

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES

Plan International at the United Nations 2024 Annual Report



Until we are all equal



Welcome

The year 2024 saw two new Heads of Office assume leadership of the United Nations (UN) Team in New York and Geneva, working together to change the way the UN, and the world, looks at girls' rights. As we seek to drive change for girls' rights at the international level as well as ensure implementation at the national level, we do so in a world that is increasingly overwhelmed by conflict. Crises, both highly publicized and largely neglected, brought untold suffering to millions of people and, as always, girls and young women are among those most affected. 2024 has been a challenging year for girls, with new and existing humanitarian crises escalating and rollbacks on girls' rights threatening to destabilise hard-won gains.

Yet there is also hope, and there is more work to be done. Our new report *Strengthening girls' rights as human rights* showed that the gains in promoting girls' rights are considerable. Girls are mentioned more, reference to girls' rights issues are occurring more often, and there are more opportunities for girls to participate at the UN. Our *Neglected Crisis* brief brought research developed directly with Plan International Country Offices to decision-makers at the UN, urging them to promote greater equity in their global responses by protecting the most vulnerable populations, especially children affected by conflict. And the President of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) launched an Advisory Council on Gender Equality, with Plan International as one of its inaugural Members.

As we begin 2025, the fight for girls' rights is as urgent as ever, and it demands immediate and sustained action. Global leaders must prioritise the unique needs and perspectives of girls in policies and programs, ensuring their voices are heard at every level. The United Nations must champion girls' rights and amplify their leadership - this report shows many examples of that leadership in UN spaces.

While the scale of global crises can feel staggering, we remain committed to the vision of a future where children, especially girls, are protected from conflict and can reach their full potential. As Amelie, a member of the Youth Task Force for the Future who visited UN Headquarters to meet key Member State representatives, said: **“Democracy, change and justice start with us, here and now – and I think that the future simply cannot wait for all the amazing things yet to happen along this way.”**



Débora Cobar
Head of Office and New York
Representative



Charlotte Stemmer
Head of Office and Geneva
Representative

Summit of the Future: Chartering the path for a gender-equal future



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One of Plan International's key influencing focuses this year was the **UN Summit of the Future (SOTF)**. Presented as a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinvigorate global action, recommit to fundamental principles, and further develop the frameworks of multilateralism so they are fit for the future," the Summit of the Future provided a critical window of opportunity to increase commitment to and investment in adolescent girls' rights.

Plan International's priority at the Summit of the Future was to secure recognition of, commitment to, and **investment in adolescent girls' rights** in the Summit of the Future's outcome documents – the Pact for the Future, the Declaration on Future Generations, and the Global Digital Compact.

Learn more about SOTF

Thought piece by youth advocate Samikshya from Nepal
Girls' Pact film featuring members of the Youth Task Force

Reflection piece after the close of the Summit

Co-authored blog after Summit by Anya Gass & youth advocate Marya from Canada

Youth video sharing highlights from the Summit

Overview post by Plan Bolivia with highlights from Juanita and Fabiana



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Influencing policy

Plan International and its partners advocated actively with Member States over the nine months preceding the Summit to ensure that the priorities identified together with partners and young people were included in the outcome documents. This included key recommendations from the youth-led manifesto called the **Girls' Pact for the Future** and the **8 Transformative Actions for Adolescent Girls and Young People** from the Pact for the Future, selected by the young people as being most impactful for achieving a gender-equal future. The Transformative Actions range from ending poverty to achieving gender equality, protecting civilians in armed conflict, ensuring meaningful youth participation, and more.

Meaningful youth engagement

Plan International was proud to support a large and incredibly active **youth delegation** at the Summit. This included four representatives of the Youth Task Force for the Future - a group of 35 young advocates from 22 countries working together over the last 8 months to advocate for their priorities at the Summit. They were also joined by several other young advocates from Bolivia, Canada and Zambia. The Youth Task Force was represented in New York by Aseel from Jordan, Eric from Guatemala, Marya from Canada and Nora from Norway.

These 9 young people were amazing advocates who eloquently engaged with government officials, multilateral partners, and various stakeholders to ensure the leadership and voice of adolescent girls' and young people's leadership are recognized as essential in global policy forums and decision-making spaces.



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Action, investment and accountability

What comes next is all the more critical: **implementation**. The UN and its Member States are at no loss for commitments. But what is missing is concrete action, investment, and accountability.

We call on governments to work together with adolescent girls and young people to find creative and radical ways of implementing the Pact and particularly the 8 Transformative Actions. We urge all stakeholders to build on these Actions in the run-up to COP29, the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Conference, and numerous other global policy forums taking place in the next year. **We will hold governments accountable, as will adolescent girls and youth all around the world.**

Meaningful youth participation at the UN Human Rights Council

In 2024, Plan International's UN Geneva team facilitated meaningful youth participation at the Human Rights Council (HRC), enabling child and young advocate to **engage directly with global decision-makers**, advocate for children's rights, and influence policy-making discussions.

Supported by Plan International's Togo Country Office, 13-year-old activist Marie-Reine from Togo made a powerful impact during the **Annual Day on the Rights of the Child** focused on inclusive social protection. On the panel, she shared her views on enhancing social protection measures for children, especially girls, emphasising the right to health and education.

Her advocacy journey included meetings with key

officials, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor, and representatives from the Togolese Permanent Mission in Geneva. She also participated in a breakfast hosted by the Lithuanian Mission with other child advocates attending the HRC.

A highlight of her visit was delivering a compelling statement during the negotiations on the draft resolution on the rights of the child focusing on social protection. Her advocacy drew widespread praise from delegations, marking a milestone as **one of the first instances of child participation within HRC negotiations**. [Read more about her journey here.](#)



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In June 2024, four She Leads youth advocates, Felicity, Korotoumou, Bernice, and Phenny, engaged actively at the HRC, delivering statements on:

- [Women's rights and the economy](#) | [Discrimination against women and girls](#)
- [Human rights and sports](#) | [New and emerging technologies](#) | [Climate change](#)

They also held discussions with Elisa Morgera, the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change, and OHCHR staff working on care and support issues. Felicity and Korotoumou moderated and spoke at Plan International's side event, "Strengthening Girls' Rights at the United Nations."

Despite facing a restrictive operating environment marked by shrinking civic space, pushback from anti-rights actors, and persistent visa challenges for Global South participants, these young advocates demonstrated exceptional resilience and determination. Their unwavering commitment to advancing children's rights showcases the power of youth advocacy at the highest international platforms.





Influencing the work of the HRC in 2024

Plan International's UN team actively engaged in the negotiations of several Human Rights Council resolutions this year, especially at the HRC55 and HRC56.

Once again, certain States and anti-rights actors sought to weaken commitments to children's rights and gender-inclusive language by emphasising restrictive age and maturity criteria, **aiming to limit children's agency and autonomy, particularly that of girls.**

Despite these challenges, Plan International's UN team, in collaboration with partner organizations and supportive delegations, successfully defended critical language on child participation, girls' leadership, and agency, including their sexual and reproductive health

and rights. Notable successes include securing strong language in resolutions on the rights of the child, discrimination against women and girls, the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning early childhood and free pre-primary and secondary education, and on domestic violence. However, we remain deeply concerned about the growing pushback against agreed human rights language related to gender and children's rights within the HRC.

Furthermore, the ongoing UN liquidity crisis, along with the termination of hybrid engagement modalities during HRC sessions, continues to hinder the participation of non-Geneva-based CSOs, as well as children and youth activists, limiting their voices in important discussions.

Strengthening girls' rights as human rights

To mark Human Rights Day on 10 December 2024, Plan International officially launched its latest report, **Strengthening Girls' Rights as Human Rights**.

Building on the landmark 2018 report Girls' Rights Are Human Rights, this new research examines the status of girls in international policy-making at the United Nations from 2018 to 2023. By analysing over 3,600 international policy documents, it highlights progress achieved, persistent gaps, and emerging opportunities to better protect girls' rights within key human rights frameworks.

While significant advances in visibility and inclusion have been made, challenges remain. Progress has been achieved in critical areas such as education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and violence prevention. However, other essential domains, including protection from torture, prevention of disappearances, and access to water, food, housing, land, and inheritance rights, continue to lag behind.

The report underscores how gender- and age-neutral policies risk rendering girls invisible, stressing the need for more intersectional and context-sensitive approaches that fully reflect their diverse realities.

Plan International's UN team offers five key recommendations for stakeholders working to advance girls' rights at the United Nations:

1. **Strengthen** international policy-making and soft law norm-setting to better reflect girls in all their diversity as rights-holders, and the full range of girls' rights and realities, in a gender-transformative and age-responsive manner
2. **Expand** the ways in which UN human rights mechanisms address girls' rights
3. **Prioritise** girls' and young women's agency, leadership and organisation, placing it at the heart of international policy-making
4. **Invest** in enhancing understanding, knowledge and expertise on girls' rights, and combating the anti-rights/anti-gender agenda



5. **Enhance** States' compliance with international standards aiming to advance girls' rights

Girls' rights are increasingly recognised but remain far from fully realized. In the face of increasing pushback, this report calls for vigilant, strategic advocacy and bold action to ensure a future where all girls are treated as equals and their rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled.



Influencing UN human rights accountability

In 2024, the UN team had the opportunity with several Plan International country offices to support children and youth engagement with UN human rights mechanisms, to hold their governments accountable to their human rights obligations.

With support from Plan International’s Bangladesh Country Office, youth activist Taslima participated in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) adoption for Bangladesh. Speaking on behalf of Joining Forces Bangladesh and the Child Rights Advocacy Coalition, she addressed **critical issues such as child marriage, sexual and reproductive health rights, and**

violence against children. Her passionate interventions highlighted urgent reforms needed in her country. During Jordan’s UPR adoption, She Leads youth advocate Bayan, supported by Plan International’s Jordan Country Office, delivered a powerful video statement calling for a ban on child marriage and the inclusion of youth voices in policy-making. Watch her [statement here](#).

The UN team also played an active role in advancing human rights advocacy through strategic contributions to key UN human rights mechanisms. We provided input for thematic submissions to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on care and support systems, as well as on the rights of intersex people. The UN team also contributed to the development of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women’s (CEDAW) submission on girls’ participation in decision-making, and

the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual abuse, and exploitation of children’s report on digital abuse. The team supported Plan International Brazil in preparing their contribution to the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s upcoming General Comment on access to justice. Additionally, insights were shared with the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls concerning the gendered impacts of care and support systems.

To ensure meaningful youth participation, Plan International’s UN team, in collaboration with regional and country-level colleagues, facilitated virtual consultations with girls and young women on critical issues, including care and support systems and access to justice. These efforts helped raise the voices of young advocates while influencing global policy discussions aimed at advancing gender equality and children’s rights.

Plan International’s UN team hosted a lunch briefing during the Special Procedures Annual Meeting aimed at strengthening the operationalisation of the UN Secretary General’s Guidance Note on child rights mainstreaming, where he mandated the mobilization of the UN system to collectively strengthen and elevate a shared UN child rights agenda. The briefing brought together representatives of the special procedures, namely the Chair of the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls, the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, and the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, as well as child rights experts to share best practices and discuss practical ways in which the guidance note could be operationalised in their daily work. During the briefing, Plan International also offered avenues for engagement and advocacy purposes on how to enable international environments like the special procedures to advance girls’ empowerment and the recognition of their rights as human rights.

Plan International at the Advisory Board on Gender Equality

In 2024, Plan International’s Head of Office in Geneva, Charlotte Stemmer, was honored to be nominated to the newly established United Nations HRC President’s Advisory Board on Gender Equality. This nomination provides a precious platform to advocate for meaningful youth engagement and ensure that the voices of girls and young women are reflected in the work of the UN’s main human rights intergovernmental body.

At the Advisory Board’s inaugural meeting, Tara, a young Irish advocate from Plan International Ireland’s Youth Advisory Panel, delivered a powerful intervention. She emphasised the urgent need for **systematic, barrier-free youth participation in global human rights processes**, highlighting challenges such as financial and identification constraints that hinder girls’ and young women’s involvement. Tara also cautioned against the rise of populist agendas limiting civic space and urged the Advisory Board to counter these trends by amplifying diverse youth voices and holding decision-makers accountable.

Through this role, Plan International remains committed to advancing gender equality and fostering inclusive participation at the UN Human Rights Council.



Amplifying the voices of girls affected by crises



In anticipation of the **International Day of the Girl**, Plan International, the Permanent Mission of Canada and Mexico, UNFPA and the International Federation of the Red Cross united policymakers and young activists in Geneva for a dialogue that brought forward urgent calls from young female leaders.

Young activists from Colombia and Canada shared personal stories of resilience in conflict zones, emphasizing the unique challenges girls face, from heightened exposure to violence to exclusion from leadership. Alongside these speeches, the UN team launched the **#UniteForPeace** campaign, a youth-led initiative amplifying the voices of girls affected by crises and rallying global solidarity to secure their safety, dignity, and potential as community leaders.

Key recommendations from the activists focused on creating safe, inclusive spaces for girls' participation, prioritizing education and leadership training, and securing financial and technical support for girl-led initiatives. This event called on all stakeholders to turn commitments into concrete actions, ensuring that **girls in conflict have the resources and respect needed to lead and thrive.**



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Advocacy support visit to Mozambique

As part of its role in supporting Country Offices, the UN Liaison Office in Geneva collaborated with Plan Mozambique to organize a mission by the UN Policy and Advocacy Adviser. A central component of the visit was the Adviser's engagement with programs in northern Mozambique, where firsthand information was gathered on the impact of the crisis in Cabo Delgado. The crisis is one of the most underfunded globally, with less than half of the required funds provided to date. These insights formed the basis for an advocacy brief developed in collaboration with colleagues from the Mozambique office, emphasizing the impacts such as child marriage and recruitment of children into armed groups. As part of the visit, the brief was shared and discussed in meetings with donors and the humanitarian community in the country to increase visibility for the crisis. The Adviser also held key meetings with donors in the capital, and a **blog post** was written to further amplify awareness of the situation.

Delivering a statement at the 75th UNHCR Executive Committee

As a recognition of our leadership, Plan International's Geneva UN Liaison Office, on behalf of the ICVA Network and the NGO community, delivered a statement at the UNHCR Executive Committee calling for urgent action to protect displaced populations. The statement emphasized the need for inclusive policies to address inequalities based on age, gender, and diversity, the challenges posed by xenophobia, misinformation, and shrinking civic space, and called for refugee-led organizations to be recognized as equal decision-making partners.

Shining a light on neglected crises



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Peter Caton

At the United Nations Headquarters in New York, Plan International focuses its humanitarian advocacy on neglected crises and emphasizes the unique challenges faced by **adolescent girls in conflict-affected regions**. We advocate for international decision-makers to better understand and address the specific protection needs of children, particularly adolescent girls within the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate and in conflict situations. We achieve this by conducting country-specific advocacy at the United Nations.

The United Nations Security Council is the primary intergovernmental body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, serving as a key platform for Plan International's advocacy. Ahead of the UN Security Council's Annual Debate on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), we engaged UN Member States and the international community by producing the **Neglected Crisis brief**. Developed in collaboration with our Country and Regional Offices, this brief highlighted five conflicts that have been largely neglected by the global community: **Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Northwest and Southwest**

Cameroon, and Sudan. It underscored the profound impact of these crises on children, exposing them to heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and restricted access to education and essential services.

The brief was a key advocacy tool, utilized to engage members of the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, and donor capitals to mobilize resources and promote coordinated actions to tackle pressing humanitarian challenges. This includes implementing gender-sensitive interventions, strengthening local systems of care and education, and amplifying the voices of affected communities in global advocacy efforts. By bringing attention to these crises through targeted advocacy, we aim to mobilize meaningful action to protect the most vulnerable children and create pathways for resilience and recovery.

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

Global coalition to protect education from attack

On the second anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2601 (2021) on Protecting Education in Conflict, Plan International participated in an event co-sponsored by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), and several country missions at the UN, which centered on reflections and further recommendations on strengthening the implementation of the resolution. The UN Team facilitated the participation of Emilia Sorrentino, Plan International's Global Lead on Education in Emergencies, who spoke about the necessary actions and support needed on the ground for humanitarian organizations and other stakeholders to **better protect children's right to education in conflict**. Emilia also highlighted the targeting of girls' education, the challenges they face in conflict and shared our recommendations to improve their situation, a focus of Plan International's speech to the UN Security Council in June 2021. Read her speech on [our website](#).



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Commission on the Status of Women

The 68th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) focused on “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.”

From the earliest planning stages, we collaborated with youth advocates and colleagues across Plan International to ensure youth defined our priorities for this event. Our **One Plan** Approach focused on the following key objectives:

Objective 1

Protect against backsliding of girls’ rights and gender equality, and make progress on language in policy outcomes towards the adolescent girls’ agenda.

Objective 2

Centre girls’ and adolescent girls’ voices, agency, and leadership in our engagement.

Objective 3

Continue to position Plan International as one of the leading INGOs on girls’ rights.



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The CSW68 Agreed Conclusions were successfully adopted by the 45 Member States of the Commission. However, this year presented significant challenges for girls’ rights. Throughout the Commission, we observed coordinated and strategic attempts to **roll back language and commitments on critical issues**. These included human rights and Member State obligations; recognition of the diversity of women and girls and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face; participation of girls; gender- and age-responsive approaches; and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). The term ‘gender’ itself continues to be contested, highlighting the growing strength and influence of anti-rights actors.

Despite these challenges, our strategic, coordinated advocacy ensured that Member States resisted regressive attempts. Notably, while there were fewer mentions of “girls,” the inclusion of “adolescent girls” increased. New mentions emphasized:

- Adolescent girls’ experiences of multidimensional poverty;
- Gender-responsive financing and adolescent girls
- Vocational and technical education and training, including for pregnant adolescents and young mothers.

While we were encouraged by the progress made, we remain increasingly concerned about the pervasive rollback on rights in global spaces, the growing presence of anti-rights actors, and

the strengthened voice of the opposition. This paints a troubling and uncertain future for gender equality and girls’ rights.

Our achievements at CSW68 would not have been possible without the unwavering commitment and passionate dedication of staff across the organization. Colleagues played instrumental roles in organizing meetings and sessions, representing Plan International on national delegations, speaking on panels, supporting meaningful youth engagement, and advocating at the national level during and after negotiations. These efforts were critical to driving impact and ensuring that girls’ rights remained central to global discussions at CSW68.

Read our blog on CSW68 from the perspective of our youth advocates [here](#).



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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