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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development

Good practices and challenges faced by States in using the guidelines on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs

Report of the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 39/11. It outlines good practices and challenges faced by States in using the guidelines on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs. The report highlights how decision-making processes that affect peoples' lives should be guided by international human rights law and ensure transparency, access to information and participation at the local, national and international levels.

* Agreement was reached to publish the present report after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitters' control.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 39/11, the Human Rights Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to prepare a follow-up report on good practices and challenges faced by States in using the guidelines on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs.
2. In follow-up to that request, OHCHR wrote to all Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office at Geneva, relevant international organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations to solicit input for the preparation of the present report. OHCHR received responses from 13 States, 13 non-governmental organizations, 2 national human rights institutions and 2 United Nations entities. The contributions are available online.¹
3. At the forty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council, OHCHR informed the Council that, in the light of the financial constraints faced by the Organization, it had not been in a position to implement that mandate within the relevant deadlines and that it aimed to submit the report to the Council at its forty-ninth session.²

II. Background

4. The Human Rights Council has dedicated increasing attention to the issue of equal participation in political and public affairs. In its resolution 33/22, the Council requested OHCHR to prepare concise and action-oriented draft guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs, as set out in article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and as further elaborated in other relevant provisions under international human rights law, and to present the draft guidelines to the Council. The Council also requested OHCHR to facilitate open, transparent and inclusive elaboration of the draft guidelines, including through informal consultations with States and other stakeholders at the regional level.
5. In response to that request, OHCHR organized regional consultations and issued two calls for submissions that elicited responses from 65 stakeholders. The consultation process, which included an exchange of best practices, resulted in the development of the draft guidelines in 2018.
6. The guidelines provide direction for States on how to ensure the right to participate in public affairs. They refer to a number of basic principles that should guide the effective implementation of the right. Various dimensions of the right to participate in public affairs are covered, with a focus on participation in electoral processes, in non-electoral contexts and at the international level. The guidelines provide concrete recommendations on how participation can be increased in these contexts.
7. In its resolution 39/11, which was adopted by consensus, the Human Rights Council took note with interest of the guidelines, presented them as a set of orientations for States and other stakeholders and requested OHCHR to disseminate and promote the use of the Guidelines and to provide technical cooperation and capacity-building to States regarding their use. In addition, the Council encouraged Governments, local authorities, relevant United Nations bodies, specialized agencies, funds and programmes, other intergovernmental organizations and national human rights institutions to give due consideration to the guidelines in the formulation and implementation of their policies and measures concerning equal participation in political and public affairs.

III. Good practices

8. Since the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 39/11, OHCHR has supported States and other stakeholders in their efforts to implement the guidelines. After consultations

¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/GoodPracticesandChallenges.aspx>.

² [A/HRC/48/33](#), para. 2.

with States and other relevant stakeholders, and guided by OHCHR experience and research in this area, good practices were identified in the thematic areas listed below.

A. Legislative and administrative measures

9. The right to participate in public affairs requires States to create an enabling environment that is conducive to the exercise of this right.³ To this end, States should recognize, protect and implement the right in national constitutions and legal frameworks and adopt such legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary to ensure that rights holders can enjoy the right to participate in public affairs. These measures should address a range of related human rights, including the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, to peaceful assembly and to equality and non-discrimination.

10. As of December 2021, 173 States are parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. States parties have a general obligation to respect the rights enumerated in the Covenant and to ensure them to all individuals in their territory and subject to their jurisdiction.⁴ This includes the right to participate in public affairs, as provided for in article 25. These obligations are binding on all branches of government at the national, regional and local levels, and Governments must adopt legislative, judicial, administrative, educative and other appropriate measures in order to fulfil their legal obligations under the Covenant.⁵

11. Several States enshrine basic principles and underlying rights for the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs in their constitutions, legislation and policies. Colombia commits in its Constitution to facilitating participation by everyone in the decisions that affect them and in the economic, political, administrative and cultural life of the State.⁶ Gabon too recognizes the right to participate in public affairs in its Constitution.⁷ The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania states that every citizen has the right and the freedom to participate fully in processes leading to decisions on matters affecting them, their well-being or the nation.⁸ Numerous countries enshrine in their constitutions related rights, such as the right to freedom of association.⁹

12. In line with the guidelines, States should protect the rights to equality and non-discrimination and prohibit all forms of discrimination in their national constitution and legal frameworks.¹⁰ Many States also include equality and non-discrimination provisions in their constitutions and legislation.¹¹

Electoral participation

13. Genuine, periodic elections remain one of the most common and effective ways for people to participate in public affairs.¹² In the guidelines, it is recommended that States develop an effective legal framework for the exercise of electoral rights that complies with their international human rights obligations.¹³ The right to vote and electoral rights are recognized in several constitutions.¹⁴

³ A/HRC/39/28, para. 19.

⁴ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 31 (2004), para. 3.

⁵ Ibid., para. 7.

⁶ Constitution of Colombia, arts. 2 and 41.

⁷ Constitution of Gabon, art. 13.

⁸ Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, art. 21.

⁹ See the Constitutions of Argentina (art. 14), Burkina Faso (art. 21), Estonia (art. 48) and Lebanon (art. 13). See also United Nations Development Programme and International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, *Legal Frameworks for Civic Space: A Practical Toolkit* (2021), p. 22.

¹⁰ A/HRC/39/28, para. 20.

¹¹ See, for example, Azerbaijan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Fiji, Georgia, Iraq, Italy, Kenya, Slovakia, Timor Leste and Tunisia.

¹² A/HRC/39/28, para. 25.

¹³ Ibid., para. 30.

¹⁴ See, for example, the Constitutions of Argentina, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Guinea, Japan, Nigeria and Tunisia.

14. In the guidelines it is stipulated that electoral management bodies should be able to function independently and impartially, irrespective of their composition, and should be open, transparent and maximally consultative in their decision-making, providing access to relevant information for all stakeholders.¹⁵ Some constitutions and pieces of legislation establish independent bodies responsible for electoral management,¹⁶ such as the Central Electoral Commission in Armenia, the Electoral Service and the Electoral Court in Chile, the National Electoral Council and the Electoral Dispute Settlement Court in Ecuador, the Electoral Commission in Fiji, the Election Commission in India, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission in Kenya and the National Election Commission in the Republic of Korea.

15. In their contributions, a number of States provided examples of electoral legislation and processes. Armenia noted that its electoral legislation required transparency and accountability in relation to all stages of the electoral process. Azerbaijan referred to its Election Code, which provided for the right to elect and be elected, as well as to participate in referendums, without discrimination. Iraq mentioned the Council of Representatives Election Law of 2020, which required the issuance of biometric voter cards to increase electoral transparency. Mauritius mentioned that electoral legislation provided for rights holders to take part in the conduct of public affairs as voters and candidates and, where necessary, to present election petitions to the Supreme Court to seek redress. The Russian Federation stated that one of the main ways in which its Constitution guaranteed the right to participate in public affairs was through elections and referendums.¹⁷

Non-electoral participation

16. Participation enhances the legitimacy of States' decisions and their ownership by all members of society.¹⁸ People wish to be heard and to participate in the decisions that affect them.¹⁹ Adopting specific laws and policies on non-electoral participation provides further recognition and protection of the right to participate in public affairs. In their contributions, some States made specific reference to the right to participate in public affairs in legislation and institutional arrangements in non-electoral contexts. Azerbaijan stated that its law on public participation provided for the right to participate in public affairs. Czechia noted the work of the Government Council for Human Rights, which monitored implementation of the Czech Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, which protects the right to participate in public affairs and related public freedoms. The Congo had established a Consultative Council of Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations to advise on issues relating to citizen participation in public affairs. Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, among other States, have adopted laws and policies on public consultations.²⁰ The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has adopted guidelines for civil participation in political decision-making that include a section on public consultations.²¹

17. The participation of various sectors of society allows the authorities to deepen their understanding of specific issues; helps to identify gaps and available policy and legislative options and their impact on specific individuals and groups; and balances conflicting interests.²² Legal frameworks in Kenya, Morocco, Nicaragua, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia, and in other States, provide for citizen participation and consultation in the formulation of draft laws and policies.²³ Participation, which is also critical for effective rights-based climate

¹⁵ [A/HRC/39/28](#), para. 45.

¹⁶ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Independent Regulatory and Oversight (Fourth-Branch) Institutions* (2019), p. 10.

¹⁷ Submission by the Russian Federation.

¹⁸ [A/HRC/39/28](#), para. 2.

¹⁹ [A/75/982](#), para. 21.

²⁰ Submission by the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL).

²¹ See <https://rm.coe.int/guidelines-for-civil-participation-in-political-decision-making-en/16807626cf>.

²² [A/HRC/39/28](#), para. 2.

²³ See, for example, the Constitution of Kenya (art. 118 (1) (b)), the Constitution of Morocco (art. 14), the Citizen Participation Law (Law No. 475, art.15) of Nicaragua, Law No. 52/2003 of Romania, the

action, requires open and participatory institutions and processes. France has developed the Citizens' Convention on Climate,²⁴ a platform for discussing climate issues and the national carbon emissions reduction agenda, while in 2020 the United Kingdom established a climate assembly.²⁵ Meaningful participation is a key element of many decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and is often discussed in the context of action for climate empowerment, the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform and the enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan.²⁶

18. Several States in Latin America, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru, have used the guidelines to ensure multi-stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of their national action plans on business and human rights.²⁷

B. Measures aimed at increasing the participation of women and people in vulnerable situations

19. In the guidelines it is recommended that States ensure inclusiveness in the exercise of the right to participate in public affairs.²⁸ It is important to address existing discrimination and inequalities in meaningful participation and to actively empower women, young people and members of marginalized groups, all of whom are frequently underrepresented in decision-making. An inclusive process that includes representatives from diverse groups is critical for building trust and creating meaningful participation.²⁹

20. Women's right to participate in public affairs on an equal basis with men is fundamental to gender equality and sustainable development and States should take concrete measures to strengthen the representation and equal participation of women.³⁰ In their constitutions, several States, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Gambia and the Niger, enshrine women's participation rights. Armenia and Italy have passed legislation requiring the inclusion of women candidates in elections. In Iraq, equal participation in public affairs for men and women is provided by law; furthermore, women with minority backgrounds have been elected to the legislature. After Mauritius amended the Local Government Act, the percentage of women represented at the local government level increased significantly. On 13 April 2020, the Government of Mexico adopted a decree that criminalized gender-based violence against women in politics. Public authorities and civil society organizations in Mexico have also cooperated to enhance the representation and equal participation of women in electoral processes, through training sessions and measures to prevent and respond to political violence against women.³¹ Similarly, Ecuador and Ireland had national strategies to promote women's rights, including through efforts to promote the participation of women in public affairs.³²

21. Persons with disabilities continue to encounter significant barriers to the exercise of their right to participate in public affairs. In the guidelines, it is recommended that States take measures to ensure full accessibility for persons with disabilities in all aspects of the electoral

Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of Serbia (arts. 83–84) and Law No. 400/2015 of Slovakia.

²⁴ See <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/en/>.

²⁵ See <https://www.climateassembly.uk/about/index.html>.

²⁶ See <https://unfccc.int/topics/education-youth/the-big-picture/what-is-action-for-climate-empowerment>; <https://unfccc.int/LCIPP#eq-3>; and <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/workstreams/the-gender-action-plan>. See also decision 3/CP.25 of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

²⁷ See <https://empresasyderechoshumanos.org/pan-edh/>.

²⁸ A/HRC/39/28, para. 20.

²⁹ United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, (2018), p. 282.

³⁰ A/HRC/39/28, para. 31.

³¹ Submission by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

³² Submissions by Ecuador and Ireland.

process.³³ In Uganda, the Constitution requires that a certain percentage of seats in Parliament be reserved for representatives with disabilities.³⁴ In Tunisia, following the amendment of the electoral law, the participation of persons with disabilities as candidates in local elections was increased and 144 persons with disabilities were elected to local authorities.³⁵ In Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, restrictive legal and constitutional provisions against persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities have been repealed, enabling enhanced participation.³⁶ A number of States mentioned having taken some positive steps to mitigate the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Mauritius and Slovakia noted measures to ensure the exercise of the right to vote for persons with disabilities, including making the electoral materials and polling stations accessible. In Croatia, the Information Commissioner supervises obligations under the Law on Accessibility of Websites and Programming Solutions for Mobile Devices of Public Sector Bodies, addressing especially the needs of persons with disabilities. Czechia has adopted a new national plan for the promotion of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities 2021–2025 aimed at enhancing the participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations in political and public life. The national agenda for persons with disabilities 2017–2021 of Ecuador establishes indicators and goals for government entities.

22. Dedicated measures should be developed to encourage the participation of groups that have been historically excluded or whose views and needs have been inadequately addressed in decision-making processes,³⁷ such as indigenous peoples, people of African descent and minorities. States should ensure the active and meaningful participation and representation of people of African descent, including women of African descent, and their organizations in State institutions, as well as in decision-making processes, through adequate funding opportunities.³⁸ Promising initiatives in this regard include the adoption – in the United States of America on 20 January 2021 – of the Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government.³⁹ Costa Rica has included the rights of indigenous peoples and people of African descent in its National Policy for a Society Free of Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia 2014–2025.⁴⁰ Through its National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, Ireland recommends that Travellers and Roma be supported to participate in political processes at the local and national levels. In the European Union, Roma organizations have actively participated in the development of the European Union framework for Roma inclusion.

23. Statelessness disproportionately affects minorities around the world.⁴¹ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has noted that stateless persons are, as non-citizens, generally excluded from participation in the public affairs of the State in which they reside. Legally recognizing stateless people and facilitating their access to nationality leads to their inclusive participation in public affairs. For example, the recognition of the Shona community as nationals of Kenya after decades of statelessness has allowed them to be registered as voters for the general elections in 2021. Other positive examples of participation of stateless communities include the Tamil Hill community in Sri Lanka and the Urdu-speaking community in Bangladesh.⁴²

³³ A/HRC/39/28, para. 39. See also General Assembly resolution 76/154, para. 23.

³⁴ Constitution of Uganda (art. 78).

³⁵ See https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_2018_tunisia_disability_assessment_arabic.pdf.

³⁶ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “The right to political participation of persons with mental health problems and persons with intellectual disabilities” (2010), p. 18. See also A/76/147, para. 45.

³⁷ A/HRC/39/28, para. 57.

³⁸ A/HRC/47/53, para. 21.

³⁹ See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>.

⁴⁰ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26894second_voluntary_national_review_sdg_costa_rica.pdf, p. 41.

⁴¹ See https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/wp-content/uploads/UNHCR_EN2_2017IBELONG_Report_ePub.pdf.

⁴² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Good practices paper: action 1 – resolving existing major situations of statelessness” (2015), pp. 9–12.

24. Ecuador and Ireland have national action plans on the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. With regard to Brazil, civil society has noted that, while the high rates of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons are of concern, there has been an increase in their political participation, with a high number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex candidates in the 2018 elections.⁴³

25. As regards the participation of children and youth, Ireland, through its National Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making, aimed at ensuring that children and young people had a voice in decisions affecting their lives. Input from youth may be secured through the establishment of youth advisory bodies or cooperation with national youth councils, as well as by reaching out to individual young people both online and offline.⁴⁴ Several States have established youth councils at the local, national and regional levels to collect young people's input on laws and policies.⁴⁵ During local elections in Portugal in September 2021, the Portuguese Committee for UNICEF promoted a national public consultation with children across the country during which children were invited to take part in an online survey to share their hopes and concerns about their communities. The results were presented to local leaders and society at large, to appeal for political and social commitment to upholding children's rights.⁴⁶

C. Measures aimed at promoting participation and access to information, including through information and communications technologies

26. The right to participate in public affairs is closely related to the full realization of the right of access to information.⁴⁷ In the guidelines, it is recommended that States guarantee and give effect to the right of access to information.⁴⁸ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places particular emphasis on ensuring public access to information. One indicator for target 16.10 of the Sustainable Development Goals is the number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees of public access to information.⁴⁹ According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 132 States have adopted access to information guarantees in their legislation.⁵⁰

27. In line with the Guidelines, requesting information of public interest should be free of charge or available at a reasonable cost, and procedures should allow for fair and rapid processing and include mechanisms for independent review in cases of refusal.⁵¹ A number of countries have established institutions for promoting the right of access to information, such as the Information Commissioner in Croatia and the Commission on the Right of Access to Information in Morocco.

28. Information and communications technologies (ICTs) offer new tools for participation, expanding the space for civic engagement, and have the potential to promote more responsible and accountable Governments.⁵² The use of innovative, cost-efficient and practical approaches, including webcasting, videoconferencing and other online tools, should be encouraged to foster greater and more diverse participation of civil society actors at the international level.⁵³ This has become even more pressing during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, when the role of ICTs has drastically increased as participation has

⁴³ Submission by Facts and Norms.

⁴⁴ United Nations, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2018), p. 70. See also [A/HRC/34/46](#), para. 41.

⁴⁵ See Council of Europe, recommendation Rec(2006)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the role of national youth councils in youth policy development. See also <https://www.pacificyouthcouncil.org/>, <https://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-youth-council> and <http://nuestravozacolors.org/#cons-anchor>.

⁴⁶ Submission by Child Rights Connect.

⁴⁷ [A/HRC/39/28](#), para. 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 22.

⁴⁹ [A/HRC/44/49](#), para. 19.

⁵⁰ See <https://www.unesco.org/en/communication-information>.

⁵¹ [A/HRC/39/28](#), para. 22 (b).

⁵² *Ibid.*, para. 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, para. 106.

migrated to online spaces.⁵⁴ A number of States have recognized the importance of ICTs to advancing public participation. In Angola, Czechia, Kenya and the Maldives, ICTs have been used in government meetings and services.⁵⁵ Italy has enacted legislative initiatives aimed at facilitating the use of ICTs in referendums. In Ecuador, Italy and the Russian Federation, ICTs are used for discussions and voting on draft laws and initiatives. Estonia, Finland and Malta have also created online platforms or tools to facilitate broader participation, queries and feedback. Furthermore, the number of innovative participatory practices has recently increased in the European Union. In 2021, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission launched the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy to improve information-sharing and to strengthen citizen engagement, among other objectives.⁵⁶ For the challenges related to the use of ICTs, see section IV.C below.

29. Expanding the availability of ICTs in remote areas and territories can promote the participation of people living in those areas. In this regard, Mauritius has enacted projects to expand ICTs to outlying islands. For the 2019 elections in the Solomon Islands, the national electoral office partnered with a private rice wholesaler company that agreed to distribute leaflets to voters affixed to the bags of rice through their nationwide network. This proved to be an effective means of reaching voters who were scattered across numerous islands and who had poor access to the Internet and mobile telephones.⁵⁷

D. Measures aimed at increasing education and awareness

30. It is important that States empower rights holders, including through education and awareness-raising programmes, to effectively exercise their right to participate in public affairs.⁵⁸ In their contributions, several States referred to education and training programmes that supported the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs. Ecuador recognizes education and political training as one of the fundamental elements for achieving empowerment for participation. Croatia referred to the training activities of its Information Commissioner and to an awareness-raising campaign on the importance of freedom of information. Slovakia mentioned the creation and testing of a new educational programme aimed at strengthening the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to encourage participation in public administration.

31. Civic education programmes should include knowledge of human rights, the importance of participation for society, an understanding of the electoral and political systems and of various opportunities for participation, including available legislative, policy and institutional frameworks.⁵⁹ Individuals and groups that are marginalized or discriminated against face specific challenges, such as illiteracy and language and cultural barriers, and targeted trainings should be provided to them.⁶⁰ In that context, Azerbaijan and Mauritius have provided training to increase the participation of women and young people, including in elections. Ireland has promoted specific measures, such as bespoke training, networking and capacity-building events, in rural areas and targeted at supporting the participation of women in local councils. Slovakia has issued several publications dealing with public participation in public policymaking, including with a focus on the participation of vulnerable groups. Civil society organizations highlighted that participation in decision-making processes should also be supported through investment in education.⁶¹ Civil society and

⁵⁴ A/HRC/46/19, para. 19.

⁵⁵ Submissions by Czechia and Kenya. See also <https://www.ipu.org/country-compilation-parliamentary-responses-pandemic>.

⁵⁶ See <https://cop-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu/#mission>.

⁵⁷ See

https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/fiji_en/58166/EU,%20Government%20of%20Australia%20and%20UNDP%20Support%20Voter%20Education%20in%20Solomon%20Islands.

⁵⁸ A/HRC/39/28, para. 24.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Submissions by the Children and Young People's Commissioner of Scotland and the European Youth Forum.

youth organizations often provide civic education and opportunities for developing vital competences that enable people to speak out and actively participate in society.⁶²

E. Measures aimed at increasing participation in international forums

32. The right to participate in public affairs also entails participation in the formulation and implementation of policies at the international and regional levels.⁶³ Those who participate at the supranational level often bring local and national concerns to the attention of the international community, thus connecting the international and local levels.⁶⁴ The participation of civil society actors in meetings of international organizations, mechanisms and other forums, at all relevant stages of a decision-making process, should be allowed and actively encouraged.⁶⁵ In addition, consultation, dialogue and partnership with civil society at the national, regional and international levels should be fostered.

33. Partnership and cooperation among States at the regional and international levels on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs is essential for crafting sustainable policies. In Azerbaijan, civil society was involved in the drafting of the 2018–2021 action plan between Azerbaijan and the Council of Europe. Iraq cooperated with the United Nations and the European Union in the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs, especially in electoral contexts. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime had contributed to building the capacity of civil society to participate in the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption by creating regional multi-stakeholder platforms where representatives of Governments worked together with civil society to adopt regional recommendations.

34. It is critical to ensure the participation in international forums of individuals or groups that are marginalized or discriminated against. The new national plan for the promotion of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities adopted in Czechia includes financial support for activities at the national and international levels. As regards the participation of indigenous peoples in United Nations meetings, a temporary committee of indigenous representatives has been charged with establishing a coordinating body to enhance indigenous peoples' participation in such meetings.⁶⁶ In June 2021, heads of United Nations entities working in support of the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights⁶⁷ expressed their joint commitment to promoting the rights of children, youth and future generations to a healthy environment and their meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels, in relation to climate action and climate justice.⁶⁸

35. The core international institutions have a unique role to play in galvanizing diverse actors and making space for marginalized voices.⁶⁹ The United Nations has made considerable efforts to ensure the meaningful participation of civil society actors through strengthened partnerships, and those efforts continue and deepen. In addition to meaningful participation, protection of civil society actors and the promotion of civic space are also essential for the United Nations in achieving its objectives.⁷⁰ This is clearly articulated in the United Nations guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space, issued in

⁶² Submission by the European Youth Forum.

⁶³ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 25 (1996), para. 5.

⁶⁴ [A/HRC/39/28](#), para. 97

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 100.

⁶⁶ [A/75/255](#), para. 40.

⁶⁷ See

https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf.

⁶⁸ See <https://www.sparkblue.org/system/files/2021-06/210615%20STEP%20UP%20-%20Joint%20Commitment%20by%20Heads%20of%20UN%20Entities.pdf>.

⁶⁹ [A/75/982](#), para. 105.

⁷⁰ See

https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf. See also https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf, p. 5.

September 2020, which outlines key steps that United Nations entities should take individually or jointly to strengthen civic space engagement.⁷¹

36. The United Nations continuously stresses the importance of an enabling environment free from reprisals or intimidation for meaningful participation at the international and regional levels. Since 2016, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights has been leading United Nations-wide efforts to address intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the Organization. In his report on cooperation with the United Nations, the Secretary-General included specific cases and an analysis of national and global trends, and outlined good practices for addressing existing cases and preventing acts of intimidation and reprisal.⁷² Good practices include legislative frameworks for access to international bodies and financial support and diplomatic interventions for individuals at risk.⁷³ In this regard, the Human Rights Council has welcomed the positive developments and good practices identified by the Secretary-General, including the development of procedures or guidelines to prevent and address acts of intimidation or reprisal against those who participate in United Nations forums and processes and the support for individuals and groups concerned.⁷⁴ Several States members of the Council, such as Angola, Argentina, Australia, Denmark, Iceland, Mexico, the United Kingdom and Uruguay,⁷⁵ have committed themselves to firmly opposing reprisals, strengthening protection of civil society and promoting its participation in the work of the Council.

37. The United Nations treaty bodies offer several avenues for civil society to participate in their work, both online and offline. For example, the Committee against Torture allows civil society organizations that have submitted written information to participate in public briefings and informal lunchtime meetings. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women allow civil society organizations to engage with them through pre-recorded video messages, teleconferencing or videoconferencing, while the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination holds regular thematic discussions during which States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations can express their views in a public plenary meeting. Finally, the Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomes the participation of children in its days of general discussion, in the reports submitted by States parties on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and in the development of the Committee's general comments.

IV. Challenges

38. Although there are many good examples regarding the implementation of the guidelines and of positive steps taken to increase participation, numerous outstanding challenges for participation were identified. These challenges were related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other crisis situations, to barriers to access to information and other conditions conducive to an enabling environment for participation, to barriers relating to discrimination and exclusion and to the lack of resources, infrastructure, capacity and political will.

A. Restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

39. The exceptional circumstances triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and measures adopted to fight it were among the main obstacles to public participation highlighted in the contributions received. The situation presented by the COVID-19 pandemic required many

⁷¹ See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷³ [A/HRC/48/28](#), para. 17.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Council resolution 48/17.

⁷⁵ Voluntary pledges and commitments made pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251: Angola (see [A/72/79](#), annex, para. 10 (b)); Argentina (see [A/73/387](#), annex, para. 34); Australia (see [A/72/212](#), annex, para. 15); Denmark (see [A/73/130](#), annex, para. 8); Iceland (see [A/72/923](#), annex, para. 18); Mexico (see [A/75/231](#), annex, para. 37); United Kingdom (see [A/71/572](#), annex, para. 14); and Uruguay (see [A/73/318](#), annex, para. 4).

States to take emergency measures to protect the health and well-being of their populations. As a result, restrictions were imposed on rights, such as the rights to freedom of movement, freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, which need to be guaranteed for the exercise of the right to participate in public affairs. Often, the restrictions imposed did not meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality, had a negative impact on the enjoyment of the right to participate in public affairs, shrank the civic space and had additional gender-specific impacts, especially on women and girls.⁷⁶ Some of the measures adopted have further entrenched pre-existing discrimination and inequalities, and have been geared towards cementing control and cracking down on opposition figures and dissenting voices, rather than ensuring public health.⁷⁷ Particularly recurrent were measures to control the flow of information and crack down on freedom of expression, including media freedom, against an existing background of a shrinking civic space.⁷⁸

40. Many civil society representatives, including human rights defenders, have been disproportionately and arbitrarily targeted by the restrictive measures imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic, threats and attacks against human rights defenders have continued and, in some parts of the world, intensified.⁷⁹ Civil society organizations and the public at large have frequently not been consulted in the process of designing, implementing or reviewing the adopted emergency measures or subsequent laws aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19, including those restricting human rights and freedoms.⁸⁰ Women in particular have been excluded, as evidenced by the low percentage of women participating in government COVID-19 task forces, which at the time of writing is only 24 per cent globally.⁸¹

41. In addition to facing restrictive emergency measures, civil society has also experienced difficulties in participating in public affairs during the COVID-19 pandemic for other reasons, including health issues. The economic recession has affected the financial support received by donors. Frequently, the time allocated for public consultations has been shortened or meetings have been suspended. At the same time, dialogue between the authorities and the people is more important than ever in order to guide government action and maintain social cohesion during the health crisis.⁸²

B. Barriers to the right to participate in public affairs during other crisis situations

42. Recent humanitarian crises and conflicts in many regions have resulted in renewed challenges for the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs as outlined in the guidelines. These crises have in some cases led to the collapse of State institutions and the economy and almost invariably resulted in or exacerbated human rights concerns, including by undermining the right to participate in public affairs. Women and youth peacebuilders and human rights defenders, including defenders of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, have been subjected to violence and attacks, including in conflict-affected countries.⁸³ These events further underline the urgent need to focus on the principles of non-discrimination, participation, empowerment and accountability.⁸⁴

43. Inclusive decision-making is fundamental to sustaining peace at all levels. While efforts to sustain peace inherently recognize the importance of securing national ownership and leadership, government ownership is not enough: it is necessary to build an ecosystem

⁷⁶ A/HRC/46/19, paras. 19–22 and 39–42.

⁷⁷ A/HRC/44/50, para. 50.

⁷⁸ See <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/we-are-all-together-human-rights-and-covid-19-response-and>. See also A/HRC/49/40 and A/HRC/49/38.

⁷⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Human-Rights-Defenders-COVID19.aspx>.

⁸⁰ A/75/163, para. 85. See also ECNL, “Public participation in crisis response” (2021), p. 7.

⁸¹ See <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>.

⁸² Submissions by ECNL and Human Rights House Zagreb.

⁸³ S/2021/827, paras. 47–50.

⁸⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27937&LangID=E>.

of strategic and inclusive partnerships across society, focusing especially on women, youth and local communities, to ensure that the needs of all segments of society are taken into account.⁸⁵ Fostering the participation of women and the organizations they lead in all aspects of peace and security is critical to effectiveness, including in peace processes, where it has been shown to have a direct impact on the sustainability of the agreements reached.⁸⁶

44. In 2020, women represented only 23 per cent of delegates from parties to conflicts in United Nations (co)-led peace processes.⁸⁷ In 2021, the Secretary-General called upon Member States to implement measures, including temporary special measures such as quotas, to increase women's equal participation in peace processes.⁸⁸ While progress on including young people in public life has been made, meaningful youth participation in the maintenance of peace and security remains a challenge.⁸⁹ There is need to recognize young people's contribution to the inclusiveness and sustainability of efforts to build and sustain peace.⁹⁰ As young women are often active contributors to peace in their communities, making targeted investments in young women's participation in peacebuilding work, specifically their leadership, and listening carefully to them are important steps towards peace and security.⁹¹ Persons with disabilities tend to be disproportionately affected by armed conflicts.⁹² They are untapped resources in the essential process of peacebuilding in post-conflict situations and have a right to be engaged meaningfully.⁹³

C. Barriers to access to information and other conditions conducive to an enabling environment for participation

45. In recent years, the suppression of peaceful protests, arbitrary arrests and the detention of protesters has contributed to the creation of a climate of fear and greatly hindered the implementation of the guidelines and public participation in general.⁹⁴ Repressive laws have spread and restrictions on the freedoms to express, participate, assemble and associate have increased.⁹⁵ Strategic lawsuits against public participation, a particular form of harassment used against journalists and others involved in protecting the public interest, often in combination with threats to physical safety, continue to be a serious concern in several States.⁹⁶

46. One of the main barriers to the implementation of the guidelines was the lack of access to information at all levels of decision-making processes, including information about the content of a decision or about the process of participation. Even when laws and policies on access to information and participation had been adopted, civil society organizations reported that participation and consultation were used by Governments as a mere formality and that their input and contributions were very rarely considered when decisions were adopted.⁹⁷ Civil society engagement in the implementation phase of decisions was also very rare, apparently reflecting a belief that participation stopped with the adoption of the decision.⁹⁸

⁸⁵ "United Nations community engagement guidelines on peacebuilding and sustaining peace" (2020), p. 5.

⁸⁶ United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*, p. xix.

⁸⁷ [S/2021/827](#), para. 21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 22.

⁸⁹ [S/2020/167](#), para. 14.

⁹⁰ Graeme Simpson, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security* (United Nations Population Fund and the Peacebuilding Support Office of the Secretariat, 2018), p. ii.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁹² [A/76/146](#), para. 47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, para. 101.

⁹⁴ [A/HRC/44/50](#).

⁹⁵ See

https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf, p. 8.

⁹⁶ [A/76/285](#), para. 16, and European Commission, *2021 Rule of Law Report* (COM(2021) 700 final).

⁹⁷ Submission by ECNL and Human Rights House Zagreb.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

47. Lack of transparency was another challenge.⁹⁹ Where inefficient or inappropriate service delivery overlaps with corruption, certain populations within society become excluded, particularly those who are already marginalized, and civil unrest, protests and even outright violence erupt.¹⁰⁰ Corruption has been recognized as an obstacle to the realization of human rights and as a potential cause of human rights violations and abuses.¹⁰¹ In addition, research suggests that, as corruption spreads, people gradually lose confidence in the political process, which they no longer perceive as publicly accessible, and, as a result, may eventually withdraw from participating.¹⁰² To defend the civic space, civil society groups and the media must operate in an environment conducive to holding Governments accountable.¹⁰³

48. A main challenge identified regarding the use of ICTs was the digital divide, including with respect to gender,¹⁰⁴ rural areas¹⁰⁵ and individuals in marginalized situations.¹⁰⁶ Another challenge in using ICTs for public participation was the reduced time and space for interactive discussions and comments. In some instances, it was observed that the trend towards holding consultations online had decreased the participation of some groups and communities. For example, it had lessened indigenous peoples' ability to participate, a situation often attributable to lower levels of Internet access in indigenous communities.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, civil society organizations have recognized the positive potential that ICTs and online consultations may have if these challenges are addressed. In this regard, they have highlighted the importance of capacity-building activities and discussions on how to make ICTs and online consultations accessible for everyone.

D. Barriers related to discrimination and exclusion

49. Discrimination and exclusion, including discrimination based on sex, gender, race, language, religion, ethnic origin, nationality and disability, are major challenges in the implementation of the guidelines. Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination have an especially devastating effect on the right to participate in public affairs. The present report builds on the challenges related to discrimination and exclusion described in past OHCHR reports.¹⁰⁸

50. Common patterns of attacks on women human rights defenders' integrity and reputation, including intimidation and psychological harassment, slander and smear campaigns, have been documented across regions. For instance, women human rights defenders have been subjected to misogynist comments directed at their "morality", sexuality, bodies, gender identity and reproductive or marital status.¹⁰⁹

51. Individuals in marginalized situations are often excluded from consultations regarding public policies, including decisions affecting them.¹¹⁰ Children, youth and older persons are often not consulted because of discriminatory practices and stereotypes relating to their age. Young people are demanding meaningful political inclusion; political exclusion is viewed as underpinning all other forms of exclusion.¹¹¹ Despite the size of the global youth population, young people are disproportionately underrepresented in formal political structures, and

⁹⁹ Submissions by ECNL, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the European Youth Forum.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*, p. 158.

¹⁰¹ [A/HRC/44/27](#).

¹⁰² Milan Školník, "Corruption and political participation: a review", *Social Studies*, vol. 17, No. 1 (2020), pp. 89–105; and Doron Navot and Itai Beeri, "Conceptualization of political corruption, perceptions of corruption and political participation in democracies", *Lex Localis Journal of Local Self-Government*, vol. 15, No. 2 (2017).

¹⁰³ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2020* (Berlin, 2021), p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ See <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2021/11/15/the-gender-digital-divide/>.

¹⁰⁵ See <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2021/11/15/internet-use-in-urban-and-rural-areas/>.

¹⁰⁶ Submissions by Kenya, the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies and ECNL.

¹⁰⁷ [A/HRC/46/72](#), para. 77.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, [A/HRC/30/26](#), paras. 23–35.

¹⁰⁹ See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Supporting_WHRDs_UN_System.pdf.

¹¹⁰ Submissions by the Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association and Facts and Norms.

¹¹¹ Graeme Simpson, *The Missing Peace*, p. xii.

young women even more so.¹¹² Non-citizens, including migrants, refugees and stateless persons, seldom have a voice in the public and political affairs of their country of residence.¹¹³

52. Stark socioeconomic and political marginalization shapes the lives of people of African descent in many States.¹¹⁴ This is compounded by the insufficient meaningful participation and representation of people of African descent in decision-making processes and in public life.¹¹⁵ Women of African descent stand at the crossroads of intersectionality and inequality and therefore face multiple forms of discrimination arising from their racial or ethnic origin combined with gender-based discrimination and harmful gender stereotyping.¹¹⁶

53. Discrimination, stereotypes and stigma, unfavourable legal frameworks, and the lack of financial resources, of support or engagement by public institutions and private entities and of role models remain persistent challenges for participation by persons with disabilities.¹¹⁷ The barriers are even higher for women with disabilities, whose level of representation in political leadership roles remains extremely low.¹¹⁸

54. Recent laws restricting civic space have been passed in different countries. In many places, civil society actors, including human rights defenders, face many challenges, from stigmatization and judicial harassment to complex and burdensome administrative procedures for the registration of their organizations, including arbitrary denial of funding and financial services.

55. Despite several calls by the United Nations and despite the recommendations in the guidelines, human rights defenders continue to face intimidation and reprisals for participating in public affairs, at both the national and international levels, including for cooperating with the United Nations and its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights. The main challenges documented at the United Nations level include the use of restrictive laws and procedures, attempts by State representatives to block or delay the accreditation of certain civil society representatives, including for consultative status, as well as online and offline surveillance and stigmatization of those who participate in United Nations forums and processes.¹¹⁹ Women human rights defenders, youth activists and those advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities are particularly affected.

E. Lack of resources, capacity and political will

56. Lack of financial and human resources and necessary expertise were additional barriers to the effective implementation of the guidelines. In this regard, increased capacity-building for government officials and the general public about the right to participate in public affairs and its practical implementation are necessary. The lack of infrastructure, technology, tools and connectivity¹²⁰ represent additional challenges in the implementation of the guidelines, particularly for people living in rural or remote areas.

57. Many States have faced challenges in the implementation of the guidelines as they were not prepared to effectively organize participation online during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some States, the necessary ICTs and structures were not in place, or were unavailable in rural areas, on islands far from the mainland or in other remote areas. Social, financial and technological barriers restricting public access to the Internet and thus resulting in digital divides were further highlighted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²¹ Civil

¹¹² Ibid., p. 66.

¹¹³ A/HRC/30/26, para. 32.

¹¹⁴ A/HRC/47/53, para. 11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., para. 13.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., para. 14.

¹¹⁷ A/76/147, para. 64.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., para. 22.

¹¹⁹ A/HRC/48/28, para. 28.

¹²⁰ Submissions by Ecuador and Mauritius, as well as by the Children and Young People's Commissioner of Scotland and Facts and Norms.

¹²¹ See https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlinf2020d1_en.pdf; and <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/09/covid-19-has-intensified-the-digital-divide/>.

society has also highlighted the need to ensure the freedom of the media, including online.¹²² Journalists and the media should be able to report on the pandemic, including when coverage that is critical of government responses, without fear or censorship.¹²³

58. Finally, a lack of political will or deliberate strategies to monopolize decision-making by those in power are central challenges to the realization of participation rights and for the implementation of the guidelines.¹²⁴ Even where the necessary legislation and structures are in place, participation has often been pro forma. Implementation of relevant laws and policies has been slow or non-existent due to a lack of commitment on the part of State authorities. Civil society participation is often not permitted, or allowed only in a tokenistic manner, with the value of such engagement being ignored or minimized. The belief that public participation will make processes long and cumbersome also discourages authorities from including civil society. Furthermore, organizers' fear of losing control over the final outcome of the decision-making process has been a related obstacle to the full realization of the right to participate in public affairs.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

59. **Participation is an enabler right that paves the way for the realization of all human rights. OHCHR welcomes efforts to ensure the legal recognition of the right to participate in public affairs and related rights, as those efforts are fundamental for the effective implementation of the guidelines. Mere formal legal recognition of the right to participate in public affairs is, however, insufficient for people to exercise this right and enjoy it. States must implement their legal obligations and policy commitments in practice. Decision-making processes that affect peoples' lives should be guided by international human rights law and ensure transparency, access to information and participation at the local, national and international levels.**¹²⁵

60. **Political will remains the most important factor in creating a supportive environment that fosters participation, which is crucial for the effective implementation of the guidelines. Political will needs to be accompanied by openness, inclusion, transparency and accountability by public authorities. Furthermore, authorities should recognize the legitimate and vital role of civil society and demonstrate confidence in civil society's positive contribution to public decision-making. Measures should be taken to ensure that people in vulnerable and marginalized situations can participate effectively and that participation is truly inclusive and diverse and reflects all segments of society.**

61. **The gender gap in participation in public affairs remains very significant. Specific measures must be taken to ensure the effective participation of women and girls. Participation can be enhanced through access to education, economic empowerment and the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices.**

62. **It is encouraging to see many examples of good practices in the implementation of the guidelines, but it is equally worrying that obstacles and challenges to participation remain and may have increased since the adoption of the guidelines. Effective participation will not take place without an enabling environment for civil society, including human rights defenders, both online and offline, and at the national, regional and international levels.**

63. **The High Commissioner underscores the importance of implementing the recommendations included in the guidelines. In addition, the High Commissioner recommends that States:**

(a) **Ensure that any measures relating to the COVID-19 pandemic do not unduly restrict the right to participate in public affairs, or related rights such as the**

¹²² Submissions by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights House Zagreb.

¹²³ See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/COVID-19_Guidance.pdf.

¹²⁴ A/HRC/30/26, para. 16, and submissions by ECNL and the European Youth Forum.

¹²⁵ See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf, p. 5.

rights to freedom of expression, including the rights to access information, to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, to equality and non-discrimination and to education. To this end, States should review pandemic-related measures for their compatibility with international human rights law and discontinue measures that are no longer necessary or proportionate to the situation;

(b) Cooperate with the national human rights institutions, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the guidelines, including by eliminating barriers to participation and replicating good practices, and measure progress in the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs;

(c) Cooperate at the international and regional levels to ensure that the right to participate in public affairs is systematically protected and discussed in international forums, for example by consistently including information on the implementation of the right in their reports to the United Nations treaty bodies and the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, as well as in the context of their voluntary national reviews on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(d) Support and encourage education, training and capacity-building activities for better implementation of the right to participate in public affairs and allocate the resources necessary for carrying out this work. Where necessary, States, national human rights institutions and other stakeholders are encouraged to request technical assistance and capacity-building from OHCHR in the use of the guidelines;

(e) Ensure that civil society actors, including human rights defenders, have access to information and can communicate with and have unhindered access to regional and international bodies, including from the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights, without fear of intimidation or reprisal;

(f) Invest in supporting diversity of participation, with particular emphasis on underrepresented sections of civil society, including women, children, youth, older persons, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people, persons with disabilities, persons belonging to ethnic, religious, national, linguistic and racial minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees, in order to ensure their meaningful engagement, including through new technologies;

(g) Ensure the inclusive and meaningful participation of women in strategies and activities, including for peacebuilding and political transitions in conflict-related settings. Such participation could be ensured by implementing temporary special measures, such as quotas, to increase women's equal participation in peacemaking, policymaking and other decision-making processes;

(h) Take concrete steps to ensure the meaningful participation of youth in the maintenance of peace and security, including by developing dedicated local, national and regional road maps for youth and peace and security, by enhancing the meaningful participation of young women and men in peace processes and throughout the negotiation of peace agreements and by increasing funding for the implementation of the youth and peace and security agenda, including accessible resourcing for organizations led by and focused on young people;

(i) Support the development of a global repository of laws and policies on participation adopted at the national, subnational and local levels and the collection and systematization of good practices on participation, including disaggregated and gender sensitive data. States should ensure that such an initiative is provided with the necessary information and resources for its effective functioning and sustainability.

64. The High Commissioner recommends that international and regional entities, throughout their activities and processes, provide for the effective participation of civil society, including human rights defenders, in conformity with international norms and standards on non-discrimination, the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, association and peaceful assembly and to participate in public affairs.