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

## Girls' and young women's activism

### Report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls\*

#### *Summary*

In the present report, the Working Group highlights the important contributions made by girls and young women from different regions and backgrounds to the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of human rights, along with the profound transformative potential of their activism. It examines the structural barriers to the exercise of their activism and identifies accomplishments and promising practices. The report concludes with a set of recommendations to States and other stakeholders to create a safe and enabling environment where the activism of girls and young women can fully flourish.

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



## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Activities .....	3
A. Sessions .....	3
B. Country visits.....	3
C. Communications and press releases.....	3
D. Other activities.....	4
II. Thematic analysis: Girls’ and young women’s activism.....	4
A. Contextual and conceptual framework .....	4
B. International human rights legal framework.....	5
C. Features of girls’ and young women’s activism .....	7
D. Challenges and barriers.....	8
E. Promoting and protecting girls’ and young women’s activism.....	13
III. Conclusions and recommendations .....	17
A. Conclusions .....	17
B. Recommendations.....	18

## I. Activities

1. The present report covers the main activities of the Working Group, from the time of submission of its previous report<sup>1</sup> up to April 2022 and also includes a thematic analysis of the activism of girls and women.

### A. Sessions

2. In the context of the restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Working Group held three sessions virtually during the period under review. At its thirty-first session, held from 25 to 28 May 2021, the Working Group held meetings with civil society organizations working on girls' rights, discussed future position papers and focused on the present thematic analysis. The experts also met with the main sponsor of the mandate to discuss the priorities for the upcoming year.

3. At the thirty-second session, held from 11 to 15 October 2021, the experts met with the then newly appointed Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences to exchange views on her vision for the mandate and seek further avenues of cooperation. In the context of the preparation of the present thematic report, the Working Group also convened meetings with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. The experts also consulted several United Nations entities on the topic of girls' activism, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Chair of the Child Rights Committee, representatives of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Women's Rights and Gender Section of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

4. At its thirty-third session, held from 31 January to 4 February 2022, the Working Group held meetings with representatives of civil society organizations, the UN-Women liaison office in Geneva, the OHCHR Women's Rights and Gender Section and the secretariat of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to exchange views on priority areas and potential synergies. The Working Group also met with representatives of regional human rights mechanisms from the African and Inter-American systems to benefit from their expertise in the area of the activism of girls and young women.

### B. Country visits

5. The Working Group visited Kyrgyzstan from 4 to 15 April 2022 and thanks the Government for its cooperation. It also thanks the Government of Maldives for its invitation to conduct a visit from 1 to 12 August 2022 and encourages other States to respond positively to its requests for visits.

### C. Communications and press releases

6. The Working Group addressed a number of communications to governments, individually or jointly with other mandates. The communications concerned a wide range of subjects, including discriminatory legislation and practices, allegations of the violations of the rights of women human rights defenders, gender-based violence and violations of the

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<sup>1</sup> [A/HRC/44/51](#).

right to sexual and reproductive health.<sup>2</sup> The Working Group also issued press releases, individually and jointly with other mandate holders, treaty bodies and regional mechanisms.<sup>3</sup>

## D. Other activities

7. The experts also undertook numerous activities in their capacity as Working Group members.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the Chair addressed the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and presented an oral report to the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly. In relation to the preparation of the present thematic report, the Working Group organized a series of virtual regional consultations focusing on girls' activism with over 150 young activists across all regions of the world.<sup>5</sup>

## II. Thematic analysis: Girls' and young women's activism

### A. Contextual and conceptual framework

#### Context

8. Girls and young women are mobilizing worldwide to demand and catalyse change on critical global issues. They are at the forefront of initiatives aimed at transforming societies towards social justice, gender equality and sustainability. This is occurring despite, and frequently in reaction to, the barriers that they continue to face in participating in public and political life, as a result of persistent gender-based discrimination and violence within families, communities and society at large.

9. Girls and young women experience unique challenges to their activism, rooted in the intersection of gender and age, exacerbated by factors including, but not limited to, economic insecurity; lack of access to education; restrictions on access to sexual and reproductive health goods, services and information; unequal access to quality education; narrowing civic spaces, both online and offline; rising fundamentalism in many countries; armed conflict; environmental disasters; and health crises.<sup>6</sup> Disability, race, ethnic origin, gender identity, refugee status, early pregnancy and motherhood place some girls in a particularly disadvantaged situation. Conservative narratives that perpetuate discriminatory gender and age-related stereotypes suggesting that women's and girls' role should be limited to the private sphere, family and procreation also affect their participation in public life,<sup>7</sup> silence their voices and render their contributions invisible.<sup>8</sup>

10. The empowerment of girls and young women through the respect, protection and fulfilment of their fundamental human rights is an indispensable precondition for just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies and the achievement of gender equality.<sup>9</sup> While in recent years their participation has increasingly been promoted, major gaps persist. The girls and young women the Working Group met identified the critical challenges they have been facing at many levels. Despite the importance of their participation, research on girls in

<sup>2</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Communications.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Communications.aspx).

<sup>3</sup> See

[https://www.ohchr.org/en/latest?field\\_content\\_category\\_target\\_id%5B158%5D=158&field\\_content\\_category\\_target\\_id%5B162%5D=162&field\\_content\\_category\\_target\\_id%5B161%5D=161&field\\_content\\_category\\_target\\_id%5B159%5D=159&field\\_entity\\_target\\_id%5B1314%5D=1314](https://www.ohchr.org/en/latest?field_content_category_target_id%5B158%5D=158&field_content_category_target_id%5B162%5D=162&field_content_category_target_id%5B161%5D=161&field_content_category_target_id%5B159%5D=159&field_entity_target_id%5B1314%5D=1314).

<sup>4</sup> [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Activities.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Activities.aspx).

<sup>5</sup> Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, South West Asia and North Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and from minority communities such as Roma and indigenous girls.

<sup>6</sup> See [A/HRC/38/46](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Activities.aspx) and [A/75/184](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Activities.aspx).

<sup>7</sup> See [A/HRC/40/60](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Activities.aspx) and [A/HRC/47/38](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Activities.aspx).

<sup>8</sup> See [A/75/184](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Activities.aspx).

<sup>9</sup> See [A/HRC/38/46](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Activities.aspx).

public and political life is scarce and has not predominantly focused on their civic space and activism.<sup>10</sup>

11. The experts of the Working Group express their gratitude to all stakeholders for their contributions to the preparation of the report. In particular, they acknowledge the unique and remarkable inputs from the girl and young women activists, from all regions and backgrounds, who participated in 10 dedicated consultations. Some of them operate in extremely oppressive contexts, especially those living in occupied territories or countries facing armed conflict, and have taken considerable risks by choosing to share their experiences with the Working Group.

### Concepts

12. In line with international standards, the Working Group recognized girl children as individuals under the age of 18.<sup>11</sup> United Nations agencies, States and other actors use varying age ranges to define young women. For the preparation of the present report, the Working Group engaged with girls and young women aged between 12 and 30, who identified themselves as girl or young women activists. Many of them indicated that they started their activism as a child.

13. The Working Group uses the term “activism” as an umbrella concept to capture the broad variety of forms and processes, both formal and informal, online and offline, through which girls and young women engage in political and public life.<sup>12</sup> It encompasses participation in the civic space and the conduct of public affairs, including engagement in formal processes related to the exercise of legislative, judicial and executive powers, which are most often established and led by adults, as well as the bottom-up initiatives led by girls and young women themselves. Activism also comprises organizing, mobilizing (including through peaceful protests), campaigning, undertaking collective and individual advocacy and action, and other informal initiatives at grass-roots level, through which girls and young women use their voices to bring about changes to their communities.<sup>13</sup>

14. When girl and young women activists take action to advance human rights, they fall within the definition of human rights defenders, as enshrined in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders), and should be recognized as such. However, they may not always identify themselves as human rights defenders, often due to the stigma and risks related to acting as one, may not be aware of the term, or may not be considered as such by adults. Regardless of how they identify themselves or are perceived by others, the Working Group recognizes girl and young women activists who engage in the promotion and defence of human rights, in all their diversity, as human rights defenders who are entitled to all related legal protections, including those outlined in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, relevant Human Rights Council and General Assembly resolutions and other international standards.

## B. International human rights legal framework

15. The Working Group recalls that every individual, whether adult or minor, is entitled to enjoy all human rights, which are interrelated and interdependent, without discrimination of any kind.<sup>14</sup> Girls are entitled to special measures of protection in consideration of their age, gender and other characteristics, encompassing those aimed at empowering and enabling

<sup>10</sup> See Emily Bent, “The boundaries of girls’ political participation: a critical exploration of girls’ experiences as delegates to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women”, *Global Studies of Childhood*, vol. 3, No. 2 (2013).

<sup>11</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 1.

<sup>12</sup> See Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 23 (1997) and [A/HRC/23/50](#).

<sup>13</sup> See Roger A. Hart, “Children’s participation: from tokenism to citizenship”, UNICEF (1992).

<sup>14</sup> The right to vote may be subject to a minimum age limit. Any restrictions on the right to stand for election, such as minimum age, must be justifiable on objective and reasonable criteria. See Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 25 (1996), para. 15.

them to enjoy the full range of human rights, including to form and express their views and be heard on matters affecting them in accordance with their age and maturity and best interests.<sup>15</sup> There is no minimum age for acting to protect, promote and fulfil human rights.<sup>16</sup>

16. Girls' and young women's full enjoyment of the rights to participate in public life, to freedom of opinion and expression, to freedom of thought and to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are essential conditions for their full personal development, the exercise of their autonomy, their participation in shaping society and, ultimately, the achievement of gender equality and the realization of free, just and democratic societies. Those rights cover, for example, the expression and dissemination of ideas online and offline and participation in non-violent gatherings, including demonstrations, protests, meetings, marches or online assemblies, for a purpose such as expressing oneself, conveying a position on a particular issue or exchanging ideas<sup>17</sup> and they are enshrined in international and regional human rights instruments.<sup>18</sup> The realization of girls' and young women's human right to participate in public and political life, including organizing and engaging actively with a variety of State and non-State actors, is essential for the protection of their human rights.<sup>19</sup>

17. States must ensure that mechanisms are in place to solicit the views of girls in all matters of public interest affecting them directly or indirectly and to give due weight to those views.<sup>20</sup> As emphasized by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, States cannot assume that children are incapable of expressing their own views; on the contrary, they should encourage children to form a freely held view and should provide a safe environment that enables them to exercise their right to be heard.<sup>21</sup> The Committee has indicated that States need to invest in proactive measures to promote the empowerment of girls and challenge patriarchal and other harmful gender norms and stereotyping, in cooperation with all stakeholders, including civil society, women and men, traditional and religious leaders and girls themselves, in order to ensure the full realization of their right to participation.<sup>22</sup> It has also indicated that children need to be supported and encouraged to form their own organizations and initiatives and to pursue networking among their organizations in order to increase opportunities for shared learning and platforms for collective advocacy.<sup>23</sup> That includes removing all barriers (namely costly administrative procedures, minimum age restrictions and so on) to children forming their own organizations or associations.

<sup>15</sup> See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 20 (2016); [A/HRC/19/55](#); Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Hacia la Garantía Efectiva de los Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes: Sistemas Nacionales de Protección* (in Spanish only); and Council of Europe recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18.

<sup>16</sup> See Committee on the Rights of the Child, "Protecting and empowering children as human rights defenders", day of general discussion outcome report (September 2018).

<sup>17</sup> See Human Rights Committee, general comments No. 21 (1992), No. 34 (2011) and No. 37 (2020).

<sup>18</sup> See International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, arts. 18, 19 and 21–22; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, art. 7; Convention on the Rights of the Child, arts. 13–15; American Convention on Human Rights, arts. 13 and 15–16; African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, arts. 9–11; African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, arts. 7–9; Arab Charter on Human Rights, arts. 24 and 32; European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, arts. 10–11; and European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights, art. 3.

<sup>19</sup> See International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, arts. 2, 3 and 25; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, arts. 5, 7 and 14 (2); Convention on the Rights of the Child, arts. 2 and 12; American Convention on Human Rights, arts. 1 and 23; African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, arts. 2, 13 and 18; Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, art. 9; European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights, art. 3; and Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2.

<sup>20</sup> See Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 12, and Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 12 (2009).

<sup>21</sup> See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 12; and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Hacia la Garantía Efectiva de los Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes*.

<sup>22</sup> See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 20 (2016).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* and general comment No. 12 (2009).

18. Article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women obliges States to take all appropriate measures with a view to eliminating prejudices and customary and all other practices that are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women. Further, in resolution 41/6, the Human Rights Council urged States to remove barriers, whether political, legal, practical, structural, cultural, economic, institutional or resulting from the misuse of religion, that prevent the full, equal, effective and meaningful participation of women and girls in all fields.

19. The Working Group emphasizes that whereas the obligation to implement girls' and young women's rights rests on States, in practice the roles and responsibilities of a number of different actors are involved, including parents and extended families, local communities, faith groups, non-State services, intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector and young women and girls themselves.<sup>24</sup> Ensuring that girls and young women can be active participants in their own lives and in public affairs requires an integrated approach that takes into account the roles and responsibilities of all those actors and is also mindful of the interconnection between all human rights of girls and young women. In that regard, the Working Group reasserts the interdependence of all human rights.<sup>25</sup>

### C. Features of girls' and young women's activism

20. Girl and young women activists engage in a wide and varied array of topics. These encompass, among others, gender equality, gender-based violence, harmful practices, children's rights, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, climate justice, social and economic inequalities, inclusive development, racial justice, good governance, defence of territories, land and resources, and peace-building and conflict resolution. They often mobilize on more than one topic, drawing attention to intersectional oppression and the complex dynamics at play in their activism. They organize across movements because, as the Working Group heard during the consultations it held, "there is no justice for one issue without justice for all".

21. The initiatives of girl and young women activists are often aimed at bringing about transformative changes in the local, national and international contexts. For example, owing to their mobilization, some of the activists who participated in the Working Group's consultations had obtained the distribution of free sanitary items for menstrual hygiene at school or essential products in refugee centres. Others had helped girls from their communities escape female genital mutilation or assisted in the rescue of girls and women who were victims/survivors of human trafficking. Yet others had achieved the inclusion of classes on human rights in school curricula and the development of age-adapted media materials to raise awareness of gender equality and human rights within their communities. In one country, they had launched campaigns to destigmatize testing for sexually transmitted infections among youth and in another they had succeeded in drawing national attention to the problem of sexual harassment in the schoolyard. They also stood at the forefront of the defence of nature and climate in several countries.

22. Personal development, self-awareness and empowerment are also major components of their activism. As one young activist noted, "I was living as a young woman in oppression without noticing it. I viewed it as normal before learning more about the topic". Activism increases girls' and young women's confidence and helps them build a sense of agency in their own lives, provides the power to shape their communities and societies, become leaders and agents for change or make career choices that have traditionally been dominated by men.

23. Their activism is in many cases triggered by personal experience of discrimination, violence and human rights violations, or arises as a need to respond to perceived injustice. For many activists with whom the Working Group spoke, becoming an activist "was not so much an inspiration as a response to a need". Some had started engaging during the

<sup>24</sup> See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 5 (2005) and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 14 (2000), para. 42.

<sup>25</sup> See [A/HRC/38/46](#).

coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as they witnessed existing inequalities being exposed and exacerbated. In some cases, inspiration came from role models and women's mobilization in their own communities, countries or abroad for the defence of their rights (such as the mobilization of women during the Arab Spring and the #MeToo campaign) or by actions taken by members of local and international movements on, for example, protecting the environment and the climate.

24. Girls' and young women's activism unfolds at all levels, online and offline, local and international, although it is more common at local and community levels. Their activism often begins at school and in girl-led groups, mostly through involvement in student organizations within post-secondary and tertiary education institutions. They engage with different actors, including State authorities, diplomats and political parties; independent institutions, such as ombudspersons and national human rights institutions; civil society organizations and movements, including feminist activists and organizations; community-based, religious and cultural institutions; and the media. Their engagement with the United Nations and international and regional human rights mechanisms, although increasing, is still limited, owing to a variety of factors.

25. While some girls and young activists operate through formal structures, others organize informally and receive financial and other support through host organizations or umbrella structures. In some cases, informality is a choice, aimed at avoiding being subject to control by third parties and the imposition of external agendas. In other cases, it is the result of legal, administrative and financial barriers.

26. Frequently confronted with exclusion from formal decision-making processes, girl and young women activists tend to utilize alternative ways of engaging in public life, making use of decentralized initiatives, digital tools, radio talk shows, public demonstrations, informal protests and innovative campaigns, including artistic expressions. One example is the performance created by a feminist youth group, entitled "La culpa no era mía" (it was not my fault), that denounced sexual violence, which has inspired many other similar initiatives across the globe. The young activists sometimes use in-person advocacy tactics, including with parliamentarians, and invest in research and fund-raising in order to build evidence and promote public reflection around certain topics. They increasingly use online spaces; social media platforms are used to organize, mobilize, network, campaign and advocate. As one girl said: "We ourselves have been opening spaces and we have not waited for others to come and give us the opportunity."

## D. Challenges and barriers

### 1. Structural gender- and age-based discrimination

27. Girls and young women face specific barriers that encompass different types of obstacles, including those derived from structural discrimination based on sex, gender and age, rooted in discriminatory social norms and harmful stereotypes. The Working Group has already demonstrated the persistence of a global discriminatory cultural construction of gender, often based on religious interpretation, and the continued cultural justifications for discriminatory laws and practices among States and other stakeholders. It has particularly emphasized that failure to eliminate discrimination within the family undermines any attempt to ensure gender equality in all areas of society.<sup>26</sup>

28. In general, children and young people are confronted with adult-centrist and paternalistic attitudes. They are often treated as incapable of making decisions about their lives because of a perceived lack of maturity or experience, or are considered "trouble-makers", unable to constructively contribute to public debates and thus addressed with hostility.<sup>27</sup> As explained by activists: "our societies take as a joke what we say about gender equality" or "they take us as if we don't know what we want, but we do: they just don't believe us". Girls face additional challenges, as they are often discouraged from speaking

<sup>26</sup> See [A/HRC/29/40](#) and [A/HRC/38/46](#).

<sup>27</sup> See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 20 (2016), [A/HRC/19/55](#) and [A/76/222](#).



their minds and engaging outside the domestic sphere. Many girl activists stressed that their chances to engage in activism were considerably limited if they were told from the youngest age that their place was at home and if parents gave priority to their sons' education. Furthermore, they frequently had very limited time available to devote to activism, given the disproportionate household and care duties they shouldered.

29. Parental authority and overprotective approaches are often exercised to limit the freedom and space of engagement of children and young people. In the case of girls and young women, these barriers are dramatically compounded by predominant gender stereotypes and patriarchal social norms. As one of the activists explained, girls "are not decision makers even in matters, like leaving school and getting married, that have a massive impact on their lives". As noted by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, the significant barriers to women's and girls' enjoyment of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association "are deeply rooted at home, in the family and in the community, where women and girls continue to live under patriarchal control and experience wrongful stereotyping, both of which prevent and punish participation in public life".<sup>28</sup> That resonates with the experiences of girl and young women activists, who are often portrayed as destroyers of family values and national traditions. The perception of young activists as challenging established sociocultural gender norms may lead to aggression, including threats and violence, or lack of recognition and support from their families, communities and the general population, as well as the authorities.

30. Girls and young women may face restrictions on their mobility and lack access to information and resources, including digital devices and the financial resources needed to pay transport costs to attend gatherings or cover the membership fees required to join an organization or association. Access to education, especially at secondary and tertiary levels, professional training, productive resources and economic opportunities continue to be limited for many girls and young women across the globe, particularly those living in rural or precarious settings. Often, they are not sufficiently aware of or duly informed about their rights, which is a fundamental precondition for their activism.

31. Early and forced marriages as well as forced, unwanted or child pregnancies, female genital mutilation, sexual violence, including rape, often with curtailed access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and goods, including those related to menstrual health, contraception and abortion care, accompanied by denial of their autonomy in relation to these matters, are also major human rights barriers to girls' and young women's activism. These stem from deeply rooted gendered norms aimed at limiting their autonomy and considerably constraining their opportunities to participate fully and equally in political and public life.

## **2. Marginalization and exclusion from public spaces and intersectional forms of discrimination**

32. Civil society organizations and movements, including those advancing human rights, are usually led by adults who may therefore frequently be unresponsive to the views, experiences, space and needs of girls and young women. Even child rights and women's rights organizations are often blind to the diverse realities and experiences of girls and young women and often perpetuate discrimination within the movement. Girl-led organizations are often not part of or connected to the mainstream women's rights movement and not equally recognized, funded or supported. In some cases, the agendas of international partners and donors drive young women's and girls' activism, instead of genuinely empowering them and giving them the space and power to set the agenda, lead decision-making and determine their own priorities.

33. International human rights mechanisms are not easily accessible to girl and young women activists. Girls generally lack information about United Nations mechanisms and bodies, their functions and the age requirements for accreditation within the system, owing to a dearth of child-friendly and age-sensitive information developed by the United Nations. They may also be unable to obtain visas to travel to participate in international forums.

<sup>28</sup> A/75/184, para. 40.

Paternalistic approaches and a lack of trained staff, coupled with a lack of dedicated mechanisms and procedures to engage with children, are often used to justify excluding children, including girls, from discussions and activities of intergovernmental bodies, including at the United Nations and at national, regional and global level. Girls' and young women's activism within the United Nations is often reserved for a certain elite, while the most marginalized girls and young women, in particular those living in disadvantaged or remote communities, in practice do not have access to United Nations spaces. Moreover, girls and young women are not genuinely included as co-creators and co-designers of solutions. They are not empowered to set the agenda, their inputs are often not properly reflected and there is often no sustained engagement after meetings. They are generally pigeonholed in discussions concerning "girls' issues", rather than being associated with other important processes, such as peace and security, the Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 recovery. Furthermore, a developed capacity and specific framework for child and youth participation and safeguarding, in order to involve girls and young women in a safe, empowering and effective manner, are generally lacking. Some girls and young women reported feeling unprotected and exposed to retaliation and intimidation by their national authorities and non-State actors for engaging with the United Nations system, including human rights mechanisms, without receiving any tangible support from the United Nations.

34. Certain groups of girls and young women may be further marginalized in public spaces because of multiple and intersecting grounds of discrimination. Girls and young women belonging to disadvantaged groups, including, for example, poor, rural, Roma and indigenous youth, migrants and those in street situations, are still not sufficiently heard. Testimonies from girls and young women with disabilities demonstrated that they are often left out of larger networks, movements and initiatives because of the lack of accommodation of their needs, including, for example, the use of sign language. Digital illiteracy and unaffordable technical solutions and devices, such as screen reading, voice software, braille writers or video magnifiers, represent further challenges. Moreover, some feminist movements lack a disability perspective, as much as some disability rights movements lack a feminist perspective, with the consequence that specific issues affecting girls and young women at the intersection of both are overlooked.

35. While the lack of language adapted to girls and young women is a general challenge, language barriers often pose additional constraints on the activism of girls and young women, in particular of those belonging to indigenous peoples and minorities, depriving them also of the opportunity to network and engage with other organizations and movements. Some testimonies also disclosed that distinctions along ethnic lines, including tribal affiliations, might render difficult the work of activists that were perceived as "strangers" and thus as not legitimate to discuss certain issues at the local or national level.

### **3. Offline and online harassment and violence**

36. The lack of safety and security are major barriers to girls' and young women's activism. The frequent occurrence of attacks, harassment and violence in the street and on public transport, including in the form of unwanted sexual remarks, unwelcome sexual behaviour and threats of rape and stalking, deter and limit girls' and young women's activities and travel outside their home, which impedes their access to and use of spaces for activism. Such risks increase during protests and demonstrations and in conflict, disaster and other crisis situations.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, widespread sexual harassment and abuse is reported within political movements and organizations.

37. Some girls and young women reported threats and violence, including bullying, which often also targeted their families and friends and were aimed at silencing their voices. One of them explained that "sometimes we cannot engage on issues we are passionate about because they are too dangerous". Some girls and young women also reported a lack of protection by the State, which in some cases perpetuated the threats or violence through its security forces. Episodes of violence included inappropriate touching, exposing underwear during arrest, humiliating and unnecessary strip searches, threats of rape, forced nudity and gendered and

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<sup>29</sup> See [A/75/184](#).

sexist insults by law enforcement and detention personnel, especially during the unjustified repression of peaceful mobilization.

38. In the context of backlashes against gender equality, girls and young women face increased risks of harassment and violence when engaging on themes related to gender equality, particularly sexual and reproductive rights, equality in marriage and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer+ issues. In addition, girls and young women may face domestic violence, including sexual violence, as a reprisal for their activism or may be separated from their children by their partners and family as a form of punishment.<sup>30</sup> In some cases, they have to choose between pursuing their activism or keeping family ties. Moreover, many girls lack the means to support themselves independently and the loss of family support due to their activism can have devastating consequences.<sup>31</sup> Others are forced to abandon their activism to ensure the economic survival of their families.<sup>32</sup>

39. Digital gender-based violence and harassment add a further layer of challenges to girls' and young women's activism.<sup>33</sup> Digital technologies may be used to blackmail, control, surveil, coerce, harass, humiliate or objectify girl and young women activists, including by resorting to "deep-fake" pornographic content and death threats. As a result, many victims of these practices limit their online activities, leading to self-censorship, endure stigma in their families and communities, or flee online spaces altogether. The majority of the young women and girls consulted had experienced some form of targeted and gendered online abuse, including threatening messages, sexual harassment and the sharing of private images without their consent.<sup>34</sup> Attacks against girl and young women activists are often orchestrated with the aim of discrediting and delegitimizing them and exposing them to ridicule, contempt or defamation. In some cases, their families may prohibit them from continuing their activism because of the reputational damage that may follow. In certain countries, their very presence on social media may constitute a great risk to girls' and young women's personal integrity. Large-scale data collection and algorithm-driven analysis targeting sensitive information creates new threats for activists, particularly those from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer+ communities. As one activist explained: "when doing online campaigns, sometimes we are afraid to speak openly because we know that there is digital surveillance from the government".

40. Girls are affected by different forms of abuse from adults, including physical punishment by family members, stigmatization in their communities or reprisals from their educational institutions, including by preventing them from taking their exams. During the consultations, girls voiced their experience of punishment by teachers and school authorities, as well as a more general lack of support to help them reconcile school attendance with their activism.

#### 4. Hostile environments

41. Some of the activists with whom the Working Group met mentioned experience of arbitrary arrests, intimidation, threats of killings, kidnappings, being tracked and spied on, as well as abusive use of anti-terrorist legislation to further shrink the civic space and restrict their activities. In some countries, "home arrest", accompanied by occasional attacks at the house, threats to family members and sexual abuse, is used as a method to control and restrict activists' work. Some also reported that, given the overall environment of intimidation they faced, feminist groups and protection networks might be difficult to access for younger activists, as these groups tended to limit the entry of or engagement with external actors, for fear of reprisals. As one activist emphasized: "It is important to make people understand that we do not want to create conflicts; we only want to address and solve certain problems

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. and A/HRC/40/60.

<sup>31</sup> See A/HRC/40/60.

<sup>32</sup> See Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, "Children as agents of positive change. A mapping of children's initiatives across regions, towards an inclusive and healthy world free from violence" (2021).

<sup>33</sup> See A/HRC/38/47.

<sup>34</sup> See <https://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-online-crisis-facing-women-and-girls-threatens-global-progress-on-gender-equality/>.

affecting us and defend our human rights.” Campaigns of defamation and attacks on honour and reputation were also mentioned, whereby activists were portrayed as lacking so-called “morals”, values and ethics, and undermining culture and tradition. As the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders has noted, girl human rights defenders can be stigmatized and ostracized by community leaders, faith-based groups, families, neighbours and communities in the belief that they and their actions are a threat to religion, honour, culture or ways of life.<sup>35</sup>

42. Additionally, girl and young women activists are subject to various types of surveillance that pose further challenges to their activism. They continue to face excessive policing by their families, especially their male relatives, with respect to public affairs, including their Internet use and access to digital devices, which greatly affects their opportunities to engage freely in the public and political life of their communities and societies.

43. In addition, mental health problems, such as burn-out and post-traumatic stress disorder, were mentioned by many activists as the consequences of the threats and risks they faced. They identified the importance of self-care and collective care, which needed to be recognized institutionally by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donors. The lack of psychological support was identified as one of the obstacles to supportive environments.

## **5. Legal and administrative obstacles and lack of access to justice**

44. Many girls organize informally because of the obstacles they face in registering their organizations. The registration process may be too costly; there may be minimum age requirements for registration; or a requirement to have a bank account.<sup>36</sup> That limits the ability of young activists to seek and receive funding for their work, which has been identified as one of the major obstacles to girls’ and young women’s activism.

45. In some cases, girls face legal barriers to the exercise of their right to freedom of assembly, owing to blanket bans on children participating in public assemblies.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in the case of girls and young women with disabilities, additional barriers often reside in the deprivation of legal capacity. However, even when they are not formally denied their legal capacity, discriminatory attitudes, including infantilization and dependency on others, particularly family members, constrain their autonomy and opportunities to engage in public and political life.

46. A distinct set of obstacles consists in the legal barriers to freedom of expression on sexual orientation and gender identity that have been introduced in various countries across the world. At the end of 2020, legal barriers to freedom of expression on issues related to sexual and gender diversity existed in at least 42 Member States, including in the form of bans on the dissemination of so-called gender ideology.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, laws criminalizing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer+ persons, pose formidable threats to the activism of girls and young women belonging to that community, forcing many of them to remain silent or impeding them from creating their own organizations and movements.

47. Different types of legal barriers concern the lack of legal recognition of undocumented migrant, refugee and stateless women and girls. Similarly, the lack of recognition of indigenous peoples’ rights in certain countries make the participation of indigenous girls and young women in public life nearly impossible and laws banning face coverings in public spaces may prevent young women and girls of Muslim background from engaging in public and political life.

48. Girls and young women also face great obstacles to accessing information about their human rights and the mechanisms available to them to seek protection against violations of their rights and reparations in cases of violations, sometimes including a lack of specific forms of reparation, such as for online harassment and violence. There is a lack of effective, age- and gender-sensitive procedures, information, advice, legal and other assistance, and

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<sup>35</sup> See [A/HRC/40/60](#).

<sup>36</sup> See <http://nostraightlines.youngfeministfund.org/>.

<sup>37</sup> See [A/HRC/26/29](#).

<sup>38</sup> See ILGA World, *State-sponsored Homophobia. Global Legislation Overview Update (2020)*.

access to independent complaints procedures, including in the courts. This often leads to a situation of pervasive impunity, where very few cases are brought to the attention of the judicial and other competent authorities. Where State actors are the perpetrators of such violations, there is a feeling of distrust vis-à-vis the State, which further impedes girls and young women from seeking justice and forces some of them to considerably limit or renounce their activism.

## **6. Insufficient, inadequate and inflexible funding**

49. Globally, women's organizations and programming relating to women and girls are disproportionately underfunded.<sup>39</sup> There has been a significant reduction in funding for women's rights in recent years and, in situations of crisis, funding for women's rights is among the first things to be reduced, despite the dire need for emergency protection funding for young women and girls.<sup>40</sup> Girls and young women face additional barriers to accessing funding for their activism, such as the lack of registration of their organizations; the lack of flexible, sustained and core funding specifically targeted at them; constraints on funding unregistered girl- and youth-led groups; the impossibility of opening bank accounts to receive funds if they are under age; and their limited organizational capacity and lack of the specific skills, time and support needed to develop proposals and comply with donor requirements. Moreover, according to a survey conducted among young feminist organizations, there is a lack of alignment between funders and their priority issues.<sup>41</sup> The funding mechanisms available are too rigid; they do not recognize and support the intersectional approaches taken by many girls' and young women's movements and rather follow a "siloed" approach to human rights issues. In some cases, young feminist organizations and movements may not fall under the category of "women's rights organizations" used by donors to allocate funding for gender equality.<sup>42</sup>

50. As a result, some girls' and young women's organizations draw their resources from self-generated activities or the collection of membership fees, which becomes a barrier to participation for those who cannot afford them. In other cases, they access resources through umbrella organizations, although this mechanism may limit the autonomy of their work, given the unequal power relations between organizations, with the larger organizations in some cases imposing their agendas. Girl and young women activists thus often rely on mutual aid and non-financial resources generated between their networks.

## **E. Promoting and protecting girls' and young women's activism**

51. States have an obligation not only to respect activism as an exercise of the rights to participate in public life, to freedom of opinion and expression and to freedom of assembly and of association, but also to proactively remove the structural and systemic barriers that impede girls' and young women's activism and the full enjoyment of the human rights that entails. That translates into the obligations of States and other actors to ensure an enabling environment for girls' and young women's activism and create the necessary frameworks and policies to promote and guarantee their inclusion and participation in decision-making processes, particularly those that affect them directly.

### **1. Creating and enhancing enabling factors and environments**

52. A number of factors contribute to creating a safe and enabling environment in which girls' and young women's activism can flourish. They include favourable socioeconomic conditions; dedicated and flexible funding; the existence of opportunities and co-creation of spaces for collaboration and networking; building solidarity with other activists,

<sup>39</sup> See [A/75/184](#).

<sup>40</sup> See [A/HRC/40/60](#) and [A/HRC/47/38](#).

<sup>41</sup> See FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, "Brave, creative, resilient: the global state of young feminist organizing" (2017).

<sup>42</sup> See <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/new-brief-where-money-feminist-organizing> and <https://plan-international.org/blog/2021/06/09/weve-had-enough-young-activists-call-for-education-funding-and-real-partnerships/>.

organizations and movements on equal terms; support in the form of two-way exchanges, mentorship and skills development; family and community support; equal access to the Internet; equal enjoyment of the right to quality education; respect for sexual and reproductive health and rights; and direct and meaningful participation through appropriate normative and institutional frameworks that have been developed with the participation of young women and girls.<sup>43</sup>

### **Facilitating collaboration and building solidarity within and across movements, organizations and generations**

53. Girls and young women often consider collaboration with and support from other actors and movements particularly important for starting, pursuing and strengthening their activism and amplifying their voices. As expressed by one of the participants during the consultations: “when we unite from a basis of respect, harmony and attention to human rights, we achieve amazing things”. International and local NGOs play a key role in providing platforms for networking, experience-sharing among peers, solidarity and holistic protection, care and well-being, and engagement with decision makers, as well as opportunities for awareness-raising and capacity-building, including leadership programmes. For some girls and young women, involvement in the work of international NGOs was useful in securing more protection against intimidation and harassment.

54. Participation in awareness-raising and other activities organized by civil society organizations or the encouragement received from teachers and parents also play an important role in promoting and sustaining girls’ and young women’s activism. In addition, the opportunity to engage with other young activists to share their experiences, strategies, challenges and struggles, to support each other and to be involved in broader networks, including feminist organizations, networks and movements, were referred to as fundamental aspects in the development of their activism. As one activist noted: “What helped me was knowing that I was not alone.”

55. Intergenerational dialogue and mentorship schemes based on mutual respect are considered critical for strengthening girls’ and young women’s motivation to engage in public and political life as they turn to adults to learn more about the issues they are interested in and look for role models.<sup>44</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region, for instance, a platform for intergenerational dialogue has been established through a women’s forum and a young women’s forum, which has led to the creation of an intergenerational women’s leadership programme. In some contexts, however, the lack of intergenerational dialogue remains a major challenge. Some girls noted that women in their communities often did not have time to engage with them to pass on knowledge and experience. Some others also considered that, in some contexts, women might be more reluctant than younger generations to defy patriarchal norms.

56. Engagement with and support from national human rights institutions also plays a vital role in sustaining girls’ and young women’s activism, especially when they face threats, reprisals or other violations of their human rights. Unfortunately, in many cases girls and young women have limited knowledge of the existence of such mechanisms and their working methods. Specific channels facilitating engagement with those mechanisms for young women and girls are often absent.

### **Promoting family and community support**

57. The encouragement and support of parents, family and caregivers are what make engagement in public and political life possible for many girls and young women. Adult understanding and awareness of the human rights of girls and young women, including their right to participate in public and political life, is vital. As stressed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child: “Support is needed to enable adults to become mentors and facilitators so that adolescents can take greater responsibility for their own lives and the lives of those

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<sup>43</sup> See Plan International, “Engaging girls, boys and youth as active citizens” (March 2020).

<sup>44</sup> See Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, “Children as agents of positive change. A mapping of children’s initiatives across regions, towards an inclusive and healthy world free from violence”.

around them.” Children have the right to receive guidance aimed at empowering them, including on how to exercise their rights and protect themselves from harm.

58. Families and communities often need support in their roles, which may need to encompass also interventions aimed at addressing shortcomings in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, such as the rights to an adequate standard of living, work, social security, the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work and the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Personal access to resources, wealth and privilege often acts in practice as a watershed between those who are able to engage in activism and those who are left out. Girls and young women belonging to disadvantaged and marginalized groups are often not sufficiently heard. During the consultations held by the Working Group, many activists referred to the importance of having received scholarships, support from individual sponsors or professional positions within NGOs.

### **Bridging the gender-related digital divide**

59. As demonstrated above, girls and young women are increasingly using the Internet and social media for their activism, which provide them with crucial opportunities to make their voices heard. Ensuring access to technology for all girls and young women, without discrimination, is thus a key enabler of their activism. However, many girls and young women, especially in rural, underprivileged areas, lack access to it (both physically to devices or reception and in terms of knowing how to go online) or do not have sufficient digital literacy, including on digital safety and security. Generally, more men globally are using the Internet than women.<sup>45</sup> The digital divide, together with socioeconomic disparities and their disproportionate gendered impact, were deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has restricted online activism for girls and young women with limited facilities at home. States are expected to promote awareness of, and access to, digital means for girls and young women to express their views and offer them training and support.<sup>46</sup>

### **Ensuring enjoyment of the equal right to quality education**

60. Equal access to inclusive, culturally appropriate and quality education is pivotal to enable girls’ and young women’s activism.<sup>47</sup> School curricula that include teaching on human rights, promote understanding of the harmful impact of gendered social norms and discriminatory stereotypes, and support the development of critical thinking skills, personal empowerment and solidarity, are crucial. As noted above, educational institutions are often the first environment where girls and young women can engage in decision-making processes and collective actions, develop leadership and public-speaking skills and gain self-confidence. However, in many cases children, especially girls, are expected to be passive recipients and their engagement in public life in schools is not supported.

## **2. Building gender- and age-sensitive normative and institutional frameworks**

### **National level**

61. In some regions, various frameworks have been established to promote and ensure the engagement of children and youth, including girls and young women, in public and political life and sustain their activism. Some States have adopted specific legislation that expressly contemplates the right of children and young people to participate in decision-making processes concerning them and provides for the adoption of special measures to encourage their participation. These include a law in one country in Eastern Europe that provides for the allocation of funds and space for youth activities and projects, and a law in a Latin American country that stipulates that political parties shall include at least 25 per cent of

<sup>45</sup> See International Telecommunication Union, “Measuring digital development: facts and figures 2021”.

<sup>46</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general comment No. 36 (2017) and Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 25 (2021).

<sup>47</sup> See Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 13 (1999) and Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 36 (2017).

youth aged between 18 and 29 in their electoral lists. Some laws lay down the obligation to set up permanent mechanisms for the participation of children and adolescents that offer opportunities for the participation of girls and young women.

62. In other cases, dedicated programmes, policies and strategies have been adopted to promote the participation of children and young people in decision-making, such as a strategy in one country of Western Europe that sets out the objective of ensuring that children and young people have a voice in decisions concerning them and contemplates the creation of a supportive environment for their participation, including by providing the necessary skills training. A dedicated institutional framework accompanies the strategy and includes, for example, youth councils and youth parliaments, although these measures often do not have a specific focus on gender and girls and young women.

63. A study by the European Commission found that children's and youth councils are among the most prevalent mechanisms directly involving children in political life.<sup>48</sup> For example, in one Western European country it is mandatory for all municipalities to have a youth council, which must have a representation of at least 40 per cent of girls and young women. Youth councils have also been established in African and Asia-Pacific countries.

64. A number of initiatives have also been taken to promote and support the engagement of children and young people, including girls, with State independent human rights mechanisms. For example, a National Human Rights Commission in one Latin American country has amended its internal regulations to allow children and adolescents to submit complaints directly about violations of their rights and has launched programmes for consultation and awareness-raising.

65. Among the frameworks put in place to promote girls' and young women's activism are also grant schemes and leadership and capacity-building programmes. For example, in one African country a number of ministries implement leadership skills development programmes for girls, which are aimed at encouraging their involvement in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies on gender equality and women's and girls' rights. In one Eastern Europe country, a programme led by role models, called "Future Heroes", was implemented to foster leadership and entrepreneurship skills for girls aged 14 to 17. Some countries have also set up grant schemes to support youth organizations.

### **International level**

66. International human rights bodies are also increasingly involving children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child may now receive communications from children regarding violations of their human rights and encourages their participation in various aspects of its work.<sup>49</sup> The Committee has also adopted a child safeguarding procedure to ensure a safe and child-friendly environment for the children with whom it interacts. Similarly, at the regional level, the Inter-American human rights system involves girls and young women in public hearings and field visits and arranges special meetings with them. In the African system, the discussions that take place on the Day of the African Child offer a platform for engaging with girls and young activists. The Working Group has also been meeting with girls and young women during its country visits.

67. The participation of children and young people, including girls and young women, at the international level is also promoted through other mechanisms. For example, in Geneva, some permanent missions to the United Nations involve girls and young women in the drafting of reports or consult them before making recommendations to other States during the universal periodic review. Some countries in Eastern and Western Europe include young people in their delegations to the United Nations or the European Union. In one Latin American country, the National Council for Intergenerational Equality (Consejo Nacional

<sup>48</sup> See European Commission, *Study on Child Participation in EU Political and Democratic Life*, (2021).

<sup>49</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/ChildParticipation.aspx>.



para la Igualdad Intergeneracional) promotes the participation of children's representatives in regional institutions, such as the Pan-American Child Congress.

### **III. Conclusions and recommendations**

#### **A. Conclusions**

68. Girls and young women around the world play crucial roles as human rights defenders and agents of change. Many of them are at the forefront of initiatives aimed at transforming societies, while others are striving to mobilize effectively and find a place of influence. They are an integral part of the struggle for more democratic and fairer societies and their activism has brought about unique contributions to the advancement of gender equality and human rights.

69. The right of girls and young women to participate in political and public life is guaranteed under international human rights law. That gives rise to binding legal obligations for States to enable their activism and to remove the structural barriers that inhibit or endanger their participation. Girls and young women are also entitled to special measures to ensure the realization of their rights in consideration of their age, gender and other characteristics.

70. Girl activists face particular challenges owing to common misperceptions around children's right to participation in political and public life, restrictions on their autonomy, disregard for their best interests, paternalistic control and superficial, tokenistic involvement in diverse processes. Additional barriers include deep-rooted structural gender- and age-based discrimination, which is frequently exacerbated by other forms of discrimination including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, health status, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability, combined with marginalization and exclusion, poverty, lack of access to education, lack of safety and security, hostile environments in the private and public spheres and a lack of resources.

71. Beyond the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing crises caused by conflict and displacement, climate change, natural disasters, sharp socioeconomic inequalities, political instability and rampant digitalization have had a considerable impact on the possibilities for girls and young women to exert their activism. However, that environment has created new opportunities as well as new challenges.

72. Girls' and young women's equal rights and opportunities in all areas, namely family and cultural life, economic and social life, political and public life, safety and health, including sexual and reproductive health, are the basis for creating an enabling and just environment for their activism. The dignity and agency of all girls and young women must be recognized and actively promoted, supported and protected, while ensuring safeguards against threats, violence and reprisals, and undertaking concrete steps to remove the structural barriers and the systemic disadvantages that they face. They should be duly informed about their human rights from the youngest age and empowered to be active participants in their own lives and in public affairs, engaging creatively in all fields.

73. Sustained access to adequate technical and financial resources, supportive networks, freedom from violence, opportunities for self-care and collective care, and protection from reprisals remain fundamental for girls' and young women's activism to thrive. Their capacity to participate in the civic space depends on a coherent and integrated set of social and economic policies directed at the family, community, school and workplace, combined with safeguards to ensure their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association. Their physical and mental health and the economic viability of their individual and collective actions are essential for their development and ability to thrive.

74. The root causes of the numerous barriers faced by girls and young women in their attempts to contribute to transformative actions should be tackled through targeted measures by States and all stakeholders concerned. The adoption of a

comprehensive human rights-based approach that is child rights-centred, while being gender-responsive and intersectional is crucial to ensuring a sustainable environment for girls' and young women's activism. As told to the Working Group during the consultations it held: "Authorities should support the voices of young activists more; instead of silencing or minimizing them, they should be used as platforms to empower, generate a change."

## **B. Recommendations**

75. States should take all appropriate measures to create safe and enabling spaces for girl and young women activists, where they can exercise their activism and express their views freely, equally, fully and meaningfully on all matters of relevance to them. In order to achieve this, States should:

(a) Put in place effective protection systems to safeguard girl and young women activists against any form of discrimination, intimidation or reprisal, whether in private or public life, and ensure that protection measures are not used to diminish the scope of their activism;

(b) Encourage and provide support and training to the families, caregivers, communities, educators and educational institutions of girl and young women activists, as well as the judiciary, government officials and other relevant professionals, so that they can fulfil their role in promoting, protecting and empowering all girls and young activists to exercise their autonomy and agency and exercise their civil and political rights safely;

(c) Support movement-building led by girl and young women activists and allow them to pursue and strengthen their activism by investing in the formation of girl-led and young feminist networks and associations, and by creating participatory structures and mechanisms whereby they can influence policy and norm-making processes;

(d) Ensure that the national legal framework recognizes and enables girl and young women activists to act freely and safely without discrimination. That in particular includes:

(i) Eliminating laws and practices that perpetuate discrimination within the family, the community and institutions, to enable girl and young women activists to exercise their autonomy and agency, respecting their age and maturity;

(ii) Removing age-based discriminatory legal barriers for girls and young women to the exercise of their civil and political rights, ensuring that any restrictions are in conformity with international human rights law and considering lowering the age for registration of associations and for opening bank accounts;

(iii) Adopting comprehensive national laws and policies that respect, protect and fulfil girls' and young women's rights to participate in public and political life, to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and to access to information, integrating gender- and age-sensitive and intersectional approaches that address all their diversity;

(iv) Adopting and implementing laws and policies that particularly target removing the inherent obstacles to their activism, including eliminating harmful practices and stereotypes, gender-based violence, barriers to access to quality education, taboos and restrictions on sexual and reproductive health information, goods and services, including contraception and abortion care, and lifting the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities;

(v) Introducing and ensuring the effective implementation of legislation and policies especially aimed at promoting the activism of girl and young women activists by allocating human, technical and financial resources;

(vi) **Incorporating effective approaches in laws, policies and programmes to address multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination against girl and young activists and remove the structural barriers they face;**

(e) **Create and enhance platforms, processes and structures within which the views of girl and young women activists are given due consideration, including formal mechanisms and institutions, such as children's parliaments and other possible mechanisms for child participation, in a gender- and age-responsive and inclusive manner, and ensure that such views are taken into account when adopting, implementing and reviewing laws and policies;**

(f) **Ensure that girl and young women activists have accessible and effective remedies through;**

(i) **Intensifying efforts to ensure the accountability of State agents, family and community members, including traditional and religious leaders who violate the rights of girl and young women activists;**

(ii) **Securing access to multiple, safe, age-, disability- and gender-responsive mechanisms to report reprisals, violence and abuse related to their activism and receive support and care for physical and psychological abuse;**

(iii) **Facilitating child-friendly and gender-responsive complaint mechanisms to address human rights violations from an intersectional perspective and facilitate access to international complaint procedures by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure;**

(g) **Provide all girls and young women with comprehensive, free, accessible and age-, disability- and gender-sensitive information including language-accessible and culturally sensitive measures to enable them to cultivate and exercise their activism.**

76. **States, private companies and all stakeholders concerned should take appropriate measures to ensure online access and safety by:**

(a) **Facilitating safe and inclusive online platforms for girls' and young women's activism and ensure the accountability of service providers for facilitating accessibility;**

(b) **Expanding the accessibility and affordability of digital technology to all girl and young women activists by investing in programmes tackling the gender-related digital divide and the digital exclusion of certain groups of girl and young women activists;**

(c) **Taking measures to foster a safe online environment for girls and young women, in particular by creating effective regulatory frameworks, including for content moderation and reporting mechanisms, sanctioning perpetrators and providing reliable information to address online gender- and age-related discrimination and violence.**

77. **Civil society organizations should foster girls' and young women's activism and promote their collaboration, based on mutual respect, solidarity and diversity. In particular, they should:**

(a) **Facilitate spaces for girls' and young women's groups to operate in diverse forms and an inclusive manner, including by supporting their initiatives and evolving leadership;**

(b) **Support dialogue and collaboration between adult and younger activists, including providing them with relevant role models of women in activism and creating mentoring programmes;**

(c) **Facilitate access for girl and young women activists to decision makers, funding, resources, training, networking and self-care programmes through the design and implementation of empowering partnerships;**

(d) Foster community support systems and raise awareness of girls' and young women's activism, including by developing training programmes for families, communities and teachers on how to support and empower girls and young women in exercising their rights.

78. National human rights institutions, including children's ombudspersons, should fulfil the following responsibilities towards the promotion, protection and empowerment of girl and young women activists;

(a) Disseminate information about their institutional mandate and work, and support girl and young women activists in training and human rights education;

(b) Promote the work of girl and young human rights defenders and educate the public, authorities and stakeholders about their positive role in society;

(c) Work closely with girl and young women activists through child, youth and gender-centred approaches;

(d) Facilitate access to reporting and seeking redress for human rights violations.

79. Donors should adopt measures that empower and support girl and young women activists in all their diversity. Specific measures should include:

(a) Investing in girls and youth networks by streamlining dedicated funding to provide financial and non-financial resources directly or indirectly to girl-led and youth-led grass-roots organizations and movements while respecting their organizational autonomy;

(b) Instituting flexible funding packages and grant application and reporting processes for groups led by girls and young women and for unregistered grass-roots networks, including the opportunity to co-apply for shared grants and funding for self- and collective care;

(c) Putting in place processes for integrating the views, interests and decision-making roles of girl and young women activists in the planning and implementation of making grants and other activities.

80. The United Nations should promote girls' and young women's activism in the following ways:

(a) The human rights bodies should prioritize:

(i) Mainstreaming gender-, child rights- and youth-sensitive approaches throughout their work and ensuring adequate resourcing for that work;

(ii) Instituting and enhancing child- and youth-friendly platforms and processes that ensure girl and young women activists are regularly, meaningfully and inclusively engaged in deliberations and decision-making and that their engagement is sustained and not tokenistic;

(iii) Using language that is responsive to girls and young women, avoiding jargon and introducing communication that is clear and accessible to all girls and young women;

(iv) Making available age-appropriate, accessible and timely information on the human rights system to enable girl and young women activists to effectively engage with its mechanisms;

(b) United Nations agencies must ensure that girl and young women activists have access to United Nations mechanisms and spaces, with the necessary safeguards and without discrimination, by building internal capacity and allocating the necessary technical and financial resources, directly or indirectly, to girl-led and youth-led grass roots in a flexible and inclusive manner.

81. Parents, family and community members should promote, empower and actively support girls' and young women's activism. They should seek information about their obligations and exercise their parental or supervisory authority in a manner that

**recognizes, respects and fosters the agency, contributions and capacities of girls and young women in a way that nurtures space for their views and participation in the public sphere.**

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