

PLAN INTERNATIONAL AT THE UNITED NATIONS | 2021 ANNUAL REPORT



CONTENTS

FOREWORD..... 3

STRATEGY AT THE UN..... 4

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: SECURITY COUNCIL..... 5

GIRLS IN CRISIS..... 6

POLICY FOR GIRLS’ RIGHTS..... 7

INNOVATING FOR GIRLS’ RIGHTS..... 7

YOUTH ADVOCACY..... 8

MAKING CHANGE..... 9

CASE STUDIES.....10



Cover photo: Three Youth Advocates from the ‘We Believe in Girls (Creemos en las niñas)’ campaign, Ecuador. Credit: Plan International / Juan José Orellana.
This page: Youth advocate Zainab, Sierra Leone. Credit: Plan International / Quinn Neely.



FOREWORD

Siloes.

It's one of those buzzwords we often hear in our sector. It describes the fractioned and fragmented way in which our sector tends to do its work. Humanitarian doesn't talk much to human rights, which doesn't interact much with health. Processes in New York often have little to do with those taking place in Geneva. The interaction with work done at the international level and regional level is weak, at best.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, however, pushed us to think differently. The entire world has been plunged into the same challenging situation, bringing a level of commonality and solidarity that we have rarely seen before. As social distancing between us has become the new norm, our new online working modalities have in fact shrunk distance between our spaces.

It is in this context that Plan International has been rethinking the way it approaches our work at the United Nations. In an effort to bring a culture shift both internally in our own organisation as well as in the broader UN space in which we work, we created one UN team out of two liaison offices, bringing them together under one UN Representative to cover Geneva and New York.

Synergies.

Another buzzword, yes. But the right one. Breaking down siloes to create synergies requires developing new ways of working and learning new things. It requires thinking about the values we espouse in doing what we do, and making an investment to live out those values. It means making sure our global advocacy is always informed by local expertise and experience. It implies strengthening collaboration with and support to Plan International's offices across the globe, and centring the voices of children and young people, especially girls and young women.

The importance of creating synergies was captured perfectly by Astrid, 16 years old from Peru, during an intergenerational dialogue organized on the occasion of Universal Children's Day by Plan International's UN Team, together with our African Union and European Union Liaison Offices. Astrid said, "Being able to exchange with adolescents and young people from other countries allows us to strengthen our common work, as we may find that we have similar solutions."

A core value of Plan International's work, both globally and at the UN, will continue to be supporting girls and young women to share their lived experiences and to speak truth to power. As we work better together, we create more opportunities for girls and young women not only to have a seat at the table, but to shape the table.



In solidarity, en solidarité, en solidaridad,

Anne-Sophie Lois
UN Representative in New York and Geneva



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A NEW STRATEGY FOR OUR WORK AT THE UN

Inclusive multilateralism, where governments work closely together with civil society, is essential to advance children's rights and equality for girls. Despite voices that criticise the UN, its impact and efficiency, the UN continues to matter today for girls' rights.

To become a more powerful voice at the UN, Plan International has developed a five-year UN Strategy for 2022-2027. It shapes Plan International's approach and priorities at the UN. In line with our principle of inclusion, the UN Strategy is the result of several months of internal and external consultations and we would like to thank all of our partners and colleagues who contributed their time, advice, and ideas.

Our UN Strategy articulates principles that will guide our work going forward. These principles cover areas such as embodied feminist principles, the importance of applying a human rights-based approach to all our engagements, co-creation, bridging for lasting impact, finding innovative solutions, promoting anti-racism and decolonization, do no harm, and accountability and agility.

Over the next 5 years, we will, together with partners, continue to bring new issues to the global debate and set the agenda, amplify good practices, work towards finding solutions to humanitarian and security crises and make sure girls are prioritised in responses. We will continue to shape and improve global standards through our work in multilateral spaces, ensuring national implementation of international commitments as well as securing funding for girls. While we advance the rights of all children and young people in all their diversity, we focus particularly on girls and young women and the specific vulnerabilities they face.

We will deepen our commitment to becoming a feminist organisation. Key to a feminist approach is centring the voices of those whom society has too often cast aside. As such, the voices of children and young people are at the centre of everything we do. We are committed to making sure children and young people's voices and priorities are heard at the UN.

OVERARCHING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:

Plan International drives change with girls and young women to advance their human rights and gender equality in all contexts. As a credible and critical feminist actor at the United Nations we advocate with partners for strong laws, policies and frameworks at international and national levels which reflect intersectional identities.

OUR THEMATIC ADVOCACY FOCUS FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS WILL COVER FOUR THEMATIC AREAS:

1. GIRLS IN CRISIS
2. POLICY FOR GIRLS' RIGHTS
3. YOUTH ADVOCACY, ACTIVISM, & PARTICIPATION
4. MONITORING STATES OBLIGATIONS & COMMITMENTS

As a cross-cutting priority, we will develop strong partnerships and collaborate with many actors across borders and sectors. Partnerships are critical for successful advocacy to deliver results for girls and to realise girls' rights. Together our voices are stronger.

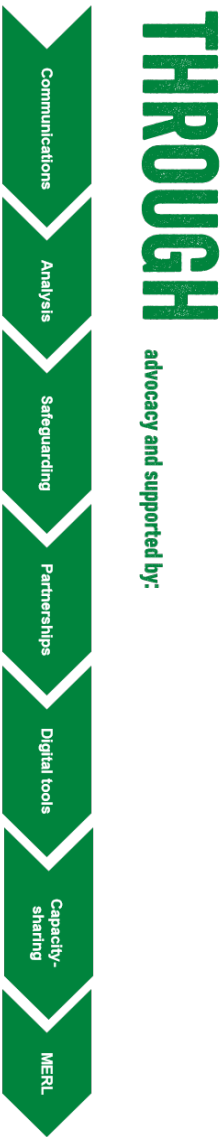
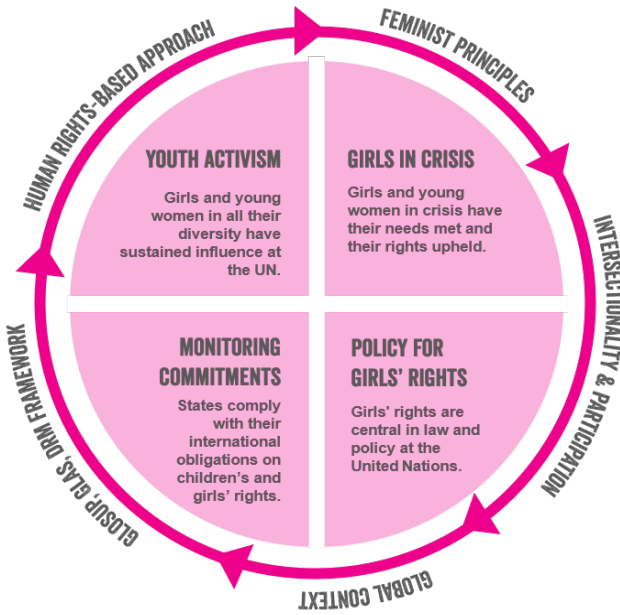
WHEN

Plan International at all levels acts with governments, UN agencies, CSOs and young people to:



THEN

the rights and needs of girls and young women will be respected and realized through UN policy and practice.



THEORY OF CHANGE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

INCREASING INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION TO THE NEEDS AND RIGHTS OF GIRLS IN CONFLICT SETTINGS

The UN Security Council in New York is the main intergovernmental body working on peace and security, making key decisions on how to address urgent situations around the world.

One of our most exciting achievements this year was bringing to the attention of the UN Security Council the situation of girls in the armed conflict in Northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, and sharing our recommendations with several [presidents, ambassadors, government ministers, the UN Secretary-General, and a global audience.](#)

In June 2021, Plan International was chosen as the only civil society organisation to brief the Security Council during their annual Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC). Laban Onisimus from Plan International Nigeria gave a briefing on children in armed conflict with a specific focus on girls' lived realities. He discussed how girls are impacted by the 6 grave violations against children in conflict, and how girls and their schools are targeted. He presented to the Security Council our recommendations for what should be done.

As a result of sustained advocacy on this issue from many civil society partners, as well as efforts such as this one to raise this issue up the agenda, the Security Council passed their first Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) resolution since 2018, with the unanimous adoption of [Security Council Resolution 2601](#) (2021) in October 2021 on the Protection of Education in Conflict. Never before has the Security Council passed a resolution explicitly dedicated to the protection of education. The resolution has an important emphasis on the vulnerability of girls in situations of armed conflict and targeted attacks on their education. It is now critical that the Security Council monitors progress against this landmark resolution, and takes swift steps to address contraventions, in order to ensure that parties to conflict comply. Without follow up and accountability, there is a risk that not much will change in conflict situations.



Laban Onisimus of Plan International Nigeria briefs the Security Council

THE SIX GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT:

- Killing and maiming of children
- Recruitment or use of children
- Sexual violence against children
- Abduction of children
- Attacks against schools or hospitals
- Denial of humanitarian access for children

GIRLS IN CRISIS



ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF GIRLS IN CONFLICT

In addition to briefing the UN Security Council at the 2021 Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) the UN team focused on ensuring that the experiences of girls in conflict-affected settings were integral to peace and security discussions. In this vein, we convened numerous briefings with UN Security Council diplomats, and connected Plan International offices in countries experiencing conflict with decision-makers at the UN to give concrete recommendations for improving the situation.

Additionally, through our engagement in several resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), we successfully advocated to protect children's education from attacks by armed forces by securing for the first time in HRC resolutions references to the [Safe Schools Declaration](#).

FINDING AMBITIOUS SOLUTIONS TO INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

2021 has been a key year to advance the rights of forcibly displaced young women and girls, with the landmark report of the [UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement](#). In the report, the Panel provides some bold high-level recommendations on action to prevent, respond to, and solve the world's internal displacement crises.

Plan International engaged with this process with the aim of ensuring specific recommendations for internally displaced girls and bold commitments to foster accountability and responsibility-sharing for all internally displaced persons (IDPs). To do this, we developed one submission on [Realizing National Accountability and International Responsibility](#) and another on [Ensuring an Age, Gender, and Diversity \(AGD\) Inclusive Approach to Internal Displacement](#), which was signed by more than fifty actors. In parallel, we have ensured that the voices of young people were contributing to the work of the Panel by conducting consultations with young internally displaced people in Colombia, South Sudan and Nigeria.

As a result, the High-Level Panel's report [reflected several recommendations](#) proposed by Plan International. For instance, it puts forward ambitious ideas around accountability, including a push for a Special Representative for the Secretary General on IDPs. The report also recognises the discrimination and exclusion from decision-making faced by internally displaced girls and calls on States to reform systems to better address the specific discrimination based on their age and gender, which prevents them from exercising their full rights.

MOVING THE NEEDLE FOR REFUGEE GIRLS

This year, we advocated to increase support to address the needs and improve the participation of refugee girls and young women in global refugee policies. As part of our sustained advocacy for the [Global Refugee Forum](#) (GRF), we worked with UNHCR and partners to improve the integration of age, gender and diversity (AGD) into the mechanisms for the follow-up of pledges. An important stage of the follow-up process to the GRF is the [High-Level Officials' Meeting](#) (HLOM), an event for senior government officials and representatives of relevant stakeholder groups to take stock of progress and maintain the momentum towards achieving the objectives of the [Global Compact on Refugees](#).

Ensuring a strong age, gender and diversity lens within the HLOM process is essential for ensuring political will and accountability for the rights and needs of girl and young women refugees. We successfully advocated for stakeholders reporting on their pledges at the HLOM to be required to explain how their pledges are targeting women, girls and other groups. We have also built a coalition with NGOs and UNHCR to advocate for increased support to age, gender and diversity in the outcome of the HLOM, co-hosting an official UNHCR stocktaking event on age, gender and diversity in pledge implementation.

This movement represents a significant improvement on the centrality of age, gender and diversity within a major global process on refugee response and we expect that this work will pave the way for more ambitious pledges at the Global Refugee Forum in 2024.



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INNOVATING FOR GIRLS' RIGHTS

Girls' rights remain largely invisible within international policy, often falling into the cracks between women's and children's rights. Without a single location to access all international policy documentation, policy influencers and advocates invest vast time and resources piecing together key information for policy development. It is difficult to gain a big picture view of girls' rights within this space, and more challenging to apply an intersectional lens to their analysis of policy.

In 2017, Plan International started on a journey into the world of innovation for girls' rights in order to address this problem. The result is our Girls' Rights Platform – a one-stop shop for all international documentation needed to advance girls' rights and gender equality, driven by gender- and intersectionality-responsive artificial intelligence, and quick, easy access for individuals of all levels of expertise.

With the Girls' Rights Platform, policy makers and influencers have access to over 8'000 documents, produced by over 52 international and regional human rights mechanisms, and all in 3 languages.

Girls' Rights Platform users can conduct broad thematic research or find specific language across a wide array of resources in less time and with less pre-requisite knowledge, realistically saving them up to 84% of time needed for traditional research methods!



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POLICY FOR GIRLS' RIGHTS

IMPORTANT GAINS FOR GIRLS' RIGHTS IN A CHALLENGING POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Plan International's UN team is working hard in global policy spaces to advance girls' rights and make sure language in international policy is strong and progressive. But this work is not without its challenges. Restrictions related to COVID-19, including virtual negotiations and restricted access of civil society to decision-making spaces, have only compounded pre-existing challenges for advancing girls' rights. We are navigating a political climate where many actors are pushing back against issues such as girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights and their right to participate in political and public life.

Despite these challenges, there was some progress this year. For example:

- At the UN General Assembly, we were able to influence a number of resolutions, including on children's rights and girls' rights specifically. We saw new language on a number of key issues, including education, climate, health and COVID-19.
- At the UN Human Rights Council, we actively lobbied States across a number of different resolutions ranging from child marriage to violence against women and girls, to girls' right to education, to reject regressive language which aimed to water down language on these rights.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND GIRLS' RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

We are witnessing a human-induced climate crisis, and the effects on girls around the world are being felt particularly strongly. Girls are pulled out of school to help their families find food and water or take care of siblings. They are forced into marriage as a strategy used by families to cope with economic hardships caused by climate change. Girls forced to stay in temporary shelters or migrate far from home are at greater risk of violence. We are working to make sure that the specific challenges faced by girls as a result of the climate crisis are addressed by global leaders.

At the same time, we are also seeing young people standing up more than ever before to make their voices heard to address this crisis. Plan International's UN team works not only to influence policy on climate change, but also to connect youth voices with important global decision-making spaces. For example, during this year's UN General Assembly we collaborated with partners to launch a [Youth Statement](#) on gender-transformative education to advance climate justice. During the course of the General Assembly High-Level week, girls and young women activists from around the world, [shared their recommendations](#) on climate education with leaders, mobilising support for their priorities for the UN Climate Change Conference COP26, and beyond. Additionally, we collectively pushed with partners to require the UN Special Rapporteurs on environment and the newly created one on climate change to consult children and youth throughout their activities.

YOUTH ADVOCACY, ACTIVISM AND PARTICIPATION

We work to support girls' and young women's activism through She Leads, a consortium that brings together child and women's rights organisations, and girl- and young women-led groups to increase sustained influence of girls and young women on decision-making and the transformation of gender norms in formal and informal institutions. We have three main objectives:

CHANGE AGENTS:

The UN system has a range of tools that we support young people to use in advancing their advocacy at the national level. For example, this year we accompanied several young women from Sierra Leone, Ireland and Togo in their engagement with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This has directly contributed to normalising the meaningful participation of children and youth with UN mechanisms.

CHANGE THE UN:

The UN still has a long way to go to become inclusive of the voices of girls and young women. Today, their participation in UN spaces is ad hoc and one-off, and too often reserved for the most privileged young people. We are working to make sure that the UN becomes a space in which young people in all their diversity can make their voices heard.

This year, we used the International Day of the Girl as an opportunity to share this message and provide a platform for girls and UN leaders to discuss the importance of promoting diversity in girls' activism. We ran a 2-week social media campaign highlighting what is meant by girls and young women "in all their diversity" and why this is relevant to the digital space. The campaign featured 9 virtual intergenerational "[Lightning Dialogues](#)" between 10 UN leaders and 11 girl and young women advocates from all around the world.

We are committed to walking the talk when it comes to diversity and inclusion, so we had dialogues in 5 languages, subtitles in 4 languages, plus American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation on all videos!

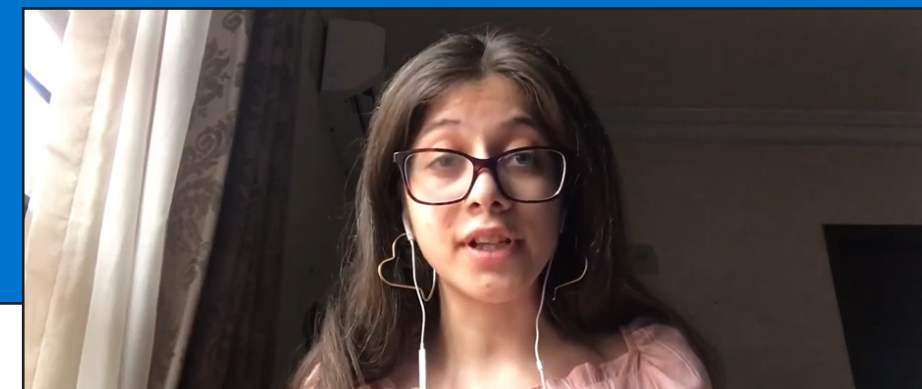


From "[LGBTQIA+ Rights at the UN](#)" Lightning Dialogue for IDG2021.

"All we want to be is to be considered equal, to put us, especially young people from the Global South at the table, where decisions are made."
– Shamah, Youth activist, Transform Education



From [UNHCR Solidarity Message](#) with Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, UNHCR, for IDG2021.



A Youth Activist delivers the feminist youth-led statement on Gender Transformative Education to Advance Climate Justice, released during UNGA76.

CHANGE POLICY:

This year, we worked to make sure that girls and young women were not left out of policy discussions focused on women's participation in decision-making. During the 2021 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), we successfully advocated for the outcome document to recognise the important contributions of girls and youth-led organisations as part of wider civil society and to support youth organisations to operate free from violence and harassment.

Additionally, the UN team uses evidence from Plan International's programmes to influence UN guidance, making sure girls' and young women's experiences and specific challenges are strongly reflected. For example, together with partners in the She Leads consortium, we sent a submission on [girls' and young women's activism](#) to the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression for her report on [gender justice](#), as well as [one](#) to the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls for their [forthcoming report](#) on girls' and young women's activism. These submissions highlighted the specific ways in which girls and young women organise themselves as activists and the specific barriers they face.

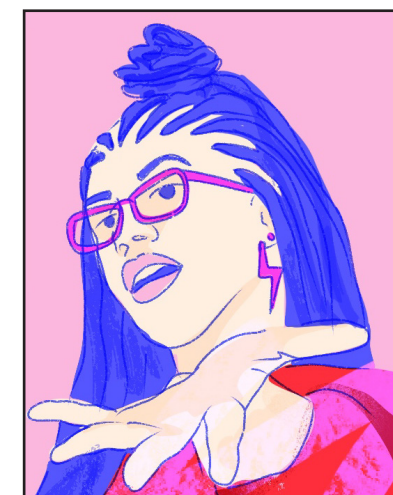


Illustration captured during CSW65 dialogue on adolescent feminist leadership & accountability.

We also successfully inputted into the [Our Future Agenda](#) report, developed by the Next Generation Fellows, which outlines young people's visions for a more just and sustainable future. We ensured that the report included a focus on girls and young women where relevant, rather than more broadly referring to "young people".

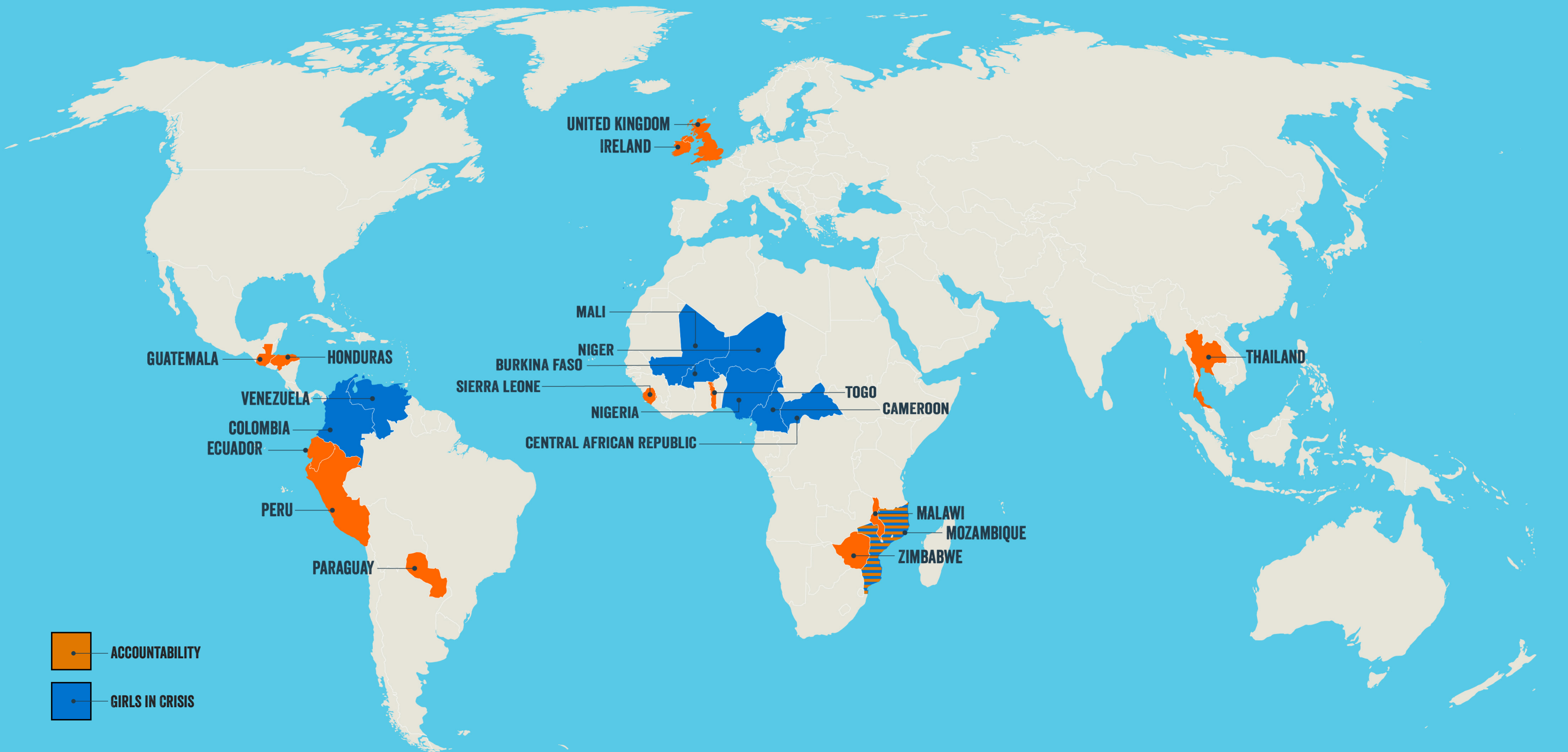
Finally, we successfully advocated for the Committee on the Rights of the Child to include a more explicit gender focus in its [policy guidance](#) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, including how the gender digital divide creates obstacles to girls' participation in public life.

MAKING CHANGE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The UN team uses various tools within the UN system to push for changes in the countries in which Plan International works. We collaborate closely with colleagues in our country offices to support their access to these powerful spaces and work together with them to advocate for change at national level. We work in a so-called “triple nexus”, using human rights, humanitarian and peace and security systems to push for change for girls in crisis situations.

MONITORING GOVERNMENTS’ OBLIGATIONS AND COMMITMENTS

Supporting the engagement of Plan International offices with UN human rights mechanisms has long been a core tenet of our work, as we seek to ensure that States respect, protect and fulfil human rights. Through our participation in the reporting cycles of the [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC) and the [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW) and the [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR), we are able to bring girls’ rights issues to the fore and hold States accountable. This year, we supported 13 Plan International offices to advance children’s rights and equality for girls in their countries (see below for an overview) with some successful influencing of governments.



CASE STUDIES

HERE ARE JUST A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE IMPACT WE'VE HAD:



GIRLS IN CRISIS: MOZAMBIQUE

Our work this year on the conflict in Mozambique is a prime example of our triple-nexus approach. In 2021, the UN Team conducted significant advocacy on the situation of children in Mozambique. We released a [joint briefing note](#) on the realities of children and adolescent girls affected by the conflict in Cabo Delgado province, northern Mozambique and conducted several briefings for Member States, including Security Council Members.

As of the end of 2021, around 800,000 people were displaced by the conflict throughout Northern Mozambique. During a recent visit to Mozambique our New York team met with displaced adolescent girls and boys in rural Cabo Delgado province. The adolescents had fled the conflict in their districts of origin and told us stories of horrific violence against their families, neighbours, and friends. They described the killing and abduction of family members, and the days on foot to escape the conflict. Plan International is responding along with NGO and UN agency colleagues to the humanitarian needs, but so much more is needed. We are also advocating for the root causes of this conflict to be addressed so that the people of Northern Mozambique can live in peace and access opportunities, quality education, livelihoods, and share in the future of the country.

We have also pushed for changes within the human rights system, including during the Universal Periodic Review of Mozambique and the review of the Human Rights Committee. Using a combination of a briefing paper and advocacy, we were able to influence recommendations on key issues made to the Government of Mozambique, which it has committed to implement. This will serve as a strong basis for actors in the country to advocate for improved responses for girls and young women.

MONITORING COMMITMENTS: MALAWI

The engagement of Plan International with UN human rights mechanisms always seeks to impact policies and standards at the national level. This year, we were able to support colleagues from Plan International Malawi in their constructive exchanges with national authorities in the context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The Government of Malawi had initially rejected recommendations received during the UPR on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). However, we worked with our colleagues to successfully lobby nationally for their government to change position. The Government of Malawi finally committed to implement comprehensive sexuality education, to disseminate the UPR recommendations to all stakeholders and to strengthen mechanisms to end teenage pregnancies, forced and early marriages.

MONITORING COMMITMENTS: ECUADOR

We aim to be as strategic as possible in our engagement with UN human rights mechanisms in order to maximise the impact of our advocacy and contribute to the follow-up to recommendations. We worked with Plan International's Office in Ecuador to submit the same (adapted) information to three human rights committees: the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). What's exciting is that Plan International Ecuador worked with children and young people throughout the whole process, including briefing members of the CEDAW Committee and the Human Rights Committee.

"Engaging with these mechanisms strengthens advocacy on girls' rights, provides them with tools and increase their chances to continue demanding their rights."
- Rossana Viteri, Country Director, Plan International Ecuador



About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are often the most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive change in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in nearly 80 countries.

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