



Annual Day of Discussion on Women's Human Rights
The Impact of COVID-19 on the Rights of Women
44th Session of the Human Rights Council
Tuesday 14 July 2020
Joint NGO Statement

Oral Statement

We thank you for giving us the floor to speak on behalf of the Girls Advocacy Alliance, which includes Plan International, Defence for Children International, and Terre des Hommes International Federation, and on behalf of Child Rights Connect, Save the Children, and World Vision International.

Girls are disproportionately affected by this pandemic, being more likely to lose education and face an unequal burden of unpaid care and domestic work. Reduced sexual and reproductive health services means increased adolescent pregnancy and maternal mortality.

Economic hardship drives girls' vulnerability to exploitation, trafficking, discrimination, and abuse, both on- and offline. We are likely to see an increase in harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. Confinement measures have heightened gender-based violence against girls.

But we can build back better. States should design laws and policies that tackle structural inequalities and the root causes of gender-based rights violations.

We call on the UN and its member states to apply a child rights-based approach and to:

- Design and implement non-discriminatory COVID-19 measures which consider age, gender, and diversity;
- Strengthen meaningful participation of girls and young women in all decision-making;
- Prioritise funding, resources, and capacity for protection of children from gender-based violence;
- Provide universal health coverage and child-friendly services, including mental health support, SRHR, and essential health for children's survival and growth;
- Implement targeted measures to support education and economic empowerment for girls and young women, including through gender-responsive social protection and livelihoods support; and
- Ensure accountability for all violations.

A longer statement is submitted in writing.

Thank you.



Written Statement

We thank you for hosting this important discussion of how COVID-19 is affecting women's human rights. This statement is submitted on behalf of the Girls Advocacy Alliance, which includes Plan International, Defence for Children International, and Terre des Hommes International Federation, and on behalf of Child Rights Connect, Save the Children, and World Vision International.

As child rights organisations, we wish to take this opportunity to highlight how the pandemic is putting many girls at risk. Girls endure a double burden of discrimination due to their age and gender. Today's "new normal" exacerbates this discrimination, threatening to compromise decades of progress towards gender equality and girls' rights.

Girls are affected by crises in particular ways. They miss out most when schools are closed, and are less likely to return when they reopen, particularly if they have become pregnant, married, or young mothers. Economic hardship drives girls' vulnerability to exploitation. Girls also bear a heavy burden of household work and unpaid care of the sick and younger children in the household. This means that girls have less time to engage with remote learning opportunities and heightens their exposure to the virus and, when health services are limited, they are often last to access them.

Confinement measures negatively affect girls, as they suffer from the related rise in gender-based violence.¹ Girls often bear the brunt of the frustration and anger of those with power over them and as a result, around the world, they will be more vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, discrimination, sexual violence, and abuse, both on- and offline. Restricted access to sexual and reproductive health information and services is preventing girls from having control over their own bodies, resulting in starkly increased rates of unintended adolescent pregnancy and maternal mortality.

As families resort to negative coping strategies, we are likely to see an increase in harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Yet, in crisis, there is an opportunity to build back better, addressing underlying structural inequalities related to age, gender, and diversity. States should listen to girls and young women, including those who acting as children human rights defenders and raising their voices in the context of current protest movements, and design laws and policies that tackle the root causes at the heart of rights violations experienced by girls, including harmful gender norms and practices.

We call on the UN and its member states to apply a child rights-based approach and to:

- Ensure that all COVID-19-related measures are designed and implemented without discrimination and with due consideration to age, gender, and diversity;

¹ If lockdown continues for six months, the UNFPA report forecasts it will result in 7 million unplanned pregnancies and 31 million gender-based violence cases: <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/impact-covid-19-pandemic-family-planning-and-ending-gender-based-violence-female-genital>



- Strengthen the leadership and meaningful participation of girls and young women in all decision-making processes, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including in COVID-19 response and recovery plans;
- Prioritise funding, resources, and capacity for the rigorous protection and safeguarding of all children, and of girls, as a particularly at-risk group, from gender-based violence, in all policies, information, and guidance;
- Prioritise child-friendly support services including mental health for survivors of violence as well as access to and funding of SRHR, which should be recognised as life-saving, along with essential health services for young children's survival and growth and universal health coverage;
- Ensure justice systems can continue their work and advance efforts to accelerate accountability for gender based human rights violations; and
- Implement targeted and fully-funded measures to support girls' and young women's right to education and their economic empowerment, including through gender-responsive social protection and livelihoods support.

Thank you.