GCs Nos. 25 and 26 mention girls irregularly, and never in isolation.³⁸² Both GCs always refer to girls as part of the 'women and girls' formulation, and often revert to only discussing the content of women's economic, social and cultural rights (ESC rights). By recognising intersectional

³⁸⁰ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 31 on harmful practices, 2019, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/31/Rev.1; CRC Committee, General Comment No. 18 on harmful practices, 2019, UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/18/Rev.1.

³⁸¹ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36 on Article 6 (the right to life), 2018, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, para 23, 61, 8.

³⁸² CESCR Committee, General Comment No. 25 on science and economic, social and cultural rights (article 15 (1) (b), (2), (3) and (4) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2020, UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/25; CESCR Committee, General Comment No. 26 on land and economic, social and cultural rights, 2022, UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/26.

discrimination and advocating for special attention being accorded to groups that have experienced systemic discrimination, girls' rights are implicitly recognised and protected.³⁸³ However, as mentioned previously, socio-economic rights discourse often excludes exploration and analysis of protections accorded to girls and prioritises women. The CESCR Committee must also do more to incorporate analysis of how girls' ESC rights can be respected, protected and fulfilled.

The CRPD Committee's GCs Nos. 6 and 7 mention girls with more regularity and go beyond simply acknowledging intersectionality, advocating specifically for the needs of girls with disabilities in various contexts, such as bodily integrity and the right to participation.³⁸⁴ However, in GC No. 8 on the right to work, the CRPD Committee does not discuss girls, rather it focuses on this right in relation to women and young people, which is a common trend identified throughout this research.³⁸⁵ When the GC refers to children, this is done only in the context of exploitation and child labour, issues which should be accompanied by an examination of the right to work.³⁸⁶ In instances like these, age-specific language is crucial to differentiate between different stages of a person's life to ensure that their rights are being respected and protected. Despite this, the CRPD Committee consistently recognises 'age' in its analysis of intersectionality.

The CRC Committee's gender-neutral approach

The CRC Committee has adopted a largely gender-neutral approach to the interpretation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), continuing the approach adopted in the drafting of the Convention itself. Consequentially, the CRC Committee's GCs do not explicitly reference girls specifically, instead referring only to children.

Importantly, GC No. 26 recognises that children's right to a clean and healthy environment is key to ensuring the realisation of all other rights, and that some children experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, calling for the implementation of child-sensitive and gender-responsive climate change measures, but without mention of girls.³⁸⁷

Uniquely, GC Nos. 24 and 25 on children's rights in the child justice system and on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, draw specific attention to girls and children who are discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity: this is a development that has rarely been identified elsewhere throughout the course of this research.³⁸⁸

The gender-neutral approach should not be seen as erasing or excluding girls from human rights discourses; rather, it should be seen as a complementary approach to girls' rights discourses. However, there is room to take this further and to adopt a more nuanced gender-responsive and age-sensitive analysis when there is a need to examine the disproportionate way in which girls and girls' rights are impacted.

³⁸³ CESCR Committee, General Comment No. 25 on science and economic, social and cultural rights (article 15 (1) (b), (2), (3) and (4) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2020, UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/25, paras 25, 28; CESCR Committee, General Comment No. 26 on land and economic, social and cultural rights, 2022, UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/26, para 12.

³⁸⁴ CRPD Committee, General Comment No. 6 on Article 5: Equality and non-discrimination, 2018, UN Doc. CRPD/C/GC/6, para 30.; CRPD Committee, General Comment No. 7 on Article 4.3 and 33.3: Participation with persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention, 2018, UN Doc. CRPD/C/GC/7, para paras 12, 61, 72; CRPD Committee, General Comment No. 8 on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment, 2022, UN Doc. CRPD/C/GC/8.

³⁸⁵ CRPD Committee, General Comment No. 8 on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment, 2022, UN Doc. CRPD/C/GC/8, paras 23, 57, 66.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, para 57, 87(d),(h).

³⁸⁷ CRC Committee, General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change, 2023, UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/26, paras 8, 14, 63.

³⁸⁸ CRC Committee, General Comment No. 24 on children's rights in the child justice system, 2019, UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/24, para 40.; CRC Committee, General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, 2021, UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/25, para 11.

General Comments and Recommendations that do not discuss girls' rights

There are four GCs issued between 2018 and 2023 — one from each of the Human Rights Committee, Committee Against Torture, Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances — that make no explicit reference to girls.³⁸⁹

There are two elements that can be noted in these GCs' language that can be interpreted to include girls, and groups within which girls can be implicitly included. These GCs illustrate the ways in which girls are rendered invisible in human rights discourses, but how some language leaves scope for their implicit inclusion. For example, various GCs recognise 'intersectionality' and discuss the ways that some groups may be disproportionately impacted by certain issues or by discrimination.³⁹⁰ Other GCs do not recognise intersectionality, but list groups/identities within which girls can be found.³⁹¹

The lack of references to girls' rights by these Treaty Bodies reinforces the silos to which women and children have been relegated. The CEDAW Committee and the CRC Committee should not be the only Treaty Bodies that discuss girls' rights, and all rights should be guaranteed to girls, not just the right to education, non-discrimination and non-violence. By omitting references to girls, the Treaty Bodies issuing these GCs/GRs reinforce the divide between the kinds of protections women are automatically accorded, and those accorded to girls.

³⁸⁹ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 37 on Article 21 (Right of peaceful assembly), 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37; CAT Committee, General Comment No. 4 on the implementation of article 3 of the Convention in the context of article 22, 2017, UN Doc. CAT/C/GC/4; CERD Committee, General Recommendation No. 36 Preventing and Combating Racial Profiling by Law Enforcement Officials, 2020, UN Doc. CERD/C/GC/36; and CED Committee, General Comment No. 1 on Enforced Disappearances in the context of migration, 2023, UN Doc. CED/C/GC/1.

³⁹⁰ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 37 on Article 21 (Right of peaceful assembly), 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37, paras 25, 80; CERD Committee, General Recommendation No. 36 Preventing and Combating Racial Profiling by Law Enforcement Officials, 2020, UN Doc. CERD/C/GC/36, paras 18, 48; CED Committee, General Comment No. 1 on Enforced Disappearances in the context of migration, 2023, UN Doc. CED/C/GC/1, paras 8(c), 16, 29, 39.

³⁹¹ CAT Committee, General Comment No. 4 on the implementation of article 3 of the Convention in the context of article 22, 2017, UN Doc. CAT/C/GC/4, paras 29(k)(iii), 45(e).

Treaty Bodies' Concluding Observations

Out of the 19,695 total recommendations made by the UN Treaty Bodies between 2018 and 2023 in their Concluding Observations on the examination of the periodic State reports, 1,691 mentioned 'girls'. This is only 8.6 per cent of all recommendations made during this period.

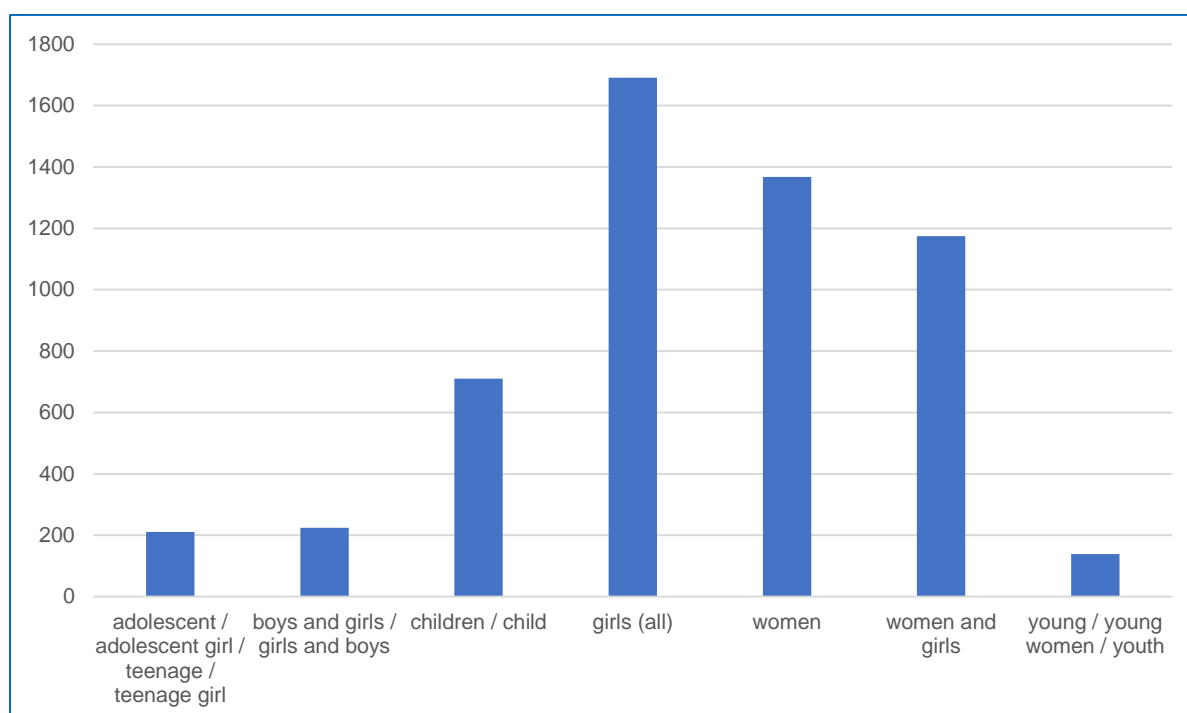
Key Findings:

- Girls are rarely singled out as a stand-alone group and are mostly mentioned in the context of 'women and girls.'
- The silos that characterise girls' rights are more obvious than ever here, with CEDAW and the CRC making most of the recommendations.
- The intersectional identities of some girls, for example Indigenous girls, or internally displaced girls are rarely mentioned.
- The right to education and the right to non-discrimination and non-violence are the main topic of the recommendations. Another topic commonly present is harmful practices.
- Civil and political rights make up a very small proportion of the overall recommendations, owing also to the very few references by the Human Rights Committee to girls.
- More references to socio-economic rights are present, but with large discrepancies depending on the right: social security and protection, food, water and sanitation, and housing all appeared minimally.

Out of these 1,691 Treaty Body recommendations regarding 'girls':

- 81 per cent (1,368) reference 'girls' in the context of 'women' or as part of the phrase 'women and girls'
- 13 per cent (1,175) reference 'girls' as part of 'boys and girls'
- 42 per cent (710) use 'children' instead of 'girls'
- 12 per cent (211) use age-specific language to focus on 'youth', 'adolescent'/'teenage' 'girls.'

Figure 6: Breakdown of how girls are mentioned in Treaty Body Recommendations related to girls



Affected groups

The silos that girls have been relegated to are more obvious than ever in these recommendations, as out of the 1,691 recommendations, 1,270 are made by the CEDAW Committee and the CRC Committee, making up 75 per cent of all recommendations. Of the remaining recommendations (421 made by the other Treaty Bodies), 215 were made by the CRPD Committee, illustrating the minimal focus that bodies such as the Human Rights Committee and CESCR have on girls' rights issues.

Table 1: Number of recommendations mentioning girls made by each Treaty Body in their Concluding Observations

| GIRLS' RIGHTS RECOMMENDATIONS IN TREATY BODY CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS | |
|--|--|
| Treaty Body Committee | Number Recommendations explicitly mentioning 'girls' |
| Total recommendations mentioning girls | 1,691 |
| CAT Committee | 31 |
| CED Committee | 5 |
| CEDAW Committee | 927 |
| CERD Committee | 18 |
| CESCR Committee | 53 |
| CMW Committee | 7 |
| CRC Committee | 343 |
| CRPD Committee | 215 |
| Human Rights Committee (CCPR) | 92 |

Age-specific language is used minimally. For example, out of the 1,691 recommendations regarding girls, 126 reference 'adolescent girls', 'teenage girl' or 'young women', which represents just 7.5 per cent of the total recommendations regarding girls. This presents an important opportunity to enhance focus on age-specific analysis of girls' rights.

The topics of the recommendations related to girls are mostly on education and on health, particularly on adolescent health, and many of them are made by the CRC Committee. The CEDAW Committee has also made recommendations, specifically on the health of adolescent girls. In line with the overall trend, most of these recommendations were made by the CEDAW Committee and the CRC Committee (111 of the 126). Few recommendations focused on other areas of girls' rights with only a handful on trafficking, GBV, harmful practices, and economic exploitation combined. The recommendations made on health focused primarily on SRHR, including: addressing early pregnancy, reproductive health services and information including family planning, abortion and sex-selective abortion, coerced sterilisations, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS including access to medication for other sexually transmitted diseases, comprehensive sexuality education, menstruation and menstrual hygiene, and contraception.

Close to nine per cent of the recommendations on adolescents and young women included specific recommendations on lesbian, bisexual, transgender women and intersex persons, which is part of the wider tendency of these specific recommendations to acknowledge

intersectionality on many grounds and in relation to several key topics and rights including health, data collection, non-discrimination, equality and non-violence.

Education features heavily in these recommendations, being one of two topics (with SRHR) that tends to have the most age-specific language. These recommendations focus on: enrolment, attention and retention of girls and young women, promoting girls' and women's completion of secondary school and access to tertiary education, establishing protective and investigative mechanisms to tackle GBV in school environments, encouraging the participation of girls and women in non-traditional fields of study, tackling discriminatory gender stereotypes in education, and comprehensive sexuality education.

There were some recommendations that included references to rural girls, Indigenous girls and girls with disabilities and acknowledged intersectionality in the right to education. However, these were not very common nor systematically included. Most references to intersectionality relate to pregnant girls or young mothers and ensuring they remain in, and return to, school.

Some examples of recommendations include:

Adolescent health:³⁹² The Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Ensure access for adolescent girls to age-appropriate family planning services, affordable contraceptives and safe abortion and post-abortion care services, particularly in Northern Ireland and the overseas territories, with a view to ensuring that no adolescent girl has to travel to other jurisdictions of the State party to access reproductive health care; (b) Integrate comprehensive, age-appropriate and evidence-based education on sexual and reproductive health into mandatory school curricula at all levels of education and into teacher training and ensure that it includes education on sexual diversity, sexual and reproductive health rights, responsible sexual behaviour and violence prevention, without the possibility for faith-based schools or parents to opt out of such education.

Health:³⁹³ The Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Ensure that women have adequate access to health care, in particular sexual and reproductive health services such as safe abortion and post-abortion services, including in rural areas; (b) **Ensure adequate access to information for adolescent girls and young women about sexual and reproductive health and rights, including on the prevention of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections;** (c) **Immediately stop the practice of forced sterilization of women living with HIV/AIDS** and amend the Sterilization Act (Act No. 44 of 1998) in order to require the free, prior and informed consent of the woman concerned to any intervention; (d) **Ensure that women with disabilities, women with albinism, women exploited in prostitution and migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women have affordable access to sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion and post-abortion services, free from gender-based violence, discrimination or harassment.**

Education:³⁹⁴ In line with its general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education, the Committee draws attention to target 4.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals and recommends that the State party **ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and high-quality primary and secondary education.** It also recommends that the State party: (a) Continue to improve the **accessibility and quality of education for all children, in particular disadvantaged groups of girls, and address the disproportionately high rates of illiteracy and dropout among migrant girls, girls with disabilities and girls living in rural and remote areas and in poverty;** (b) Ensure that mandatory, age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health education, including education in responsible sexual behaviour, is incorporated as a separate subject into curricula; (c) **Ensure that pregnant girls and young women and mothers are reintegrated into and supported in continuing their education;** (d) **Continue to review curricula and textbooks at all levels of education in order to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles of women,** and enhance training for teachers in women's rights and gender equality, with a view to changing existing stereotypes regarding the roles of women and men in the family and in society; (e) **Step up efforts to provide girls with career counselling in non-traditional career paths and non-stereotypical fields of study that correspond to market demands;** (f) **Continue to promote sports and physical activities as well as vocational training for women and girls.**

Adolescent health:³⁹⁵ With reference to its general comments No. 20 (2016), on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence, and No. 4 (2003), on adolescent health and development in the context of the

³⁹² CRC Committee, Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 22 June 2023, UN Doc. CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7, para. 44.

³⁹³ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of South Africa, 23 November 2021, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/ZAF/CO/5, para. 54.

³⁹⁴ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia, 14 March 2018, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/3-4, para. 44.

³⁹⁵ CRC Committee, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Argentina, 1 October 2018, UN Doc. CRC/C/ARG/CO/5-6, para. 32.

Convention, and noting with concern the barriers that adolescents continue to face in their access to sexual and reproductive health-care services and education, the high incidence of teenage pregnancy and the elevated risks of maternal mortality among adolescent mothers, and the insufficient access to modern methods of contraception and family planning, the Committee recommends that the State party: (a) **Ensure that sexual and reproductive health education is part of the mandatory school curriculum, and that it is developed with the involvement of adolescent girls and boys, with special attention paid to preventing early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections;** (b) **Ensure access to safe abortion and post-abortion care services for adolescent girls, ensuring that their views are always heard and given due consideration as part of the decision-making process;** (c) **Ensure that information about family planning methods and modern contraceptives are available for adolescents in accessible and confidential formats and in indigenous languages.**

Similarly to the above, recommendations acknowledging intersectionality make up almost nine per cent of all girls' rights recommendations, or 143 out of 1,691 recommendations mentioning girls. Some groups of women and girls are almost completely absent, for example only 13 recommendations discuss the rights of Indigenous women and girls, making up only 0.8 per cent of the recommendations. The topics covered in this group of recommendations focus mostly on GBV and intersecting and compounding forms of discrimination including discriminatory stereotypes and *de jure* discrimination which disproportionately impact Indigenous women and girls.

More focus can be found in relation to women and girls with disabilities, who feature in 281 of the recommendations mentioning girls, or 17 per cent. Out of those 281, 178 (63 per cent of the recommendations mentioning girls) were made by the Committee on the CRPD.

Two of the primary areas of focus in the Treaty Body recommendations are violence and education, with 120 recommendations each on the topic. Another significant focus is on health in relation to the rights of women and girls with disabilities, especially in relation to coerced and forced medical procedures and ensuring free, prior and informed consent.

The treatment of the rights of women and girls with disabilities exemplifies the silos already identified in this research, because the only Treaty Bodies that made recommendations on them were CEDAW, the CRC and the CRPD, illustrating the lack of systematic inclusion of girls across all mandates and mechanisms.³⁹⁶

The recommendations made on women and girls with disabilities by the CRPD Committee are much more wide-ranging and refer to areas which are often neglected, such as access to justice, situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, and the right to an adequate standard of living and social protection.

Certain categories of women and girls, such as rural women and girls, displaced women and girls, and refugee women and girls, feature in a tiny minority of recommendations. For example, combined references to 'displaced women and girls' and 'refugee women and girls' were identified 82 times, or in 4.5 per cent of the recommendations related to girls. Recommendations on displaced women and girls seem to focus more on civil and political rights such as access to justice, as well as participation in peace mediation as part of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Interestingly, however, the recommendations made by the CEDAW Committee refer to girls much less than other recommendations analysed. For example, recommendations on access to justice refer only to displaced women's rights and list intersectional identities, omitting the inclusion of girls. In these recommendations, girls are more noticeably an annexe to women and included in the discussion on ensuring protection for women and girl victims of GBV. This was identified also in the case of the rights of rural women and girls, where recommendations would omit references to girls on topics such as land ownership, and leadership.

There were 61 recommendations on rural women and girls. However, most of the time they were

³⁹⁶ There is one exception by the CAT Committee, which made a single recommendation in 2022 in the Concluding Observations of Australia on GBV against women and girls with disabilities: see further CAT Committee, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Australia, 5 December 2022, UN Doc. CAT/C/AUS/CO/6.

mentioned in a list along with many other groups who may be disproportionately impacted by discrimination or require special attention. There is some focus on them specifically by the CEDAW Committee, and since 2019, **specific recommendations on ‘rural women and climate change’ have been made by the Treaty Bodies that advocate for ensuring access to health care, education, employment, credit, justice, social protection, housing, safe water, sanitation and production means as well as their equal rights to own, acquire and inherit property, including land.** Strengthening the equal participation of rural women and girls in decision-making on disaster mitigation and climate change has also been recommended with slightly more frequency since 2022.

Despite the CEDAW Committee’s ‘all encompassing’ definition of women, which implicitly includes girls, girls as distinct from women are the subject of the recommendation often enough. However, **the Committee’s selective explicit inclusion of girls, inadvertently bolsters their exclusion from certain areas of rights. Recommendations on rural women for example omit girls in reference to work, leadership and property, and inconsistently include them regarding participation in climate change policy-making.**

Some examples of recommendations include:

Women with disabilities:³⁹⁷ The Committee, recalling its general comment No. 3 (2016) on women and girls with disabilities, and targets 5.1, 5.2 and 5.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, recommends that the State party: (a) **Adopt effective and specific measures to ensure equality and prevent multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination against women and girls with disabilities** in its gender equality policies, and mainstream a gender perspective into its disability-related legislation and policies; (b) **Take measures to empower women and girls with disabilities, ensuring that all their human rights and fundamental freedoms are equally protected,** and including their effective participation in the design and implementation of these measures.

Rural women and climate change:³⁹⁸ In line with general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women, the Committee recommends that the State party, in view of the importance of the agricultural sector for its economic development and food and nutrition security: (...) (b) **Take targeted measures to support women’s leadership in rural areas** through representation on the national land commission and land board and as village heads in order to ensure that rural women are meaningfully involved in community decision-making and the development and implementation of agricultural policies, including with regard to decisions on land use; (c) Establish a section in the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare mandated **to promote the rights of rural women through coordinating cross-sectoral efforts and collaboration among various ministries and stakeholders;** (d) Address attitudes and assumptions relating to customary and religious laws that impede **rural women’s equal access to land ownership or control,** and implement the provisions of the Women’s Act recognizing women’s right to inherit, acquire and administer property, in line with the State party’s commitment to achieve the African Union goal of allocating 30 per cent of land to women by 2025 and in line with the good practices of countries with similar backgrounds; (e) **Strengthen the equal participation of rural women and girls in decision-making on disaster mitigation and climate change,** in line with general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, including in the implementation of the national climate change policy; (f) **Formalize rural women’s agricultural work** by establishing a scheme to ensure their fair remuneration, access to benefits and social protection; (g) **Improve rural women’s access to education, agricultural information, financial literacy, extension services, technology, credit and banking services and rural transportation, as well as access to storage and processing technology.**

Refugee, returnee, internally displaced and migrant women and girls:³⁹⁹ In line with its general recommendations No. 32 (2014) on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women and No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, the Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Swiftly adopt the draft bill on the prevention, assistance and protection of displaced people; (b) **Provide internally displaced women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence with free and immediate access to medical services, legal assistance and a safe environment, as well as to female health-care providers and services such as reproductive health care and counselling;** (c) Ensure that immediate humanitarian assistance needs and protection requirements are complemented by **long-term strategies in support of the socioeconomic rights and livelihood opportunities of returnee, refugee and migrant women,** with a view to ensuring that they have adequate access to health services, education, food, shelter, freedom of movement, registration and durable solutions, as well as sustainable employment opportunities; (d) **Address the specific risks and needs of different groups of returnees, internally**

³⁹⁷ CRPD Committee, Concluding observations on the initial report of Japan, 7 October 2022, UN Doc. CRPD/C/JPN/CO/1, para. 16.

³⁹⁸ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Guinea-Bissau, 7 August 2009, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GMB/CO/6, para. 38.

³⁹⁹ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Honduras, 7 August 2009, 1 November 2022, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/HND/CO/9, para. 47.

Areas of discrimination

Recommendations on discrimination feature often in Treaty Body Concluding Observations, accounting for 459 out of the 1,691 overall recommendations, or 27 per cent of the recommendations mentioning girls. The most common form of discrimination discussed is discrimination on the grounds of gender which, when filtered for as ‘gender-based discrimination,’ arose 124 times (27 per cent of the girls’ recommendations featuring discrimination). Additionally, due to various wording used to discuss gender-based discrimination, words ‘gender’ and ‘discrimination’ were filtered and found in 205 of the same recommendations, further emphasising this as the primary form of discrimination discussed.

Discrimination on the grounds of disability was also common, featuring in 204 of the 459 recommendations (44 per cent) on discrimination, with 94 of these recommendations issued by the CEDAW Committee, 60 by the CRPD Committee and 44 by the CRC Committee. In line with the previously identified trend, the other Treaty Bodies have made only three recommendations, combined, on disability-based discrimination illustrating the lack of examination of the rights of women and girls with disabilities by the non-gender and disability mandated bodies.

Racial discrimination and religious discrimination also featured with some significance, with the former featuring in 81 of the recommendations that mention girls and discrimination (18 per cent), and the latter in 75 recommendations (16 per cent). Interestingly, most recommendations on racial discrimination were made by the CEDAW Committee, illustrating a lack of explicit focus by the CERD Committee on racial discrimination against women, and especially girls, which was also identified in the analysis of General Comments. In fact, out of the 459 recommendations on discrimination, only 12 were made by the CERD Committee (or 2.6 per cent of the recommendations mentioning girls and discrimination).

In line with the other mechanisms, age-based discrimination, a key form of discrimination which impacts girls specifically, is not commonly referenced. While it was identified in 63 recommendations, or 14 per cent of the recommendations on discrimination, the primary focus of these recommendations rest on a variety of age-related human rights concerns such as: establishing a minimum age of marriage, establishing a minimum age to work, collecting data disaggregated by age, ensuring age-appropriate sexuality education, and ensuring children’s sufficient age of maturity before undergoing medical procedures. When the recommendations were filtered just for ‘age,’ the majority of those (258 out of the 288), were all related to the above topics.

Age, as a specific grounds for discrimination, is therefore rarely discussed, illustrating a significant gap in analysis on the human rights of girls.

Similarly to UPR recommendations on discrimination, in Treaty Body Concluding Observations, most recommendations on girls and discrimination also refer to violence. In this case, out of 459 recommendations on girls and discrimination, 175, or 38 per cent also mention violence. While it is important to consider that these recommendations are significantly longer, more detailed and varied than UPR recommendations, the general trend of discussing ‘gender-based violence and discrimination’ can also be found here. In fact, 106 recommendations on discrimination also mention GBV, or 23 per cent of the recommendations mentioning girls and discrimination.

This further bolsters the trend, identified across this research, that girls’ rights are dominated by a focus on discrimination and violence at the expense of consideration of other rights.

Some examples of these recommendations include:

Gender-based violence against girls:^{400,401} The Committee recommends that the State party **significantly strengthen its efforts to prevent gender-based violence against girls**, in close consultation with experts on the prevention of gender-based violence, and **take a girls' rights-centred approach to such efforts**, including by focusing on eliminating all forms of gender-based violence at school at all levels of education, and training teachers accordingly, and by conducting media campaigns challenging stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity, **with a view to eliminating all forms of gender-based violence against girls**, addressing aggressive behaviour and raising awareness of the available remedies and assistance available for victims/survivors. It also recommends that the State party: (a) Bring its legislation on gender-based violence fully into line with international standards, ensure the effective implementation of the national strategy to combat gender-based violence, 2013–2018, and adopt an updated strategy; (...) (c) Reprioritize resources to strengthen victim support services, including by ensuring a sufficient number of adequately funded emergency shelters that provide legal, medical and psychosocial assistance to victims of gender-based violence and their children, including to victims of domestic violence, beyond 72 hours after the incident, **incorporating a victim-centred and girls' rights-centred approach, with a particular focus on rural girls and those belonging to disadvantaged groups**; (d) **Set up a system of data collection in order to compile statistical data on gender-based violence against girls, disaggregated by age and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.**

Non-discrimination:⁴⁰² Noting the structural discrimination of children based on their age and the persistent discrimination and exclusion of girls, indigenous and Afro-descendant children, children with disabilities, migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee children, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children and taking into consideration measures to recognize discrimination as a criminal offence, the Committee urges the State party to: (a) Develop and implement awareness-raising strategies at the community level and in schools, to ensure an attitude of respect for children and their recognition as rights holders, irrespective of their age ; (b) Ensure adequate budget allocation for the implementation of the public policy for coexistence and the elimination of racism and racial discrimination; (c) Adopt a national strategy with clear benchmarks, indicators and monitoring mechanisms aimed at addressing structural and multiple discrimination against children belonging to the above-mentioned groups in areas such as health, education, social protection and standard of living; (d) Strengthen measures to tackle poverty and extreme multidimensional poverty among indigenous and Afro-descendant children, prioritizing action at the municipal level.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution:⁴⁰³ The Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Address the root causes of prostitution, such as poverty and structural gender inequalities, as well as the demand for prostitution, and adopt targeted measures to prevent women in vulnerable situations from being exploited in prostitution, including by providing women who wish to leave prostitution with exit programmes and alternative income opportunities; (b) **Investigate and prosecute cases of gender-based violence and discrimination against women in prostitution**, bring perpetrators to justice, and **de-stigmatize women and girls in prostitution through gender-sensitive training** for the judiciary, the police and the general public to encourage victims to report abuses; (c) Repeal discriminatory local regulations, with a view to decriminalizing women in prostitution.

Intersectionality

Out of the 459 recommendations on discrimination and girls, 139 (30 per cent), refer to intersectionality. Interestingly, the CESCR Committee, the CAT Committee, and the CMW Committee did not make any recommendations during this period on intersectional discrimination, and the majority (92) of the relevant recommendations were made by the CEDAW Committee. Most of the CEDAW Committee recommendations on intersectional discrimination are made in reference to Articles One and Two of CEDAW, which define non-discrimination and equality as the key principles of the Convention. These recommendations urge States parties to CEDAW to implement laws and policies which prohibit discrimination, including intersectional forms of discrimination against women and girls to end all forms of discrimination against them.

⁴⁰⁰ CRC Committee, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Sao Tome and Principe, 23 June 2023, UN Doc. CRC/C/STP/CO/5-6, para. 27.

⁴⁰¹ This is the *only* recommendation identified which explicitly discusses violence against girls across all treaty bodies. The rest of the recommendations on violence either only address violence against women and/or violence against women and girls.

⁴⁰² CRC Committee, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Guatemala, 28 February 2018, UN Doc. CRC/C/GTM/CO/5-6, para. 13.

⁴⁰³ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Indonesia, 24 November 2021, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/IDN/CO/8, para. 32.

In terms of discussing specific forms of intersectional discrimination, the recommendations from the CEDAW Committee discuss a handful of topics, including: eliminating obstacles in obtaining access justice, particularly for women and girls who face intersecting forms of discrimination; the rights of women and girls with disabilities; disadvantaged groups of women; and migrant, internally displaced, refugee and asylum-seeking women.

The recommendations on migrant, refugee, displaced and asylum-seeking women mention girls inconsistently, apart from when regular references are made to the children of these groups of women. Only references to gender-sensitive policies and plans regarding these groups are present, omitting the importance of taking age-sensitive approaches. This illustrates the limited effect that the CEDAW Committee's 'catch-all' definition of 'women' can have, and the fact that it excludes crucial elements of girls' lives which affect them uniquely.

Out of the 139 recommendations regarding intersectionality, discrimination, and girls, 40 were made by the CRPD Committee and these focused on women and girls with disabilities generally in terms of ensuring the fulfilment of their rights. The CRC Committee only made four recommendations which reference intersectional discrimination, two of which discuss women with disabilities and children belonging to minority groups, including Indigenous children.

The lack of focus by the CRC Committee specifically on intersectional discrimination faced by girls is likely the result of using a gender-neutral approach. While this approach is important to recognise the rights of children, especially non-binary children and those with diverse SOGIESC, the specific challenges and needs of girl child must be identified, when necessary, in order to ensure adequate protections are accorded to her.

Some examples of these recommendations include:

Women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination:⁴⁰⁴ The Committee recommends that the State party urgently **implement targeted measures to achieve substantive equality for women and girls in all stages of life who face intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women and girls with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons.**

Migrant and minority women:⁴⁰⁵ The Committee recommends that the State party take effective measures to **ensure that Roma and migrant women and girls, regardless of their country of origin, have full access to basic services and the labour market in the State party.** The Committee also recommends that the State party take measures to **combat racism against migrant and Roma populations**, including through training programmes for police and collaboration with the media on awareness-raising campaigns to prevent intersecting forms of discrimination.

Non-discrimination:⁴⁰⁶ With reference to targets 5.1 and 10.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Strengthen its efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes and remove patriarchal ideologies in education, and in the family, including through awareness-raising campaigns, and strengthen its measures, including temporary special measures, and budgetary, human and administrative resources to ensure equal access of girls to education and health; (b) Expedite the adoption of legislation to sanction and address all forms of violence related to racism, xenophobia and discrimination, including sanctions for perpetrators of hate speech, and adopt a comprehensive national strategy and action plan to **eliminate discrimination, racism, sexism and all forms of discrimination against children, addressing multiple and intersectional discrimination against them;** (c) Strengthen campaigns to counter hate speech, harassment, bullying and negative portrayal affecting **migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee children, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children.**

⁴⁰⁴ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Bulgaria, 10 March 2020, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/BGR/CO/8, para. 40.

⁴⁰⁵ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Germany, 31 May 2023, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/DEU/CO/9, para. 54.

⁴⁰⁶ CRC Committee, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Costa Rica, 4 March 2020, UN Doc. CRC/C/CRI/CO/5-6, para. 17.

Girls' rights issues

Similarly to other mechanisms, all forms of violence, and education are the main topics covered in the girls' rights recommendations. When the 1,691 Treaty Body recommendations that mention girls were filtered for 'violence', 562 recommendations resulted: 337 recommendations related specifically to 'gender-based violence', 218 related to other forms of violence (such as verbal, physical, psychological and economic), and 144 to domestic violence. Overall, 33 per cent of girls' rights recommendations focus on violence. More than half the recommendations on violence were made by the CEDAW Committee (333 out of 562). Related to this, harmful, traditional and cultural practices also featured heavily in the recommendations, resulting 328 times, or 20 per cent of the overall girls' rights recommendations. The CEDAW Committee made 68 per cent of these recommendations on harmful, traditional and cultural practices. Harmful practices also feature in 20 per cent of the recommendations on gender-based violence, illustrating a clear link between the two human rights issues.

Education features even more frequently, making up 624 recommendations, or 37 per cent of the recommendations mentioning girls, with 80 per cent of the recommendations made by the CRC Committee and the CEDAW Committee. In these recommendations, girls feature most of the time as annexes to women (in 357 of the recommendations), or implicitly within 'children' (in 308 of the recommendations). As mentioned in the previous section, education does feature more language that is age-specific, however, these references primarily centre around girls' reproductive functions. For example, in recommendations on education, 132 discuss pregnant girls, young, adolescent and teenage mothers.

When the education recommendations were filtered with the phrase 'especially/particularly girls,' only 15 recommendations resulted, meaning girls are being singled out only 2.4 per cent of the time girls are included in recommendations.

Within these 15 recommendations, a broad array of issues are tackled namely: equal and inclusive education for girls with disabilities, ending de facto discrimination and stigmatisation against vulnerable and marginalised girls, especially those who come from disadvantaged communities, and those with HIV/AIDS, taking measures against all forms of violence against girls in education, freedom of movement to and from school for girls and retention of girls in education.

Recommendations on displacement are uncommon, featuring only 14 times out of all girls' rights recommendations (0.8 per cent of the time). Most of these recommendations were made by the CEDAW Committee, with only two made by the Human Rights Committee and the CRC Committee. The focus of these recommendations is on eliminating SGBV against displaced women and girls, and ensuring their rehabilitation and provision of reparations, as well as ensuring that displaced and refugee women and girls have adequate access to their rights such as those to food, water and sanitation, education, shelter and health. The inclusion of girls is not systematic, and often the recommendations only discuss displaced women and their rights, and include girls mostly only when referring to providing protection and support to victims of SGBV.

Some examples of these recommendations include:

Gender-based violence against women:⁴⁰⁷ Recalling its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, the Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Systematically assess the impact of measures adopted to **combat gender-based violence against women and girls**, and continue to explore and adopt innovative approaches to address the root causes of such violence; (b) Undertake a comprehensive review of the law on the prevention of domestic violence and the protection of victims and amend its provisions to define, prohibit and criminalize all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence and marital rape, to facilitate the process of obtaining protection orders and to ensure that

⁴⁰⁷ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Cambodia, 12 November 2019, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/KHM/CO/6, para. 25.

victims/survivors of domestic violence have access to effective remedies and that perpetrators are held accountable; (c) Increase the availability, accessibility and quality of essential services and support to victims/survivors of gender-based violence, including legal assistance, victim/survivor-centred health-care services and psychosocial support, and continue to explore the possibility of establishing one-stop service centres for victims/survivors of gender-based violence; (d) **Systematically collect data on gender-based violence against women and girls, disaggregated by age, ethnicity, disability, geographical location and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.**

Education:⁴⁰⁸ Recalling its general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education and its previous recommendations (CEDAW/C/URY/CO/8-9, para. 32), the Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Promote the enrolment, attendance and **retention of girls and women in school, especially at the secondary level and above, in particular for Indigenous girls, girls of African descent, rural girls, girls living in poverty, pregnant girls, young mothers and girls with disabilities, and reduce dropout rates among pregnant girls and women and adolescent mothers and help them reintegrate into the education system,** including by raising awareness among parents, community leaders and girls and women on the importance of education for their life choices and career prospects; (b) Introduce **mandatory age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality education in school curricula at all levels of education, including education on responsible sexual behaviour to prevent early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections;** (c) Ensure that **all women and girls with disabilities are able to gain access to inclusive education,** including by increasing the number of schools offering inclusive education throughout the State party, and that school infrastructure is accessible, and provide reasonable accommodations for girls with disabilities in schools; (d) Develop an anti-bullying policy aimed at providing **safe educational environments for women and girls that are free from gender-based violence and discrimination, harassment and bullying,** and set up confidential complaint mechanisms in schools.

Internally displaced women and girls:⁴⁰⁹ The Committee recommends that the State party **address the specific needs of internally displaced women and girls,** including their need for humanitarian assistance, and ensure they have **adequate access to health services, education, food, shelter, freedom of movement, registration and durable solutions, as well as sustainable employment opportunities.**

Civil and political rights

Civil and political rights, such as freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, featured the least in the recommendations, with only 14 combined references, or 0.8 per cent.

Additionally, only five recommendations out of the 1,691 were made by the Human Rights Committee, the body mandated with monitoring the ICCPR. There were, however, significantly more references to the right to participation, which was identified 215 times in recommendations mentioning girls, or 12.7 per cent of the time. Close to half of these, however, related to participation in education, and only 41 recommendations referred to public and/or political life. Within the latter recommendations, the inclusion of girls' participation in public and political life is inconsistent. In fact, related to this is the lack of reference to, and inclusion of, girl human rights defenders.

While there are two recommendations which discuss 'human rights defenders,' both recommendations only mention 'women human rights defenders and activists' as well as 'women politicians', illustrating the gap identified throughout this study. Bolstering this, no recommendations referred to girls' leadership. This is similar when it comes to the rights to assembly and protest, with only one recommendation made by the CRPD Committee acknowledging the need to ensure the protection of life and safety of women and girls when exercising these rights. **While there are only five recommendations about freedom of expression, these do include girls with some regularity, recognising their rights to express themselves on media platforms, and the need for heightened protection due to the disproportionate risks they face.** However, only women human rights

⁴⁰⁸ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the tenth periodic report of Uruguay, 14 November 2023, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/URY/CO/10, para. 32.

⁴⁰⁹ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 6 August 2019, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/COD/CO/8, para. 49.

defenders (HRDs) and journalists are mentioned, excluding girls and their ability to be both.

For example:

Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies (art. 11):⁴¹⁰ The Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Take effective measures to ensure the life, safety and rights of persons with disabilities, women and girls in particular, in the current political situation, including the right to peaceful assembly and protest; (b) Develop and follow protocols for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all phases, including prevention and preparedness, rescues, recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation, of the planning and provision of services in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, not least climate-related hazards, and have the protocols ensure universal access to environments, services, messages and information, such as temporary shelters, evacuation, accessible warnings and the dissemination of information in all accessible formats, including Braille and Peruvian Sign Language; (c) **Ensure that disaster risk reduction plans and climate change strategies and policies at all levels are formulated together with persons with disabilities** and are explicitly tailored to their specific requirements in all situations of risk, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.

Freedom of expression:⁴¹¹ In the light of the Committee's general comment No. 34 (2011) on the freedoms of opinion and expression, the State party should: (a) Review its legislation to ensure that criminal laws are not used to silence independent journalists and dissenting voices, including by blocking websites and detaining journalists; (b) Release all journalists who have been arrested in the course of practising their profession; (c) Take all necessary measures to support the continued existence of a genuinely pluralistic media landscape, which appears to have been significantly eroded in recent years, including by removing unduly onerous administrative and licensing obligations for media outlets and journalists; (d) **Ensure that women and girls are not criminalized under overly broad morality offences for sharing content on social media platforms.**

Socio-economic rights

Socio-economic rights are featured with more frequency, but between the rights, there are large discrepancies in how often they are discussed. For example, there are only 47 recommendations (or 2.7 per cent) on the right to social security and social protection and girls. The rights to food, water and sanitation, and housing also appeared minimally, resulting in 96 references to all these rights combined (or 5.6 per cent).

The informal economy and unpaid labour only appeared a handful of times (7 times out of 1,691 or 0.4 per cent of all recommendations that mention girls). Out of these few recommendations, however, only two acknowledge that girls also participate in the informal economy and unpaid labour. These recommendations illustrate the clear discrepancy between women's rights and girls' rights. These recommendations refer to several other accompanying rights: such as the right to equal remuneration, the elimination of stereotypes which relegate women to the private sphere, as well as ensuring women's right to work. The lack of nuance in these recommendations excludes girls and omits consideration of their rights, but also fails to explore the unique situations which relegate girls to domestic labour and/or the informal economy.

As already identified, references to SRHR abound, making up 19.4 per cent of all girls' rights recommendations. However, discrepancies exist also within this area of rights, namely in relation to menstruation, menstrual hygiene and CSE. Combined, these arose 19 times, or in 1.1 per cent of the recommendations mentioning girls.

The focus on SRHR continues to centre girls' rights around their reproductive functions and prioritises them as reproductive entities, over the myriad of other capacities and needs they have. While it is important to continue ensuring that these rights are respected, protected and fulfilled, more targeted efforts should be made to do the same for other key rights such as the

⁴¹⁰ CRPD Committee, Concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Peru, 29 November 2023, UN Doc. CRPD/C/PER/CO/2-3, para. 23.

⁴¹¹ Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Egypt, 14 April 2023, UN Doc. CCPR/C/EGY/CO/5, para. 46.

ones described above.

Some examples include:

Employment:⁴¹² In line with target 8.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals on the achievement of **full and productive employment and decent work for all women** and men and recalling its previous recommendations (CEDAW/C/HND/CO/7–8, para. 35), the Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Address the high unemployment rate among women by **enhancing women’s access to formal employment, especially for refugee women and women from marginalized groups, and extend social protection schemes to women employed in the informal economy** by, inter alia, implementing the findings of the time-use survey; (b) Strengthen efforts to eliminate horizontal and vertical occupational segregation and **encourage women and girls to choose non-traditional career paths**, in particular in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, information and communications technology and artificial intelligence; (c) Effectively enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, in order to narrow and eventually close the gender pay gap, by: (i) conducting regular labour inspections; (ii) applying gender-neutral analytical job classification and evaluation methods; (iii) conducting regular pay surveys; and (iv) encouraging employers to publish a narrative with their gender pay gap data, with a view to better understanding the reasons behind the gender wage gap, and to take appropriate remedial measures; (d) **Ensure that Indigenous women, rural women and women with disabilities have access to employment and accessible transportation to promote their inclusion in public and private employment;** (e) Explicitly criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace and ensure that victims of sexual harassment in the workplace have access to effective, independent and confidential complaint procedures and that all complaints are effectively investigated and those responsible adequately punished, and protect victims from retaliation; (f) Ratify the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), and the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), of the International Labour Organization.

Health of adolescent girls:⁴¹³ Recalling target 3.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party: (a) On the basis of an evaluation of the national youth policy strategy and the action plan for the prevention of early pregnancy, 2018–2022, develop an **age-appropriate comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents and strengthen sexual and reproductive health education**, including by ensuring the mandatory provision of such education and that it is focused on the **prevention of early pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and AIDS**, and by promoting responsible sexual behaviour in school curricula at all levels; (b) Address the root causes of early pregnancy, including socioeconomic vulnerability, limited access to education and sexual violence, and ensure that adolescents have knowledge of and access to modern contraceptives, safe abortion services and confidential HIV testing and treatment, including through information campaigns and other targeted measures addressing the relevant sociocultural barriers; (c) **Develop and implement a policy to protect the rights of pregnant girls, adolescent mothers and their children, combat discrimination against them and ensure school retention and reinsertion for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers, with a view to completion;** (d) **To prevent school absenteeism and dropout among girls owing to menstruation, ensure that girls have access to menstrual hygiene items**, including free of charge, if needed, that every school has adequate **gender-separated sanitary facilities for girls and conduct awareness-raising activities in schools and among the general public to ensure that menstruation is not considered a social taboo and that girls are not exposed to any form of stigma or menstruation-related discrimination.**

⁴¹² CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Honduras, 1 November 2022, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/HND/CO/9, para. 37.

⁴¹³ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the combined initial and second to fifth reports of Sao Tome and Principe, 31 May 2023, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/STP/CO/1-5, para. 45.

Conclusion: The Challenges Ahead

Advocates for girls' rights – and for girls to be recognised as autonomous and active agents in their own lives - have made significant progress in bringing the discrimination they face, simply for being young and female, to the forefront of policy discussions and human rights mechanisms. But it is clear from our research that much remains to be done.

What emerges from this in-depth study of Geneva and New York UN mechanisms is that, while progress has undoubtedly been made in recent years, the pace of change is not sufficient to make real strides towards gender equality. It is also under threat by coordinated efforts to undermine international human rights law and strip girls of the, often hard won, protections they are afforded. In nearly all the policy documents studied, girls are becoming more visible, but they are not yet seen clearly enough. Too often they are subsumed into broad categories such as 'children' or 'women and girls,' without any attention paid to the unique challenges they may face due to their age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or identity: conditioned, sometimes, too by location and disability, and often magnified by intersecting factors.

Advances have been made within rights to education, SRHR and freedom from violence. Gender-based discrimination is, in many policy documents, more clearly acknowledged but girls are still too often portrayed as 'victims,' as vulnerable and in need of protection. The rights recognised are centred around this attitude and often around girls' reproductive role: there is rarely any sense of girls as proactive participants in their own lives, capable of contributing to the society and communities they live in. Their rights to participation, to being consulted and acknowledged as agents of change, is only very slowly emerging into the minds of legislators and policy makers. Furthermore, girls tend to be invisible when broader rights – for example, to land, water, inheritance or labour rights - are under discussion.

In addition, even this limited success, has set off a reaction. There is increasing pushback against the gains made, marked by a revival of paternalism and the ascendancy of 'family values' – an ethos which is predominantly patriarchal and rarely benefits the younger, female members of any family. 'Protection' is the prevailing argument, but this often goes hand in hand with restriction and a narrowing definition of what is appropriate for girls and for women. This regressive outlook is reflected in the language used, the diversity ignored, and in the spaces for change and activism squeezed.

Understanding the challenges ahead is crucial to meeting them. It is possible to track progress taking place between from 2018 – 2021, the early years covered by this review, but gradually tailing off in the later years analysed, as pushback gathers momentum. In this context, a disproportionate amount of time, energy and resources need to be dedicated towards defending the progress that has been made: a task of increasing difficulty because it coincides with a reduction in funding for gender and children's rights globally, due to decreases in multilateral and bilateral aid and international cooperation budgets.

As our research emphasises, there are many challenges ahead: girls' rights advocates, and girls themselves, need support to defend, maintain, and further progress if the gains of the last decade are not to be entirely undermined.

Annex: Methodology

Database research and desk review of documents

To identify girls' specific rights and determine how and in which contexts girls' rights are being addressed within the UN human rights system, Plan International analysed 3,664 documents, comprising of outputs (resolutions, agreed conclusions, recommendations and reports) from a variety of mechanisms—including negotiated and non-negotiated international soft law texts—covering a total period of six years, from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2023. For an overview of the documents reviewed and analysed, please see Table 2 below.

The Plan International Girls Rights Platform Human Rights Policy Database was primarily used for this research,⁴¹⁴ supplementing the use of this platform with other databases as required, in particular the Universal Human Rights Index.⁴¹⁵ The full text of most of the documents examined in this study are available on the Plan International Girls Rights Platform Human Rights Policy Database; UPR recommendations and the recommendations from Treaty Bodies Concluding Observations are available on the Universal Human Rights Index. The use of these databases enabled us to navigate the magnitude of information, identify and select the most relevant documents, and to extract any information of interest. With the tools at our disposal, and their limitations, we were able to conduct different levels of analysis depending on the documents and their availability on databases.

To research UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions, and UN Special Procedure reports, we used the Girls Rights Platform Human Rights Policy Database to produce a list of all the documents within the study period that referenced or were relevant to girls' rights, and consequently conducted a manual review to select a smaller sample sub-set for analysis. Due to the quantity of outputs produced in the last six years, it was necessary to select a smaller sample sub-set of documents for in-depth analysis. In selecting these sample documents for review, for resolutions of the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council, as well as for reports of the UN Special Procedures, we prioritised documents that were primarily addressing girls' rights (i.e. contained 'girls' or 'girls' rights' in the title), those whose subject matter was clearly related to women and girls' rights issues, or those where a select topic of interest in terms of emerging inclusion of girls' rights was of interest. Aside from focusing on the key issues surrounding the girl child, we included documents, analysis and recommendations that relate to the goals in Plan International's refreshed Global Advocacy Strategy (GLAS) 'All Girls Standing Strong'.⁴¹⁶

The research on UNGA and HRC resolutions focused on the temporal change that occurred within the sample of recurring resolutions. We preferred to conduct a substantially more in-depth textual analysis by focusing on a limited number of recurring resolutions to hone in on the changes that occurred during the six years, analyse the language used and, in some cases, discuss the amendments tabled by States, to understand the progress made and the impact of the anti-rights and anti-gender pushback, and which issues are being impacted. This study allowed us to understand what language is most under attack, and where progress is most evident. While studying the voting records and amendments tabled for all UNGA and HRC resolutions was outside the scope of this project, conducting future research to study this would be of great added-value, as it highlights the issues which the anti-rights and anti-gender movements are most active in challenging.

Since only a limited number of CSW Agreed Conclusions and General Comments of the UN Treaty

⁴¹⁴ It was decided to expand the research for this study beyond the negotiated international soft-law texts to encompass more non-negotiated international soft-law texts, such as recommendations of the UPR and Concluding Observations and Recommendations of Treaty Bodies. These documents are not part of the Plan International Girls Rights Platform Human Rights Policy Database, hence the use of the Universal Human Rights Index for these documents.

⁴¹⁵ <https://uhri.ohchr.org/en>

⁴¹⁶ Plan International, *Global Advocacy Strategy 2022-2027*, 2022, available at <https://plan-international.org/publications/global-advocacy-strategy/>

Bodies were produced within the last six years, all of these documents were analysed.

For recommendations made at the UPR and in Treaty Body Concluding Observations, we researched and analysed the thousands of recommendations made during the study period. Thanks to the online human rights databases and accompanying statistical analysis work, we had a birds'-eye view of all recommendations and a filtering system to extrapolate desired information. We used the Girls Rights Platform Human Rights Policy Database and the Universal Human Rights Index to search for documents relevant to girls and girls' rights, primarily through text searches for documents that included references to 'girls' (on the Girls Rights Platform Human Rights Policy Database) and through filtering for the following 'concerned groups' on the Universal Rights Index: 'children', 'children in vulnerable situations (abused, living on the street, institutionalized, Indigenous, migrant children, etc', 'women and girls', 'youth and juveniles'). The final set of recommendations analysed all contained the word 'girl' within, and the research was conducted to understand in what context, and in relation to what rights were they present.

Table 2: Overview of the number of documents selected for analysis for this study

| NEGOTIATED AND NON-NEGOTIATED DOCUMENTS ANALYSED | |
|--|---|
| INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS (NEGOTIATED) | |
| Type of document | # documents |
| General Assembly Resolutions | 57 reviewed and identified as relevant to girls' rights 20 analysed in-depth |
| Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions | 6 ⁴¹⁷ |
| Human Rights Council Resolutions | 70 reviewed and identified as relevant to girls' rights 26 analysed in-depth |
| Total negotiated documents analysed: 51 | |
| INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS (NON-NEGOTIATED) | |
| Universal Periodic Review Recommendations | 1,826 |
| Special Procedures Reports Reports of Special Representatives of the Secretary-General | 66 12 |
| Treaty Body General Comments / Recommendations | 18 |
| Treaty Body Concluding Observations | 1,691 |
| Total non-negotiated documents reviewed: 3,613 | |
| GRAND TOTAL DOCUMENTS REVIEWED: 3,664 | |

⁴¹⁷ Note in 2020 there were no CSW Agreed Conclusions, rather a 'Political Declaration', which is included in this count and in the analysis above.

Consultations with key stakeholders

In addition to the desk review of key documents, Plan International also undertook consultations with key stakeholders, including focus group discussions and user-experience interviews with:

- diplomats involved in drafting and negotiating resolutions on girls' rights in the UN human rights mechanisms in Geneva;
- civil society advocates working on children and women's rights;
- representatives of UN agencies.

These conversations with international policy makers on the improvement of protection of girls' rights in the UN spaces and key challenges ahead were invaluable in validating and supplementing the database and desk research.

Specific methodology and limitations for each mechanism studied

UNGA Resolutions

The UNGA resolutions examined in this study were a sample set of 20 resolutions, selected from a broader set of 57 resolutions that had been identified as being relevant to girls' rights (see overview above for basis of selection of this sample sub-set).

The sample sub-set analysed covered a range of topics that were either directly related to girls, women, children or youth or were of particular interest for this study, namely internal displacement and climate change. In particular, this study analysed several key resolutions relevant to girls' rights that are biennially recurring, such as the resolution on 'the girl child', the resolution on 'the rights of the child', and the resolution on the 'intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls'. The latter of these varied each year with focuses on particular thematic topics, such as 'trafficking of women and girls', 'intensification of efforts to end obstetric fistula', and 'women and girls in rural areas', to name a few.

Once the sample set of UNGA resolutions to be examined in this study was identified, keyword searches were conducted manually to produce the findings discussed in this report. The UNGA resolutions reviewed below, therefore, represent only a limited sample of the potentially relevant UNGA resolutions passed between 2018 and 2023. This inevitably leaves out ones that contribute to the development of soft law on girls, despite these identities not being the focus of the resolution.

Table 3: UNGA Resolutions analysed for this study

| UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS ANALYSED | | |
|--|---|---------------|
| Year | Resolution Title | Document Code |
| 2023 | The girl child | A/RES/78/188 |
| 2023 | Rights of the child | A/RES/78/187 |
| 2023 | Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind | A/RES/78/153 |
| 2022 | Trafficking in women and girls | A/RES/77/194 |
| 2022 | Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: gender stereotypes and negative social norms | A/RES/77/193 |
| 2022 | Child, early and forced marriage | A/RES/77/202 |
| 2022 | The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment | A/RES/76/300 |
| 2021 | The girl child | A/RES/76/146 |
| 2021 | Rights of the child | A/RES/76/147 |
| 2021 | Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind | A/RES/76/205 |
| 2020 | Trafficking in women and girls | A/RES/75/158 |
| 2020 | Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls | A/RES/75/161 |
| 2020 | Child, early and forced marriage | A/RES/75/167 |
| 2020 | Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind | A/RES/75/217 |
| 2019 | Rights of the child | A/RES/74/133 |
| 2019 | The girl child | A/RES/74/134 |
| 2018 | Trafficking in women and girls | A/RES/73/146 |
| 2018 | Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment | A/RES/73/148 |
| 2018 | Child, early and forced marriage | A/RES/73/153 |
| 2018 | Rights of the child | A/RES/73/155 |

CSW

Between 2018 and 2023, the CSW produced five documents of Agreed Conclusions on various thematic areas. In 2020, due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CSW issued a more limited 'Political Declaration', as it was unable to convene for its regular session. For the purposes of this study, all six

documents were reviewed.

Table 4: CSW Agreed Conclusions analysed for this study

| CSW AGREED CONCLUSIONS ANALYSED | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Year | Resolution Title | Document Code |
| 2023 | CSW Agreed Conclusions | E/CN.6/2023/L.3 |
| 2022 | CSW Agreed Conclusions | E/CN.6/2022/L.7 |
| 2021 | CSW Agreed Conclusions | E/CN.6/2021/L.3 |
| 2020 | CSW Political Declaration | E/CN.6/2020/L.1 |
| 2019 | CSW Agreed Conclusions | E/CN.6/2019/L.3 |
| 2018 | CSW Agreed Conclusions | No document code |

HRC Resolutions

For the purposes of this study, 25 resolutions of the Human Rights Council (HRC) were selected based on relevance, with a particular focus on resolutions related specifically to girls' rights and women's rights, from amongst a broader set of 70 resolutions identified as being potentially relevant to girls' rights.

The research focused on the main recurring resolutions at the HRC which discuss child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), girls' right to education, and the various resolutions on violence against women and girls (VAWG) and the resolutions on discrimination against women and girls (DAWG). Additionally, the new resolutions on menstrual hygiene, care and support and discrimination in sport were also discussed. Several thematic resolutions of interest were also studied, namely the resolutions on the environment and climate change, and those on internally displaced persons (IDPs).

As the research undertaken only represents a sample of all the resolutions passed by the HRC between 2018 and 2023, it will inevitably omit some references to girls' rights.

Table 5: HRC Resolutions analysed for this study

| HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS ANALYSED | | |
|--|--|----------------------|
| Year | Resolution Title | Document Code |
| 2023 | The centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective | A/HRC/RES/54/6 |
| 2023 | Human rights and climate change | A/HRC/RES/53/6 |
| 2023 | Child, early and forced marriage: ending and preventing forced marriage | A/HRC/RES/53/23 |
| 2023 | Realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl | A/HRC/RES/54/19 |
| 2023 | Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls in criminal justice detention | A/HRC/RES/53/27 |
| 2022 | Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls | A/HCR/RES/50/18 |
| 2022 | Human rights and climate change | A/HRC/RES/50/9 |
| 2021 | Human rights and the environment | A/HRC/RES/46/7 |
| 2021 | Realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl | A/HRC/RES/47/5 |
| 2021 | Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities | A/HRC/RES/47/15 |
| 2021 | Human rights and climate change | A/HRC/RES/47/24 |
| 2021 | Child, early and forced marriage in times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic | A/HRC/RES/48/6 |
| 2021 | Menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality | A/HRC/RES/47/4 |
| 2020 | Human rights and climate change | A/HRC/RES/44/7 |
| 2020 | Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls | A/HRC/RES/44/17 |
| 2020 | Promoting, protecting and respecting women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian situations | A/HRC/RES/45/29 |
| 2020 | Rights of the child: realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment | A/HRC/RES/45/30 |
| 2019 | Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls | A/HRC/RES/41/6 |
| 2019 | Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in the world of work | A/HRC/RES/41/17 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----------------|
| 2019 | Human rights and climate change | A/HRC/RES/41/21 |
| 2019 | Elimination of discrimination against women and girls in sport | A/HRC/RES/40/5 |
| 2019 | Consequences of child, early and forced marriage | A/HRC/RES/41/8 |
| 2018 | Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls | A/HRC/RES/38/1 |
| 2018 | Human rights and the environment | A/HRC/RES/37/8 |
| 2018 | Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts | A/HRC/RES/38/5 |
| 2018 | Human Rights and climate change | A/HRC/RES/38/4 |

UPR Recommendations

All 58,112 recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review made by and for all States during the 3rd and 4th cycles (up to the end of 2023) were analysed to uncover the presence of girls' rights language and identify trends.

The recommendations were filtered to only those that included the word "girls" to exclude those that were not directly relevant. Subsequently, 1,826 recommendations regarding 'girls' were extrapolated and analysed according to these categories:

1. **Affected groups:** this sought to uncover the subjects of the recommendations, apart from girls, and with what frequency
2. **Areas of discrimination:** this search sought to understand what intersectional personal characteristics were included in the Concluding Observations, and with what frequency.
3. **Girls' rights issues:** this search sought to identify which human rights are discussed, and with what frequency.

The resulting data was statistically analysed to develop an understanding of the prevalence of mentions of girls' rights and how girls' rights are discussed in UPR recommendations, including which 'types' of girls and groups of identities were considered.

Identifying the States that made and received UPR Recommendations regarding girls' rights

Analysis was also undertaken to determine which States made and received UPR Recommendations regarding girls' rights. The 1,826 recommendations made related to girls' rights were made by 159 States and directed towards 188 States.

Table 11: Special Procedures thematic reports analysed for this study

| SPECIAL PROCEDURES THEMATIC REPORTS ANALYSED | | | |
|--|--|------|---------------|
| Special Procedure Mandate | Thematic Focus of Report | Year | Document Code |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences | Custody, violence against women and violence against children | 2023 | A/HRC/53/36 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences | Violence against women and girls, nationality laws and statelessness | 2023 | A/78/256 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences | Violence against indigenous women and girls | 2022 | A/HRC/50/26 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences | Violence against women and girls in the context of the climate crisis, including environmental degradation and related disaster risk mitigation and response | 2022 | A/77/136 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences ⁴¹⁸ | Rape as a grave, systematic and widespread human rights violation, a crime and a manifestation of gender-based violence against women and girls, and its prevention | 2021 | A/HRC/47/26 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences | Taking stock of the femicide watch initiative | 2021 | A/76/132 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences | Violence against women journalists | 2020 | A/HRC/44/52 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences | Intersection between the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the pandemic of gender-based violence against women, with a focus on domestic violence and the 'peace in the home' initiative | 2020 | A/75/144 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences | Twenty-five years of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences: an analysis of its evolution, current challenges and the way forward | 2019 | A/HRC/41/42 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences | A human rights-based approach to mistreatment and violence against women in reproductive health services with a focus on childbirth and obstetric violence | 2019 | A/74/137 |

⁴¹⁸ Name of the mandate prior to the 2022 amendment to include girls in the mandate title.

| | | | |
|--|---|------|-------------|
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences | Online violence against women and girls | 2018 | A/HRC/38/47 |
| Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences | Violence against women in politics | 2018 | A/73/301 |
| Working Group on discrimination against women and girls | Gendered inequalities of poverty: feminist and human rights-based approaches | 2023 | A/HRC/53/39 |
| Working Group on discrimination against women and girls | Girls' and young women's activism | 2022 | A/HRC/50/25 |
| Working Group on discrimination against women and girls | Women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health rights in crisis | 2021 | A/HRC/47/38 |
| Working Group on discrimination against women and girls | Women's human rights in the changing world of work | 2020 | A/HRC/44/51 |
| Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice ⁴¹⁹ | Reasserting equality, countering rollbacks | 2018 | A/HRC/38/46 |
| Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity | The Law of inclusion | 2021 | A/HRC/47/27 |
| Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity | Gender (Part II): Practices of exclusion | 2021 | A/76/152 |
| Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity | Legal recognition of gender identity and depathologisation | 2018 | A/73/152 |
| Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children | Strengthening accountability for trafficking in persons in conflict situations | 2023 | A/78/172 |
| Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children | Refugee protection, internal displacement and statelessness | 2023 | A/HRC/53/28 |
| Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children | Addressing the gender dimensions of trafficking in persons in the context of climate change, displacement and disaster risk reduction | 2022 | A/77/170 |
| Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children | Beyond law enforcement, towards social justice: proposals on the way forward for an effective implementation of a human rights-based approach to trafficking in persons | 2020 | A/HRC/44/45 |

⁴¹⁹ Name of the mandate prior to the 2019 amendment to include girls in the mandate title.

| | | | |
|---|--|------|-------------|
| Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children | Access to remedy for victims of trafficking committed by businesses and their suppliers | 2019 | A/74/189 |
| Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children | The Gender dimension of trafficking in persons in conflict and post-conflict settings and the importance of integrating a human rights-based approach to trafficking in persons into the women and peace and security agenda of the Security Council | 2018 | A/73/171 |
| Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material | Reparation for child victims and survivors of sale and exploitation | 2023 | A/HRC/52/31 |
| Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material | A practical approach to addressing the sale and sexual exploitation of children | 2022 | A/HRC/49/51 |
| Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material | Thematic study on the gender dimension of the sexual exploitation of children and the importance of integrating a child-centred and gender-inclusive approach to combating and eradicating it | 2021 | A/76/144 |
| Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material | Impact of coronavirus disease on different manifestations of the sale and sexual exploitation of children | 2021 | A/HRC/46/31 |
| Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material | Sale and sexual exploitation of children in sports | 2018 | A/HRC/40/51 |
| Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, its causes and consequences | Contemporary forms of slavery in the informal economy | 2022 | A/77/163 |
| Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, its causes and consequences | Child slavery | 2019 | A/74/179 |
| Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, its causes and consequences | Impact of slavery and servitude on marginalized migrant women workers in the global domestic economy | 2018 | A/HRC/39/52 |
| Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression | Gendered disinformation and its implications for the right to freedom of expression | 2023 | A/78/288 |

| | | | |
|---|--|------|---|
| Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression | Gender justice and freedom of opinion and expression | 2021 | A/76/258 |
| Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association | Exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association as essential to advancing climate justice | 2021 | A/76/222 |
| Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders | Pathways to peace: women human rights defenders in conflict, post-conflict and crisis-affected situation | 2023 | A/78/131 |
| Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy | Artificial intelligence and privacy, and children's privacy | 2021 | A/HRC/46/37 |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation | Outlining the impact of climate change on the human rights to water and sanitation around the world | 2022 | https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/climate-change-1-friendlyversion.pdf |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation | The impacts of climate change on the human rights to water and sanitation of groups and populations in situations of vulnerability | 2022 | https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/climate-change-2-friendlyversion.pdf |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation | Forcibly displaced persons | 2018 | A/HRC/39/55 |
| Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health | Violence and its impact on the right to health | 2022 | A/HRC/50/28 |
| Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health | Sexual and reproductive health rights: challenges and opportunities during COVID-19 | 2021 | A/76/172 |
| Special Rapporteur on the right to education | Early childhood care and education | 2022 | A/77/324 |
| Special Rapporteur on the right to education | Interrelation between the right to education and the rights to water and sanitation | 2020 | A/75/178 |
| Special Rapporteur on the right to education | The right to education for refugees | 2018 | A/73/262 |
| Special Rapporteur on the right to education | Governance and the right to education | 2018 | A/HRC/38/32 |
| Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of human rights in the context of climate change | Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change | 2023 | A/HRC/53/34 |
| Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of | Exploring approaches to enhance climate change legislation, supporting | 2023 | A/78/255 |

| | | | |
|---|--|------|-------------|
| human rights in the context of climate change | climate change litigation and advancing the principle of intergenerational justice | | |
| Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of human rights in the context of climate change | Promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change | 2022 | A/77/266 |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons | Housing, land and property issues in the context of internal displacement | 2021 | A/HRC/47/37 |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons | Prevention of arbitrary displacement in situation of armed conflict and generalized violence | 2021 | A/76/169 |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons | Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change | 2020 | A/75/207 |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons | Protection of internally displaced children | 2019 | A/74/261 |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants | The impact of climate change on the human rights of migrants | 2022 | A/77/189 |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants | Ending immigration detention of children and providing adequate care and reception for them | 2020 | A/75/183 |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants | Good practices and initiatives on gender-responsive migration legislation and policies | 2019 | A/74/191 |
| Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants | Impact of migration on migrant women and girls: a gender perspective | 2019 | A/HRC/41/38 |
| Working group of experts on people of African descent | Children of African descent | 2022 | A/HRC/51/54 |
| Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism | Women and children impacted by albinism | 2019 | A/HRC/43/42 |

SRSR Annual Reports

Table 12: SRSR Annual Reports analysed for this study

| SRSR ANNUAL REPORTS ANALYSED | | | |
|--|---|------|---------------|
| SRSR | Report | Year | Document Code |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence | 2023 | S/2023/413 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence | 2022 | S/2022/272 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence | 2021 | S/2021/312 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence | 2020 | S/2020/487 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence | 2019 | S/2019/280 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence | 2018 | S/2018/250 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | 2023 | S/2023/363 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | 2022 | S/2022/493 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | 2021 | S/2021/437 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | 2020 | S/2020/525 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | 2019 | S/2019/509 |
| Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict | 2018 | S/2018/465 |

Treaty Body GCs and GRs

We analysed the 18 General Comments (GCs) / General Recommendations (GRs) that were published by the Treaty Bodies between 2018-2023. The GCs and GRs that were examined are set out in Table 10 below.

Table 13: General Comments & General Recommendations analysed (2018-2023)

| TREATY BODY GENERAL COMMENTS AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ANALYSED | | | |
|---|----------------|---|---|
| Treaty Body Committee | Year | Title | Document Number |
| CED Committee | 2023 | General Comment No. 1 on Enforced Disappearances in the context of migration | CED/C/GC/1 |
| CEDAW Committee | 2022 | General Recommendation No. 39 on the rights of Indigenous Women and Girls | CEDAW/C/GC/39 |
| CEDAW Committee | 2020 | General Recommendation No. 38 on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration | CEDAW/C/GC/38 |
| CEDAW Committee | 2019 (2014) | Joint General Recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women / General Comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices | CEDAW/C/GC/31/Rev.1– CRC/C/GC/18/Rev.1 |
| CEDAW Committee | 2018 | General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change | CEDAW/C/GC/37 |
| CERD Committee | 2020 | General Recommendation No. 36 Preventing and Combating Racial Profiling by Law Enforcement Officials | CERD/C/GC/36 |
| CESCR Committee | 2022 | General Comment No. 26 on land and economic, social and cultural rights | E/C.12/GC/26 |
| CESCR Committee | 2020 | General Comment No. 25 on science and economic, social and cultural rights (article 15 (1) (b), (2), (3) and (4) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights | E/C.12/GC/25 |
| CMW Committee | 2021 | General Comment No. 5 on migrants' rights to liberty and freedom from arbitrary detention and their connection with other human rights | CMW/C/GC/5 |
| CRC Committee | 2023 | General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change | CRC/C/GC/26 |
| CRC Committee | 2021 | General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment | CRC/C/GC/25 |
| CRC Committee | 2019 | General Comment No. 24 on children's rights in the child justice system | CRC/C/GC/24* |
| CRC Committee | 2019 (2014) | Joint General Comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child/general | CEDAW/C/GC/31/Rev.1– CRC/C/GC/18/Rev.1 |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|---|--------------|
| | | recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on harmful practices | |
| CRPD Committee | 2022 | General Comment No. 8 on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment | CRPD/C/GC/8 |
| CRPD Committee | 2018 | General Comment No. 7 - Article 4.3 and 33.3: Participation with persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention | CRPD/C/GC/7 |
| CRPD Committee | 2018 | General Comment No. 6 - Article 5: Equality and non-discrimination | CRPD/C/GC/6 |
| Human Rights Committee (CCPR) | 2020 | General Comment No. 37 on Article 21 (Right of peaceful assembly) | CCPR/C/GC/37 |
| Human Rights Committee (CCPR) | 2018 | General comment No. 36 - Article 6 (the right to life) | CCPR/C/GC/36 |
| CAT Committee | 2017 ⁴²⁰ | General Comment No. 4 on the implementation of article 3 of the Convention in the context of article 22 | CAT/C/GC/4 |

In examining these documents, a manual review was undertaken to assess the language and terminology used, as well as the issues addressed. The 18 GCs/GRs were examined and divided into the following categories:

- A. GCs/GRs which are about girls' rights (i.e. girls are mentioned in the title, or the content is explicitly about girls and/or girls' rights issues), all of which were issued by the CEDAW Committee (see [Annex 2](#) for a map of these):
 - 2022 GR No. 39 on right rights of Indigenous women and girls;
 - 2020 GR No. 38 on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration;
 - 2018 GR No. 37 on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change.
- B. GCs/GRs that contain some language regarding girls and/or girls' rights but where girls are not the main focus (see [Annex 2](#) for a map of these);
- C. GCs/GRs that omit references to girls and their rights, including those issued by the CMW Committee, CERD Committee, CAT Committee, CED Committee, and the Human Rights Committee.

⁴²⁰ This General Comment was included because it was distributed in 2018, and therefore falls into the scope of this research.

Treaty Body Concluding Recommendations

All the recommendations made by the UN Treaty Bodies between 2018 and 2023 in their Concluding Observations on the examination of the periodic State reports were analysed to uncover the presence of girls' rights language and to identify trends. The recommendations were filtered to only those that included the word 'girls', to exclude those that were not directly relevant, resulting in 1,691 recommendations.

The resulting 1,691 recommendations on girls' rights were extrapolated and analysed according to these categories:

1. **'Affected groups'**: this sought to uncover the subjects of the recommendations, apart from girls, and with what frequency
2. **'Areas of discrimination'**: this search sought to understand what intersectional personal characteristics were included in the Concluding Observations, and with what frequency.
3. **'Girls' rights issues'**: this search sought to identify which human rights are discussed, and with what frequency.

Affected groups

Table 14: Mentions of affected groups identified in Recommendations in Treaty Body Concluding Observations related to girls

| Recommendations in TB Concluding Observations contain "girls" and... | Number |
|---|--------|
| girls (all) | 1691 |
| women | 1368 |
| women and girls | 1175 |
| children / child | 710 |
| boys and girls / girls and boys | 224 |
| adolescent / adolescent girl / teenage / teenage girl | 211 |
| young / young women / youth | 139 |
| Indigenous / indigeneity | 132 |
| Indigenous girls / indigenous women and girls / indigenous children | 38 |
| minority / minorities | 79 |
| lesbian / bisexual / transgender / intersex / LGBTI / LGBTI | 131 |
| rural women and girls / women and girls in rural areas / rural girls / rural children / children in rural areas | 61 |
| women and girls with disabilities / girls with disabilities / children with disabilities | 281 |
| displaced women / displaced girls / displaced women and girls / displaced children | 37 |
| refugee women / refugee girls / refugee women and girls / refugee children | 45 |

Areas of discrimination

Similarly to the method used to identify areas of discrimination in UPR recommendations, a spreadsheet was created to filter for certain key terms. To make the search as accurate as possible, we filtered the term 'discrimination' and each other key terms, or grounds of discrimination. This can differentiate between words not referenced in the context of discrimination, and those used to address a specific form of discrimination. Table 15 below contains statistics which illustrate both filtering categories to give a broader view of the frequency of use of these key terms.

Table 15: Mentions of areas of discrimination identified in Recommendations in Treaty Body Concluding Observations related to girls

| Areas of discrimination | Number | Without filtering for 'discrimination' |
|---|-------------|--|
| 'discrimination' | 459 | 459 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'intersectional / intersecting / intersectionality' | 139 | 143 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'gender' | 250 | 813 |
| 'gender-based discrimination' | 124 | 360 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'sexual orientation' | 7 | 12 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'gender identity' | 8 | 11 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex' | 15 | 28 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'language' | 11 | 75 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'religion / religious belief' | 75 | 157 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'race / racial / ethnic / ethnicity' | 81 | 309 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'disability' | 201 | 633 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'indigenous' | 43 | 131 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'other status' | 3 | 3 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'economic' | 48 | 219 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'age' | 63 | 288 |
| recommendation contains reference to 'discrimination' and 'sex' | 8 | 54 |
| Total | 1691 | |

Girls' rights issues

Table 16: Mentions of girls' rights issues identified in Recommendations in Treaty Body Concluding Observations related to girls

| Girls' rights issues | Number |
|---|--------|
| violence | 562 |
| gender-based violence / GBV / sexual and gender-based violence / SGBV | 337 |
| discriminatory / discriminatory norms / discriminatory attitudes | 197 |
| verbal violence / sexual violence / economic violence / psychological violence / physical violence / harassment | 218 |
| harmful practices / tradition / traditional practices / culture / cultural practices / custom / customary norms | 328 |
| female genital mutilation / FGM / female genital cutting | 53 |
| child marriage / early marriage / forced marriage | 162 |
| crimes in the name of so-called "honour" / Killings and forced suicide in the name of so-called "honour" | 14 |
| early pregnancy | 100 |
| domestic violence | 144 |
| femicides / feminicides / femicide / femicide | 24 |
| stereotypes | 184 |
| prejudice | 20 |
| poverty / poor | 107 |
| climate change | 32 |
| slavery / enslavement / forced labour / child labour / unpaid labour | 32 |
| migrant / migration | 277 |
| displacement / displaced / internal displacement / internally displaced | 52 |

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| education | 624 |
| sexual health / reproductive health / reproduction / sexual reproductive health rights / SRHR | 329 |
| menstruation / menstrual hygiene | 6 |
| comprehensive sexuality education / CSE | 13 |
| right to health | 9 |
| COVID-19 | 59 |
| water and sanitation | 16 |
| trafficking | 175 |
| participation / girls' participation / participation of girls / participation of women and girls / participation of children / children's participation | 215 |
| Care / self-care | N/A ⁴²¹ |
| Informal economy / Unpaid work / Unpaid labour / Informal work | 7 |
| housing / right to an adequate standard of living / adequate housing / homeless / homelessness / unhoused | 40 |
| employment / right to employment | 146 |
| health / right to health / access to health care | 643 |
| sexual health / reproductive health / reproduction / sexual reproductive health rights / SRHR | 329 |
| workers' rights / social protection / right to social security and social protection | 47 |
| food / nutrition / hunger / malnutrition | 40 |
| freedom of expression | 5 |
| freedom of assembly / freedom of peaceful assembly | 9 |
| crisis/ emergency / emergencies / crises | 113 |
| humanitarian / armed conflict / conflict | 102 |
| empowerment / economic empowerment | 111 |
| leadership / children's leadership /women's leadership | 0 |
| girls' leadership | 0 |
| early childhood development / ECD | 9 |
| maternal mortality / maternity morbidity | 49 |
| abortion | 212 |
| sterilization /sterilisation | 54 |
| nationality | 104 |
| birth registration | 21 |
| inheritance | 39 |
| land rights | 1 |
| property | 27 |
| Total | 1691 |

⁴²¹ Not possible due to limits of method. Includes unrelated words.

List of affected groups identified via keyword searches

- women
- women and girls
- children / child
- boys and girls / girls and boys
- adolescent / adolescent girl / teenage / teenage girl
- young / young women / youth
- Indigenous / indigeneity
- Indigenous girls / indigenous women and girls / indigenous children
- minority / minorities
- lesbian / bisexual / transgender / intersex / LGBTI / LGBTI
- rural women and girls / women and girls in rural areas / rural girls / rural children / children in rural areas
- women and girls with disabilities / girls with disabilities / children with disabilities

List of areas of discrimination identified via keyword searches

- discrimination (mention of)
- gender
- sex
- age
- language
- religion / religious belief
- intersectional / intersecting / intersectionality
- gender identity
- sexuality
- race / racial / ethnicity / ethnic
- disability
- 'other status' + discrimination
- socioeconomic status

List of girls' rights issues identified via keyword searches

- violence
- gender-based violence / GBV / sexual and gender-based violence / SGBV
- discriminatory / discriminatory norms / discriminatory attitudes
- verbal violence / sexual violence / economic violence / psychological violence / physical violence / harassment
- harmful practices / tradition / traditional practices / culture / cultural practices / custom / customary norms
- female genital mutilation / FGM / female genital cutting
- child marriage / early marriage / forced marriage
- crimes in the name of so-called "honour" / Killings and forced suicide in the name of so-called "honour"
- early pregnancy
- domestic violence
- femicides / feminicides / femicide / femicide
- stereotypes
- prejudice
- poverty / poor
- climate change
- slavery / enslavement / forced labour / child labour / unpaid labour
- migrant / migration
- displacement / displaced / internal displacement / internally displaced
- education
- sexual health / reproductive health / reproduction / sexual reproductive health rights / SRHR
- menstruation / menstrual hygiene
- comprehensive sexuality education / CSE

- right to health
- COVID-19
- water and sanitation
- trafficking
- participation / girls' participation / participation of girls / participation of women and girls / participation of children / children's participation
- Care / self-care
- Informal economy / Unpaid work / Unpaid labour / Informal work
- housing / right to an adequate standard of living / adequate housing / homeless / homelessness / unhoused
- employment / right to employment
- health / right to health / access to health care
- sexual health / reproductive health / reproduction / sexual reproductive health rights / SRHR
- workers' rights / social protection / right to social security and social protection
- food / nutrition / hunger / malnutrition
- freedom of expression
- freedom of assembly / freedom of peaceful assembly
- crisis/ emergency / emergencies / crises
- humanitarian / armed conflict / conflict
- empowerment / economic empowerment
- leadership / children's leadership /women's leadership
- girls' leadership
- early childhood development / ECD
- maternal mortality / maternity morbidity
- abortion
- sterilization /sterilisation
- nationality
- birth registration
- inheritance
- land rights
- property



Until we are all equal

About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal.

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