



# **ENGAGING GIRLS, BOYS AND YOUTH AS ACTIVE CITIZENS**

**PLAN INTERNATIONAL POSITION PAPER**

**MARCH 2020**

# ENGAGING GIRLS, BOYS AND YOUTH AS ACTIVE CITIZENS: PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S POSITION STATEMENT

**All children and young people** have the right to freely speak out and influence the decisions that shape the world around them. Girls and young women in particular are held back by gender inequalities and oppression that prevent them from being full citizens and leaders. The patriarchal norms and structural barriers at the root of these injustices must be dismantled so that all children and young people can realise their civil and political rights and have their voices count as active drivers of change.

---

## TACKLE GENDER NORMS AND BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

- Plan International believes that ensuring girls have access to decision-making spaces and can occupy leadership positions at every stage of their lives is key to building a world where girls and women can thrive across politics, the economy and society.
- We must also challenge gender inequality and gender norms which undermine the civil and political rights and leadership of girls and young women and perpetuate unequal power relations. Harmful traditions, beliefs and social norms should not be reasons for countries to make reservations to international conventions and agreements which hinder children's and young people's participation and foster gender-based discrimination.
- We recognise the responsibility of governments to challenge gender inequality and acknowledge that this requires engaging multiple state and non-state stakeholders. Boys and men play a critical role as beneficiaries, rights holders, and agents of change, in challenging dominant norms of masculinity and power.

## COLLECTIVE ACTION AND ACTIVISM OUTSIDE FORMAL PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES

- Plan International supports youth activism, and the rights of girls and young women to respond to gender inequality and fundamental human rights breaches. This includes in contexts where local laws contradict fundamental rights.
- Governing mechanisms are often inaccessible and can replicate the oppressive systems girls and young women strive to resist. When governance structures do not allow meaningful participation, engagement in activism is often the only feasible alternative for young people's voices to be heard in public policy debates.
- It is the right of all children and young people, including girls and young women in all their diversity, to have their voices heard. Supporting youth-led collective action and movement building is key to gender transformative influencing. It has the power to shift norms and behaviours and to create positive and lasting social change.

- Support for children and young people's civic participation from a young age allows them to exercise their agency and autonomy and equips them with the necessary skills, experience and networks to be effective drivers of change. Engaging in social movements can empower girls and young women, nurture leadership ambitions, build confidence and provide necessary skills to drive change.
- Children's and young people's active citizenship outside of formal processes and institutions should be promoted. In this context, their autonomy must be respected and free from unwanted adult interference. Furthermore, national laws and policies must make it possible for children and young people to choose to organise within movements or associations and legally register or not, without repercussion on their activities.
- Children and young people who take action to promote, protect and fulfil their own human rights or those of others, should be regarded as human rights defenders and deserve the same protection detailed in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders<sup>1</sup>, even when they chose not to be labelled this way. Girls and women human rights defenders, and other human rights defenders who work in defence of women's rights or gender equality, are considered as women human rights defenders<sup>2</sup>.
- An enabling environment must be developed and protected for youth-led organizations and girl human rights defenders to meaningfully and equally participate in public life. In any efforts to protect and empower children as human rights defenders, a gender lens must be applied to address and recognise the distinct threats and violence faced by girls and young women.
- Digital and online spaces play a positive role in movement building, training and connecting activists and harassment of girls and young women should not be tolerated. Measures to protect and empower children online, with specific actions for girls, young women and women human rights defenders in all their diversity, must be central to laws and policies regulating digital technology and online spaces. Digital platform providers must be accountable for safety online.
- Plan International does not condone violence of any kind as a tactic that activists might use to press for social and political change.

---

## **PARTICIPATE IN FORMAL POLITICAL PROCESSES AND INSTITUTIONS**

- Supporting children and young people's active citizenship is a key indicator of good governance. Promoting the participation of children and young people, including girls and young women, in local, district and national decision-making processes is crucial to fulfilling their civil and political rights as citizens.
- Moreover, all individuals, regardless of age, gender or other characteristics have the right to have their voices heard, be represented and participate in formal institutional and political processes at all levels. Although nothing about them should be decided without them, girls and young women are the least represented population and are often refused the space and opportunity to formally voice their concerns and priorities.
- Participatory processes for children and young people should be institutionalised at different levels (local, regional and national), with clear and meaningful mandates and adequate resources. These processes must be accessible to and inclusive of all children without discrimination, ensuring that girls and

young women are able to participate on an equal basis.

- Children and young people should also be given legitimate space in every community and local level accountability programme. Feedback mechanisms must be child-friendly, gender-responsive and easily accessible so children can monitor the quality and efficiency of public services. This can be done through tools such as the young citizens score cards.
- In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we believe that a child is every person below the age of 18 and encourage all states to recognise 18 as the age when they legally become an adult.
- Neither the eligible age to vote nor the eligible age to run for and hold public office should exceed 18. When states lower the voting age to below 18, girls and boys should be able to vote in free, fair and regular elections without adult interference. Infrastructure and education should be in place to ensure all children, without discrimination, understand their civil and political rights, where to access relevant information and how democratic processes operate in their context. Furthermore, measures to understand and address heightened protection risks and potential risks to fundamental rights must be taken.
- Lowering the voting age to below the age of majority (18) is never a reason to consider lowering the age for other civil rights. As outlined in the Article 1 of the Protocol to the UNCRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict and in General Comment number 4 of the CRC Committee, nobody below the age of 18 should be able to get married or take part in combat.
- Children and young people should be informed of their right to report any concerns regarding human rights violations, including

by their national government, through independent human rights mechanisms as outlined in CEDAW and CRC respectively.

- Political institutions and processes must be reflective and representative of wider society and, importantly, there should be fair and equal representation between genders. Plan International supports the introduction of positive measures to redress imbalances, such as quotas and earmarked funding to female candidates. Affirmative action should always be considered a temporary intervention, needed until representation is more equitable and there is limited chance of regression once those interventions are no longer in place.
- Supportive laws and policies are needed to enable girls and women to leverage digital technology to include their voices in public decision making, as well as enabling their direct participation in processes.

---

## **BUILD THE FOUNDATIONS FOR POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT**

- Misplaced societal perceptions and age-related policies and practices undermine the ability of children and young people to have their views taken seriously. As a result, they often have limited opportunity to engage and participate in political and public affairs and, due to harmful gender norms, girls and young women experience additional limitations. Plan International maintains that their voices should be heard to ensure that decisions are fair and contribute to greater social justice.
- Interventions aiming to build women's capacity to engage in political and public affairs must begin in childhood and create an enabling environment. Every child has the right to an inclusive quality gender transformative education which includes a focus on human rights and civic education,

equipping all children and youth with the necessary skills, knowledge, critical consciousness and experience to feel confident to engage in civic and political participation. For girls and young women, civic education and skills development are essential in strengthening their pathway to leadership.

- Female role models are crucial to nurturing girls and young women's ambitions to become active drivers of change. Mentorship schemes and other ways to connect women leaders to younger generations need support.
- The media has the power to shape, reinforce or challenge societal norms. With this comes responsibility to ensure that content does not reinforce negative gender stereotypes. Content should actively promote public perceptions of young people as active citizens and of girls and women in all their diversity as decision-makers and leaders through gender-transformative stories.

---

## **SUPPORT MARGINALISED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS ACTIVE DRIVERS OF CHANGE**

- All children and young people, including those in vulnerable situations; children with disabilities and those marginalised by structural inequality; ethnic, racial minority, indigenous and LGBTIQ+ children; should be able to freely and safely express their opinions, on and offline. They must be provided with inclusive support to facilitate their active participation in all civic matters, in accordance with their age, maturity, gender and ability.
- Girls and young women in vulnerable situations face multiple forms of exclusion, discrimination and additional barriers preventing them from exercising their full citizenship and stifling their voices.

Appropriate actions must be taken to ensure that vulnerable girls and young women in all their diversity have equal access to civic space and take part in decision-making.

---

## **YOUTH PARTICIPATES IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND PEACEBUILDING**

- Plan International believes that the inclusion and participation of children and young people, particularly girls and young women, and of youth-led organisations, in peace building initiatives is an important prerequisite for achieving and maintaining peaceful societies. National and international stakeholders must recognize young people's agency and the work they are undertaking in response to fragility, and support and build on these interventions.
- State responses to violent extremism must not be used to limit young people's participation or wider civil and political rights.
- As a signatory of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, Plan International calls on all humanitarian actors to promote systematic engagement and partnership with young people, and especially young women, in all phases of humanitarian action. This includes the establishment and strengthening of mechanisms that foster their participation and greater investment in building their capacities to be effective humanitarian actors.
- Young people in fragile and conflict-affected states, especially young women, will face additional barriers to actively engaging in the public sphere. In these contexts, governments should make increased efforts to safely and meaningfully engage all their citizens in the public and political affairs of the country. Civic

space must remain protected, open and accessible.

- In humanitarian settings, the protection and wellbeing of children and all civilians must remain a priority for governments, UN bodies and other humanitarian actors. Plan International does not condone or promote the involvement of children and young people in social and political action where violence is used as a tactic to provoke change and/or that poses a direct threat to their safety and wellbeing.

---

## IMPLEMENT INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS AND AGREEMENTS

- Plan International believes that governments have an obligation and should be held accountable to take specific measures for the empowerment of all children, including in their ability to engage in political and public affairs in accordance to their evolving capacities (CRC Art 5) and without discrimination (Art 2) or violence (Art 19). Children should learn about human rights through education (Art 28), be able to express their views and be heard (Art 12) and have the necessary freedoms to take action (Art 13-17) if they desire. These measures should apply to both online and physical situations. We believe a gender transformative approach must be used to implement these measures, acknowledging the specific experience of girls and the

additional barriers they face to their political empowerment and engagement in public affairs.

- Children at all stages of their lives, face different obstacles to their political empowerment depending on their gender. Only when the intersecting forms of discrimination based on age and gender are acknowledged can these obstacles be addressed. The situation of girls must be explicitly addressed in international law —and in national and regional legislation, policies and programmes. Disaggregated data by sex, age, wealth quintile, location and disability (with due protections for privacy and human rights) must be collected, including the age range 10 to 14 years, to make younger adolescent girls and their needs visible and to track progress against commitments, policies and programmes.
- Plan International fully supports the call in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women for States to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against girls and women. This must apply to both online and physical spaces, so girls and women can engage fully, freely and safely as drivers of change.



# CONTENTS

<b>Definitions</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Engaging girls, boys and youth as active citizens</b>	<b>5</b>
Introduction .....	5
The issues at stake .....	8
Implement international human rights frameworks and agreements .....	10
Social norms and participation .....	14
Tackle gender norms and barriers to participation.....	15
Support marginalised children and young people as active drivers of change .....	17
Youth participates in humanitarian action and peacebuilding initiatives.....	18
<b>Pathways to Political Empowerment</b>	<b>23</b>
Build the foundations for political empowerment.....	29
Collective action and activism outside of formal processes and structures.....	38
Participate in formal political processes and institutions.....	43
8	
<b>References</b>	<b>54</b>

## DEFINITIONS

**Active citizenship:** An individual's civil, political, social and economic human rights define what can be expected and demanded from the state. Active citizenship involves individuals or groups taking action to ensure those rights are upheld.

**Activists / Drivers of change:** Children, adolescents and youth, particularly girls and young women, taking collective action for systemic change and conflict transformation. We recognise that children and young people are discerning in navigating their social, cultural and political environments as activists. In certain contexts, they may choose to identify as advocates, youth leaders, influencers or change makers.

**Age of majority:** The age at which a child becomes an adult and acquires full legal capacity. It means that a person can then engage in legal activities and is liable for any contractual obligations. In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Plan International believes that all states should recognise 18 as the age of majority.

**Child** is every human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child majority is attained earlier (UNCRC)

**Child and youth participation:** Activities in which girls, boys and youth express their views, and are involved in shaping decisions that affect them in an informed way.

**Child Protection** refers to all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to prevent and respond to all forms of physical or mental violence, maltreatment, abuse, neglect and exploitation affecting children. Child protection aims to address Child Rights violations and deficits related to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including the precursors and repercussions for children who are in conflict with the law or those children who have been victims of or witnesses to a crime. The nature and scale of child protection issues are diverse, multifaceted and inter-connected.

**Children's evolving capacity:** Anchored in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),

the term "evolving capacity" describes how children are in a process of continuous development and that their capabilities and personal autonomy vary according to each child's level of physical and cognitive development, and individual life experiences.

**Civil society:** The arena, outside the family and the state, where citizens freely associate to achieve the fulfilment of their rights and the rights of others.<sup>3</sup>

**Collective action:** Involves a number of people planning and implementing concrete actions together to achieve change by either influencing decision makers to change formal or informal decision-making processes and outcomes and/or influencing relevant attitudes, behaviour and norms of target groups to create systemic social and political change. Collective action can be undertaken within a group or as a collective effort of multiple groups or networks.

**Conflict transformation:** Conflict transformation responds to social conflict with the aim to reduce violence, increase justice at interpersonal and structural levels and improve human relationships.<sup>4</sup>

**Critical consciousness:** The transformation of discriminatory and exclusive social norms and structures through the development of skills, knowledge and self-reflection that encourage and facilitate questioning of power relations, its impact on gender inequalities and how it operates in people's lives.

**Gender-based violence (GBV):** when directed against girls or boys because of their biological sex or gender identity or sexual orientation, any type of violence can also constitute gender-based violence. GBV results in physical, sexual and psychological harm to both women and men and includes any form of violence or abuse that targets women or men on the basis of their sex. Unequal power relations between men and women significantly contribute to gender violence, which is intended to maintain gender inequalities and reinforce traditional gender roles for both women and men. Although men and boys are also victims of GBV, especially in trafficking, conflict and educational settings, the majority of



GBV victims worldwide are female. Gender-based violence cuts across public and private spheres, including: home, school and work, and takes place during peacetime and conflict. It is both a human right and a development issue, with negative consequences for both women and men.

**Gender-sensitive, responsive and transformative Child Protection** reflects different stages of integrating gender dimensions into measures and processes preventing and responding to violence against all children. While gender sensitive Child Protection takes into account different specific ways in which violence is differently affecting girls, boys and children with other gender identities, gender responsive Child Protection takes proactive steps in addressing and responding to different gender dynamics driving violence. Gender transformative child protection both addresses immediate needs of children affected by violence, while ensuring that the overall situation of every child and the way s/he is being treated is improved on a continuous basis and with lasting positive effects.

**Girl and young woman:** Every child or person under 25 years old, whose gender is female or who is identifying as a girl or a woman.

**Harmful Practices** are defined as and constitute violence against children and include, but are not limited to corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment; female genital mutilation; amputations, binding, scarring, burning and branding; violent and degrading initiation rites; force-feeding of girls; fattening; virginity testing (inspecting girls' genitalia); forced marriage and early child marriage; so-called "honour" crimes; "retribution" acts of violence (where disputes between different groups are taken out on children of the parties involved); dowry-related death and violence; accusations of "witchcraft" and related harmful practices such as "exorcism" etc. These are commonly based on tradition, culture, superstition and religion and related misinterpretations.

**Human Rights Defenders:** Individuals, groups and associations contributing to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals. It encompasses anyone working for the promotion and protection of human rights, even on an occasional basis.

**Inclusion** is an approach that recognises and addresses the exclusion of some children, especially regarding discrimination based on gender, disability, minority status.

**Intersectionality:** The understanding that a person's identity is made up of multiple, intersecting factors including age, gender, race, class, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity amongst others, which combine to both benefit and disadvantage them, and which cannot be separated from each other.

**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, (LGBTQI+)/ Gender and Sexual Diversities children, adolescents or youth:** This is a broad category of those who self-identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning. It also includes those who are questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and non-binary people. Issues relating to LGBTQI+ can emerge at different ages. For example, some people's intersex identity is clear at birth, and some transgender people are aware from early childhood that their real gender identity differs from that assigned at birth. Many realise their sexual orientation during adolescence. Being LGBTQI+ is central to a person's identity and their physical and emotional wellbeing.<sup>5</sup>

**Peace-building:** Activities that address root causes of conflict, that prevent and mitigate all forms of violence, and that work towards healing and reconciliation. The particular needs and situations of youth and women as well as their participation and leadership need to be considered in peace-building.<sup>6</sup>

**Political action:** Strategic activities undertaken alone or collectively to influence decisions, processes or institutions of the government or public affairs.

**Political consciousness:** A way of seeing, caring about and acting in the world. It is guided by a commitment to human rights and justice and an understanding of power and inequity in social, political and economic systems, relations and values.<sup>7</sup>

**Political empowerment:** The process and result of understanding the power dynamics and

relations that govern political spheres and having the capacity and skills to act with agency and autonomy to access, influence and change them.

**Social movement:** A loose but broad network of interaction between individuals, groups and other actors across society pursuing and embracing a shared transformative political agenda of change through deliberate, strategic and collective action.

**Social norms:** Social norms can be defined as shared perceptions about others that exist within social and cultural groups which are maintained through group approval and disapproval.<sup>8</sup>

**Youth leader/leadership:** Children and youth with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilise others around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation for equality and the realisation of human rights for all.<sup>9</sup>

**Young person/young people/youth:** according to the UN definition, youth as “a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence”. For statistical purposes, the UN defines “youth” as the 15-24-year-old age group.

# ENGAGING GIRLS, BOYS AND YOUTH AS ACTIVE CITIZENS

**All children and young people have the right to freely speak out and influence the decisions that shape the world around them. Girls and young women in particular are held back by gender inequalities and oppression that prevent them from being full citizens and leaders. The patriarchal norms and structural barriers at the root of these injustices must be dismantled so that all children and young people can realise their civil and political rights and have their voices count as active drivers of change.**

---

## INTRODUCTION

Plan International believes that every child and young person has the right to express their views freely and safely; influence decisions and take action on issues that matter to them. However, around the world children and young people – particularly girls and young women – face significant challenges in realising this right. They tend to be wrongly dismissed as insufficiently mature to participate in political and civic processes. They also tend to be stigmatised as potential perpetrators of disruption, not as valued citizens and contributors to society who can lead and drive positive change.

Plan International is calling for a paradigm shift in the way the international community talks about, engages and partners with children and young people. Children and young people are not just the future. They are the present. Young people constitute almost half of the world's population, yet they are dramatically underrepresented – even excluded – in political decision-making<sup>10</sup>. It is critical that their views and needs are taken

into account politically, socially, legally and economically.

Promoting the voices and views of children and young people – especially girls and women – in all their diversity and supporting them to actively engage in decision-making on issues that affect their lives must be an urgent priority for the world's power holders. Realising children and young people's civil and political rights is a prerequisite for building sustainable and peaceful societies, and a gender just world envisioned in international human rights frameworks and the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Across the 75+ countries Plan International works in, young people have consistently identified the denial of their political and civil rights as a priority issue. In March 2017, Plan International conducted consultations with young women and men aged 14 to 30 from 14 countries.<sup>11</sup> In every country, young people reported a sense of "citizen responsibility" and an interest in public life, yet identified the lack of platforms to meaningfully engage with

decision-makers and inability to ensure their opinions are taken seriously as key barriers. Girls and young women in particular have called for the removal of gendered norms that increase those barriers, silence their voices and disproportionately hold them back from leadership and active citizenship.

This internal paper provides Plan International's position on the right to participate in public life, as well as analysis of: the legal and political framework; the impact of social and gender norms on participation; and specific issues in relation to political empowerment and active citizenship. This paper supports **100 Million Reasons**, Plan International's 2017-2022 Global Strategy, in which supporting girls, boys and youth as active drivers of change is a main priority. It upholds our work in relation to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals – in particular Goals 5, 10 and 16. A number of high-level recommendations are included to guide advocacy. However, an influencing framework for political empowerment has been developed separately, under the global campaign, Girls Get Equal.

The analysis and positions are founded on human rights, global evidence, consultations with children and young people, and Plan International's programmatic work. The position paper is situated within the Area of Global Distinctiveness on LEAD but has relevance across the other five areas as it emphasises the creation of an environment where girls, boys, young men and young women, and youth with other gender identities – in all their diversity – can equally and freely voice their opinions and take action on any issue that concerns them without fear of harassment, retribution or violence. Such issues may include political empowerment; economic empowerment; right to education (including gender-transformative and comprehensive sexuality education); sexual and reproductive health and rights; sexual and gender-based violence; child, early and forced marriage; LGBTQI+ rights; peacebuilding and humanitarian conflict

response and solutions. Offices will be expected to put the position into practice using their judgement and analysis of the key issues included in this paper in their specific context.

Plan International recognises that it is the responsibility of national governments, as the primary duty bearer accountable for their commitments and obligations under international human rights law and within Agenda 2030, to ensure every girl, boy and young person – in all their diversity – is able to grow up and participate as an active citizen without restriction. Plan International also recognises the role of the international and national community – donors, civil society, UN agencies and the private sector – in supporting national governments to guarantee this right.

This paper is split into two main sections. The first section sets the scene by addressing the fundamental issues around political empowerment and active citizenship that concern Plan International, as follows:

- Outline of the human rights frameworks on children's and young people's civil and political rights
- Overview of the key issues and the current global context;
- Social and gender norms and other restrictions that prevent girls, boys and youth from engaging in active citizenship

The second section of this paper presents the pathways to political empowerment for children and young people:

- Foundations for building political consciousness and interest in active citizenship
- Two pathways to political empowerment:
  - **Informal:** Civil society, where children and young people are choosing innovative ways to participate in public life as active citizens outside of

- formal spaces and structures of political decision-making
  - **Formal:** Formal political mechanisms, the public pathway and where children and young people, particularly girls and young women, engage within formal mechanisms for political participation including through voting eligibility in democratic elections and membership of political parties

Plan International focuses on girls and young women as a distinct, marginalised group, facing heightened, disproportionate and gender-specific barriers to free and safe participation as active citizens in public life. To properly scope the broad and diverse experiences of girls and young women, it is important to consider identities such as age, ethnic background, sexuality, gender (including non-binary and gender-queer) identities, sexual characteristics, any possible disabilities or other form of identity or condition that may have an impact upon how they experience the world. Throughout this paper, these intersecting identities will be referred to as *girls and young women, in all their diversity* to highlight where these considerations must be taken into account.

Globally, political participation and active citizenship is highly gendered. Girls and young women, worldwide, are subject to intersecting forms of discrimination based on their age and gender.<sup>12</sup> Entrenched gender norms – social and cultural prescriptions about appropriate roles, behaviour and values for different genders – amplify existing barriers to political empowerment for girls and young women. They also generate additional obstacles for girls and young women that their male counterparts do not face.

As such, the specific needs and interests of girls' and young women's - in all their diversity - must be explicitly recognised. Yet, international human rights frameworks and legislation, and national development plans scarcely acknowledge this. Girls' and young

women's needs are too often marginalised – or effectively erased – under those of 'all children' or 'women and girls'.<sup>13</sup> Plan International's experience shows that overlooking girls' rights by grouping them with children's rights or women's rights, blinds decision-makers to their age- and gender-specific lived realities, vulnerabilities, interests and needs with serious consequences for them as well as global sustainable development. This paper aims to highlight the specific barriers and vulnerabilities faced by girls and young women throughout.

There are a number of areas that were nevertheless considered beyond the remit of this paper, despite its comprehensive scope. For example, birth registration is a key prerequisite for any person choosing to engage in formal political processes and exercise their right to vote in democratic elections. Having a child's existence formally recognised by the relevant authorities is the first step to allow children's voices to be heard. However, this paper does not provide a large focus on interventions that take place at birth and in early childhood. Instead, it focuses on adolescence and young adulthood, the life stages where children start to become more politically conscious and interact with social issues and networks outside of their immediate home environment. The paper does not cover our organisational approach to supporting the collective action of young people or partnering with youth organisations. For more information on these pieces, please refer to ***Powering the Movement***<sup>14</sup>, our global strategy for supporting youth influencing and collective action and ***Pathways to partnering with youth-led groups and organisations***<sup>15</sup> guidance focused on civil society strengthening, including with youth groups. This paper also does not specifically discuss climate change activism and youth political engagement. We recognise that climate change contributes to violent conflicts and exacerbates displacement, making it even harder for girls and young women to participate in climate decision-making processes and actions. For more information please refer to Plan



International's ***Position Paper on Climate Change***<sup>16</sup>.

This paper also does not outline our organisational response to the protection risks faced by children and youth advocates who choose to speak out, including in the event where their freedoms may be compromised. These remain under the remit of ***Plan International's Child and Youth Safeguarding policies***.

---

## THE ISSUES AT STAKE

Children and young people constitute almost half of the world's population yet are dramatically under-represented in political decision-making. Less than 2 percent of the world's parliamentarians are aged under 30 years and fewer than 6 per cent are under 35. Only 22 percent of parliamentarians worldwide are women. Collectively, across the world's youngest parliamentarians, there is still a stark gender divide where 60 per cent are male and 40 per cent are female. This means that young women are among the least adequately represented social groups in politics worldwide.<sup>17</sup>

Young peoples' – and particularly girls' and women's – participation in policy and budget decisions is critical to ensure that states take their interests into account legally and economically. The voices of vulnerable and excluded girls and women in particular should be heard because it is their right,<sup>18</sup> but also to ensure that decisions are fair, responsive to and inclusive of all individuals, and contribute to greater social justice. Achieving this is at the heart of Plan International's efforts to support girls, boys and youth<sup>19</sup> to become active drivers of change.

Adolescents and youth are a diverse and heterogeneous group. Girls and boys, young women and young men and youth with other gender identities from different social, economic, cultural and political backgrounds and contexts navigate complex and varied journeys on their journey between childhood and adulthood. Each individual can have

many identities, including ethnicity, race, class, ability, language, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others, that determine how society interacts with and views them. Depending on their intersecting identities, children and young people experience discrimination and exclusion in varying degrees and will face different challenges, questions and issues related to participation in community decision-making and greater political involvement. For example, girls and women with disabilities and those from indigenous communities have historically encountered more barriers to political participation and public decision-making due to "power imbalances and multiple forms of discrimination"<sup>20</sup>.

In most parts of the world, young people's participation in formal political processes and institutions is declining.<sup>21</sup> This is not surprising given that those who make public and political decisions on their behalf often don't represent their interests. Civic space is shrinking and formal political spaces are increasingly harder to access and influence – and they are rife with youth-unfriendly bureaucracy and legal restrictions.<sup>22</sup> In a third of countries worldwide, eligibility for national parliament starts at 25 years or older.<sup>23</sup> Since 2010, many countries have introduced youth policies<sup>24</sup> that theoretically contribute to a better enabling environment for young people's civil and political engagement.<sup>25</sup> However, formal participation structures for young people often remain ineffective channels for their involvement in decision-making. While, globally, 133 countries have national youth<sup>26</sup> organisations, very few of these are consulted regarding policies affecting children and young people.<sup>27</sup> Youth parliaments tend to be tokenistic, chronically underfunded and in reality, have limited direct access to decision-making processes.<sup>28</sup>

Faced with shrinking civic space, adult-centric spaces for political participation, and growing frustration due to perceived inaction from world leaders, young people are increasingly rising up to take action and exercise their civic and political rights. From the



#MarchForOurLives to Ni Una Menos and the #ClimateStrike movement, we are witnessing a surge globally in youth activism and advocacy. Children and young people are showing us that they are not just the future. They are the present. They are active citizens in their own right, with their civic and political rights enshrined in international human rights frameworks.

Disenfranchised by formal political and civil society agendas and structures that they don't find representative and responsive to their needs and interests, yet enabled by new information and communication technologies, young people are increasingly choosing different routes for participation. They express their social and political engagement through protest, campaigning or political action outside formal civil society institutions. They initiate grassroots social movements, new organisations and projects while developing and making use of digital tools and innovative strategies.<sup>29</sup> They are increasingly organising online. Girl- and youth-led feminist organisations with particularly young members exist and work with some of the most vulnerable populations; however, they are severely under-resourced, and their sustainability is in jeopardy.<sup>30</sup> Youth-led collective action is growing and diverse, but it is under-funded and under threat. Although young people's leadership in social change is on the rise overall, it is far from equitable. Globally, poor, uneducated youth, rural youth, indigenous youth, youth in crisis contexts, and particularly girls and young women, are less engaged than their counterparts in any type of political action, whether formal or informal.<sup>31</sup>

Political disenfranchisement, high levels of inequality and a population "youth bulge" combined are increasing the risk of conflict and violence – especially in sub-Saharan Africa, southern Asia and the Middle East.<sup>32</sup> These conditions also impede young people from contributing meaningfully to the peace-building and conflict-transformation process, and perpetuate public views of youth as either villains or victims in conflict.<sup>33</sup> Excluding and marginalising young people from mainstream

decision-making processes and politics can prompt them to disengage from formal processes and can sometimes lead in turn to some youth expressing their frustrations and seeking change in a violent way.

Valuing young people as political actors is critical for understanding and enabling their potential to build democratic and peaceful societies – driving solutions with a youth- and gender-responsive lens. It is also critical for understanding more realistically why and how some may become contributors to violent conflict.<sup>34</sup> Acknowledging these intricate linkages, the UN Security Council adopted in December 2015 Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security<sup>35</sup>. While the resolution does not include young people under 18, it is still a landmark for enabling participation of younger age groups in conflict transformation processes. It is also an important complement to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security,<sup>36</sup> which calls for greater protection for girls and women recognising the disproportionate impact and vulnerabilities they face, and also for their greater representation and active participation in peace-building processes and decision-making.

Globally 65.6 million people are displaced because of armed conflicts or government persecution.<sup>37</sup> Climate change contributes to violent conflicts and exacerbates displacement. Since 2008, an annual average of 21.5 million people have been forcibly displaced by weather-related sudden onset hazards.<sup>38</sup> About 10 million people are stateless.<sup>39</sup> In such disruptive situations, the opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making processes often become even more limited. Girls' and women's mobility and access to information and services becomes further limited, and their vulnerability in terms of SRHR, education, malnutrition and health, sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage increases. This makes it even harder for them to participate in decision-making processes and adaptation actions, compared with their male counterparts<sup>40</sup>.

---

## IMPLEMENT INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS AND AGREEMENTS

Political empowerment is the process and result of understanding the power dynamics and relations that govern political spheres and having the capacity and skills to act with agency and autonomy to access, influence and change them<sup>41</sup>. To be able to express your views freely and safely in all matters that affect you; to have freedom of expression and thought; and freedom of association and peaceful assembly; are all fundamental human rights necessary to the political empowerment of girls, boys and young people – in all their diversity.

These principles are enshrined in numerous international human rights frameworks and standards and are applicable from birth as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). They are also protected by other human rights instruments including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Other important international agreements include the UN General Assembly 2003 and 2011 resolutions on women's political participation (A/RES/58/142 and A/RES/66/130) and UN Security Council Resolutions on Women and Youth, Peace and Security. In addition, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and several of the Sustainable Development Goals within Agenda 2030 promote the political empowerment of young people, particularly young women.

### Convention on the Rights of the Child

Much of the global discourse on children's and young people's right to participation in public life is centred around Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which clearly states that "State Parties shall

assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child..." In addition, there are several other relevant articles that protect and promote children and young people's political empowerment. These include Articles 13-17 on Freedom of expression; Freedom of thought, Rights to Association and Privacy; and Right to access to information and mass media. To complement the many articles of the Convention dealing directly and indirectly with children's political empowerment, the third Optional Protocol<sup>42</sup> to the Convention which came into force in 2014 outlines a communications procedure that enables children to bring complaints about violations of their rights to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, if they have not been fully resolved in national courts.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has also published subsequent guidance notes to provide further clarity on considering children's views and promoting their participation in public affairs. In 2009 the Committee on the Rights of the Child published General Comment No. 12 on "the right of the child to be heard"<sup>43</sup>. This General Comment aims to unpack Article 12 of the Convention and provide further guidance on the implementation of this article within different settings and situations. In addition, it notes the nine basic requirements for the implementation of the right of the child to be heard. These requirements provide a framework to ensure the promotion of meaningful, safe and ethical participation of children. Within the comment, the Committee recognises that children's ability to express their views is often impeded by long-standing practices and attitudes, as well as economic and political barriers. However, it also stipulates that state parties must assure the right of the child to be heard according to the age and maturity of the child. However, this can have a negative impact on children and limit the opportunities given to them by decision-makers and duty bearers. By adding this condition to the article, state parties have been given the opportunity to deny children

their full right to participate by arguing that children are not yet mature or old enough to engage.

Other General Comments:

**CRC/C/GC/19** General Comment on public budgeting for the realisation of children's rights

**CRC/C/GC/20** General Comment on the Rights of the Child during Adolescence

### **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

At the international level, progress has been made to ensure legal human rights frameworks are in place to support women's participation in political and public life. CEDAW is the international human rights treaty that focuses specifically on equality between women and men in all areas of life, including within public and private spheres. With regard to political empowerment, the treaty provides specific rights whereby states are committed to remove any barriers that may discriminate against or infringe women's equal participation. These include:

**Art. 7:** Political and Public Life

**Art. 8:** Participation at international level

**Art. 9:** Nationality

**Art.15:** Equality before the law

**Art. 16:** Marriage and the law

Article 7 is particularly relevant in setting out state obligations to supporting the full and active political participation of women as it covers their right to be elected to public office, the right to vote and to participate in public functions and services in their countries<sup>44</sup>. Also relevant is Article 8 which stipulates that women have the right to represent their governments at the international level and work in international organisations, without discrimination<sup>45</sup>. CEDAW General Recommendation 23 : Political and Public Life, fully guarantees women's rights to political participation, including by encouraging member states to adopt temporary positive measures to ensure that

women fully participate in public policy development and can engage at the international level; can access senior leadership positions; that their right to vote is incorporated in their legislation; that groups representing the rights of women have adequate and safe participation spaces; and by addressing public attitudes that discriminate against women and discourage their involvement in political, and public life<sup>46</sup>. It also includes many aspects of civil society concerned with public and political life<sup>47</sup>. While these articles outline the specific responsibilities of states to uphold the right for women to participate in political and public life, there is no explicit reference to girls within the text, meaning that specific barriers that prevent girls from active participation may be overlooked by governments. As a result, girls' age-, gender-specific needs and interests fall through the cracks of international human rights frameworks and standards.

### **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**

The ICCPR is a legally binding human rights treaty adopted by the UN in 1966. It is one of two treaties that give legal force to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (the other being the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). The ICCPR commits states which have ratified it to protect and respect the civil and political rights of all individuals. Importantly, these include fundamental rights such as:

**Art. 3:** Equal right of men and women to all civil and political rights

**Art. 17:** Privacy

**Art. 19:** Freedom of expression

**Art. 21:** Freedom to peaceful assembly

**Art. 22:** Freedom of association

**Art. 24:** Birth registration

**Art. 25:** Political participation

### **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise the fundamental importance of people's participation and their empowerment. This emphasis provides opportunities to

promote girls', boys' and young people's political empowerment and advance their civil and political rights. In particular, Agenda 2030 highlights the importance of ensuring "women and girls enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources and political participation, [and]...leadership and decision-making at all levels<sup>48</sup>". It commits to developing a global partnership that involves "the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people".

Entry points for these efforts within the SDGs are as follows (article text quoted from the SDGs):

- 4.7** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for ... human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship ...
- 5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
- 10.2** By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status
- 10.3** Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard
- 11.b** By 2020, substantially increasing the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and to develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for

Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels

- 16.1** Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- 16.6** Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
- 16.7** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
- 16.10** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

There has been a growing call to strengthen children's and youth engagement in civil and public affairs over recent years. Momentum has continued to build as young people campaigned for a robust post-2015 framework<sup>49</sup> and their efforts were duly recognised by international actors including the then UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon<sup>50</sup>. A focus on their empowerment, participation and well-being is secured in 65 out of the 169 indicators and 20 youth-inclusive targets across 9 out of the 17 goals<sup>51</sup>.

#### **Minimum age definition within international human rights frameworks**

Minimum age definitions for being heard in judicial proceedings or held in adult prisons, for access to credit, consent to marriage or making choices on their own health have a significant impact on how children, adolescents and young people experience and exercise their citizenship.

Taking into account children's evolving capacities, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) protects the civil rights of under 18-year olds, putting particular emphasis on the principle of their participation. It does not, however, grant children full political rights, that is, the right to vote or stand for elections. The UNCRC also makes further restrictions on children's and



young people's right to participate in political processes and decision-making, for example, to protect the reputation of others, national security and order (Articles 13–15), protection of health or morals (Article 15), and the clause “due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”. These provisions may give decision makers the license to limit children's and young people's civil and political rights on an arbitrary basis.

This view of children's and young people's civil and political rights is further compounded by the fact that several other international legal frameworks and resolutions do not refer to age specifically. Among those are the UNGA Resolution 130 on women's political participation, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its General Recommendation No. 23 on political and public life.

Legal age definitions provide an important basis for children to exercise their citizenship and to take an active part in public decisions. They also impose limitations on children's ability to exercise their political and civil rights. The UNCRC defines 18 years as a general age marker for adulthood (“unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”). However, age markers of adulthood vary, and states can set citizenship rights and obligations at different ages, for example on the minimum age to vote in elections. Many countries allow children below the age of 18 to vote in local or municipal elections, though not at the national level. These variations may also include different rights and obligations between boys and girls and can lead to inconsistencies, such as a gap between the maximum age of compulsory education and the minimum working age. In some cases, children can be sent to jail (to account for their actions) or serve in the military, but not be considered old enough to vote. A child may be legally entitled to have heterosexual sex with another child of their age but may be expelled from school if this happens<sup>52</sup>.

The current interpretation and application of international law rarely refers to girls as a particular demographic group—instead, girls are all too often grouped together with ‘women’ in legal texts. For example, a 2016 Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution states “women human rights defenders of all ages” face discrimination and violence.<sup>53</sup> A recent report produced by Plan International found that since 2010 there has been no explicit mention of girls in any of the 15 reports published by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.<sup>54</sup>

Girls—at all stages of their early lives—face distinct obstacles. Addressing their unique experience in legal frameworks will enable girls and young women to have clear and specific rights, while setting an obligation to member states to respect them. It also gives girls and young women advocates, activists and human rights defenders the necessary knowledge, tools and mechanisms to hold states accountable when their rights are not upheld and violated.

Merely adding ‘and girls’ after each mention of women is not enough. Girls and young women require explicit and targeted actions to reflect their age- and gender-specific needs. These actions should never stigmatise or isolate girls but rather compensate for the consequences of gender- and age-based inequality, such as the long-term deprivation of rights to education or health care.

### Plan International's Position

- Plan International believes that governments have an obligation and should be held accountable to take specific measures for the empowerment of all children, including in their ability to engage in political and public affairs in accordance to their evolving capacities (CRC Art 5) and without discrimination (Art 2) or violence (Art 19). Children should learn about human rights through education (Art 28), be able to express their views and be heard (Art 12) and

have the necessary freedoms to take action (Art 13-17) if they desire. These measures should apply to both online and physical situations. We believe a gender transformative approach must be used to implement these measures, acknowledging the specific experience of girls and the additional barriers they face to their political empowerment and engagement in public affairs.

- Children at all stages of their lives, face different obstacles to their political empowerment depending on their gender. Only when the intersecting forms of discrimination based on age and gender are acknowledged can these obstacles be addressed. The situation of girls must be explicitly addressed in international law — and in national and regional legislation, policies and programmes. Disaggregated data by sex, age, wealth quintile, location and disability (with due protections for privacy and human rights) must be collected, including the age range 10 to 14 years, to make younger adolescent girls and their needs visible and to track progress against commitments, policies and programmes.
- Plan International fully supports the call in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women for States to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against girls and women. This must apply to both online and physical spaces, so girls and women can engage fully, freely and safely as drivers of change.

### **Plan International's Recommendations**

- Governments should ratify, remove reservations to, fully implement and

monitor all relevant conventions and agreements in relation to the civil and political rights of all children and young people in all their diversity as well as women's participation in political and public life. Governments should adopt, budget for, implement and monitor national legislation and policies to ensure all children, adolescents and young people, particularly girls and young women in all their diversity, are able to actively contribute to public decision-making and good governance. This should include legislation that acknowledges and protects all children and young people from violence and particularly girls and women from gender-based discrimination when they choose to be politically active. Legislation and policies should also be fully consistent with international human rights law including the CRC, CEDAW and ICCPR and take precedence over conflicting customary or religious laws.

- In line with General Comment 12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Governments should ensure all legislation and policies enabling and promoting children's participation adhere to the nine basic requirements for meaningful engagement<sup>55</sup>.
- Governments must work to counter the human rights rollback by defending the universality and indivisibility of human rights and by recognising children as rights holders at national level and in regional and international fora. Governments should ensure there are no barriers to children attaining their rights.

---

## **SOCIAL NORMS AND PARTICIPATION**

Social norms are the shared beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour in a



group of people. All social norms, including gender-related social norms are a pervasive feature of all our lives<sup>56</sup> and, when related to what girls or boys of different ages should say or do, they influence the way that adults let children participate in decisions. Children and young people are not always allowed to express their views at home, school or in the community. Adults often do not believe it is appropriate or beneficial for them or for the children involved to share information or power with them, whether in family or formal “politics”.<sup>57</sup> These dynamics are also highly gendered: social norms and power relations often particularly discriminate against girls and young women in all their diversity, whose role is seen to be in the family rather than in the public sphere. From an early age, they are often discouraged from speaking their minds and once adult, from engaging in politics, which is considered generally a “male domain”. Across cultures and throughout history, politics has been the exclusive domain of privilege and power for older, male and often wealthy citizens, systematically excluding and marginalising other social groups – predominantly young people and women – from political discourse, debates and decision-making. As a result, the diverse needs and interests of numerous social groups have been historically – and hugely – underrepresented.<sup>58</sup>

Inequality, discriminatory social norms and negative attitudes towards girls and young women deny their voice, agency and autonomy to make decisions about their own lives. They also prevent them from engaging in political and public affairs. Prevailing social norms and cultural attitudes reduce girls’ and young women’s mobility, freedom, access to resources and information, their ability to develop broad social networks and limit their confidence. They are also a barrier to the family support that girls and young women need to encourage their political ambitions. Such harmful gender norms increase girls’ lack of time as they maintain expectations that girls and young women will assume high levels of domestic responsibilities. Gender norms further deprive them of access to the

financial resources<sup>59</sup> needed to pay for transport to meetings or membership fees to associations for their civic and political action. With little encouragement from within their direct environments and few strong female role models in public decision-making positions, levels of engagement in party activism among young women throughout much of the world is about two times lower than young men’s<sup>60</sup>.

Tackling gender inequality requires the end of discriminatory laws and policies and adequate, equal distribution of resources. However, transformative, long-lasting change cannot be achieved without addressing and transforming social and gender norms that manifest into sexist behaviours, practices and attitudes towards girls and women in all their diversity, and which hold them back from leadership and political participation.

It is also important to note that while the patriarchal status quo privileges male power and the interests of boys and men over their female, and gender non-conforming counterparts, gender inequality and social and cultural expectations also dictate male behaviours. Gender equality benefits everyone. Engaging men and boys as allies and change-makers in gender equality interventions is crucial to dismantling harmful gender norms<sup>61</sup>.

---

## **TACKLE GENDER NORMS AND BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION**

When women are included as political leaders, countries experience higher standards of living and positive developments in education, infrastructure and health<sup>62</sup>. Studies show that women’s political participation results in tangible gains for democratic governance, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs<sup>63</sup>; increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines<sup>64</sup>; greater economic growth and more sustainable peace<sup>65</sup>. However, women face a number of barriers to their political

participation and as leaders in public life. This is largely due to prevailing gender norms that undermine and dismiss women's ability to lead. It should be noted that while all women may experience discrimination, some women experience a greater impact due to their multiple, intersecting identities. Gender stereotypes do not exist in a vacuum but are often intertwined with other identities including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, class and education.

The barriers preventing women's equal participation in political and public affairs are both well documented and recognised by international human rights bodies. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 acknowledged persisting inequality between men and women in public life and political decision-making. Leading by example, the Beijing Platform for Action set a target for women to hold 50 percent of managerial and decision-making positions in the United Nations by 2000<sup>66</sup>. To accelerate the implementation of action in this area, the Commission on the Status of Women in 1997 adopted Agreed Conclusions (1997/2), which emphasised that the equal participation of men and women in decision-making was important for strengthening democracy and sustainable development<sup>67</sup>. The UN General Assembly 2011 resolution on women's political participation<sup>68</sup> and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution 33/22, further acknowledge the discrimination faced by women, amongst other excluded groups, and reminds states of their obligations to promote their active participation on equal terms with men at all levels of decision-making. This includes the need to implement measures that would redress the underrepresentation of women in decision-making, through the elimination of discriminatory practices and the introduction of positive action, such as quotas as temporary measures.

This latticework of policy and legislation is essential. However, it has been 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, and insufficient progress

has been made. Despite these attempts to advance women's participation and leadership in political and public life, the current rate of progress means we are far from achieving the ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically target 5.5<sup>69</sup>. In fact, since 2015 and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, we have seen a stagnation in women's representation in politics with the number of women as heads of state decreasing between 2015 and 2017 and limited improvement elsewhere in the number of women entering positions of power<sup>70</sup>. Overall, women still only represent 24% of the world's parliamentarians and their representation in municipal and local government positions remain disproportionately low. Currently, we are 107 years away from closing the gender gap in politics, globally<sup>71</sup>.

Achieving young women's meaningful participation in public life and decision-making processes necessitates a full and concerted effort to address gender-based barriers to their participation. For instance, efforts must be made to ensure that girls are able to attain a full 12 years of safe, quality, and inclusive education, including action to prevent child and early marriage and early pregnancy. Protection related concerns, including all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, must be addressed, particularly as relates to contexts where they prevent or curtail women's participation in policy-making processes. Girls and women often report feeling unsafe in the policy-making spaces themselves, or in traveling to and from these spaces. Additionally, due to unequal, patriarchal divisions of labour and gendered expectations, girls and women perform the vast majority of unpaid domestic labour and care work, including child-care responsibilities. Such a gender disparity in division of household labour and childcare impacts women's ability to participate in public spaces, despite available opportunities. All these gender-based barriers to their participation in political and policy-making processes are exacerbated in crisis contexts. Childhood and adolescents are entry points

for interventions to invest in girls' leadership as they transition to adulthood.

### **Plan International's Position**

- Plan International believes that ensuring girls have access to decision-making spaces and can occupy leadership positions at every stage of their lives is key to building a world where girls and women can thrive across politics, the economy and society.
- We must also challenge gender inequality and gender norms which undermine the civil and political rights and leadership of girls and young women and perpetuate unequal power relations. Harmful traditions, beliefs and social norms should not be reasons for countries to make reservations to international conventions and agreements which hinder children's and young people's participation and foster gender-based discrimination.
- We recognise the responsibility of governments to challenge gender inequality and acknowledge that this requires engaging multiple state and non-state stakeholders. Boys and men play a critical role as beneficiaries, rights holders, and agents of change, in challenging dominant norms of masculinity and power.

### **Plan International's Recommendations**

- Governments must implement and monitor all international and regional agreements that refer to government commitments to work towards achieving gender equality such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the SDGs and the annual Commission on the Status of Women agreed conclusions.
- Governments should collect, at a minimum, disaggregated data by sex, age, wealth quintile, location and disability to

identify gender-based and other barriers faced by girls and young women in all their diversity, in order to better inform national laws and policies.

- Governments should adopt policies and fund public campaigns in partnership with civil society organisations that challenge gender and social norms and that promote gender equality and the value of girls, boys and all young people's voices and actions in public and political affairs.

## **SUPPORT MARGINALISED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS ACTIVE DRIVERS OF CHANGE**

Although young people's civic action and leadership in social change is on the rise overall, it is far from equitable within and across contexts. Globally, poor, uneducated youth, rural youth, youth in humanitarian crisis contexts, and particularly girls and young women are less engaged in political action, whether formal or informal, than their more privileged counterparts<sup>72</sup>.

As outlined in Plan International's Tackling Exclusion Framework, gender norms and inequalities intersect with other forms of exclusion and patterns of discrimination. For example, girls and young women who live in poverty in rural areas, who belong to indigenous groups and/or who are disabled face additional barriers to platforms and resources to engage in civic and political action. Belonging to marginalised or excluded groups can make this even more difficult for children and young people, particularly girls and young women, and compounds their exclusion from decision-making. For example, in contexts where the rights of indigenous groups aren't recognised, it can make it nearly impossible for those groups to access information and participate to public life. It is very difficult for youth groups to engage in rights issues at all. Young activists who

identify as LGBTQI+ or who chose to take collective action around LGBTQI+ issues, are particularly vulnerable to hostile reactions and violence. In contexts where identifying as LGBTQI+ is illegal, resources for their work, including funding, tend to be scarce and these organisations will likely be excluded from decision-making spaces all together and may even be formally persecuted. All marginalised and minority groups risk hostile reaction and backlash for speaking out, especially if such identities are more visible.

### **Plan International's Position**

- All children and young people, including those in vulnerable situations; children with disabilities and those marginalised by structural inequality; ethnic, racial minority, indigenous and LGBTQI+ children; should be able to freely and safely express their opinions, on and offline. They must be provided with inclusive support to facilitate their active participation in all civic matters, in accordance with their age, maturity, gender and ability.
- Girls and young women in vulnerable situations face multiple forms of exclusion, discrimination and additional barriers preventing them from exercising their full citizenship and stifling their voices. Appropriate actions must be taken to ensure that vulnerable girls and young women in all their diversity have equal access to civic space and take part in decision-making.

### **Plan International's Recommendations**

- Governments and civil society should ensure civic space remains open and accessible to all individuals and groups who choose to engage in social and political action, regardless of their gender identities, ability, ethnic or minority background and socio-economic status.
- Governments must ensure young women's appointment to leadership

positions and young people's participation within formal political processes and institutions are not obstructed by discriminatory laws relating to their age, gender, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or any other identity or condition.

- Governments, UN bodies and civil society organisations including child- and youth-led groups/associations should adhere to principles of inclusion and non-discrimination when it comes to creating spaces and platforms for children's and young people's substantial participation. They must not discriminate against any individuals or groups and should take proactive steps to meaningfully involve the most marginalised and excluded children and youth. Their structures and work should foster inclusive practices, acknowledging and responding to intersecting forms of exclusion.

---

## **YOUTH PARTICIPATES IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES**

Of the global population, it's estimated that 1.8 billion are aged between 10-24 years old and 600 million of them live in fragile and conflict-affected areas<sup>73</sup>. Over 50% of the world's 25.9 million refugees are under the age of 18<sup>74</sup>. In humanitarian and fragile settings, young people, particularly girls and young women, are often the most affected due to entrenched and harmful gender norms. During a crisis, their access to education and vital services is obstructed, limiting their mobility and freedom, and leaving them at an increased risk of child protection concerns and gender-based violence. It significantly impacts their ability to exercise their autonomy and agency, convene and self-organise and



actively participate in public spaces. Where girls, boys and young people's needs are overlooked and misunderstood within humanitarian contexts, their potential to contribute as effective humanitarian actors is even further ignored<sup>75</sup>.

Yet, numerous studies including research conducted by Plan International UK show that children and young people are highly motivated to participate in humanitarian action and peacebuilding initiatives<sup>76</sup>. They are not only concerned about the immediate impact of crises on their wellbeing and livelihoods but are most motivated to act in order to offset the long-term effect on their ability to transition into adulthood including in areas of financial independence, active citizenship and supporting a family<sup>77</sup>. Recognition of this has led to two different landmark agreements in the field of youth participation. The first is the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action<sup>78</sup>, which launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 as a global call to prioritise the needs and rights of young women and men, boys and girls affected by disaster, conflict, and forced displacement. The second is the UN Security Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security<sup>79</sup> which urges States to recognise and promote the role of young people in conflict prevention and building peaceful societies. The agreements emphasise the importance of enabling young people's participation in decision-making in all phases of crises and any resulting democratic reforms<sup>80</sup>.

Despite the international recognition and a few countries making provisions to systematically include young people in humanitarian responses and peace agreements, this hasn't necessarily translated into concrete measures to facilitate young people's participation. Most national and international security-related policy discourse and programmes in post-conflict and fragile contexts tend to limit their participation. Instead, this discourse chooses to view young people, particularly young men, as potential perpetrators of violence that need to be de-radicalised, and young women only as victims

of crises lacking agency to contribute to change<sup>81</sup>. The media often reinforces social norms and public attitudes that exclude young people, and particularly young women, from political participation and conflict transformation. These further depict young people as either villains or victims. There is an urgent need to challenge the negative perception of young people's contribution in conflict affected contexts and other humanitarian settings and encourage states and other relevant actors to redress their policy and programming approaches according to the steps outlined in the two global pacts mentioned above.

Special attention must also be paid to the needs and rights of girls and women in crises. A recent UNHCR study on the barriers faced by women and girls' participation in humanitarian settings<sup>82</sup> found they faced numerous obstacles to having their voices heard in decision-making spaces – obstacles that their male counterparts did not experience. Not surprisingly, girls and women's primary concern during or in the immediate aftermath of a humanitarian emergency is meeting their safety and security needs and the restoration of lost livelihoods and economic assets, leaving little time for political participation. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a significant barrier to girls and women in humanitarian contexts, who tend to be disproportionately affected by SGBV in comparison to non-displaced populations. This includes SGBV within displacement settings but also importantly, the increased rate of domestic violence that occurs at times of crises<sup>83</sup>. The link between domestic violence and girls' and women's participation should not be underestimated or overlooked. If a girl or young woman has limited autonomy within her own home, she is unlikely to have the freedom to venture out into public spaces to participate in informal or formal political processes. In the same vein, the importance of creating safe spaces for girls and women within humanitarian settings, as an opportunity to promote their active participation and citizenship, should not be

ignored. Girls' and women's safe spaces are often the first opportunity for participation outside of the house and are the first place where girls and women are listened to as individuals. They are crucial entry points for girls and women's participation at the local level.

Protracted crisis contexts and fragile humanitarian settings generate new barriers and inequalities to girls and young women's political participation, but they also exacerbate existing ones. This makes it even more difficult to access platforms for civic action and political participation, let alone achieve equal representation among genders in decision-making. The participation rate of women in parliament amongst conflict and post-conflict countries is continuously lower at an average of 16 percent compared to the global average at 24%<sup>84</sup>. Even when women are in government and other formal positions of power, they face multiple forms of discrimination, exclusion and intimidation. There is an urgent and indispensable need to confront gender inequality within formal power structures. Yet, the link between women's political participation and leadership and sustained peace is widely evidenced. A study investigating 82 peace agreements in 42 armed conflicts between 1989 and 2011

found that peace agreements with female signatories are associated with durable peace and higher implementation rate of provisions set out in the peace agreements<sup>85</sup>.

Participation of girls and women in decision-making would also allow them to raise gender-specific crime against girls. Over the past two decades, efforts have been made at the international level to ensure that the push for women's leadership and participation extends to fragile settings. Through the adoption of resolutions such as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security in 2000 and its' subsequent resolutions<sup>86</sup>, the UN Security Council have recognised women's role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peacebuilding<sup>87</sup>.

Projects that aim to encourage and strengthen young people's participation, particularly of girls and young women in all their diversity, must consider a long-term, strategic view with a strong gender and intersectional lens. In humanitarian settings, participation projects are often limited to consultations regarding the implementation and management of the humanitarian response. These consultations are often passive in nature; only provide short-term engagement and rarely promote active citizen participation which focuses on

## **CASE STUDY: Girls Take the Lead (GTTL)**

Building Assets of Adolescent Girls in Refugee Camps in Rwanda was a 29-month project implemented by Plan International Rwanda, with support from Plan International USA in two Congolese refugee camps, Gihembe and Nyabiheke, from May 2015 – October 2017.

A baseline study found that adolescents lacked knowledge, role models and services to access reproductive health information and were subject to gender-based violence when accessing resources outside the camps. The project aimed to increase the access of girls aged 12-17 to girl-only safe spaces, girl-friendly counselling and referrals to needed services, increase knowledge of reproductive health and financial literacy. It also focused on increasing personal self-esteem of girls ages 15-17, and awareness of boys aged 15-17 on ways to promote gender equality and prevent violence.

At the end of the project 94% of girls participating in GTTL could identify at least one safe space as compared to 74% in the baseline, and these safe spaces were referred to as "the heart" of the project. Moreover, in the post-test, 94% of girls were aware of ways to prevent pregnancy and 93% could identify signs of pregnancy, representing a 19% and 28% increase from the pre-test.

In equipping young people in Gihembe and Nyabiheke camps with critical knowledge, Plan International Rwanda helped to protect them from violence.



the redistribution of power to those excluded from political processes<sup>88</sup>. For example, women have always participated in peace negotiations and peacebuilding, but always at the informal level and rarely visible to the formal peacemakers<sup>89</sup>. Girls and young women should be meaningfully included in the development, implementation and monitoring of peace solutions, and have an active role in driving them. Any efforts to increase the participation of affected populations must look to link localised activities to different decision-making spaces and contribute to public policy development, including where more formal power sits at the district and national level.

### **Plan International's Position**

- Plan International believes that the inclusion and participation of children and young people, particularly girls and young women, and of youth-led organisations, in peace building initiatives is an important prerequisite for achieving and maintaining peaceful societies. National and international stakeholders must recognize young people's agency and the work they are undertaking in response to fragility, and support and build on these interventions.
- State responses to violent extremism must not be used to limit young people's participation or wider civil and political rights.
- As a signatory of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, Plan International calls on all humanitarian actors to promote systematic engagement and partnership with young people, and especially young women, in all phases of humanitarian action. This includes the establishment and strengthening of mechanisms that foster their participation and greater investment in building their capacities to be effective humanitarian actors.

- Young people in fragile and conflict-affected states, especially young women, will face additional barriers to actively engaging in the public sphere. In these contexts, governments should make increased efforts to safely and meaningfully engage all their citizens in the public and political affairs of the country. Civic space must remain protected, open and accessible.
- In humanitarian settings, the protection and wellbeing of children and all civilians must remain a priority for governments, UN bodies and other humanitarian actors. Plan International does not condone or promote the involvement of children and young people in social and political action where violence is used as a tactic to provoke change and/or that poses a direct threat to their safety and wellbeing.

### **Plan International's Recommendations**

- Governments and other humanitarian actors should endorse the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action<sup>90</sup> and take active steps to implement all five recommendations outlined in the agreement, including by building partnerships with civil society organisations and child- and youth-led groups/associations.
- Governments, UN bodies and other humanitarian actors must prioritise the specific needs and rights of girls and young women and reduce barriers to their participation, including by addressing sexual and gender-based violence within displaced settings. The sexual and gender-based violence should be addressed both within public spaces and as a form of domestic violence, through public awareness campaigns, the creation of safe spaces and strengthening of

prevention, response mechanisms, and referral pathways, including social and economic support for survivors.

- Governments should take steps to implement the commitments and measures set out in UNSCR 1325 (2000), its consequential resolutions on Women, Peace and Security and in the more recently adopted UNSCR 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security. Both reiterate the importance of ensuring women and all young people meaningfully participate in all decision-making and policy processes throughout all phases of a conflict, including conflict prevention, peace processes, transitional justice mechanisms and peacebuilding processes. As outlined in UNSCR 2250, governments should act on the acknowledgement that building inclusive and peaceful societies is dependent on the active participation of young people in programmes to prevent, mitigate and respond to conflict and look to foster their meaningful engagement on this basis. Governments should specifically ensure and guarantee the participation of girls and young women.

# PATHWAYS TO POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

---

## BUILD THE FOUNDATIONS FOR POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

The active citizenship and participation of children and young people – and particularly girls and young women – is critical to ensure that states take their interests into account and develop policies that respond to their specific needs. It is crucial for building stable and peaceful societies and ensuring governments adhere to the fundamental principles of democracy and human rights. The voices of vulnerable and excluded girls and women in all their diversity should be heard. Not only is it their right as outlined in the UNCRC and CEDAW<sup>91</sup>, but it is integral to ensuring that decisions are fair and contribute to greater social justice. Achieving this is at the heart of Plan International's efforts to support girls, boys and youth to become active drivers of change. However, for children and young people to be adequately represented in political institutions, processes and decision-making, and in elections, they must know their rights and be given the necessary knowledge, skills and capacity to participate in a meaningful way at all levels.<sup>92</sup>

From adolescence onwards, participation in the political sphere becomes particularly important. This is the time where young people increase their understanding of social and political systems and processes but also start to exercise their ability to initiate change. Plan International's research found that 76% of girls and young women aged 15 to 25 are motivated to drive social and political change

in their homes, communities and beyond. There are several contributing factors during the time of adolescence and early adulthood that creates the enabling environment to empower girls and young women to have the confidence and continued motivation to become active citizens<sup>93</sup>.

Collective action and activism enable girls, boys and all young people to exercise and explore different styles of leadership. This affects how they organise, value different individual strengths and recognise the power of collective efforts to challenge gender injustice. It gives them the space to navigate their immediate social, cultural and political environments and to understand how power relations operate. It gives them the skill set, confidence and experience to then pursue their leadership ambitions – whether at home or in the local community, within boardrooms or in parliament. Studies suggest that for girls and young women, participating in civic action as adolescents is key to building an appetite to engage in public decision-making in adulthood<sup>94</sup>.

### Family and community support networks

Social norms and beliefs about what girls and women should say or do influence the way they are able to participate in decisions. Norms and power relations often particularly discriminate against girls and women whose role is seen to be in the family rather than in the public sphere. Even today, 55% of girls aged 7-21 say gender stereotypes affect their ability to say what they think<sup>95</sup>. Girls and young women have repeatedly reported to

Plan International how deeply ingrained ideas about gender roles in their communities and societies impacts their ability to lead<sup>96</sup>. In South Sudan and India for example, girls reported how ideas around their role in the home can restrict their mobility and ability to engage in social activities and networks<sup>97</sup>.

Plan International's *Taking the Lead* research conducted in 2019 found that girls identified family support as the key component to supporting their aspirations and confidence to become change-makers. Girls in focus group discussions across India, South Sudan, Dominican Republic, Japan and Senegal noted that whilst female leaders faced a general lack of support and criticism from society, it was the lack of support from the family which seemed to be more detrimental to their leadership ambitions. Conversely, support from family from an early age, including encouragement to defy gender stereotypes is one of the essential enablers of leadership.

Parents, schools, religious and cultural organisations should be seen as key entry points to creating a strong support network that nurtures girls' leadership aspirations. Efforts should be focused on making families more aware of their unique ability to foster equality in society by enabling girls to become leaders. Parents and family members can all act as champions within the home and the local community. Male family members can share the burden of domestic responsibility as it relates to housework and childcare in order to undermine stereotypes and promote girls' and young women's leadership.

### **Importance of role models and mentors**

Multiple studies find that girls are more likely to have leadership ambition if they have a role model to look up to and aspire to<sup>98</sup>. It's important that female leaders become visible and positively portrayed. Mentorship schemes and other ways that connect women who hold leadership positions to younger generations provide a critical intergenerational exchange. It helps girls navigate challenges previously overcome by their mentors and is a crucial

source of encouragement for girls to pursue their ambitions to become leaders<sup>99</sup>.

The absence of female role models can have a detrimental impact on girls' aspirations of leadership. Adolescent girls need female role models at all levels of society in order for them to see themselves as leaders and change agents<sup>100</sup>. A study of the effect of female political leadership on adolescent girls in India found the presence of women on village councils, through affirmative action measures, had a positive influence on girls' career aspirations and educational attainment.<sup>101</sup> Mentorship is a key part of strengthening girls and young women's motivation to participate and lead in areas such as business and innovation.<sup>102</sup> Young leaders who serve as mentors are also very important to motivate young people to take up leadership roles and develop future generations of leaders<sup>103</sup>.

### **Civic education and leadership skills development**

Inclusive quality education is one of the most powerful and important tools for achieving gender equality, active civic engagement and promoting girls' access to power and leadership in adulthood<sup>104</sup>. It plays a critical role in teaching the necessary skills to challenge the status quo, to develop one's own leadership style and demand an inclusive and equitable world<sup>105</sup>. For girls in all their diversity, the need to close the education gap is clear. When girls and women do not have the same opportunity to learn as their male peers, be it basic literacy or advanced degrees, they are already less likely to have an array of career prospects and rise to leadership in the public or private sector<sup>106</sup>. Efforts must be made to ensure that all girls are able to attain a full 12 years of free, safe, quality, and inclusive education, and opportunities to strengthen their skills and knowledge. However, in supporting all young people's political empowerment, education must prepare young people to be politically engaged. Education should promote the development of critical thinking skills allowing

children and young people to analyse and understand political arguments and harmful social norms. Education is also critically important in supporting individuals in learning to navigate media and access to mass information, particularly in the age of misinformation and disinformation.

The UN 2016 World Youth Report<sup>107</sup> focused on youth civic engagement highlighted the intrinsic link between civic education and political participation. Voter turnout amongst younger age groups is universally lower than their older counterparts. The report concludes that the lack of knowledge about political processes could be a contributing factor with young people struggling to understand the complexities of democratic societies and formal political processes without the appropriate education. The UN 2016 global youth report shows that nearly 53 percent of young graduates say they always vote in national elections, in comparison with about 44 percent of all 18- to 29-year olds. Marginalised youth such as minorities, unemployed youth and those living in isolation and/or poverty are often likely to lack the required knowledge to participate. A weak understanding of democratic principles and electoral processes makes it more difficult for youth to perceive elections as routes to express their grievances, demand change and hold governments accountable<sup>108</sup>. Encouraging governments to include civic education in national curricula at all levels, including on topics of human rights, gender equality and global citizenship has been a long-standing recommendation from child and youth participation experts and young people alike<sup>109</sup> and is prioritised in the Sustainable Development Goals under target 4.7. - a global and collective agreement that education must promote human rights, gender equality, peace and non-violence, global citizenship, appreciation of cultural diversity and sustainable development.

For girls and young women, civic education and leadership skills development are crucial in strengthening their pathway to leadership. The Wilson Center's *Women in Public Service*

Leadership Index, which surveyed women in government across 75 countries, found that vocational skills and literacy matters more for women entering leadership positions than higher levels of education attainment. It suggests that we should look more broadly at the type of skills that women need to move into positions of leadership<sup>110</sup>.

### Participation and Leadership Experience

Civic and human rights education is an important and contributory factor in developing young people's political awareness, but this intervention alone won't guarantee young people's and girls' political participation<sup>111</sup>. Exposure to leadership experience is vital to igniting and strengthening children's and young people's interest in political and civic action, especially for girls and young women. Participation in the governance of education institutions such as schools is often one of the first opportunities for children to develop and exercise their leadership capacities and learn to engage and negotiate in intergenerational decision-making processes. Educational settings are also often the first place where girls, boys and youth are able to engage with their peers away from home, start critical thinking, organise and form networks, and take part in youth-led collective activities.

A review of the available literature conducted by ODI in 2015 found that girls felt more confident in their abilities and motivated to become change-makers when they themselves were engaged in decision-making and leadership opportunities from an early age. Participation in decision-making processes at family and school level can help girls to gain such skills and challenge social and gender norms. However, being exposed to participation and leadership opportunities earlier in life isn't without risks for girls and young women. Plan International research found that young women who have actual experience of being in leadership positions often reported a higher expectation of gender discrimination than respondents with less or no experience in leadership<sup>112</sup>. This suggests that even from an early age, those who do put



## CASE STUDY: Leadership School for Girls project

Val grew up in a rural community in the state of Pará, Brazil. With no access to education, by the age of 8, she did not know the letters of the alphabet.

Things turned around for her when her aunt, who lived in São Luís, the largest city in the Brazilian state of Maranhão, invited her to come and live with her. She wanted to offer Val the possibility of a happier future and prevent her from falling into an early marriage like many girls in Val's village. Val's aunt enrolled her in school which is where she discovered her love for reading.

One day, she was at school when one of Plan International's community outreach workers came to talk about the Leadership School for Girls project. Val was immediately interested in the idea and applied to take part. The main objective of the initiative is to empower girls to recognise their role and power in society, helping them fight against violence and inequality, strive to obtain leadership roles and demonstrate that gender is not a deterrent to achieving their goal.

From the offset, Val identified herself with Plan International's purpose and principles. "I find it very unfair for women to be deprived of anything. No one should be limited because society has imposed it. Being with Plan International and meeting people who also think this way motivates me to go beyond and break down barriers". Through a series of exercises and workshops, Val has been equipped with the information and arguments to talk about these issues with her family and friends.

Val's ability and interest to speak in public, meant she was often called on to present the projects that her group was working on.

Val is now often invited to talk to new students and share her experiences and has become a reference point for female empowerment. She hopes to continue her education and go to college to study social work so she can help people and make a difference in their lives.

"I have encouraged myself to believe in me, to fight to be an empowered woman, to have the strength within myself to do whatever I need to follow the path I want to follow. I have met people with interests identical to mine, a diversity of thoughts, people fighting the same battles as me ... Today, I feel stronger to face any problems and any injustices that I might find," Val says triumphantly.

themselves forward to pursue leadership opportunities are likely to be exposed to gender discrimination. This could negatively

impact their aspirations to lead as the findings indicate the more leadership experience a young woman has, the more she sees leadership as a hostile space for women<sup>113</sup>.

### Portrayals of girls and women leaders in the media

How girls and young women are portrayed, through the media, in textbooks, in advertising, on screen, in video games and in other forms of communication, has significant

influence in determining how the world views girls and how they view themselves. The 2019 state of the world's girls report "*Rewrite Her Story*"<sup>114</sup> concludes that media influence on our lives is huge and not benign in terms of gender equality. In a recent study, researchers found that by the age of six, girls began to lose their confidence in their own ability to affect change. This has immediate impact on the types of activities girls then chose to engage with and potential long-term implications on their career ambitions<sup>115</sup>. A 2017 research report found that globally more than half of 10-17-year-old girls do not have high body esteem and as a result are not

asserting themselves, putting themselves forward for different opportunities and are shying away from socialising<sup>116</sup>. Seven in 10 girls think there is too much importance placed on beauty as a source of happiness and it has been widely acknowledged that advertisers and the media, including social media has a significant role in shaping the value that society puts on this<sup>117</sup>.

Girls and women who do succeed in visible positions of power are often held to different standards, treated more harshly and expected to conform to outdated leadership practices. Women suffer negative and demeaning portrayals in the media, on social media, in parliament and other decision-making spaces as a way to undermine their position of authority and discourage girls and women from voicing their opinions or pursuing leadership opportunities. This often comes in the form of the threat of gender-based violence delivered through online platforms such as social media, but also manifests in other ways including in the narrative and language adopted by the media when reporting on women in the public eye. Again, the public narrative tends to focus on a woman's external qualities e.g. the way she looks or dresses, instead of her intellect and leadership capacity. Out of the analysis of 56 top-grossing films in 2018 across 20 countries, female leaders are far more likely than male leaders to be shown wearing revealing clothing, partially nude or completely naked and to be sexually objectified as well as sexually harassed<sup>118</sup>. More disturbingly, women are constantly subjected to threats of violence and abuse in public spaces. A recent survey found that almost half of women in politics globally experienced serious abuse, including threats of murder, rape and assault, and one fifth were victims of sexual violence<sup>119</sup>.

Yet, addressing the under and misrepresentation of girls and women in the media has been proven to bring economic benefits. Unilever conducted a year-long internal gender audit into the advertising industry in 2015. They found that over 40% of

women felt they could not relate at all to the women they see in advertisements, having a significant impact on their decision to purchase products<sup>120</sup>. The research also found that more progressive adverts where women were shown in less stereotypical roles, had 12% better impact on consumers<sup>121</sup>. According to data from the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, out of the top 100 movies in 2015, female-led films generated nearly 16% more at the box office than movies with a male lead<sup>122</sup>. Seeing girls and women in leading roles, positions of authority and away from outdated and damaging stereotypes results in a multitude of benefits; for girls themselves and their future life chances and for wider society as a whole.

Acknowledgement of the damaging nature of negative portrayals has long been understood. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) notes that violent or demeaning depictions of women and girls in media contribute to the continuation of gender-based violence: 'Images in the media of violence against women and girls [...] are factors contributing to the continued prevalence of such violence, adversely influencing the community at large, in particular children and young people'.<sup>123</sup> Article 5 of CEDAW also stipulates that Member States take action to alter social and cultural patterns that fuel prejudice between the sexes. This implies the need to consider how media and other storytelling institutions shape such patterns, including prejudices and stereotypes<sup>124</sup>.

Progress to stamp out gender stereotypes and negative images of girls and women is happening. The International Chamber of Commerce Code on Advertising and Marketing Communication Practice stipulates that "marketing communications should respect human dignity and should not incite or condone any form of discrimination, including that based upon race, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation". In June 2019, the UK Government's ban on adverts featuring harmful gender stereotypes or those that are likely to cause "serious or widespread offence" also came into force as

the result of a review on gender stereotyping in adverts conducted by the UK Advertising Standards Authority<sup>125</sup>. Other regulatory bodies around the world have also made provisions in legislation and policy although this largely extends to advertising standards or television and radio content only<sup>126</sup>. However, many of these rules are self-regulatory and, therefore, difficult to monitor and enforce. Beyond voluntary guidelines and codes of conduct, it would be difficult for governments to introduce legislation that dictates how the media, particularly news journalism, should portray different members of society as it could be argued that this infringes the media industry's right to freedom of expression and status as an autonomous institution, free from government or state interference.

Instead, awareness raising amongst the media industry about their responsibility to promote gender-transformative stories, imagery and reporting must be the starting point to challenging media outlets to change their narrative on girls and women in the public eye. The forming of new public-private sector coalitions such as UN Women's & Unilever's *Unstereotype Alliance*<sup>127</sup> is also a positive indication that companies are beginning to take responsibility for their role in promoting gender equality and inclusive societies. Low-key initiatives such as Amnesty International's *Troll Patrol*<sup>128</sup>, a research project run by young volunteers analysing gender-based violence and discrimination aimed to silence women on digital platforms such as Twitter, are also effective ways to empower girls and young women to reclaim control over their preferred online storytelling platforms.

### Plan International's Position

- Misplaced societal perceptions and age-related policies and practices undermine the ability of children and young people to have their views taken seriously. As a result, they often have limited opportunity to engage and participate in political and

public affairs and, due to harmful gender norms, girls and young women experience additional limitations. Plan International maintains that their voices should be heard to ensure that decisions are fair and contribute to greater social justice.

- Interventions aiming to build women's capacity to engage in political and public affairs must begin in childhood and create an enabling environment. Every child has the right to an inclusive quality gender transformative education which includes a focus on human rights and civic education, equipping all children and youth with the necessary skills, knowledge, critical consciousness and experience to feel confident to engage in civic and political participation. For girls and young women, civic education and skills development are essential in strengthening their pathway to leadership.
- Female role models are crucial to nurturing girls and young women's ambitions to become active drivers of change. Mentorship schemes and other ways to connect women leaders to younger generations need support.
- The media has the power to shape, reinforce or challenge societal norms. With this comes responsibility to ensure that content does not reinforce negative gender stereotypes. Content should actively promote public perceptions of young people as active citizens and of girls and women in all their diversity as decision-makers and leaders through gender-transformative stories.

### Plan International's Recommendations

- Governments should partner with civil society organisations to implement outreach programmes and public campaigns at the community, local and national level focusing on promoting

gender equality, active citizenship and access to public spaces across all members of society including children and young people.

- Governments should recognise the role of education in the empowerment of children and young people as active citizens and gender equality champions and must ensure all children and youth receive human rights and civic education at primary and secondary levels. As outlined in the SDGs target 4.7t, governments, UN bodies, and civil society organisations should help children and young people, especially girls and young women, to understand and claim their rights, including through gender equality and human rights education and dissemination of human rights information in child- and youth-friendly formats.
- Governments should undertake a gender review of their Education Sector Plans including on curricula, textbooks, pedagogy and teacher training, to ensure that learning materials are non-discriminatory, gender responsive, inclusive and do not reinforce gender stereotyping around leadership roles and styles.
- Governments should ensure child participation in schools as a crucial component of their learning process, where children learn to express themselves, develop their opinions and critical consciousness, listen to others, and build the necessary skills to become active citizens. Schools should provide spaces and opportunities for girls in particular to exercise their leadership and citizenship skills including through student councils, mock elections, and active engagement in school governance structures where they can liaise with their peers, teachers and parents.

- In line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), governments should carry out their commitments to encourage local and national media to use their platforms to promote positive content around gender equality and women's leadership. They should amplify messages portraying a positive image of young women and men as leaders and change-makers. Furthermore, they should introduce legislation and policies that prevent and address the use of negative and harmful gender-stereotypes across public and commercial broadcasting and advertising.
- Media producers and publishers should consider the adoption of self-regulatory measures such as gender audits within their staff structures and content production.

## COLLECTIVE ACTION AND ACTIVISM OUTSIDE FORMAL PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES

Young people have played an important role in every social movement in modern history<sup>129</sup>. Leadership and positive change for young people is often created through collective action, outside of formal processes and structures. Due to their limited access to policy making systems and formal institutions of power, young people are not in a strong position to influence public decisions through institutional processes. In order to create social and political change, young people have to adapt their actions to their specific status and role in societies<sup>130</sup>, and often use collective actions to induce change. Research shows a growing number of citizens, including young people, have little trust in formal political processes, political institutions and leaders and therefore choose to engage in civic and political action in alternative ways,



giving rise to more informal and fluid forms of civic engagement<sup>131,132</sup>. Children and young people are more likely to engage in informal political participation for different reasons, one of them being their lack of financial resources. Formal civic participation such as joining a political party can be more expensive than informal engagements, such as the act of signing a petition.

However, child and youth-led organisations face numerous challenges in civic space and as human rights activists. This ranges from a lack of funding available to child- and youth-led groups and challenges in situating youth movements within wider movements for social and political justice. It also includes the fact that younger people, particularly girls and young women are more vulnerable to violence, physical threats and intimidation for the very act of convening and speaking out. These threats can come from their families and communities, military and police and political representatives; and can be further hampered by negative media coverage of youth mobilisation and activism. They also face harassment and threats of violence in online spaces when speaking up and expressing themselves. The below section covers key topics related to how children and young people are choosing to engage in civic action and drive change outside of formal spaces.

### Youth organising within civil society

Civil society plays an important role in holding governments accountable, as the primary duty bearers, to their obligations in upholding and promoting children's and all people's human rights. Civil society also plays an important role in ensuring the needs and perspectives of individuals and groups of citizens are heard and considered in the formation of public policies by different political actors<sup>133</sup>. Governments have a responsibility in ensuring there is adequate space for civil society to convene, mobilise and connect to decision-makers. Plan International understands that children and young people who choose to speak out and self-organise around rights

issues are an important part of civil society. They often represent the views of marginalised and excluded groups and have the right to express those views without interference. However, due to prevailing social norms and attitudes relating to the maturity of children and young people, their place as a legitimate actor within wider civil society is often not taken seriously and can be actively undermined, leaving them vulnerable to a number of risks relating to their safety, autonomy and ability to have influence.

From the young activists we work with, we have repeatedly heard about the challenges for girl- and youth-led associations to be formally recognised as part of civil society. Where they choose to register as official associations, they often risk violence or intimidation, adults interfering with their agenda and their autonomy being compromised. Where they choose to go unregistered, they miss out on the vital protection and funding available to civil society actors<sup>134</sup>. According to FRIDA's global report on young feminist organising, most groups they work with are unregistered for several reasons: 1. The process is too expensive; 2. Not registering is a conscious choice; 3. They face a series of legal, fiscal and administrative burdens that hinder both the registration process and their efficiency at the grassroots level<sup>135</sup>.

Plan International has found that a key enabler to the empowerment and protection of girls and young women activists is to create a safe environment that focuses on building the individual and collective capacities of human rights defenders. An essential part of this is connecting stakeholders who are building their capacity to influence to other more established movements including the women's rights movements and indigenous movements. An example of this type of programme is Plan International's regional school of political empowerment. In partnership with Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas ECIAMIA (the Continental Network of Indigenous



Women) Plan International is creating spaces for the activism and leadership of indigenous adolescent girls and young women across 9 countries in Latin America.<sup>136</sup> The programme works at the individual, family and community level to raise awareness around gender equality and strengthen the capacities of girls to have political influence at all levels. It also connects girls to the wider indigenous women's movements, promoting intergenerational dialogue and acting as a protection measure to support girls to carry out their human rights work safely. At the institutional level, the programme encourages municipal and national governments to establish formal mechanisms to engage girls in the monitoring of key regional and global human rights agreements and the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **Funding to youth groups and youth-led organisations/associations**

Youth activists constantly tell us about their need for financial and technical support to navigate adult-centric funding processes. They often face legal barriers to registering due to their age or because they do not hold a bank account. Legal and administrative obstacles can prevent children from establishing their own organisation<sup>137</sup>.

Increased and earmarked funding that directly contributes towards the work of grassroots organisations is also critical to strengthening child-, girl- and youth-led organisations around the world. There is a notable absence of funding available for youth movements from multilateral or bilateral agencies and governments<sup>138</sup>. Instead, income sources tend to come from self-generated activities including membership fees. This, in itself, could act as an exclusionary barrier to some individuals who do not have the financial means to participate. There can be funding available from women's funds, INGOs and foundations, but also with bureaucratic challenges<sup>139</sup>. Dedicated funding streams are needed for youth-led organisations working on human rights issues that values collaboration, not competition amongst grassroots groups

and associations. Offering the opportunity to co-apply for shared grants is one way to do this. As youth groups and activists respond quickly to emerging rights issues, their agendas evolve as needed. It requires flexible funding and fast reaction from donors. Youth groups and associations also need flexible funding for technical equipment and organisational strengthening based on the needs they defined. Training on project management, financial management and general capacity is identified as a key area of support by youth activists<sup>140</sup>.

### **Non-financial support to youth groups and youth-led organisations/associations**

Youth activists require multi-year flexible funding as well as non-financial support<sup>141</sup>. Youth activists need capacity building opportunities, technical assistance, networking opportunities and access to decision-makers and spaces of power. Capacity building may include training on: how to influence and organise, risk management, project management, financial management and administrative support<sup>142</sup>.

Any organisation looking to support child- and youth-led groups or associations should take the time to understand the needs of that group, what barriers they face, what enables their organising and what do they need to be able to continue their work. Children and young people are often undertaking collective action on a voluntary basis and do not have the infrastructure of formal organisations to manage risk, human resources and finances in the same way. However, it should not be assumed that informal groups are disorganised or unable to function effectively or efficiently as a result.

Informal groups are often told that they lack the administrative capacity to manage larger grants but do not have the funds to expand their teams to meet this need. For groups that are informal or too small to apply for larger grants, but wish to expand, women's funds, local NGOs and some INGOs can play a role in bridging this gap. As a strategic partner, they can provide the non-financial support to

build capacity as well as support with managing and processing the funds.

National, regional and international organisations with access to decision-makers and spaces of power can also consider how to share these non-financial resources with youth groups. This gives the opportunity to share their own story and recommendations and challenge negative perceptions of youth activists. Sharing contacts and networking opportunities should be tied to capacity building on how to influence safely and strategically. Capacity building could involve: mentoring and coaching, training opportunities and the facilitation of peer learning opportunities with other youth groups on campaigning tactics and approaches.

### **Youth collective action within restricted contexts**

Globally, CIVICUS reports the shrinking of civil society space and that at least one of the three core civic freedoms (freedom of association, assembly and expression) was threatened in 109 countries in 2016.<sup>143</sup> In November 2018, this was updated to 111 countries meaning that civic space remained under serious threat in almost 6 out of 10 of the world's countries<sup>144</sup>. Women-led organisations, including groups advocating for women's rights and women human rights defenders make up the largest proportion of groups commonly involved in civic space incidents<sup>145</sup>. Youth-led civil society groups, activists and human rights defenders, routinely at the forefront of rights-based movements, remain particularly susceptible to these unlawful restrictions and persecutions<sup>146</sup>.

Civic space is important because it is the space in which civil society and other influencers, such as INGOs, multilateral bodies or the media, operate. When civic space shrinks, governments and institutions are less likely to be responsive to citizens' requests<sup>147</sup>. For child- and youth-led groups, as well as girl-led and women's associations and networks, shrinking or restricted civic space poses additional and specific

challenges. For example, not all youth, girls' and women's human rights defenders openly refer to themselves as such. Plan International conducted extensive consultations with young feminist activists in the process of designing our Powering the Movement strategy and global campaign, Girls Get Equal. Young people are increasingly discerning in navigating their social, cultural and political environments to advance their agendas. In some countries young people described how they could not even call themselves "youth leaders" as this was seen as threatening to local legislators. In another, young people identified as human rights defenders in private, but chose the less controversial term "girls' rights advocate" externally. Consequently, this makes monitoring the situation of human rights defenders, particularly youth and girls' human rights defenders, much more difficult. Groups who are doing the work of human rights defenders but don't necessarily call themselves as such still need to be recognized.

It should be the role of civil society to promote space for young people's collective action and help navigate potentially contentious spaces. Wider civil society should comprise adequate space for all those wanting to promote human rights and gender equality without restrictions or fear of backlash. A key way to ensure civil society actors remain effective is to build solidarity through partnering between organisations and movements. For example, in April 2019, Plan International signed onto a global civil society call launched by CIVICUS to combat the issue of closing civic space. The Belgrade Call to Action<sup>148</sup> calls for civil society organisations to stand together in defence of people's voices for a just and sustainable world. It calls for the immediate end to attacks against civil society members, social leaders and human rights defenders and for UN Member States to take concrete urgent action to reverse trends of closed or repressive civic space.

## Children and young people as human rights defenders

Article 1 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders states that “Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”<sup>149</sup>. There is no minimum age to act for the protection, promotion and fulfilment of human rights and the actions of human rights defenders are wide-ranging. They include promoting the realization of human rights; collecting and disseminating information on human rights violations; supporting victims; contributing to the implementation of human rights treaties; and supporting better governance and accountability<sup>150</sup>.

Children who are or want to become human rights defenders face unique and additional challenges as opposed to adult human rights defenders. This is due to not being fully recognised and supported as individual rights holders, experiencing multiple barriers to accessing their rights such as the right to education, having their voices meaningfully heard and accessing appropriate accountability mechanisms to seek redress for rights violations. The lack of recognition of children as both rights holders and defenders makes it difficult to address and prevent those challenges. This is particularly true for girls and young women who face heightened challenges. Children’s special and dependent status creates real difficulties for them, not only in pursuing remedies for breaches of their rights but also in accessing information and support from adults to undertake their work as human rights defenders according to their evolving capacities.

Children human rights defenders are not only under attack due to their actions, but because they are children. Young human rights defenders are reporting increasing fear and real experiences of threats and violence to their physical and mental wellbeing when participating in activism<sup>151</sup>. Ahead of the 2018 Day of General Discussions of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, of the 2695

children aged 5-18 who participated in group consultations and to an online survey, 70% responded that they were concerned about violence when they act as children human rights defenders<sup>152</sup>. As it stands, there is no country in the world that recognises the specific situation of children within national law on human rights defenders<sup>153</sup>. Such barriers can significantly impede the actions of children human rights defenders and children from becoming rights defenders.

It is important to highlight the additional pressures and difficulties faced by certain groups of children, including girls. Girls, young women and all young people advocating for gender justice issues in particular have reported fear of retribution. In 2016, FRIDA reported that over half of the 1500 young women, girl and trans-led organisations who participated in their research regularly felt unsafe because of the work they do.<sup>154</sup> Although the perpetrators of intimidation and violence may vary in different contexts; whether it’s state, non-state actors or disapproving families and community members, the result is the same. Girls’ and young women’s voices are being silenced and their right to participate in public life is violated.

In recent years, the critical role of young human rights defenders and reports of attacks, including gender-based violence targeted at young people have been raised at the international level. Most recently, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of General Discussion in 2018 focused on children and human rights defenders<sup>155</sup>. The first formal recognition of young human rights defenders and specific provisions relating to their contributions within an international agreement came in March 2019 through the UN Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/40/L.22/Rev.1 *Recognizing the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development* whereby states are called upon to “provide a safe and empowering context for initiatives organized by young people and children to defend human rights relating to the

environment". It also calls for states to facilitate the participation of children and youth in decision-making and implementation of environmental policies and programmes<sup>156</sup>. This was followed up by a joint statement from UN human rights experts providing a groundbreaking acknowledgement of the role that children and youth are playing as well as the recognition and support that they need as defenders<sup>157</sup>. In July 2019, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution expressing 'profound concern at the backlash against progress made by ... civil society, including women's and community-based organizations, feminist groups, women human rights defenders, trade unions and girls' and youth-led organizations...'. The resolution mentions girl human rights defender for the first time by urging 'States to develop, support and protect an enabling environment for the full, meaningful and equal participation of women's rights organizations, feminist groups and women and girl human rights defenders and youth-led organizations ...'<sup>158</sup>. In any efforts to protect and empower children as human rights defenders, a gender lens must be applied to address and recognise the distinct risks and needs of girls.

## Digital Activism

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the role technology can have in promoting the empowerment of women<sup>159</sup>. It can be a powerful platform to amplify girls' and young women's voices, access new information and exercise their freedom of expression. Research in more than 8 western countries between 1974 and 2002 has shown that access to technology has had a positive impact on closing the gender gap between men and women in terms of political and civic participation. Institutionalised forms of political participation kept a significant gender gap throughout the years. But for emerging participation acts, the gender gap was reversed in 2002, with women now being significantly more active than men in acts such as signing petitions and joining boycotts and protests<sup>160</sup>. Yet, online violence and harassment faced by girls and

women remains rife. Violence and harassment are being used, both incidentally and strategically, to silence the voices of girls and women, and to limit their engagement in political debates online. This mirrors concerning behaviours towards women negotiating political spaces. In a global survey, it was found that almost half of women in politics have faced serious abuse, including threats of murder, rape and assault<sup>161</sup>. While many young people struggle with the pressures of social media, compared to their male peers, girls online are facing more threats of sexual violence, more comments about their appearance and behaviour, and are more often told not to speak out and have an opinion. Global data on girls' experiences online is scarce, but experiences of women suggest the problem is global: 45% of women in Kampala and 21% of women in Nairobi have been harassed or threatened online<sup>162</sup>.

Whilst online platforms have statistics and reporting ability for certain issues such as terrorism, they do not produce statistics analysing gender-based violence (GBV) on their platforms. Until freedom from online violence and harassment against girls and women is secured, technology will continue to serve as another tool to maintain unequal power relations.

Activists and advocates, including children and young people, are increasingly mobilising in online spaces and social media sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter<sup>163</sup>. They are better connected, but face harassment and violence both online and in person. It has been widely recognised that virtual spaces have been used to perpetuate direct attacks on girls and young women in all their diversity as a way to silence their voices<sup>164</sup>, commonly using and referring to their gender in a derogatory manner. A joint statement by the UN Special Rapporteurs on Violence against Women and Freedom of Expression highlighted how violence, harassment and abuse against girls and women online can "chill and disrupt the online participation of women journalists, activists, human rights defenders, artists and other public figures and



private persons”<sup>165</sup>. A 2017 UK study found that 88% of respondents who regularly use Twitter for feminist debate, also experienced abuse whilst on this platform<sup>166</sup>. Activists and advocates with a range of intersecting identities, (e.g. gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability) experience multiple forms of abuse and intersectional discrimination on social media platforms. Attackers aim to undermine their authority, belittle their experiences and silence their voices. The digital environment has become an integral part of civic and political activities. Therefore, the protection and the empowerment of child and youth advocates and activists, especially girls, in both their online and offline activities can no longer be addressed separately<sup>167</sup>. The question of digital safety, access and voice must be approached not simply from an individual perspective, but also in light of the internet being a core social structure, and a crucial platform for active citizenship and voice.

The take-down of offending content is an urgent priority for girls and women who face cyberviolence. To address this concern, dominant social media companies have, over time, introduced new design features for improved user safety and security. This is an individual fix and is far from adequate as a systemic response. There is no common approach to addressing women’s rights standards across different platforms and contexts. In India, they have taken the view that the business of securing women’s rights is the sole responsibility of the state, arguing that their liability extends only to compliance with official rules. The platform companies use their ‘community standards’ to justify opaque actions that are accountable to no one.<sup>168</sup>

Digital media has an empowering impact in providing new spaces for freedom of expression to girls and women in all their diversity, making it possible for girls and boys to communicate across national and international boundaries and contributes to effective collaboration on a global scale to promote gender equality<sup>169</sup>. However, usage of misinformation and ‘fake news’ can impact

children and young people’s ability to self-organise and leave them susceptible to external, adult interference and exploitation. Children and youth activists need to be properly equipped to deal with the issue of misinformation and fake news.<sup>170</sup>

There is also a need to ensure conversations around civic space extends to the digital space. State control over internet access and social media surveillance can greatly encroach on children’s and young people’s civil and political rights. According to CIVICUS, between 2016 and 2018, censorship was imposed in at least 31 countries in Africa. Several African governments disrupted internet access, including by blocking social media platforms<sup>171</sup>. This isn’t unique to the African continent but is increasingly happening across all regions of the world. Therefore, any discussion around young people’s right to assembly and freedom of expression must be grounded in the wider policy discourse around internet regulation and censorship.

Policies on children and digital rights are important. There are now several guidelines being developed to look at what upholding human rights looks like within the digital era. For example, the Council of Europe are drafting “Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment” and work is ongoing at the international level by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to develop a General Comment on Children’s digital rights. It is widely recognised that the internet can serve as an enabler of human rights, boosting economic, social and political development and contributing to the progress of humankind. However, these benefits require targeted actions, such as ensuring digital literacy education and that child-centred design accompany policy initiatives; embedding children’s voices and concern in developing digital resources; and ensuring that business-led innovation is subject to regulation that recognises children’s rights and is informed by risk impact assessments<sup>172</sup>.



## Plan International's Position

- Plan International supports youth activism, and the rights of girls and young women to respond to gender inequality and fundamental human rights breaches. This includes in contexts where local laws contradict fundamental rights.
- Governing mechanisms are often inaccessible and can replicate the oppressive systems girls and young women strive to resist. When governance structures do not allow meaningful participation, engagement in activism is often the only feasible alternative for young people's voices to be heard in public policy debates.
- It is the right of all children and young people, including girls and young women in all their diversity, to have their voices heard. Supporting youth-led collective action and movement building is key to gender transformative influencing. It has the power to shift norms and behaviours and to create positive and lasting social change.
- Support for children and young people's civic participation from a young age allows them to exercise their agency and autonomy and equips them with the necessary skills, experience and networks to be effective drivers of change. Engaging in social movements can empower girls and young women, nurture leadership ambitions, build confidence and provide necessary skills to drive change.
- Children's and young people's active citizenship outside of formal processes and institutions should be promoted. In this context, their autonomy must be respected and free from unwanted adult interference. Furthermore, national laws and policies must make it possible for

children and young people to choose to organise within movements or associations and legally register or not, without repercussion on their activities.

- Children and young people who take action to promote, protect and fulfil their own human rights or those of others, should be regarded as human rights defenders and deserve the same protection detailed in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders<sup>173</sup>, even when they chose not to be labelled this way. Girls and women human rights defenders, and other human rights defenders who work in defence of women's rights or gender equality, are considered as women human rights defenders<sup>174</sup>.
- An enabling environment must be developed and protected for youth-led organizations and girl human rights defenders to meaningfully and equally participate in public life. In any efforts to protect and empower children as human rights defenders, a gender lens must be applied to address and recognise the distinct threats and violence faced by girls and young women.
- Digital and online spaces play a positive role in movement building, training and connecting activists and harassment of girls and young women should not be tolerated. Measures to protect and empower children online, with specific actions for girls, young women and women human rights defenders in all their diversity, must be central to laws and policies regulating digital technology and online spaces. Digital platform providers must be accountable for safety online.
- Plan International does not condone violence of any kind as a tactic that activists might use to press for social and political change.

## Plan International's Recommendations

- Governments and civil society actors must collectively ensure spaces remain open, accessible and safe for children and young people to advocate in, especially for girls and young women. They should protect and uphold citizens' rights and civic freedoms (freedom of association, assembly and expression) as outlined in international agreements such as the CRC and ICCPR. Any restrictions on civic space should be lifted immediately. This includes any laws and policies that restrict or censor online access and freedom of expression that are based on principles of human rights and gender equality.
- Civil society organisations should encourage intergenerational exchange and movement building between established groups and child- and youth-led associations, and protect them from risk of intimidation, harassment or other forms of unwelcomed interference.
- Governments should encourage children and young people, particularly girls and young women, to take part in collective action and activism at local and national levels, promote their active citizenship and recognise their contribution as drivers of change in societal and political affairs. Governments must ensure legal and policy frameworks do not obstruct young people's collective action and activism, particularly girls', young women's and women human rights activists'.
- Governments should not restrict access to online spaces, including social media platforms. Parents, teachers, law enforcement officials and information and communication technologies businesses must support and train children on digital literacy and resilience, including how to report and respond to inappropriate

words, insults, negative criticism, harassment or online violence. This is particularly important for girls and young women who experience disproportionate levels of online violence.

- Technology companies must recognize violence against girls and women on their platforms as a human rights abuse and develop both individual and collective means to eliminate it. Protection measures for users, monitoring and reporting mechanisms should be strengthened, especially for girls, young women and women human rights activists. Safeguarding to avoid online risks for girls, young women, young advocates, activists and human rights defenders can include the creation of alternative child-friendly online platforms.
- Technology companies should take responsibility for the spread of misinformation and fake news on their platforms and take clear actions to curb it.
- As part of their Overseas Development Assistance, governments should consider allocating a proportion of foreign aid to support civil society strengthening within the recipient country. This should include earmarked funding towards grassroots youth-, girl and young women-led movements, groups, associations and organisations.
- All donors should provide flexible multi-year funding to unregistered, grassroots girl-, young women-, child- and youth-led groups, networks, organisations and associations. Donor required reporting, evaluation and accountability mechanisms should be co-designed with the children and young people themselves, making time for capacity building if needed.

- Donors, governments and NGOs must respect the autonomy of young women-, child-, and youth-led groups and associations, including where their organisational and decision-making structures may differ and follow non-hierarchical approaches. They should understand how the groups and associations operate and how to best support their work, including through financial and non-financial means.
- Governments should strengthen and enforce all national laws and policies targeted at ending violence against children, girls and women as human rights defenders. This should include provisions that protect their right to speak out freely, and measures addressing the additional barriers faced by girls, young women and vulnerable youth both online and in physical spaces. Laws prohibiting violence against girls and women must extend to cover all private, public and digital spaces and include condemnation of gender-based violence and discrimination against women political leaders and other figures in the public eye.
- UN bodies responsible for monitoring the situation of violence against children and human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders must ensure they pay attention to the situation of child, girl and young human rights defenders. Age and gender-disaggregated data must be collected and made available to all, so that civil society groups can use these to hold their governments accountable for any rights violation or failures to guarantee their safety and security.

## PARTICIPATE IN FORMAL POLITICAL PROCESSES AND INSTITUTIONS

Although young people are drivers of change and engaged in socio-political movements, formal politics is still largely a domain of people over the age of 35, with youth remaining underrepresented. Evidence shows that young people are less likely to participate in formal political processes than older generations. Voters turnout among youth aged 18 to 25 continues to be lower than other age groups and they are less likely to join political parties<sup>175</sup>. As young people are not a homogenous group, reasons for their underrepresentation vary. They include lack of knowledge, interest or trust, as well as flaws in the political process itself, making it hard for young people to participate in an effective and meaningful way.<sup>176</sup> Nevertheless, it's important to ensure formal mechanisms and institutions do provide children and young people with the opportunity to engage, and that all political institutions and processes are conducted in a way that does not discriminate, exclude or reinforce negative social norms on the basis of sex, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation or any other exclusionary categorisation.

Without formal mechanisms, these institutions and processes are not representative of society at large and policy makers can make public policy decisions about and for citizens without being properly informed of and taking into account their needs and perspectives. A sign of democracy and good governance is ensuring all citizens have a voice in the political and public affairs of their country. This is outlined in several international human rights frameworks including the SDGs which call on governments to be transparent, inclusive and responsive to the needs of their citizens<sup>177</sup>. This should apply at all levels of local governance, within communities, schools, cities or districts, where there is the same need to integrate child and youth participation, especially girls and young women, in order to reflect the voices of all concerned citizens. The following section

highlights some of the key areas that can act as entry points to strengthen children's and young people's engagement in formal political processes and structures. It also covers topics that specifically look at opening up more pathways for women, including younger women, to enter into public and political spaces.

### Laws and policies at the national level

At the international level, there has been increasing acknowledgement and commitment from states around their obligations to address the barriers that prevent women from equally and effectively participating in public life and for young people to be more actively engaged through civic participation. But challenges remain on both fronts when it comes to implementation at the national level. For children and young people, existing national policies and action plans addressing youth participation centre on fulfilling their basic rights such as health and nutrition, but forgo any emphasis on building their capacities for political participation and active citizenship.

In 1998, ministers for youth gathered in Lisbon, Portugal for the first World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in cooperation with the United Nations to agree on the key principles and approaches when it comes to youth policies and programmes. It was recognised that youth are a positive force in society and have enormous potential for contributing to development and the advancement of societies. The declaration held commitments to support young people's active participation in all spheres of society and in decision-making processes at all levels, necessitating the implementation of gender-sensitive measures to give equal access and opportunity<sup>178</sup>. Governments committed to implement youth policies at the national level by 2005 which cover a comprehensive multi-sectoral approach to positive youth development. Yet, in 2013, it was reported that of the 198 UN Member States, only 99 (50%) had an existing youth policy. A further

56 (28%) were revising their youth policy or in some cases, developing their first national policy and a total of 43 states (22%) did not have a youth policy at all<sup>179</sup>. In 2019, 21 years on from the original conference, ministers reconvened to take stock of the state of youth policies in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the new UN Strategy on Youth focused on young people's empowerment. The 2019 Declaration reaffirmed the commitments of the 1998 version but also put higher emphasis on taking the necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination, particularly against girls and young women, in national law, regulations, policies and practices<sup>180</sup>. It included provisions to tackle violence, ensure access to digital spaces, and young people's economic and political empowerment.

In recent years, many countries have embraced the positive discourse surrounding youth-led development and implemented strategies that both build children's political capacities for the future and ensure they can have a say in public policy formation, including on issues that particularly affect them. For example, the Government of Ireland's Ministry for Children and Youth Affairs has launched several national strategies to create enabling environments for children and young people to have their perspectives heard including the National Strategy on "Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020"<sup>181</sup>. The National Youth Council of Ireland also developed the Youth Check – an impact assessment tool designed to consider the impact on young people and children of any new youth-relevant policy or legislation<sup>182</sup>. However, more needs to be done to ensure that every government has a comprehensive, cross-sectoral, gender-transformative national youth policy that is fully budgeted and includes action plans for implementation. National youth policies should reflect current and emerging issues as they relate to young people's development and include an emphasis on fostering their participation in



decision-making locally, nationally and internationally.

### Child Rights Governance and Youth Governance

Good governance requires government to be responsive to the rights, needs and opinions of its citizens. It includes the need to be open and transparent about decision-making processes, delivery of quality services, ensuring information is accessible and having established independent mechanisms whereby it can be held accountable for its actions and inactions<sup>183</sup>. Ensuring that there are spaces and mechanisms for children and young people to be able to hold their governments accountable is a clear indication of good governance. There are a number of ways in which this can be done including through an established national child rights infrastructure whereby laws and policies are made to specifically deliver on children's rights and the implementation of the CRC; ensuring that all other national laws and policies are assessed for their impact on child rights and wellbeing; participatory budget-making and establishing independent mechanisms or commissions for reporting on children's rights and human rights more broadly.

Governments can also show they are responsive to their citizens' voices by engaging in local social accountability programmes. In recent years, Plan International has developed programme models that specifically support youth-led social accountability, including the Young Citizens Score Card. It is a tool allowing children and young people, along with their communities, to measure the quality of services such as healthcare, water and sanitation, education or child protection and advocate for their improvement. Importantly, it is a two-way process that engages children, youth, community members and government officials in an ongoing manner to jointly analyse services and improve them<sup>184</sup>.

Other measures can be implemented to facilitate youth engagement in governance

practices, including the establishment of child and youth councils and parliaments at the local and national level. National youth councils or representative structures have been established by 131 countries, however their quality varies with many chronically underfunded and politically weak<sup>185</sup>. Some have formal ties to national parliaments, but most are coordinated by other stakeholders and have limited direct access or power to influence parliamentary decision-making processes.

An increasingly popular mechanism for the integration of youth voice within public policy processes is youth participatory budgeting. It has long been utilised in schools, cities, and regions. For example, Uganda's Local Government Development Planning Guidelines notes youth groups as one of the selected citizen interest groups to be consulted in plan reviews<sup>186</sup>. From 2010, Plan International Ghana has been working alongside the Integrated Social Development Centre on the Youth Budget Advocacy Group of Awutu-Senya District, where young people are trained in effective budget advocacy and were invited to help shape the 2011 Ghana budget statement.<sup>187</sup> Portugal was the first OECD country to apply this at a national level in 2017<sup>188</sup>.

The ever-growing use of youth participatory budgeting as a mechanism of youth engagement indicates a transformative approach to youth citizenship. This shift is an integral part of 'youth mainstreaming', defined by the Commonwealth Secretariat, in accordance with the UN Economic and Social Council definition of gender mainstreaming as: *Strategies for intergenerational equity and justice that enable young people's capabilities, participation and human rights to be an integral dimension to the analysis, design, implementation and monitoring & evaluation of policies and programmes in inter-sectoral planning across all social, political and economic spheres. It enables young people and adults to benefit equally from, and contribute equally to, development outcomes.*<sup>189</sup>



Plan International welcomes this holistic approach to the meaningful engagement of young people, and to the mainstreaming of youth governance, ensuring that young people's access to political power is embedded into public policy processes. Any empowerment of young people must be gender-transformative, ensuring that girls and young women are able to participate on an equal basis, and that barriers and power differentials are addressed.

### Gender-Responsive Governance

The past two decades have seen a resurgence in the adoption of gender-responsive budgeting, with examples including government-led gender-responsive budgeting being taken up in Uganda from 2004/2005 through incorporation in the budget call circular; in Mali, through the integration of a budget annex in the finance law, which from 2011 onwards mandated the use of indicators mapped against the national

gender policy plan; in Pakistan, a concerted governmental shift towards GRB has been implemented since 2005; and in Timor-Leste, GRB was first outlined in the budget papers of 2008.<sup>191</sup>

A particularly interesting case study of gender-responsive budgeting is the Philippines, as agencies are mandated by the Republic Act 7192 (more commonly known as the 'Women in Development and National Building Act') to set aside resources for the institutionalisation of gender equality. Public agencies, offices, bureaus, state universities, government-owned and controlled corporations and local government units are authorised to allocate at least 5% of their annual budget for activities related to gender and development. The positive impacts of this gender-conscious financing are wide-ranging and have been documented by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. The funds have enabled gender-transformative initiatives such as small loans

### CASE STUDY: Girl-led shadow reporting on CEDAW (UN Geneva case study)

In 2018, Plan International's first-ever girl-led CEDAW alternative report was submitted for the CEDAW review of Nepal. The report was prepared by 527 girls, 110 boys and two sexual minorities<sup>190</sup> from 47 districts representing all seven provinces of Nepal. The objectives of this report were to provide a platform for girls at different levels for discussing issues affecting them and to outline the existing situation of girls in Nepal.

The process was facilitated by Plan International and its partners in the Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) and was entirely led by girls under the age of 18. A core group of three girls was selected by their respective Child Clubs as the main leaders of the process. Capacity-building workshops were conducted by Plan International and its partners, both for the three girls in the core group, as well as for an additional 14 girl facilitators from around the country, who would be responsible for running consultations in their home districts. The girl facilitators then ran consultations with groups of 25-30 girls (and a few boys) in their respective districts, collecting their insights on the state of girls' rights in their country, in the form of drawings, poems and oral contributions. Additionally, "special consultations" were held with girls in particularly vulnerable circumstances, including girls in institutional care, girls involved in labour, girls with disabilities, survivors of trafficking, and survivors of sexual abuse. The contributions from all consultations were collected, reviewed and analysed by the core group of three girls, who then drafted the final report with the support of the adult facilitators of the process.

This experience was ground-breaking because not only does it represent Plan International's first-ever girl-led CEDAW report (and possibly the first one of its type in general), but it also provides a good practice that can be replicated, both for CEDAW reports and for other reporting processes.

for women's livelihood projects; education workshops on women's human rights and gender issues; the establishment of local women's centres that respond to issues of women's health and violence against women, including abuse in intimate and family relations; integrated women's development programmes and related advocacy at various levels; as well as strengthened citizenship actions by local women's organizations.<sup>192</sup>

With budgets being used across the world to institutionalise efforts towards gender equality, the way governments spend money can further entrench or alleviate inequality. However, the inclusion of girls and young women's voices needs to become a central part of this endeavour, so that initiatives and solutions *for* girls, are driven *by* girls.

### Challenges of age-regulations for political participation

Where young people do feel confident and supported to engage in active citizenship, they can still face other barriers to their participation. Discriminatory laws and policies may render them unable to enter formal political structures as young adults. For example, in a third of countries, eligibility for national parliament starts at 25 years.<sup>193</sup>

Whilst many governments have youth structures to theoretically promote an enabling environment for young people to exercise their political rights, these tend to be politically weak, underfunded and in reality, have limited direct access to decision-making processes<sup>194</sup>.

There is often a disconnect between the age citizens are allowed to vote in public elections and other freedoms and markers of maturity, responsibility and adulthood. For example, in the UK, the general age of majority, is the age of 18. Despite being denied the right to vote, 16- and 17-year olds are allowed by law to give full consent to medical treatment; pay income tax; consent to sexual relationships and serve in the armed forces, although not be deployed to the front line.

In the 2000s, countries began to consider lowering the voting age and discussed it locally and nationally. Several proposals were put forward in American states, including California, Florida and Alaska; a national reduction was proposed in 2005 in Canada and in the Australian state of New South Wales. In 2009, a Danish Member of Parliament presented an initiative to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg to lower the voting age in Europe to 16. The Scottish Parliament reduced the voting age to 16 for parliamentary and local elections in 2015 and, in British Columbia (Canada) a Vote16 campaign started in 2018 and is close to legislative approval.

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights demands that elections be held "*by universal and equal suffrage*", but in most countries universal suffrage still only applies to individuals 18 years old and above. Recurring arguments against lowering the voting age to below 18 include the alleged lack of political maturity of youth. But as analysed previously, we are witnessing a surge in youth activism and advocacy. Children and young people are already politically engaged and are citizens in their own right, with their civic and political rights enshrined in international human rights frameworks. They are subject to political resolutions, as much as adults, but are not allowed to choose their representatives. Demands to reduce the voting age to 16 years old were made by climate strike activists in several countries (including Germany and the UK)<sup>195</sup>. A study examining the link between youth political participation and fiscal policies in the U.S. found that lowering the voting age below 18 was linked to higher youth turnout, and that politicians became more responsive to issues that the young have strong preferences on, such as higher education spending<sup>196</sup>. One study found that allowing 16-year olds to vote led those voters to have

"substantially higher levels of engagement with representative democracy (through voting) as well as other forms of political participation"<sup>197</sup>. Valuing young people as political actors is critical and voting should not be a final responsibility you earn once you've taken on the other responsibilities of society; it should be one of the core rights you exercise as a member of society.

Lowering the voting age empowers children as active citizens: it is separate and should never imply granting other rights and obligation linked to adulthood. States taking measures to reduce the voting age should maintain and implement all protections due to children as outlined in the UNCRC, so that nobody below the age of 18 should be able to get married or take part in combat. Article 12 of the UNCRC mentions that "*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child*", but Article 1 of the Protocol to the UNCRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict specifies that "*States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities*" and General Comment number 4 of the CRC Committee recommends setting the minimum age for marriage with and without parental consent to 18 years, for both girls and boys.

In Europe, Austria already allows children to vote in all types of elections from the age of 16 years old, while Greece accords this right to children from the age of 17 years. In Estonia and Malta, children are entitled to vote in local elections from the age of 16 years. The same minimum age also applies for local and regional elections in certain regions of Germany (Länder). In Belgium, children can vote in public consultations

organised at the local or regional level from the age of 16 years.

Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador and Nicaragua also have a voting age of 16. In all these countries, the legal age to marry without parental consent is 18 and lowering the voting age did not lower the age of marriageability.

Furthermore, lowering the voting age below 18 must be non-partisan. It should not imply political enrolment of youth in one political party but should allow children to vote in in free and regular local or general elections, without adult interference. Therefore, pertinent infrastructure and education should be put in place. As outlined previously, the UN 2016 World Youth Report<sup>198</sup> focused on youth civic engagement highlighted the intrinsic link between civic education and political participation. All children should understand their civil and political rights, where to access relevant information and how democratic processes operate in their context, so they have the necessary skills, knowledge, critical consciousness and experience to feel confident to engage in political participation and to vote.

### Representation in Political Parties and Parliament

While in the past political engagement of citizens was mainly channelled through activism in political parties (membership, voluntary work, door-door campaigning, attending meetings etc.), the last decade has shown that political parties are facing difficulties in attracting new party members, and in particular young people<sup>199</sup>. The 2016 UN global youth report shows that political party membership is less prevalent among those under the age of 30 than among older adults. Only 4.1 percent of 18–29-year olds are active party members, compared with 5 percent of all adults<sup>200</sup>. The gender gap in political party membership is also disproportionate. Young women are estimated

two times less likely to be members of political parties in comparison to young men<sup>201</sup>.

The 2016 report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on youth participation in parliaments notes that whilst young women face a double layer of inequality – due to the intersection of age and gender - the fact that the gender gap between representation of women and men is at its narrowest amongst the youngest MPs is an encouraging sign<sup>202</sup>. The IPU view this as an encouraging trend and see the gender imbalance as something that becomes more apparent later on, therefore insinuating that interventions should focus later on when women have already established themselves as political actors. However, to settle with this assumption means the international community are missing the vital fact that there are still fewer women choosing to enter into politics compared to their male counterparts. Plan International research and consultations with youth groups around the world, as well as peer agencies, has found that girls and young women are more inclined to aspire to and enter into typically male-dominant sectors and decision-making roles when other women are visible in similar positions, as role models.<sup>203</sup>

Political parties are critical to women and young people's participation in politics<sup>204</sup>. How women participate in political parties, including how those parties encourage women's involvement in political life and how they incorporate gender equality issues into their mandates, are key determinants of women's political empowerment. In order to promote women's involvement in political processes, it is imperative that parties take a series of steps across the electoral cycle to incorporate women fully into the structure of the party, and to shift the organization and financing of the party to be more conducive to women's participation<sup>205</sup>. Youth wings of political parties have been vehicles for younger party members to receive nominations as candidates and hold office. Elected officials who were youth wing

members are typically 9 years younger than elected officials without that background.<sup>206</sup>

Three countries can provide examples of how to take positive action when it comes to electoral financing of women and young people. In Canada, the 1974 Elections Act allows childcare expenses to be included in a candidate's personal expenses during a campaign<sup>207</sup>. In Panama, Law 60 of the Electoral Code stipulates that parties use at least 25 percent of public funds for capacity-building, out of which at least 10 percent must go to female candidates<sup>208</sup>. In Costa Rica, 20 percent of the total contributions to the Citizen's Action Party are allotted to training and organizational efforts, with no less than 15 percent being targeted at training women and youth<sup>209</sup>.

The most effective strategies for women's political empowerment involve reforms to political institutions that target support to women within the party, women candidates and elected officials<sup>210</sup>. It is important for parties to incorporate rules that guarantee women's representation. In recent years, some 50 countries have adopted legislation on electoral quotas in order to ensure that a certain proportion of candidates for political office are women. Hundreds of political parties in another 20 countries have voluntarily adopted their own gender quotas<sup>211</sup>.

The issue of violence against women in public positions of power should not be underestimated, nor should the ways in which political violence and harassment against women can significantly limit their capacity to engage in public and political life.<sup>212</sup> Pre-emptive action must be taken by governments and political parties to end the culture of impunity and sexism when it comes to gender-based threats and attacks against female political candidates. Plan International's own research shows that over 93% of girls and young women believe women will experience unwanted physical contact and sexual harassment as leaders<sup>213</sup>. There is a need to call out the explicit violence



and harassment experienced by women in the public space. A good example of where this has been done is in Bolivia, where the House of Representatives in 2009 passed an Act

specifically to defend the rights of female political candidates in elections from violence and harassment. Included in this Act is the prohibition of pressure, threats, harassment, or persecution against a woman candidate, as well as pressure on a female candidate's family<sup>214</sup>.

### **Use of quotas and other temporary measures to increase representation**

Women, particularly young women, face systemic barriers to enter political institutions. Sexism remains deeply rooted within political institutions because of the ways they reproduce social systems, including gendered power relations<sup>215</sup>. Research shows that these structural barriers within political systems can work towards excluding women or ignoring their voices, and that such sexist cultural norms of institutions can be enough to deter women from engaging<sup>216</sup>.

Although multiple international agreements, regional frameworks and national laws recognise girls' and women's rights to participate in public life and reach leadership positions as a measure of democratic integrity, the widespread absence of women

in political and decision-making bodies persists. Globally, only 24% of the world's parliamentarians are women<sup>217</sup>.

Quotas, when used in conjunction with other measures have the potential to break a cycle of marginalisation in politics and decision-making<sup>218</sup>. The article 4 of CEDAW suggests states should adopt temporary measures aimed at accelerating the equal participation of women in the political, economic, social, cultural, and civil spheres. The CEDAW Committee's definition of these measures is quite broad, and includes "a wide variety of legislative, executive, administrative and other regulatory instruments, policies and practices, such as outreach or support programs; allocation and/or reallocation of resources; preferential treatment; targeted recruitment, hiring and promotion; numerical goals connected with time frames; and quota systems"<sup>219</sup>. The Beijing Platform for Action lists a number of actions to be taken at every level of government, by political parties, the private sector and other stakeholders (e.g. "gender-sensitive training for women and men to promote non-discriminatory working relationships and respect for diversity").

As of June 2016, women represented more than 30% of elected representatives in only 46 countries<sup>220</sup> and 40 of these countries had some form of quota system. An Inter-Parliamentary Union study noted that in 2011,

## **CASE STUDY: SUPPORTING WOMEN TO RUN FOR LOCAL OFFICE IN EAST TIMOR**

Since 2014, Plan International has been supporting women's political participation and leadership in local districts in East Timor. Currently, just 2% of local leaders in Timor are women. A number of these women in Aileu district are beginning to change this with the support of Plan International and of a local women's NGO, Patria. Through the creation of women's forums in local communities, we have supported women's and girls' participation in local governance and local elections. 11 Women's Forums are now created, bringing awareness to women about their rights and building their public speaking, advocacy and leadership skills to support them in running election campaigns. For the local elections in December 2015, Plan International, Patria and partner organisations launched the "I'm Ready" campaign that supported more than 100 women to run in local elections. In 2017, Plan International supported a further 22 women to stand for elections in East Timor.



17 countries holding elections used quotas. As a result, women took 27.4 percent of seats, in comparison to 15.7 percent of seats in countries without any form of quota<sup>221</sup>. Research suggests that quotas ‘trump’ cultural factors in determining women’s participation: when quotas are used, religious and cultural factors no longer constrain women’s representation<sup>222</sup>. Numerous Muslim countries, such as Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal and Indonesia have successfully adopted quotas. In the Maghreb, it resulted in relatively high rates of female representation, with an average of 21.6 percent, as compared to MENA countries without quotas, with an average of 8 percent female representation<sup>223</sup>.

Quota systems can also be a way of promoting youth representation into formal political institutions. For example, some countries use a quota system of reserved seats which guarantees that a certain proportion of young people will be elected<sup>224</sup>. This type of quota does have a strong impact in increasing youth representation. Examples include Kenya<sup>225</sup>, where 12 members were nominated by political parties to represent special interests including youth. In Uganda<sup>226</sup>, five seats are guaranteed for people under 30, one of whom must be a woman. In Rwanda<sup>227</sup>, two members of parliament are elected by the National Youth Council.

Similarly, reserved seats have led to increased women’s representation too. In the African region, there are a few good examples of states that have reserved seats for women at the local level. In Lesotho, 30 percent of all local election divisions were reserved for women in the 2005 local elections, and in the end, over 50 percent of the elected representatives were women<sup>228</sup>.

Yet, an element of caution needs to be considered when introducing quotas. When quotas assume that all women are equal, they fail to acknowledge the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by girls and women

based on their economic status, age, minority race and ethnicity, disability, and/or identification to the LGBTQI+ community. Therefore, quotas may enable more women to get into positions of power, but it does not guarantee that women from diverse backgrounds will be represented, and it can exclude the most marginalised women. This logic applies to young people, too. Young people from low income backgrounds, of minority races and ethnicities, young disabled people and young LGBTQI+ people must be factored into any considerations about quotas. Nonetheless, quotas can be positive temporary measures to change the status quo regarding gender balance and can also enable representation of young people within political parties and governments.

### Plan International’s Position

- Supporting children and young people’s active citizenship is a key indicator of good governance. Promoting the participation of children and young people, including girls and young women, in local, district and national decision-making processes is crucial to fulfilling their civil and political rights as citizens.
- Moreover, all individuals, regardless of age, gender or other characteristics have the right to have their voices heard, be represented and participate in formal institutional and political processes at all levels. Although nothing about them should be decided without them, girls and young women are the least represented population and are often refused the space and opportunity to formally voice their concerns and priorities.
- Participatory processes for children and young people should be institutionalised at different levels (local, regional and national), with clear and meaningful mandates and adequate resources. These processes must be accessible to and

inclusive of all children without discrimination, ensuring that girls and young women are able to participate on an equal basis.

- Children and young people should also be given legitimate space in every community and local level accountability programme. Feedback mechanisms must be child-friendly, gender-responsive and easily accessible so children can monitor the quality and efficiency of public services. This can be done through tools such as the young citizens score cards.
- In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we believe that a child is every person below the age of 18 and encourage all states to recognise 18 as the age when they legally become an adult.
- Neither the eligible age to vote nor the eligible age to run for and hold public office should exceed 18. When states lower the voting age to below 18, girls and boys should be able to vote in free, fair and regular elections without adult interference. Infrastructure and education should be in place to ensure all children, without discrimination, understand their civil and political rights, where to access relevant information and how democratic processes operate in their context. Furthermore, measures to understand and address heightened protection risks and potential risks to fundamental rights must be taken.
- Lowering the voting age to below the age of majority (18) is never a reason to consider lowering the age for other civil rights. As outlined in the Article 1 of the Protocol to the UNCRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict and in General Comment number 4 of the CRC Committee, nobody below the age of

18 should be able to get married or take part in combat.

- Children and young people should be informed of their right to report any concerns regarding human rights violations, including by their national government, through independent human rights mechanisms as outlined in CEDAW and CRC respectively.
- Political institutions and processes must be reflective and representative of wider society and, importantly, there should be fair and equal representation between genders. Plan International supports the introduction of positive measures to redress imbalances, such as quotas and earmarked funding to female candidates. Affirmative action should always be considered a temporary intervention, needed until representation is more equitable and there is limited chance of regression once those interventions are no longer in place.
- Supportive laws and policies are needed to enable girls and women to leverage digital technology to include their voices in public decision making, as well as enabling their direct participation in processes.

### **Plan International's Recommendations**

- As the primary duty bearers of children's civil and political rights, governments should make conscious efforts to equip all children and young people with the capacity to participate as active citizens, in childhood as well as when they reach the age of majority. All national and local government policies relating to positive youth development must be gender transformative and inclusive of young people in all their diversity, ensuring that children of all genders have equal

opportunities and benefit equally from them.

- Governments should consider the adoption of temporary measures such as quotas, to secure an increase in more young women's representation in all their diversity in political leadership. Sensitisation campaigns must run in conjunction with the introduction of temporary measures to ensure the wider population understands the importance and value of such actions. They should also tackle the prevailing gender and social norms that so often undermine girls' and young women's authority and ability to lead.
- Governments should take measures to ensure an enabling and fear-free environment in every sphere of government (local government to parliament) to encourage more young women to take up leadership positions. These include policies to address sexual harassment in the workplace.
- At the international level, UN committees should welcome, encourage and facilitate girls, boys and young women's groups to engage in practices such as shadow reporting during CEDAW and CRC Universal Periodic Reviews and voluntary national reviews on SDG implementation. At a national level, Children's Commissioners should actively seek out the voices and opinions of girls and boys when assessing government action on the implementation of children's rights.
- Governments, UN bodies and civil society organisations must carry out their obligation to educate and assist children and women on the mechanisms to report rights violations including those conducted by their national governments and national justice systems. As outlined in CEDAW

Communications Procedure and CRC Optional Protocol 3, reporting must be done to independent monitoring bodies including at the international level.

- Governments should reform any laws or policies and remove all discriminatory barriers that prevent young people and women from voting in regular, fair and free elections and/or running for public office. This includes ensuring eligibility is aligned to international and national age of majority and that participation is not dependent on consent for subject to interference from any relatives.

# REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> General Assembly Resolution [A/RES/53/144](#) adopting the Declaration on human rights defenders. Available Online: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/wrgs/pages/hrdefenders.aspx>
- <sup>2</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (A/HRC/16/44) Available Online: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/178/70/PDF/G1017870.pdf?OpenElement>
- <sup>3</sup> Plan International (2014) *Citizen and Governance Programme Strategy 2013-2017*, <https://plan-international.org/publications/citizenship-and-governance-programme-strategy>
- <sup>4</sup> Definition adopted from Lederach, J. P. (2006) *Defining Conflict Transformation*, <http://restorativejustice.org/10fulltext/lederach.html> (accessed 14 December 2017): "Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships."
- <sup>5</sup> Plan UK and Plan Sweden (2015) Strengthening support to LGBTQI+ adolescents.
- <sup>6</sup> Definition based on: Del Felice, C., Ruud, H., United Network of Young Peace Builders (2016) *Annotated Bibliography: The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding* (online), <http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/Annotated-Bibliography-Youth-and-Peacebuilding-November-2016.docx-2.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2017) and UN Peacebuilding Commission (2016) *Gender Strategy* (online).
- <sup>7</sup> Just Associates (2002) "Political Consciousness – a perpetual quest", <https://www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/political-consciousness-perpetual-quest-varlie-miller.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> An overview of the way social norms can be brought about can be found in Lilleston P.S. et al. (2017), 'Understanding social norms and violence in childhood: theoretical underpinnings and strategies for intervention', *Psychology, Health and Medicine*, 22:sup1, p. 123. Available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13548506.2016.1271954?needAccess=true>
- <sup>9</sup> Definition based on CREA (Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action) (2010) *Feminist leadership for social transformation: clearing the conceptual cloud* (online)
- <https://justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/feminist-leadership-clearing-conceptual-cloud-srilatha-batliwala.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2017)
- <sup>10</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) *Youth participation in national parliaments* (online). [www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf) (accessed: 10 July 2017)
- <sup>11</sup> Countries include: Egypt, Guatemala, US, Canada, Finland, Uganda, Sweden, India, Afghanistan, Syria, Norway, Netherlands, Senegal and Germany
- <sup>12</sup> EC-UNDP Joint Taskforce (2017) Youth participation in....
- <sup>13</sup> See Elisabeth J Croll, 'From the Girl Child to Girls' Rights', *Third World Quarterly*, vol.27, no.7 (2006), p.1287 and Nura Taefi, 'The Synthesis of Age and Gender: Intersectionality, International Human Rights Law and the Marginalisation of the Girl-Child', *The International Journal of Children's Rights*. 17(2009), p.345.
- <sup>14</sup> Plan International (2018) Powering the Movement: A strategic framework for realising gender equality and girls' rights through girl- and youth-led collective action.
- <sup>15</sup> Plan International (2019) Pathways to partnering with youth-led groups and organisations. Programme guidance.
- <sup>16</sup> Plan International Position Paper on Climate Change: Focus on Girls and Women
- <sup>17</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) *Youth participation in national parliaments* (online). [www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf) (accessed: 10 July 2017)
- <sup>18</sup> See global human rights framework in the Appendix.
- <sup>19</sup> By using the term, "girls, boys and youth" we recognise that many individuals identify as male or as female and that older children such as adolescents might not identify with the term child. We also recognise that gender is not binary and includes a continuum of possibilities. To facilitate ease of reading within this document we refer to women, men, girls and boys throughout, and to youth or young people. This does not in any way diminish our commitment to and work with individuals with other gender identities; or our understanding that legally in most contexts the term "child" denotes a person up to 18 years of age.
- <sup>20</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities - [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/31/62](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/31/62)



<sup>21</sup> The Commonwealth (2016) *Global Youth Development Index and Report*. Commonwealth Secretariat (online). <http://cmydiprod.uksouth.cloudapp.azure.com/sites/default/files/2016-10/2016%20Global%20Youth%20Development%20Index%20and%20Report.pdf> (accessed: 10 July 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) *Youth participation in national parliaments* (online). [www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf) (accessed: 10 July 2017)

<sup>23</sup> UNDP (2012) *Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle* (online). [www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral\\_systemsandprocesses/enhancing-youth-political-participation-throughout-the-electoral.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral_systemsandprocesses/enhancing-youth-political-participation-throughout-the-electoral.html) (accessed: 10 July 2017)

<sup>24</sup> According to youthpolicy.org, of 198 countries, 127 countries (64 per cent) have a national youth policy, up from 99 (50 per cent) in January 2013 and 122 in April 2014.

<sup>25</sup> The Commonwealth (2016) *Global Youth Development Index and Report*. Commonwealth Secretariat (online). <http://cmydiprod.uksouth.cloudapp.azure.com/sites/default/files/2016-10/2016%20Global%20Youth%20Development%20Index%20and%20Report.pdf> (accessed: 10 July 2017)

<sup>26</sup> While these include young people aged over 18, they defend the interests of an important part of the child population of a country, i.e. adolescents.

<sup>27</sup> Statistics disaggregated by sex or age are unavailable.

<sup>28</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Rhize (2016) *The new global citizen – Harnessing youth leadership to reshape civil society*. [online]. [www.comminit.com/governance-africa/content/new-global-citizen-harnessing-youth-leadership-reshape-civil-society](http://www.comminit.com/governance-africa/content/new-global-citizen-harnessing-youth-leadership-reshape-civil-society) (accessed: 10 July 2017)

<sup>30</sup> FRIDA (Flexibility, Resources, Inclusivity, Diversity, Action), the Young Feminist Fund and AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development) (2014) *Brave, creative, resilient. The global state of young feminists organizing* (online). [http://youngfeministfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/frida-awid\\_research\\_summary.pdf](http://youngfeministfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/frida-awid_research_summary.pdf) (accessed 10 July 2017)

<sup>31</sup> The Commonwealth (2016) *op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> See Urdal, H. (2006) "A clash of generations? Youth bulges and political violence", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 50, 2006, pp. 607–29. Urdal tests the claim that youth bulges potentially

increase both opportunities and motives for political violence through a time-series cross-national statistical model for internal armed conflict for the period 1950–2000, and for event data for terrorism and rioting for the years 1984–1995. He concludes that youth bulges (relative cohort size) increase the risk of low-intensity political violence (internal armed conflict, terrorism and rioting). See also C. G. Mesquida and N. Wiener (1999) "Male age composition and the severity of conflicts", *Politics and the Life of Sciences*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1999; and R. Cincotta (2003) *The security demographic: Population and civil conflict after the cold war*, Washington, D.C.: Population Action International. Available from [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ecspr10\\_C-cincotta.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ecspr10_C-cincotta.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> See Hendrixson, A. (2004) *Angry Young Men, Veiled Young Women – Constructing a New Population Threat*, Corner House Briefing 34 ([www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/resource/angry-young-men-veiled-young-women](http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/resource/angry-young-men-veiled-young-women))

<sup>33</sup> United Network of UN Peacebuilders (date unknown) *Agreed Language on Youth, Peace and Security* (online). <http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Agreed-UN-Language-on-Youth-Participation-in-Peacebuilding-2-FLAT.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2017)

<sup>34</sup> Ozerdem, A. (2017) *Center for Trust, Peace and Social Relations*, Coventry University at <http://sustainablesecurity.org> (accessed June 2017)

<sup>35</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) Youth, Peace and Security. Adopted December 2015. (online) <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>

<sup>36</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) Women, Peace and Security. Adopted October 2000. (online) [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000))

<sup>37</sup> See UNHCR (2016) *Global Trends Report*, [www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/](http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/)

<sup>38</sup> UNHCR (2016) "Frequently asked questions on climate change and disaster displacement" (online) [www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/11/581f52dc4/frequently-asked-questions-climate-change-disaster-displacement.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/11/581f52dc4/frequently-asked-questions-climate-change-disaster-displacement.html) (accessed 10 July 2017)

<sup>39</sup> UNHCR (n.d.) "Ending Statelessness" (online) [www.unhcr.org/stateless-people.html](http://www.unhcr.org/stateless-people.html) (accessed 10 July 2017)

<sup>40</sup> For more information on the above issues and Plan International's programmatic response, including our global theory of change for LEAD as an Area of Global Distinctiveness, refer to the LEAD narrative available on Planet.



<sup>41</sup> Definition of 'political empowerment' as outlined in Plan International (2017) Area of Global Distinctiveness narrative on Lead: girls, boys and youth as active drivers of change.

<sup>42</sup> UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure (2014)

<sup>43</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) General Comment No.12 on the right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/GC/12 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> CEDAW Article 7 explains: "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all public elected bodies; b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country."

<sup>45</sup> Article 8 explains: "State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations."

<sup>46</sup> See, generally, United Nations, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 23, *Political and Public Life*, HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6 at 260 (1997).

<sup>47</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation 23 on political and public life (1997) paragraph 5.

<sup>48</sup> UN General Assembly (2015) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A/RES/70/1. 21 October 2015 p6

<sup>49</sup> For example, over 7 million young people voted for their priorities in the online My World Survey. UN, My World Campaign 2015, <http://vote.myworld2015.org/>.

<sup>50</sup> The 2030 Agenda not only specifically names young people as "critical agents of change" and former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, named people specifically as "torchbearers" in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, preamble and para 51.

<sup>51</sup> UNDP 2016, Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace 2016-2020.

<sup>52</sup> Interagency Group on Children's Participation (2008) *Children as Active Citizens*

<sup>53</sup> See HRC Resolution, 'Protecting Human Rights Defenders, whether Individuals, Groups or Organs of Society, Addressing Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' (2016), A/HRC/RES/31/32, OP 9

<sup>54</sup> Plan International, 'Report: Girls' rights are human rights', (2018), <https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-rights-are-human-rights>

<sup>55</sup> General Comment 12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, page 26. Available online: <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Plan International Global Policy on Gender Equality and Inclusion. June 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation (2008) *Children as Active Citizens*. ECPAT International, Knowing Children, Plan International, Save the Children Sweden, Save the Children UK, UNICEF and World Vision

<sup>58</sup> EC-UNDP Joint Taskforce (2017) Youth participation in....

<sup>59</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (2016) *Compendium of good practices for advancing women's political participation in the OSCE region* (online) [www.osce.org/odihr/224206?download=true](http://www.osce.org/odihr/224206?download=true) (accessed: 10 July 2017)

<sup>60</sup> UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) (2016) World Youth Report on Youth Civic Engagement (online) <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/world-youth-report-on-youth-civic-engagement.html> (accessed: 10 July 2017)

<sup>61</sup> Plan International Global Policy on Gender Equality and Inclusion. June 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Markham, Susan. "Strengthening Women's Roles in Parliaments" *Parliamentary Affairs*, (2012) 1-11.

<sup>63</sup> Cammisa, A. and Reingold B. "Women in State Legislature and State Legislative Research: Beyond Sameness and Difference" *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 4 (2004), pp. 181-210.

<sup>64</sup> Rosenthal, C.S. "Gender Styles in Legislative Committees" *Women & Politics*, 21 (2001), pp. 21-46

<sup>65</sup> Chinkin, Christine, "Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring the Participation of Women" United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women (2003).

<sup>66</sup> Three key themes of the Beijing Platform for Action support gender equality in public and political life in particular: a) Women in Power and Decision-Making; b) Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; and c) Women and the media.

<sup>67</sup> Other relevant Agreed Conclusions of the CSW include 1999/2: Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; 2003/44: Participation in and access of women to the media, information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women; and 2006: Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels.

<sup>68</sup> UN General Assembly resolution 66/130 Women and Political Participation. A/RES/66/130. 19 Mar 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 5.5 “Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. More information at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5>

<sup>70</sup> UN Women & IPU Women in Politics 2017 map

<sup>71</sup> World Economic Forum (2018) The Global Gender Gap Report 2018. Online [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2018.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf) (accessed 8 October 2019)

<sup>72</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) Day of General Discussion: Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders. Outcome report.

<sup>73</sup> UNFPA (2014) State of World Population 2014. Geneva: UNFPA. [http:// www.unfpa.org/swop-2014](http://www.unfpa.org/swop-2014)

<sup>74</sup> UNHCR (2019) Global Trends: <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/>

<sup>75</sup> Oosterom M., Wignall R., Wilson S. (2018): Youth Action in Fragile Settings (London) Plan International UK and Institute of Development Studies

<sup>76</sup> See Global Partnership for Children & Youth in Peacebuilding’s 2015 evaluation report <http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/3M-Evaluation-Global-report-Child-and-Youth-Participation-in-Peace-building.pdf>; ‘The Missing Peace’ Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security to the UN Security Council (2018) <http://www.unfpa.org/youth-peace-security>; UNFPA (2018) Compact for Youth Humanitarian Action ‘Igniting Hope’.

<https://www.unfpa.org/publications/compact-young-people-humanitarian-action>

<sup>77</sup> Oosterom M., Wignall R., Wilson S. (2018): Youth Action in Fragile Settings (London) Plan International UK and Institute of Development Studies

<sup>78</sup> The Compact for Youth Humanitarian Action <https://www.youthcompact.org/about>

<sup>79</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) Youth, Peace and Security

<sup>80</sup> The Youth Compact addresses humanitarian action, not democratic reforms, the YPS resolution covers all aspects of peacebuilding.

<sup>81</sup> Ozerdem, A. (2016) “[The role of youth in peacebuilding. Challenges and Opportunities](#)”, in: *Sustainable Security*. (online) <https://sustainablesecurity.org/2016/10/26/the-role-of-youth-in-peacebuilding-challenges-and-opportunities/> (accessed: 10 July 2017)

<sup>82</sup> Tearing Down the Wall, confronting the barriers to internally displaced women and girls’ participation in humanitarian settings, UNHCR. Available online:

<https://www.unhcr.org/5cd1a3394.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> SGBV Prevention and Response. Available online: <https://www.unhcr.org/583577ed4.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> UN Security Council (2018). [Report of the Secretary-General on women peace and security](#) (S/2018/900), para. 80. Data come from IPU (2018). Women in National Parliaments Situation as at 1 June

2018 <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world010618.htm>. The percentage in conflict and post-conflict countries were calculated by the UN Women by using data from the IPU.

<sup>85</sup> Krause, J. Krause, W & Bränfors, P. (2018). Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace, *International Interactions*, 44:6, 985-1016.

<sup>86</sup> Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, beginning in 2000 with Resolution 1325, and including Res 1820 (2008); Res 1888 (2009); Res 1889 (2009); Res 1960 (2010); Res 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015), and 2467 (2019). See more: <https://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions/resolutions>

<sup>87</sup> UN Security Council ‘Resolution 1325 (2000)’ 31 October 2000, (S/Res/1325/(2000)

<sup>88</sup> Tearing Down the Wall, confronting the barriers to internally displaced women and girls’ participation in humanitarian settings, UNHCR. Available online:

<https://www.unhcr.org/5cd1a3394.pdf>

<sup>89</sup> *Global Study on the Implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325. Chapter 3: Women’s participation and a better understanding of the political*

<sup>90</sup> See: [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA\\_PUB\\_2018\\_EN\\_Compact\\_Report-Igniting\\_Hope.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_PUB_2018_EN_Compact_Report-Igniting_Hope.pdf)

<sup>91</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

<sup>92</sup> EC-UNDP Joint Initiative (2017) Youth Participation in Electoral Processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Boards. March 2017.

<sup>93</sup> Plan International (2019) Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women Changing the Face of Leadership.

<sup>94</sup> Overseas Development Institute (2015) Support to women and girls' leadership: a rapid review of the evidence.

<sup>95</sup> Girl Guiding UK (2018) Girls' Attitude Survey 2017. Web. 18 June. 2018.  
<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2017.pdf>

<sup>96</sup> See consultations conducted with girls around the world to inform the Lead Area of Global Distinctiveness in 2017, Powering the Movement strategy and Girls Get Equal campaign in 2018.

<sup>97</sup> Plan International & Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2019) Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women Changing the Face of Leadership.

<sup>98</sup> ODI (2016) Rapid Review: Women and Girls' Leadership

<sup>99</sup> Plan International (2019) Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women Changing the Face of Leadership.

<sup>100</sup> Plan International (2019) Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women Changing the Face of Leadership.

<sup>101</sup> Tam O'Neil and Georgia Plank, with Pilar Domingo, Support to women and girls' leadership: A rapid review of the evidence, Overseas Development Institute (March 2015).

<sup>102</sup> Tam O'Neil and Georgia Plank, with Pilar Domingo, Support to women and girls' leadership: A rapid review of the evidence, Overseas Development Institute (March 2015).

<sup>103</sup> Michael A. Hoyt & Cara L. Kennedy (2008) Leadership and Adolescent Girls: A Qualitative Study of Leadership Development

<sup>104</sup> Plan International (2019) Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women Changing the Face of Leadership

<sup>105</sup> Michael A. Hoyt & Cara L. Kennedy (2008) Leadership and Adolescent Girls: A Qualitative Study of Leadership Development

<sup>106</sup> Wilson Center (2018) Roadmap to 50x50: Power and parity in women's leadership. The Women in Public Service Project, p.29  
[https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/roadmap\\_to\\_50x50-power\\_and\\_parity\\_in\\_womens\\_leadership.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/roadmap_to_50x50-power_and_parity_in_womens_leadership.pdf)

<sup>107</sup> UN-DESA, 'World Youth Report 2016. Youth Civic Engagement',  
[www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un\\_world\\_youth\\_report\\_youth\\_civic\\_engagement.pdf](http://www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un_world_youth_report_youth_civic_engagement.pdf).

<sup>108</sup> UN-DESA, 'World Youth Report 2016. Youth Civic Engagement',  
[www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un\\_world\\_youth\\_report\\_youth\\_civic\\_engagement.pdf](http://www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un_world_youth_report_youth_civic_engagement.pdf).

<sup>109</sup> *the Co-chairs of the UN Forum on Democracy, Human Rights and Rule of Law: (2016)*

<sup>110</sup> Wilson Center (2018) Roadmap to 50x50: Power and parity in women's leadership. The Women in Public Service Project, p.29  
[https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/roadmap\\_to\\_50x50-power\\_and\\_parity\\_in\\_womens\\_leadership.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/roadmap_to_50x50-power_and_parity_in_womens_leadership.pdf)

<sup>111</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat (2016) Commonwealth Youth Index.

<sup>112</sup> Plan International (2019) Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women Changing the Face of Leadership.

<sup>113</sup> Plan International (2019) Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women Changing the Face of Leadership.

<sup>114</sup> Published by Plan International and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media in 2019. Available online: <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-rewrite-her-story-plan-international-report.pdf>

<sup>115</sup> Bian, L, Leslie, SJ, Cimpian, A, 'Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests' *Science*, January 2017: Vol. 355, Issue 6323, pp. 389-391

<sup>116</sup> Edelman Intelligence (2017) Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence 2017 report. Findings based on interviews with 5,165 girls aged 10 to 17 in 14 countries.

<sup>117</sup> The Dove Global Beauty and Confidence Report, Available Online:  
[https://www.unilever.com/Images/global-beauty-confidence-report-infographic\\_tcm244-501412\\_en.pdf](https://www.unilever.com/Images/global-beauty-confidence-report-infographic_tcm244-501412_en.pdf)

<sup>118</sup> State of the world's girls report "Rewrite Her Story", published by Plan International and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media in 2019.

<sup>119</sup> Female parliamentarians were surveyed across 39 countries. IPU. 2016. "Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians." Accessed at

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

<sup>120</sup> As cited in World Association of Advertising

<sup>121</sup> As cited in World Association of Advertising

<sup>122</sup> Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2017) Trends report

<sup>123</sup> United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 27 October 1995.

<sup>124</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, article 5.



<sup>125</sup> The UK Advertising Standards Authority (2017) Depictions, Perceptions and Harm: a report on gender stereotypes in advertising.

<sup>126</sup> The UK Advertising Standards Authority. International and European legalisation and rules as of 2017. Url:

<https://www.asa.org.uk/asset/48117592-4977-4B96-ADD41047BB75A21C/> (accessed 19.06.2019)

<sup>127</sup> The Unstereotype Alliance's mission is to use advertising as a force for good to drive positive change. It seeks to eradicate harmful gender-based stereotypes. For more information:

<http://www.unstereotypealliance.org>

<sup>128</sup> To find out more:

<https://decoders.amnesty.org/projects/troll-patrol> [accessed 16.09.2018]

<sup>129</sup> Sasha Costanza-Chock, 'Youth and Social Movements: Key Lessons for Allies' December 17, 2012, [http://cyber.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.harvard.edu/files/KBWYouthandSocialMovements2012\\_0.pdf](http://cyber.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.harvard.edu/files/KBWYouthandSocialMovements2012_0.pdf)

<sup>130</sup> J Mortensen, L Lichty, P Foster-Fishman, S Harft, S Hockin and K Warinske (2014) Leadership through a youth lens: understanding youth conceptualisations of leadership. University of Michigan State.

<sup>131</sup> The 2015 EuroBarometer shows that 62 percent of European Union (EU) citizens do not trust their national parliaments, 63 percent tend not to trust their national governments and 46 percent tend not to trust the EU. European Commission, Standard EuroBarometer 2015, Public Opinion in the European Union, <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/index?p=1&instruments=STANDARD>. In Asia-Pacific, trust in legislative and executive institutions in most countries is lower among young people than among other population groups. UNDP, 'Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South East Asia: Exploring Political Attitudes of East and South-East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer Survey', 2014, <https://issuu.com/undp/docs/rbap-dg-2014-youth-n-democratic-cit/69>.

<sup>132</sup> Stolle, Dietlind and Hooghe, Marc, "Shifting inequalities? Patterns of exclusion and inclusion in emerging forms of political participation" Discussion Papers No. SP | 2009-204.

<sup>133</sup> From the Civic Space Watch website: <https://civicspacewatch.eu/what-is-civic-space/>

<sup>134</sup> These issues were identified in youth consultations informing the design of the Girls Get Equal campaign. The findings were corroborated by external research including Rhize (2017) Understanding Activism: how INGOs can better support social movements, FRIDA (2016) Brave,

Creative, Resilient: State of Young Feminist Organising and Save the Children (2016)

<sup>135</sup> FRIDA Young Feminist Fund (2016) Brave, Creative, Resilient. The Global State of Young Feminist Organising.

<sup>136</sup> The programme is supported by Plan International Germany's Girls Lead Fund and is taking place from 2017-2022, in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Guatemala and Peru.

<sup>137</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Day of General Discussion 2019: Empowering and Protecting Children as Human Rights Defenders Outcome report. UN OHCHR Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law 2016: Widening the Democratic Space: Youth Participation in Public Decision-Making. Outcome report.

<sup>138</sup> FRIDA Young Feminist Fund (2016) Brave, Creative, Resilient. The Global State of Young Feminist Organising.

<sup>139</sup> FRIDA Young Feminist Fund (2016) Brave, Creative, Resilient. The Global State of Young Feminist Organising.

<sup>140</sup> See youth consultations on Powering the Movement strategy and Girls Get Equal campaign. Both series of consultations took place in 2018.

<sup>141</sup> FRIDA Young Feminist Fund (2018) Girls to the Front

<sup>142</sup> See youth consultations on Powering the Movement strategy and Girls Get Equal campaign. Both series of consultations took place in 2018.

<sup>143</sup> CIVICUS 2016 State of Civil Society report <http://www.civicus.org/index.php/socs2016>

<sup>144</sup> CIVICUS *People Power Under Attack: a global analysis of threats to fundamental freedoms*. A report based on data from the CIVICUS Monitor. November 2018.

<sup>145</sup> CIVICUS *People Power Under Attack: a global analysis of threats to fundamental freedoms*. A report based on data from the CIVICUS Monitor. November 2018.

<sup>146</sup> CIVICUS submission to the UN OHCHR Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law. 2016.

<sup>147</sup> From the Civic Space Watch website: <https://civicspacewatch.eu/what-is-civic-space/>

<sup>148</sup> CIVICUS and its members. The Belgrade Call to Action. 8 April 2019. [online] <https://action4sd.org/policy-advocacy/the-belgrade-call-to-action/> (accessed 02.07.2019)

<sup>149</sup> [United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#)

<sup>150</sup> Child Rights Connect (2019) UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of General Discussion 2018 Outcome Report: Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders.

<sup>151</sup> Child Rights Connect & Queen's University Belfast, "The views, perspectives and recommendations of children across the world" prepared for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. September 2018.

<sup>152</sup> Child Rights Connect & Queen's University Belfast, "The views, perspectives and recommendations of children across the world" prepared for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. September 2018.

<sup>153</sup> Child Rights Connect (2019) Day of General Discussion 2018: Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders. Outcome Report.

<sup>154</sup> FRIDA (2016) Brave, creative, resilient: the global state of young feminist organising

<sup>155</sup> Threats to young human rights defenders was raised as a key issue at the UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law in November 2016 and highlighted in the Report of the Co-chairs to the Human Rights Council A/HRC/34/46, 31 January 2017

<sup>156</sup> UN Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/4-/L.22/Rev.1 20 March 2019.

<sup>157</sup> UN human rights experts applaud children fighting climate change. Press Release. 22 March 2019.

<sup>158</sup> Human Rights Council Resolution 41/6 adopted 11 July 2019. Available online: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G19/210/54/PDF/G1921054.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>159</sup> See Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality, target 5.b

<sup>160</sup> Stolle, Dietlind and Hooghe, Marc, "Shifting inequalities? Patterns of exclusion and inclusion in emerging forms of political participation" Discussion Papers No. SP | 2009-204. This research is based on data from Western Europe and the US, over several decades, and for a number of participation acts. Results also focus in on the Dutch Election Studies.

<sup>161</sup> Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians. Available online: <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/issuesbrief-e.pdf>

<sup>162</sup> Global report – Women's rights online. Available here: [http://webfoundation.org/docs/2015/10/womens-rights-online\\_Report.pdf](http://webfoundation.org/docs/2015/10/womens-rights-online_Report.pdf)

<sup>163</sup> Internal Youth Influencing Consultations for the design of Girls Get Equal. Conducted between December 2017 to June 2018.

<sup>164</sup> UN Women 2012

<sup>165</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. UN experts urge States and companies to

address online gender-based abuse but warn against censorship. Press Release. 8 March 2017 [online: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21317&LangID=E>]

<sup>166</sup> Lewis, J., Rowe, M., Wiper, C. "Online Abuse of Feminists as an Emerging Form of Violence against Women and Girls", *British Journal of Criminology*, 2016. <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/27724/3/Br%20J%20Criminology-2016-Lewis-bjc-azw073.pdf>

<sup>167</sup> Child Rights Connect (2019) UN CRC Day of General Discussion 2018: Children as Human Rights Defenders. Outcome Report. June 2019.

<sup>168</sup> Born digital, Born free? A socio-legal study on young women's experiences of online violence in South India. Available online: [https://itforchange.net/sites/default/files/1662/Executive\\_Summary\\_Born%20digital-Born-free%20.pdf](https://itforchange.net/sites/default/files/1662/Executive_Summary_Born%20digital-Born-free%20.pdf)

<sup>169</sup> Gurumurthy, Anita, "Promoting gender equality? Some development-related uses of ICTs by women" *Development in Practice*, Vol 16, No 6, (November 2006)

<sup>170</sup> Article 19's recommendation was noted in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Day of General Discussion 2019 outcome report on empowering and protecting children as human rights defenders.

<sup>171</sup> CIVICUS *People Power Under Attack: a global analysis of threats to fundamental freedoms*. A report based on data from the CIVICUS Monitor. November 2018.

<sup>172</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue (A/66/290) August 2011.

<sup>173</sup> General Assembly Resolution [A/RES/53/144](#) adopting the Declaration on human rights defenders. Available Online: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/wrgs/pages/hrdefenders.aspx>

<sup>174</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (A/HRC/16/44) Available Online: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/178/70/PDF/G1017870.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>175</sup> UN-DESA, 'World Youth Report 2016. Youth Civic Engagement', [www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un\\_world\\_youth\\_report\\_youth\\_civic\\_engagement.pdf](http://www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un_world_youth_report_youth_civic_engagement.pdf)

<sup>176</sup> EC-UNDP Joint initiative (2017) Youth Participation in Electoral Processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Boards. March 2017.

<sup>177</sup> See Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (2015) Goals 10 and 16.

<sup>178</sup> World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth. Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and



Programmes. Lisbon, Portugal 12 August 1998.

<https://www.youthpolicy.org/blog/participation-global-governance/lisbon-declaration-1998/>

<sup>179</sup> The State of Youth Policy in 2013. Youth Policy Labs.

<sup>180</sup> The World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth. Lisboa+21 Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes 2019  
<https://www.lisboa21.gov.pt/>

<sup>181</sup> Government of Ireland Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015) National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making, 2015 – 2020. Dublin: Government Publications.

<sup>182</sup> See National Youth Council of Ireland's 2018 report of the Youth Check:  
<https://www.youth.ie/documents/youth-check-report-for-web-final-june-2018/>

<sup>183</sup> Save the Children (2014) Child Rights Governance Programming Guidance. Available online  
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/child-rights-governance-programming-guidance-save-childrens-child-rights-governance-global>  
(accessed 19.08.2019)

<sup>184</sup> See Plan International's short introduction to Young Citizen Scorecards and wider guidance package available from October 2018.

<sup>185</sup> Youth Policy written submission to UN HRC Forum on Human Rights, Democracy, Rule of Law – November 2016  
<http://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/united-nations/geneva/1523-youth-and-human-rights-joint-statement-at-the-human-rights-council>

<sup>186</sup> The Local Government Development Planning Guidelines (2014) <http://npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/LG-PLANNING-GUIDELINES.pdf>

<sup>187</sup> Bani-Afuduego, C., Yorke, G. C., and Koudoh, A. A. (2011). Seeing from our perspectives: youth budget advocacy in Ghana, in Participatory Learning and Action, 2011, available at  
<https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G03202.pdf>

<sup>188</sup> OECD (2018) *Empowering Youth Across the OECD*, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/empowering-youth-across-the-oecd.pdf>

<sup>189</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat (2017) Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

<sup>190</sup> Sexual minority includes a variety of gender and sexual identities and expressions that differ from cultural norms. Usually used to refer to LGBTQI+ individuals.

<sup>191</sup> Costa, M. (2018) *Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Fragile States*. Oxon: Routledge.

<sup>192</sup> Gonzalez, E. T., Singh, A., Thomson, S. B. (2013) Millennium Development Goals and

Community Initiatives in the Asia Pacific. New Delhi: Springer.

<sup>193</sup> UNDP (2012) *Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle* (online).

<sup>194</sup> Inter-parliamentary Union (2016) *Youth Participation in National Parliaments*.

<sup>195</sup> "The grown-ups have failed miserably on climate change", *The Independent*.  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/climate-change-protest-strike-global-warming-children-greta-thunberg-a8779221.html>

<sup>196</sup> Bertocchi, Graziella; Dimico, Arcangelo; Lancia, Francesco; Russo, Alessia. "Youth Enfranchisement, Political Responsiveness, and Education Expenditure: Evidence from the U.S." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*.

<sup>197</sup> Eichhorn, Jan (2018-04-01). "Votes At 16: New Insights from Scotland on Enfranchisement". Parliamentary Affairs. / January 2nd; 2018|current-affairs; Elections; Politics, Party; Europe, government across; Comments, Jan Eichhorn|2 (2018-01-02). "Beyond anecdotes on lowering the voting age: New evidence from Scotland". EUROPP. Retrieved 2020-02-13.

<sup>198</sup> UN-DESA, 'World Youth Report 2016. Youth Civic Engagement',  
[www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un\\_world\\_youth\\_report\\_youth\\_civic\\_engagement.pdf](http://www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un_world_youth_report_youth_civic_engagement.pdf).

<sup>199</sup> UNDP, 'Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South East Asia: Exploring Political Attitudes of East and South-East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer Survey', 2014, <https://issuu.com/undp/docs/rbap-dg-2014-youth-n-democratic-cit/69>. In Europe, the European Youth Forum perceives the decline in youth party membership in the region as one of the core problems in institutional politics. Research conducted in 2014 by International IDEA reveals that across the continent, as few as 2 percent of young people are members of a political party. Deželan, Tomaž, 'Young People and Democratic Life in Europe: What Next After the 2014 European Elections?', European Youth Forum, 2015, [www.youthup.eu/app/uploads/2015/11/YFJ\\_YoungPeopleAndDemocraticLifeInEurope\\_B1\\_web-9e4bd8be22.pdf](http://www.youthup.eu/app/uploads/2015/11/YFJ_YoungPeopleAndDemocraticLifeInEurope_B1_web-9e4bd8be22.pdf). Results from the 2015

AfroBarometer show that youth participation in election campaigns remains limited in Africa. On average, 34 percent of youth attended campaign rallies or meetings in 2014, the year preceding the survey, and only 23 percent tried to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party. In East Africa, 51 percent of youth said they attended campaign rallies or meetings. North African youth had by far the lowest levels of participation, with 12 percent reporting having attended a campaign

event and 11 percent having tried to influence other voters. AfroBarometer, Dispatch no. 41, 12 August 2015,

[http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab\\_r6\\_dispatchno41.pdf](http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r6_dispatchno41.pdf).

<sup>200</sup> UN-DESA, 'World Youth Report 2016. Youth Civic Engagement',

[www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un\\_world\\_youth\\_report\\_youth\\_civic\\_engagement.pdf](http://www.unworldyouthreport.org/images/docs/un_world_youth_report_youth_civic_engagement.pdf).

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) Youth participation in national parliaments. Web [www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf) – findings are 60:40 ratio of men to women.

<sup>203</sup> Plan International (2019) Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women Changing the Face of Leadership

<sup>204</sup> UNDP and NDI "Empowering women for stronger political parties" (October 2011)

<sup>205</sup> Dersnah, M.A. Women in Political and Public Life: Global Report for the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice. OHCHR. Available here:

[https://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/women/WG/PublicPoliticalLife/WG\\_Global.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/women/WG/PublicPoliticalLife/WG_Global.docx)

<sup>206</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018) Youth participation in national parliaments. Web <<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2018-12/youth-participation-in-national-parliaments-2018>>

<sup>207</sup> IPU "Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice" Report No 65 (2011)

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> IDEA, From Words to Action: Best Practices for Women's Participation in Latin American Political Parties, Sweden, 2008.

<sup>210</sup> UNDP and NDI (2011)

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> UN Women, OHCHR, IPU and NDI (2018) Violence Against Women in Politics. New York: UN Women.

<sup>213</sup> Plan International (2019) Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women Changing the Face of Leadership

<sup>214</sup> IPU "The World of Parliaments" IPU Quarterly Review, December 2009, No 36.

<sup>215</sup> Lovenduski, J. (2015) *Gendering Politics, Feminising Political Science*. London. ECPR Press

<sup>216</sup> Goetz, A.M. (2002) Women's Political Effectiveness – A Conceptual Framework. Chapter 2 in *No Shortcuts to Power: African Women in Politics and Policymaking*. Zed Books

<sup>217</sup> UN Women & IPU Women in Politics 2017 map

<sup>218</sup> OHCHR Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, Co-chairpersons report of the First Session on "widening the democratic space: the role of youth in public decision-making. A/HRC/34/46. 31/01/2017

<sup>219</sup> United Nations, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), General Recommendation 25, *Temporary Special Measures*, UN Doc.

CEDAW/C/2004/I/WP.1/Rev.1, 30 (2004), para. 22.

<sup>220</sup> "Women in national parliaments." *Inter-Parliamentary Union*. 1 Jun. 2016. Web.

<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif010616.htm>.

<sup>221</sup> Hamelin, Amy. "Presentation to the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and Practice: National Democratic Institute" July 25, 2012.

<sup>222</sup> Tripp, Aili Marie, "Quotas and the Political Representation of Women" Presentation to the Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice, October 3, 2012.

<sup>223</sup> Tripp, Aili Marie, "Quotas and the Political Representation of Women" Presentation to the Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice, October 3, 2012.

<sup>224</sup> EC-UNDP Joint Taskforce (2017) Youth Participation in Electoral Processes. Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies.

<sup>225</sup> Quota Project, 'Kenya', [www.quotaproject.org/country/kenya](http://www.quotaproject.org/country/kenya)

<sup>226</sup> Quota Project, 'Uganda', [www.quotaproject.org/country/uganda](http://www.quotaproject.org/country/uganda)

<sup>227</sup> Quota Project, 'Rwanda', [www.quotaproject.org/country/rwanda](http://www.quotaproject.org/country/rwanda)

<sup>228</sup> IPU "Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice" Report No 65 (2011)