

# Plan International at the United Nations



**2023 Activity Report**

# Foreword

The year 2023 marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 75 years of saying that every human is born free and equal in dignity and rights. 75 years of saying that we will not tolerate discrimination of any kind. 75 years of commitment by every country to protecting and promoting the inherent rights of every person.

But as we celebrated this 75th anniversary in December 2023, we also acknowledge that we are in an unprecedented time of wars, ecological emergencies, technological disruption, democratic backsliding, geopolitical tension, and rising inequalities. As we look to the next 75 years, we must harness the energy and innovation of young people, and provide them a platform to lead us into the future envisioned 75 years ago by the authors of the Declaration.

It is in this tumultuous and uncertain time that I step down from my role as leader of Plan International's work at the United Nations. I started Plan International's advocacy and representation work towards the United Nations in 2009 by opening the first Plan International UN Liaison Office

in Geneva. In the last 15 years, I have been privileged to bring, together with so many brilliant and passionate colleagues, Plan International's priorities around children's rights and equality for girls to the UN in both Geneva and New York. We have seen so many changes in laws, frameworks and political commitments, including on child and forced marriage, gender, age and diversity, forced migration, conflict, participation, investment in children, climate, just to name a few. Girls are more than ever before at the centre of discussions around human rights, and for that, I am proud. I will now turn my focus internally in the organisation to work on staff care and wellbeing, as Plan International is committed to cultivate organisational cultures of care and compassion and to create an organisation where people thrive at work.

In solidarity, en solidarité, en solidaridad,



Anne-Sophie Lois  
Senior UN Representative in  
New York and Geneva

## Changing policy for girls

The **67th Commission on the Status of Women** (CSW67) focused on innovation, technological change and education – key opportunities for the UN team to advance the adolescent girl agenda on a global scale.

From the earliest planning sessions, we partnered with colleagues from across the organization to influence at national, regional, and global levels. Our [policy brief](#) covered key priority issues:

- bridging the digital divide for adolescent girls
- recognizing the challenges they face amid global digital transformation
- delivering digital literacy and skills (including digital citizenship education)
- ensuring their meaningful participation in decision-making processes related to the digital environment

At every stage we prioritized the voices, agency and leadership of the newly created She Leads UN Youth Cohort. **She Leads**, a joint programme of several INGOs with a specific focus on East Africa, West Africa, and the Middle East, seeks to increase the sustained influence of girls and young women on decision-making and the transformation of gender norms in formal and informal institutions.

Along with co-creation of our written statement to the Commission, participation in working groups and contributions to policy text markups, two members of the Cohort traveled to New York to work on integrating our policy recommendations during the intense conclusion of negotiations on the final agreed conclusions. One advocate, Hiqmat, also co-wrote and delivered an oral statement during the Commission.

**Our efforts at CSW67** led to unprecedented gains in the session's outcomes: **for the first time ever in the Commission's history, the agreed conclusions included a standalone paragraph recognizing the challenges facing adolescent girls**, using language we had submitted as policy recommendations. These achievements not only demonstrate our continued impactful presence at the UN but also set a new standard for our future global advocacy initiatives.



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# Push back against the rollback



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Amidst increasing attempts to roll back rights in global spaces, the UN Team in New York worked to influence the outcomes of the **UN General Assembly's High-Level Week** (UNGA78). Along with a Plan International Delegation of global staff and young people, we worked under very restricted civil society access to secure investments in and recognition of the rights, needs and challenges facing adolescent girls.

UNGA78 marked the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the SDG Summit, and we influenced policy outcomes for several key declarations: the SDG Political Declaration, the UHC (Universal Health Coverage) Political Declaration, and the Scope document for the Pact for the Future.

At the UNGA's Third Committee, our team's engagement was extensive and multifaceted. The Third Committee, dealing with **crucial issues like human rights, gender equality, children's rights, and social development**, provided a vital platform for our advocacy. We contributed to resolutions including

the Rights of the Child, the Girl Child, and Policies and Programs Involving Youth.

Our intense efforts were successful in ensuring that children, especially girls, adolescents and youth remained central in global discussions, and that attempts to roll back previous agreed language and commitments by Member States were unsuccessful. Additionally, our work sought to influence resolutions on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Human Rights Defenders, and Women and Girls in Rural Areas, aligning with our broader organisational objectives.

Our involvement in the Third Committee was more than just participation; it was an exercise in working closely with a significant number of UN Member States in order to impact and shape global norms and influence policies for sustainable change. By actively engaging in the Committee's work, we ensured our voice was heard and our priorities were central in the creation of resolutions that drive national and global agendas, thereby solidifying our role as a thought leader in girls' rights, gender equality and the empowerment of young people worldwide.

## Meaningful youth engagement

At Plan International, we aim for **youth to be at the centre of everything we do**. This includes not only giving children and young people in all their diversity platforms to raise their voices in international spaces, but also striving to co-create our own advocacy messaging with young people themselves. Among others, we do this through our work in She Leads.

**"Representing the girls and young women at a local level is normal but it was not until I was privileged to amplify my voice at a global level that I understand the meaning of advocacy. This was a dream come true. More than ever, I feel the need to speak the unspoken, to let the world know from the victim's mouth and to take the stand even in the middle of unfamiliar faces/ages. Thank you Plan UN for making this happen."**  
- Margaret, Kenya



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## She Leads at the Human Rights Council



The UN Team in Geneva supported three young members of the She Leads UN Youth Cohort to attend the 53rd session of the **Human Rights Council**, fostering a powerful journey of advocacy for the youth advocates and representing a practice of truly meaningful youth engagement: longer-term participation; constructive reflections before, during and after the event; and co-creation and co-decision making.

Through workshops and training, the She Leads Youth Advocates gained confidence, public speaking skills, and diplomacy insights. This culminated in their active engagement at the Council, delivering impactful statements and participating in negotiations for the Child Early and Forced Marriage Resolution. The Cohort worked collectively to advocate for critical issues such as climate change and food systems, discrimination against women in political and public spaces, freedom

of expression and digital spaces, and child, early and forced marriage. Concurrently, the UN Team in Geneva engaged with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Permanent Mission of Netherlands to facilitate more opportunities for the youth advocates.

The progress achieved can be contextualized within a framework of shrinking civic space for rights-based CSOs and strong pushback from the

anti-rights movement. Additionally, the complications arising from obtaining visas for those from the global south to attend events in Geneva further emphasize the restrictive operating context. Despite these obstacles, the progress made by the She Leads UN Youth Cohort stands out as a commendable achievement, reflecting resilience and determination in navigating widespread constraints.

# Shedding light on neglected crises



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

At the United Nations Headquarters in New York, Plan International directs its humanitarian advocacy toward neglected crises, emphasizing the unique challenges faced by adolescent girls in areas affected by armed conflict. We advocate for decision-makers in the international humanitarian and human rights system to better understand and act upon the specific protection needs of adolescent girls throughout the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate and situations of armed conflict, especially where Plan International operates.

Ahead of the **UN Security Council's Annual Debate on Children and Armed Conflict** (CAAC), we engaged the UN Member States and the international community by developing a neglected crisis brief. **This advocacy brief**, collaboratively developed with our Country and Regional Offices, captures the authentic life experiences of girls within these specified regions. We brought attention to five conflicts that had long been overlooked by the global community: Burkina Faso, Niger, Northwest

Southwest Cameroon, Mozambique, and Haiti.

Our call to action urged the UN Security Council and the international community to mobilize for enhanced protection and support for children, especially girls, living through these conflicts.

As a result of sustained advocacy from many civil society partners, as well as efforts such as the Neglected Crisis Brief, the Security Council successfully passed a resolution to authorize a Multinational Security Support Mission for Haiti that the UN Secretary-General and the Government of Haiti requested a year earlier. The resolution calls for the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) to fully take into account child protection as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate and to assist the authorities in the protection of children including through prioritising advisory support on child protection.

# Supporting young refugees to make change



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**The Global Refugee Forum** (GRF) in December 2023 was a pivotal platform for Ministers and Heads of State to pledge their commitments to advancing the rights of refugees worldwide. Plan International urged decision-makers to increase commitments to equitable access to services, participation of refugee girls and young women in decision-making processes, enhanced protection against violence and gender inequality and the need for inclusive, quality, gender-transformative education for all displaced children.

In both the preparation for and during the GRF, Plan International worked hard to ensure that young refugees could influence decisions made by governments and other key stakeholders. To this end, we developed **a Global Refugee Forum Youth Manifesto** together with fifteen displaced youth advocates from diverse backgrounds and age groups. The Manifesto, which was presented in front of governments attending the GRF, had concrete calls for decision-makers to foster the participation of young people in responses to displacement, on legal reforms and freedom of movement, and on education. As the authors of the Manifesto stated: *"We want our voices not merely to be heard but to be a decisive factor in global change."*

We also launched a policy brief entitled **"Supporting refugee girls to thrive,"** which addresses the distinct challenges faced by adolescent refugee girls, emphasizing the critical need for concrete commitments from governments, donors, and humanitarian actors.

Sedra, a 15-year-old refugee from Syria, attended as part of Plan International's delegation and spoke at a number of events, including ones on education, youth empowerment and child rights. She has called decision-makers to open space for youth leaders to shape refugee responses and called for increased investments in education. Plan International's CEO Stephen Omollo led the delegation and presented Plan International's commitments to the GRF and held strategic discussions with governments and UNHCR leadership.

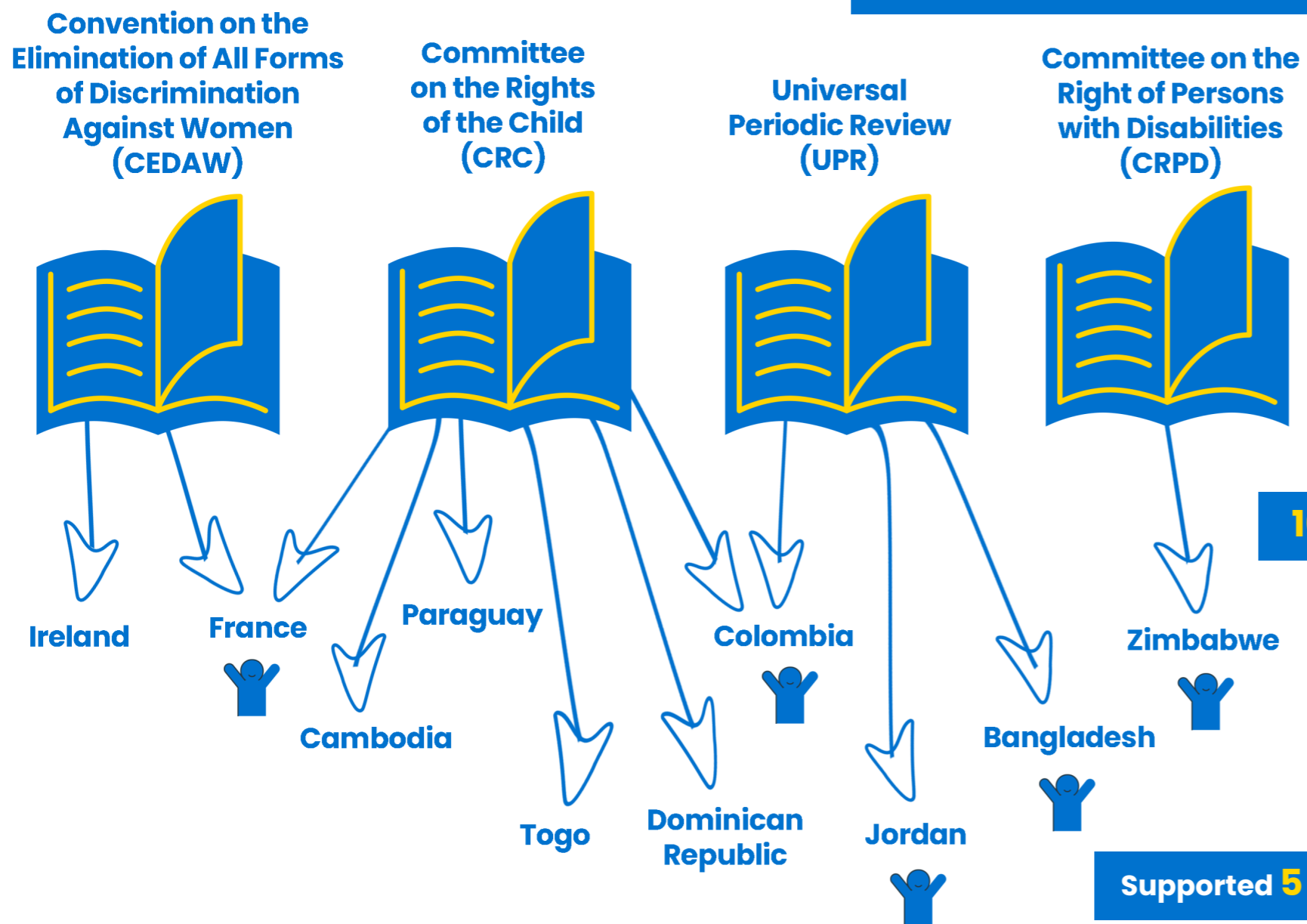


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# Engaging with UN Human Rights Mechanisms to Increase Accountability

This year we had the opportunity, together with our offices around the world, to support children and young people to hold their governments accountable to their human rights obligations and commitments.

## 4 Human Rights Mechanisms Influenced



10 Countries Supported

Supported 5 children and young people to engage with UN processes in-person

### Some of our big wins this year in our accountability work:

- 9 recommendations drafted by youth representatives from Colombia were taken on board at their country's UPR review
- The Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) of Plan International Ireland engaged in the full CEDAW process, from report drafting to attending the review and now are working on follow-up!
- A young woman from Jordan was able to speak at the pre-session of her country



# “Nothing about us without us”



The **Annual Day on the Rights of the Child** (ADRC) is a yearly celebration and discussion on children’s rights during the Human Rights Council March session. Traditionally, this one-day panel discussion brings in experts from all over the world to discuss different topics that transversally affect children’s rights. However, participation of children in these discussions, whether as leading conversations or merely engaging as speakers, has been lacking in previous years. This changed this past ADRC where for the first time in history a full panel was composed by children. During this first-of-a-kind event, Plan International supported a young girl to be part of the panel, chair another panel, and share her experiences as a child human rights defender. Children all over the world continually tell us that they want “nothing about us without us”, and finally, the Human Rights Council is starting to listen.

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## Youth drive the future of human rights

In the context of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), we supported young people to amplify their own priorities and messages. For example, young people from Asia represented Plan International in regional dialogues in preparation for the UDHR75 High Level event, sharing their valuable insights in analyzing the context of South Asia regarding the civic space of young people, especially girls and women, and encouraging the creation of a regional human rights accountability mechanism. Additionally, we co-sponsored an event on the margins of the High Level event which focused on children’s rights and participation.



Until we are all equal



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## 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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