

SECOND WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Side Event Concept Note

Panel Title: *Time's Up: End Forced Marriages, Unions, and Pregnancies of Girls and Adolescents in the Americas*

Hosted by: Plan International and Equality Now

Co-sponsored by: The Government of Mexico (TBC)

Date: November 4–6, 2025 (TBC)

Format: Virtual

Context

The Political Declaration of the Second World Summit for Social Development seeks to outline concrete commitments to social development that place people at the centre, ensuring that no one is left behind. In order to truly centre those who have long been excluded, it is essential that girls aged 10 to 19 in the Americas are not only included but heard and meaningfully considered in political dialogues and decision-making processes. Plan International¹, Equality Now², and the Government of Mexico (TBC) propose an intergenerational space for dialogue, connecting past and present childhoods, an intersectional space where gender, age, and diversity matter, and an intersectoral space because civil society, governments, and the international community all share responsibility for building a more just world.

This space will explore in depth two persistent and urgent issues affecting the present and undermining the future of girls in the Americas: adolescent pregnancy and Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU). These issues are deeply intertwined with the poverty experienced by children in the region and are both cause and consequence of one another. The event also aims to outline concrete actions for prevention and response, ensuring that the experiences and demands of girls shape the policy agenda.

Addressing these issues is urgent: Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region in the world where the prevalence of CEFMU has not declined in more than 25 years³,

¹ A development and humanitarian organization working for a just world that promotes children's rights and equality for girls.

² An international human rights organization dedicated to promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls around the world since 1992.

³ UNICEF (2020) Child Marriage and Early Unions in Humanitarian and Crisis Contexts in Latin America and the Caribbean

despite legal advances prohibiting child marriage (not informal unions) in some countries. It is also the only region with a rising trend in pregnancies among girls under the age of 15. Every hour, four girls become mothers⁴, these pregnancies are the result of sexual violence. The region also holds the second highest adolescent pregnancy rate globally, with incidence rates up to twice as high among the most impoverished girls, especially those from rural, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities. In fact, one adolescent gives birth every 20 seconds⁵. Meanwhile, in the United States of America, laws in 34 of 50 states still allow CEFMU to take place; with over 300,000 minors married under the age of 18 in the last 25 years, with the vast majority being girls.

This context reflects not only a grave violation of rights, but also severely constrains the present and future opportunities of girls and adolescents. Evidence shows that girls in CEFMU spend over half of their time on unpaid care work, more than double that of their unmarried peers, and only 6% continue their education⁶. In contrast, girls who are not in early marriages or unions have more time to study, play, and engage in civic and political life, and are significantly more likely to remain in school and eventually access decent and productive employment.

At the same time, evidence also shows that girls who are in school and who have access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) are better equipped to prevent pregnancy and to identify and report sexual violence⁷.

Therefore, acting now and investing in a present free from CEFMU, adolescent pregnancy, and violence against girls is the smartest and most urgent decision we can make to break intergenerational cycles of poverty, promote sustainable and inclusive development, and ensure a dignified and joyful future for all girls.

Objectives

1. To centre the voices, experiences, and demands of girls and adolescent girls in all their diversity from the Americas in political discussions and decisions around social and sustainable development.
2. To highlight and critically analyse the structural causes and far-reaching impact of child and adolescent pregnancy and Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) on the lives and futures of girls.

⁴ UNFPA (2024), State of World Population Report 2024

⁵ UNFPA (2025), The Cost of Inequality: Socioeconomic Consequences of Adolescent Pregnancy and Early Motherhood in Latin America and the Caribbean

⁶ Girls Not Brides (2020), Care Work and Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) in Latin America and the Caribbean

⁷ Plan International (2019), Position Paper on Sexual and Reproductive Rights

3. To foster joint dialogue and action between civil society, governments, international cooperation, and the private sector, with the aim of mobilising political will, resources, and capacity to implement urgent, concrete, and sustained actions to prevent and respond comprehensively to CEFMU and adolescent pregnancy.

Proposed Format

This side event will be structured as a 75-minute conversational panel, designed to promote reflective, inclusive, and interactive dialogue with meaningful audience participation.

The session will begin with brief opening remarks from the *Movimiento Por Ser Niña*⁸ and a representative from the Government of Mexico (TBC), followed by a panel discussion. The panel will explore the structural causes and impact of CEFMU and adolescent pregnancy on the lives of girls in the Americas, recognizing their deep connection to poverty, gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and gender inequality. The panel will also outline urgent, sustained, and concrete actions for prevention and response.

The session will include space for questions and audience input, ensuring an inclusive and participatory format. Girls from two countries in Latin America and Caribbean region will play a central and leading role in the event.

Duration: 75 minutes

Structure:

1. Welcome (5 minutes)

- Girl representative of Movimiento Por Ser Niña
- Representative from the Government of Mexico (TBC)

2. Panel Discussion (50 minutes)

- Girl representative of Movimiento Por Ser Niña, Ecuador
- Representative from the Government of Mexico
- Girl from the region (country TBC)
- Representative from the Congress of the Republic of Colombia, *Niñas No Esposas*

⁸ A civil society organization led by girls, adolescent and young women, advocating for gender equality and equity by promoting girls' leadership in the spaces they inhabit.

- Representative from Equality Now
- Representative of US civil society organization working to end Child marriage
- Moderation and comments: Plan International Americas

3. Q&A Session (15 minutes)

4. Closing Reflections (5 minutes)

Expected Outcomes

- Girls panelists will have a safe, central platform where their experiences, perspectives, and demands are heard, valued, and incorporated into the event's conclusions. These conclusions will be shared with decision-makers and the media to amplify their voices and drive tangible change.
- Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the structural causes and consequences of CEFMU and adolescent pregnancy, recognizing their links to poverty, sexual violence, and gender inequality, and the urgent need for a comprehensive, intersectional, and gender-sensitive approach.
- Initial commitments and opportunities for coordination will be generated among key stakeholders from different sectors to implement concrete actions, mobilise resources, and strengthen public policies focused on the prevention of and response to CEFMU and adolescent pregnancy.