

Submission from Save the Children: “Report on promoting, protecting and fulfilling women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian situations pursuant to resolution 45/29 of the Human Rights Council (2020).

Age, gender, disability, and other factors of diversity, including socio-economic and cultural factors, play a significant role in both the human rights violations experienced by people living in humanitarian settings, as well as their access to justice and critical response services. As emphasized in a recent Lancet [review](#), adolescent girls, given the dual factors of discrimination and marginalization experienced with their age and gender, are at increased risks of slipping through gaps in policy and programming designed for women or children more broadly.¹² Save the Children’s consultations with adolescent girls, their families and communities have highlighted similar concerns and mirror the ongoing failure of humanitarian response efforts to adapt to the needs of adolescent girls.³

The human rights violations adolescent girls experience both within and outside of humanitarian settings are inextricably tied to their standing in society and frequently subordinate role and relative lack of power in comparison with both women and boys within the overarching patriarchy.⁴ When households are physically, financially, or food insecure, manifestations of gender inequality and discrimination worsen.⁵

Physical insecurity, particularly in conflict-affected contexts, often results in adolescent girls facing increased controls on their movements and influencing their exposure to, or experience of, human rights violations. For example, movement restrictions in crisis settings may impede adolescent girls’ access to critical information and services, while also increasing their risk of specific forms of gender-based violence.⁶ Adolescent girls across humanitarian settings may also face limited access to essential information and services such as educational, economic or medical services.

Child Marriage and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence

Adolescent girls living in humanitarian settings are at an increased and disproportionate risk of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, intimate partner violence, child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM), and denial of the provision of, or access to, other essential health and education services and adequate food and nutrition. Recent analysis from UNICEF indicates that 10 million more girls globally are at risk of child marriage by 2030 due to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.⁷ Notably, this is in addition to the already 100 million girls who were at risk of child marriage in the next decade prior to the pandemic. For the first time in almost 30 years, adolescent girls are more, not less at risk of child marriage, with those living in already fragile or crisis-affected settings facing significant vulnerabilities.⁸ Significantly, all 10 countries with the highest prevalence rates of child marriage are considered fragile or conflict-affected.⁹ In March, the Global Protection Cluster reported that over 80% of its operations described the current gender-based violence situation as severe or extreme and 50% of Protection Clusters reported child marriage specifically, as a severe to extreme risk for girls.¹⁰

Adolescent girls may experience gender-based violence perpetrated by armed forces and groups, as well as by community members, humanitarian response providers or civilian peace and security actors, and even their families, including both male and female family members. The diversity of potential perpetrators and entrenched power disparities due to the combination of their age and gender requires gender-based violence prevention, mitigation, and

¹ “Adolescent girls face elevated risks of gender-based violence in humanitarian settings because of the intersectionality of age and gender, and the additional and exacerbated risk factors relevant to emergencies. Because there is no clear division of labour between the gender-based violence and child protection sectors, adolescent girls are often neglected by both groups, and violence against this subpopulation goes unaddressed.” [Gender-based violence against adolescent girls in humanitarian settings: a review of the evidence - The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health](#)

² [Beyond the Shadow Pandemic: Protecting a generation of girls from gender-based violence through COVID-19 to recovery | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

³ Save the Children, What Girls Want: Synthesis Brief, forthcoming publication, Summer 2020

⁴ Save the Children, Gender, Age and Conflict: Addressing the different needs of children affected by conflict- <https://www.savethechildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SC-Gender-Age-and-Conflict-report-final.pdf>

⁵ See for example, [Child Marriage in Humanitarian Crises: Girls and parents speak out on risk and protective factors, decision-making, and solutions | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#). The study found that financial support is a crucial component of child marriage programming. In particular, adolescent girls and caregivers asked for cash assistance to relieve extreme financial hardship, offset financial incentives for child marriage, and enable them to provide for their children’s basic needs – all major contributors to child marriage rates in forced displacement contexts.

⁶ [Association Between Girl-child Marriage and Intimate Partner Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Insights From a Multicountry Analysis of Demographic and Health Surveys - Bright Opoku Ahinkorah, Olayinka Modupe Onayemi, Abdul-Aziz Seidu, Oluwafemi Emmanuel Awopegba, Anthony Idowu Ajayi, 2021 \(sagepub.com\)](#)

⁷ UNICEF, March 2021, [10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage due to COVID-19 – UNICEF](#)

⁸ [The Global Girlhood Report 2020: How COVID-19 is putting progress in peril | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

⁹ Girls Not Brides, [Child marriage and humanitarian contexts - Girls Not Brides](#)

¹⁰ [Global-Protection-Update_04032021 \(globalprotectioncluster.org\)](#)

response efforts tailored and targeted to address the specific needs of adolescent girls, as well as intentionally adolescent-friendly and gender-responsive accountability mechanisms and processes.

Data collection on child marriage in humanitarian settings is inconsistent and challenging, with complex ethical and safeguarding risks, as well as logistical concerns.¹¹ All humanitarian actors should act quickly to prevent, mitigate, and respond to all forms of gender-based violence in the first phase of a crisis, regardless of the presence or absence of gender-based violence data.¹² Yet, despite increased rhetoric and political commitments and an acknowledged responsibility to act even without existing prevalence or incidence data, persistent data gaps on gender-based violence in humanitarian settings and child marriage, in particular, have contributed to the continued under-prioritization and under-funding of the issue, leaving millions of adolescent girls at grave risk and duty-bearers unaccountable.

Despite recent progress, significant gaps persist in the existing literature for practitioners seeking to develop evidence-based programming to address and respond to child marriage. While there is a growing body of research on the causes of child marriage in humanitarian contexts, the existing studies tend to focus on high-level drivers, failing to capture more actionable risk factors and differentiate decision-making factors that may be impacted by humanitarian response programming.¹³ Save the Children, in partnership with the University of Berkley and Plan International, has sought to contribute to addressing these gaps through a qualitative study aiming to better understand the risk and protective factors, decision-making processes, service and support needs of girls and their caregivers that contribute to vulnerability to child marriage, and community perspectives on solutions for addressing and responding to child marriage in humanitarian settings.¹⁴ The study's findings emphasized that in humanitarian settings preventing violence within the home is essential to preventing child marriage in crisis. Further, the study highlighted that peers continue to have a strong influence in marriage decisions for adolescent girls in displacement settings, and significantly, that adolescent girls do often play a role in marriage decision-making. While many adolescent girls have little to no say in marriage decision-making, others have a significant say over whom and when to marry, including some who have full autonomy.¹⁵

In conflict-affected contexts, adolescent girls may be married as a perceived protective and pre-emptive measure, due to fears associated with armed actors and the sexual violence they perpetrate.¹⁶ The rise in child marriages associated with a conflict setting means that sexual violence could slip under the radar when an intimate partner perpetrates it.¹⁷

Beyond conflict-driven crises, climate change related impacts, like drought, famine, and climate-related forced displacement are driving risks of child marriage. Harmful gender stereotypes and norms that expect adolescent girls to perform unpaid domestic labour and care work mean that, in climate-induced disasters, girls are the first to be taken out of school to support with household and caring duties and are at increased risk of child marriage due to the economic impact of climate-related shocks on households.¹⁸ Significantly, as climate change has exacerbated global food insecurity, the phenomena of "famine brides" has been observed in food insecure settings. The term describes the increase in child, early and forced marriage of adolescent girls in the aftermath of famines driven by drought, floods, or today, COVID-19.¹⁹ The World Bank suggests that more than 143 million people could be internally displaced by 2050 in just three regions due to the slow-onset impact of climate change.²⁰

Migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking girls in transit are also at increased risk of gender-based violence, including child, early, and forced marriage.²¹ Migrating girls in temporary shelters, border camps and those in transit face the added risk of kidnappings and human trafficking as security and protection services en route and in crowded migrant camps are

¹¹ Save the Children, Addressing Data Gaps on Child, Early, and Forced Marriage in Humanitarian Settings- <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/addressing-data-gaps-child-early-and-forced-marriage-humanitarian-settings>

¹² Microsoft Word - GBV Prevalence data Query final.docx (gbvaor.net)

¹³ Child Marriage in Humanitarian Crises: Girls and parents speak out on risk and protective factors, decision-making, and solutions | Resource Centre (savethechildren.net)

¹⁴ Child Marriage in Humanitarian Crises: Girls and parents speak out on risk and protective factors, decision-making, and solutions | Resource Centre (savethechildren.net)

¹⁵ Child Marriage in Humanitarian Crises: Girls and parents speak out on risk and protective factors, decision-making, and solutions | Resource Centre (savethechildren.net)

¹⁶ For example, Girls Not Brides has reported a 20% rise in child marriage prevalence rates in Yemen and South Sudan as a result of conflicts.

¹⁷ UNFPA, 2020, Preventing and responding to child marriage in humanitarian settings: the global programme approach, <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/GP-2020-Child-Marriage-in-Humanitarian-Settings-FactSheet.pdf>

¹⁸ Save the Children, Let Girls Learn, 2021, [Let Girls Learn! | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](https://www.savethechildren.net/resources/let-girls-learn-2021)

¹⁹ Glinski, Allison, Magnolia Sexton, and Lis Meyers. *Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide*, 59. Washington D.C.: USAID, 2015.

https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USAID_CEFM_Resource-Guide.PDF

²⁰ Save the Children, Let Girls Learn, 2021, [Let Girls Learn! | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](https://www.savethechildren.net/resources/let-girls-learn-2021)

²¹ UNHCR. COVID-19 pandemic worsening gender inequalities for refugee women and girls. 2021.

often inadequate or non-existent.²² They also face a host of additional challenges, including as relates to meeting their essential health needs and access to continuous learning in displacement camps that are already under resourced and overcrowded. As forced migration is often politically contentious and origin, transit and destination states may be unwilling or unable to take responsibility for them, migrant girls are easy targets for gender-based violence that mostly goes undetected or unaddressed. Language barriers may also serve as a significant constraint preventing women and girls from reporting abuses, accessing aid, and seeking counselling and legal services while in transit or after they have reached their destination.²³

Noting the invisibility of girls in research, policy, and programming related to migration, Save the Children conducted a global series of action research putting girls at the center. Save the Children's Girls on the Move Initiative was conducted across different regions, including in Southern Africa, Latin America, and the Balkans, within existing Save the Children programming. Each regional study generated targeted evidence to address knowledge gaps in current literature and programmatic approaches, and engaged Save the Children teams to immediately strengthen ongoing interventions for girls in different stages of migration, notably during transit and arrival. A key common finding across regions emphasized that pervasive violence, particularly gender-based violence, was both a key driver and motivator of migration, as well as a noted impact. The study found that overlapping forms of violence often saturated all aspects of girls' lives, from threats, extortion, and kidnapping, to intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and femicide. Risks of gender-based violence, including in some cases child, early, and forced marriage, was a notable predominant factor driving decisions to migrate.²⁴

Health

Gender inequality and age-related factors intersect to serve as a barrier to adolescent girls' access to essential health services both within and outside humanitarian settings. For example, research estimates that 426,000 girls aged 0-14 in Africa die each year because they do not receive the same healthcare that is given to boys.²⁵ In humanitarian emergencies, increased pressure on health systems may further reduce access to routine health services.²⁶ Increased barriers to essential health services is particularly dangerous for adolescent girls facing different factors of inequality and whose needs may be more acute, including girls with disabilities, those living in poor households, or pregnant girls and child mothers who already face heightened barriers to critical services.²⁷

Life-saving health interventions for child survivors of gender-based violence are particularly essential in humanitarian settings. This includes, adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and information, menstrual health management information and supplies, and child- and gender-sensitive mental health and psychosocial support.²⁸

Early childbirth, when girls' bodies have not fully developed can lead to complications during birth, serious and permanent physical injuries and death.²⁹ Additionally, there is significant risk of infection, miscarriage, premature delivery, stillbirths, and long-term health issues such as obstetric fistula.³⁰ Significantly, the leading causes of death for girls aged 15-19 years are pregnancy- and childbirth-related complications, followed by self-harm.³¹ In humanitarian settings, the absence of adolescent-friendly information and sexual and reproductive health services, including obstetric services, critical equipment and supplies, and skilled health workers compounds the already high risks of adolescent pregnancy.³²

²² Save the Children, *Girls on the Move*, 2020: In Guatemala two-thirds of the children that reportedly went missing were girls. In El-Salvador 28.5% of adolescent mothers reported that their first sexual encounter was non-consensual. [Girls on the Move Research Series | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

²³ Save The Children, *Girls on the Move*, 2020, [Girls on the Move Research Series | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

²⁴ [Girls on the Move Research Series | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

²⁵ Anderson, Siwan & Ray, Debraj. « Working Paper. Excess Female Mortality in Africa. » United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, May 2017, Wider Working Paper 116/2017. <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/excess-female-mortality-africa>.

²⁶ Save the Children. "Yemen: Thousands of Children's Lives at Risk as Health Care Services Plummet." July 5, 2020. <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/aboutus/media-and-news/2020-press-releases/yemen-childrens-lives-at-risk-as-healthservices-plummet>

²⁷ UNFPA. "Young Persons With Disabilities. Global Study on Ending GenderBased Violence and Realising Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights." Published July 2018. <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/young-personsdisabilities>.

²⁸ [ASRH-factsheet-v6.pdf \(rygn.io\)](#)

²⁹ Save the Children, *What Girls Want*, 2021 (forthcoming).

³⁰ UNFPA, *Adolescent Girls in Disaster and Conflict: Interventions for Improving Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services*, p.8, 2016

³¹ WHO. "Global Health Estimates 2015: Deaths by Cause, Age, Sex, by Country and by Region, 2000-2015 ». Published in 2016. https://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/estimates_regional_2000_2015/en/

³² In Tapachula, a popular Mexican transit city, 10-20% of arriving girls seeking shelter are pregnant or young mothers. The camps they reach however are not equipped to meet their unique needs. Save the Children, *Girls on the Move*, 2020, [Girls on the Move Research Series | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

Education

Conflict, insecurity, and disaster have a disproportionate impact on girls' access to education and a safe environment for learning.³³ Prior to the pandemic, nearly one third of out-of-school children – an estimated 104 million – lived in countries affected by emergencies.³⁴ Girls affected by conflict and forced displacement are more than twice as likely to be out of school than boys.³⁵

In at least 21 countries between 2015 and 2019, girls were directly targeted or more exposed to risks such as attacks in and around schools because of their gender. Attacks on girls' schools are often a direct attack on girls who step outside of restrictive gender norms and expectations. In some cases, violent extremist groups have clearly stated their rationale for attacking girls' schools – for example, to warn girls not to go to school, demand that teachers and parents close girls' schools, or to try to restrict mobility and dress codes for women teachers and girls attending schools.³⁶ Some of these attacks have been driven by entrenched harmful norms around gender and girls' roles and value. In such settings, a common perception may be that girls' value derives solely from their marital and reproductive capacities or care-taking roles, and that they should be confined to the private sphere.³⁷

Adolescent girls who have had their education or learning disrupted face increased protection risks, including sexual violence, violent repression of their education, recruitment and use by armed forces or groups, abduction, and child, early and forced marriage.^{38 39} Recent Save the Children research has further reinforced well-established evidence that breaking down barriers to education for adolescent girls is as critical as ever in preventing and responding to child marriage in humanitarian settings.⁴⁰ While primary and secondary schools operate in many formalized displacement contexts, adolescent girls often face a number of barriers to accessing them, including school fees, lack of menstrual hygiene products, long distances to schools, and discrimination against married or pregnant girls. The harmful gender norms driving disruptions in adolescent girls' access to education in humanitarian settings are often a direct reflection of gender inequality and discrimination experienced by girls outside of crises.

Food Insecurity and Malnutrition

Gender norms and lack of awareness about the nutrition needs of women and girls often means that men and boys are prioritized in food insecure settings.⁴¹ When food is scarce, women and girls eat last and eat less.⁴² According to FAO, while women experiencing heightened vulnerability are at greater risk of malnutrition than men, more girls die of malnutrition than boys.⁴³ Malnutrition poses a variety of additional risk to adolescent girls, including weakening their immune systems making them more susceptible to infections, and impacting their capacity to survive childbirth. In addition, children born of malnourished women and girls are more likely to have cognitive impairments and higher risk of disease throughout their lives.⁴⁴ Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition because of the increased rate at which they are growing and their bodies are changing.⁴⁵

There is also strong correlation between the age adolescent girls are married and the level of food insecurity in their households, with the age of marriage declining as food security declines.⁴⁶ In some of the countries with the highest child marriage rates in the world, it is a common practice for families to resort to marrying their daughters off for

³³ Save the Children, Let Girls Learn, 2021. [Let Girls Learn! | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](https://www.savethechildren.net/resource-centre/let-girls-learn)

³⁴ UNICEF, More than 104 million children and young people – 1 in 3 – are out of school in countries affected by war or natural disasters (press release), 18 September 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/pressreleases/more-104-million-children-and-young-people-1-3-are-out-of-school-in-countries-affected-by-war>

³⁵ UNESCO (2015) Education for All Global Monitoring Report, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233557>

³⁶ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (22 November 2019) 'Girls targeted when schools attacked, impacting lives, education', <http://www.protectingeducation.org/news/girls-targeted-when-schools-attacked-impacting-lives-education>

³⁷ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (22 November 2019) 'Girls targeted when schools attacked, impacting lives, education', <http://www.protectingeducation.org/news/girls-targeted-when-schools-attacked-impacting-lives-education>

³⁸ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2020) Education Under Attack, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2020_full.pdf

³⁹ J Freccero and A Whiting (2018) Toward an End to Child Marriage: Lessons from research and practice in development and humanitarian sectors, Save the Children, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/toward-end-child-marriage-lessons-research-and-practice-development-and-humanitarian-sectors>; D Mazurana and A Marshak (2019) Addressing Data Gaps on Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Humanitarian Settings, discussion draft, Save the Children, https://blog.savethechildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/F_STC_union_online_dec19.pdf

⁴⁰ [Child Marriage in Humanitarian Crises: Girls and parents speak out on risk and protective factors, decision-making, and solutions | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15094/pdf/nutrizione-le-ragazze-misure-integrate-e-multisetoriali.pdf)

⁴¹ <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15094/pdf/nutrizione-le-ragazze-misure-integrate-e-multisetoriali.pdf>, pg. 18;

⁴² [In focus: Women and the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\): SDG 2: Zero hunger | UN Women – Headquarters](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/women/)

⁴³ <http://www.fao.org/3/al184e/al184e00.pdf>

⁴⁴ NCBI, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3296368/>

⁴⁵ PRB, <https://www.prb.org/nutritionofwomenandadolescentgirlswyhitmatters/>

⁴⁶ *Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia: Study Results from Bangladesh and Nepal*, 45. John Hopkins, UNFPA, UNICEF, WRC, 2020. <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Child-Marriage-Humanitarian-Settings-South-Asia-102020.pdf>

resources in order to cope with food insecurity.⁴⁷ A recent qualitative and participatory study with adolescent girls living in refugee settlements revealed that girls viewed financial and food insecurity, not being enrolled in school, safety issues and vulnerability to rape and sexual abuse as the main drivers for marrying early.⁴⁸

Funding Gaps

Ongoing and glaring funding gaps for gender equality and the prevention, mitigation, and response of gender-based violence and gender-sensitive child protection in humanitarian settings are discouraging evidence of accountable failures to girls living in humanitarian settings. Rhetoric and even public demonstrations of political will to address gender inequality and the manifestations of such inequalities as outlined above mean little without robust funding to back it up. According to global funding data, gender-based violence accounted for only 0.12 percent of all humanitarian funding over a three year period reviewed.⁴⁹ Joint research from UN Women and UNFPA, published last summer, found that the combined effect of low levels of funding requested and received signified a double threat for humanitarian programming targeting the specific needs of women and girls. In other words, the report found that “not only is the amount of funding requested for women and girls falling significantly short of the overall request, but it is then disproportionately underfunded.”⁵⁰

National level budgets can be further evidence of ongoing accountability gaps when it comes to girls’ rights. Save the Children has conducted a first of its kind budget and policy analysis to assess the implementation of political commitments made on ending child marriage in two West African countries, Niger and Sierra Leone.⁵¹ Noting that government budgets are a reflection of a government’s priorities, the research emphasized that adequate budgeting was a key tool for government to turn political commitments into concrete interventions and found that the lack of robust funding to implement political commitments constituted a significant gap in accountability to adolescent girls on ending child marriage, specifically. Significantly, this research also highlighted the ways that protracted humanitarian crises, or sudden onset emergencies, like the COVID-19 pandemic, can negatively impact potential or existing budget allocations targeting issues facing girls. In the report’s two case studies, both Niger and Sierra Leone have been impacted by various forms of humanitarian crisis, including national and transnational conflict, forced displacement crises, as well as public health emergencies.

Best Practices and Ongoing Efforts to Ensure Accountability to Adolescent Girls Living in Humanitarian Settings

Contributing to the research and evidence-base:

Save the Children seeks to ensure that all relevant duty-bearers are held accountable to adolescent girls living in humanitarian settings, including government, donors, and UN actors. Save the Children’s contributions include the production and analysis of new data on the experiences of children, particularly adolescent girls, living in humanitarian settings. As referenced above, recent substantive and technical research studies of particular relevance include:

- [Child Marriage in Humanitarian Crises: Girls and parents speak out on risk and protective factors, decision-making, and solutions | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)
- [The Global Girlhood Report 2020: How COVID-19 is putting progress in peril | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)
- [Ending Child Marriage in West Africa: Enhancing policy implementation and budgeting, Sierra Leone and Niger | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)
- [Girls on the Move Research Series | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)
- [Let Girls Learn! | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)
- [Beyond the Shadow Pandemic: Protecting a generation of girls from gender-based violence through COVID-19 to recovery | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)
- [Weapon of War: Sexual violence against children in conflict | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)
- [Stop the War on Children 2020: Gender matters | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

⁴⁷ South Sudan." Girls Not Brides. <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/south-sudan>.

⁴⁸ Freccero, Julie, and Audrey Taylor, Child Marriage in Humanitarian Crises, 2021.

⁴⁹ IRC research, 2020

⁵⁰ [funding-for-geewg-in-humanitarian-programming-en.pdf \(unwomen.org\)](#)

⁵¹ [Ending Child Marriage in West Africa: Enhancing policy implementation and budgeting, Sierra Leone and Niger | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

- Gender, Age, and Conflict: Addressing the Different Needs of Children, [SC-Gender-Age-and-Conflict-report-final.pdf \(savethechildren.ca\)](#)
- [Addressing Data Gaps on Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Humanitarian Settings | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

Technical and Financial Support for Adolescent Girls' Meaningful Participation

Children, including adolescent girls, have the right to participate in decision-making for matters that affect their lives and their communities, and nearly every country in the world has committed to delivering on this right. The promotion, protection, and fulfillment of this right is the collective responsibility of all human rights and humanitarian actors. However, there are very few governance institutions or other decision-making spaces with safe and meaningful participatory mechanisms for children to engage in policymaking, program design, or accountability mechanisms. Children's participation is about having the opportunity to express views, having these views taken seriously and having the opportunity to influence decision-making. It is the informed and willing involvement of children in any matter concerning them directly or indirectly. This includes children of different ages, genders, and abilities, and those children most marginalized in a society.⁵² In order for children's participation to be meaningful and ethical, it must meet the 9 basic requirements outlined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Where such spaces and mechanisms to facilitate children's participation do exist, special measures to ensure the inclusion of girls is rare. Save the Children strives to provide technical and financial support for adolescent girls' meaningful participation in decision-making and accountability processes through:

- **Development and dissemination of child-friendly tools and information.** See for example, an illustrated guide for children on [Ending Child Marriage in West Africa: Enhancing policy implementation and budgeting, Sierra Leone and Niger | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#), for use by child-led groups engaged in ending child marriage advocacy with their respective governments.
- **Access to decision-making platforms and spaces.** Save the Children has supported adolescent girls' participation at international, regional, and national level policy and accountability spaces, including for example, at the annual opening of the UN General Assembly, at the Commission on the Status of Women, at the Security Council's annual open debate on children and armed conflict, during relevant Human Rights Council sessions, and at the High-Level Political Forum to monitor progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Ongoing advocacy for institutionalized and systemic inclusion of children's meaningful participation in decision-making platforms.** See our recent brief with concrete recommendations for policy-makers, private sector, and civil society [here](#).

Save the Children Processes and Protocols

Save the Children recognizes our role and responsibility as a child rights focused humanitarian response actor and is deeply committed to leveraging our technical expertise, global reach, visibility, and voice to prevent, mitigate and respond to the needs of children living in humanitarian crises, including adolescent girls.

- **Save the Children requires that all priority responses conduct a gender analysis and develop a Gender Action Plan that outlines actions for mainstreaming gender, and mitigating, preventing and responding to gender-based violence.** We have also created new tools and resources for humanitarian programmatic colleagues to better mainstream gender in our efforts, including a training module and mandated use of a gender equality marker for all humanitarian proposals.
- **Save the Children has taken proactive measures, learning from previous guidance, to address the gender balance in our humanitarian response teams.** A 2020 assessment found that 71% of Save the Children's humanitarian response staff are male and 29% are female, with some caveats on the availability and accuracy of this data. Save the Children is currently working on piloting a test series of approaches to recruit, retain, and promote more women in our humanitarian response efforts.
- **All of Save the Children's priority humanitarian responses are mandated to apply a set of 15 Gender and GBV Minimum Actions** on which they will be held to account. In addition, all response plans will be informed by the recently launched Gender and GBV in Humanitarian Framework. Our intention

⁵² See Save the Children, *Applying the 9 Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Child Participation during COVID-19*, 2020.

is to drive gender equality both internally and in the communities we work in with an increasing focus on adolescent girls' protection and empowerment.

- In order to address children's right to participate as key stakeholders in decision-making on their lives, **Save the Children piloted and rolled out real time reviews of response efforts that engaged children as key participants.** Following a pilot in Nepal, the initiative developed guidance and a process containing simple tools for engaging children in real time reviews. Also embedded in the initiative was an internal advocacy and awareness building component to ensure that colleagues across the organization recognized children as vital stakeholders in real time reviews of humanitarian responses. A second pilot was completed in Uganda and has become standard practice in all real time reviews it now conducts, including in Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and the Rohingya refugee response real time review.⁵³

Recommendations

All human rights and humanitarian actors, including governments, donors, civil society organizations, and UN actors should urgently address and prioritize the promotion and protection of the human rights of, and accountability to, adolescent girls living in humanitarian settings, by:

- **Systematic inclusion, consultation, and partnering with adolescent girls and girl-led groups and networks, to leverage their agency, innovative solutions, and ensure their safe and meaningful participation in all decisions and accountability processes affecting them.** Support girls to raise complaints of violations of their rights directly to Human Rights Council and humanitarian processes and mechanisms, including at sub-cluster level. Adolescent girls, and girl-led groups and networks, require child-friendly and gender-sensitive information and tools, as well as increased technical and financial support for their knowledge and skills building, so that they may safely and meaningfully engage in decision-making spaces. Adolescent girls also require safe spaces and platforms for peer-to-peer interactions and consultations.
- **Address ongoing data gaps on child marriage in humanitarian settings, to the extent feasible while adhering to established data collection safety and ethics standards.** This includes through the development of new data collection tools where necessary, through the improvement and enhancement of existing data collection tools across humanitarian actors, and through systematic data mining of existing resources to more comprehensively understand the issue, address prevention and response needs, and hold all duty-bearers accountable to girls living in humanitarian settings.
- **Prioritize adequate human resources and expertise.** Ensure consistent inclusion of specialist experts on both gender equality and child rights within investigatory teams and other human rights accountability mechanisms and processes, as well as adequate training and tools. Further, ensure and increase the presence of female humanitarian response staff, regularly reporting disaggregated data on staffing balance.
- **Ensure that all humanitarian needs assessments and humanitarian response plans are informed by an intersectional gender analysis and the collection and analysis of sex-, age-, and diversity-disaggregated data.** Age disaggregation should highlight the different stages of child development, and ensure that very young and older adolescent girls are visible in the data (girls 10-14 and girls 15-19, respectively).
- **Continue to implement and report on all commitments made** during the “2019 Oslo Pledging Conference on Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises” and the “Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies”, as well as new commitments under the Generation Equality Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality.
- **Develop and execute humanitarian policies, practices, and programming tailored to the specific needs and priorities of adolescent girls across all clusters and areas of responsibility,**

⁵³ [Innovating Around Accountability: A review of innovative initiatives in humanitarian contexts | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](https://www.savethechildren.net/resources/innovating-around-accountability-a-review-of-innovative-initiatives-in-humanitarian-contexts)

including gender-based violence, child protection, health, and education in accordance with the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action, and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, among other international standards on education in emergencies and gender-based violence in emergencies.

- **Endorse, implement and support the Safe Schools Declaration to ensure that all students and educators can learn and teach in safety.** States and other institutions should provide nondiscriminatory assistance for all survivors of attacks on education, regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, or other attributes, while taking into account their distinct needs and experiences based on gender and potential vulnerabilities such as disability and forced displacement.

The Human Rights Council and its mechanisms should:

- **Ensure that legal and policy frameworks and all accountability mechanisms recognize and incorporate an age and gender lens.** While the unique needs of children merit a standalone mandate with dedicated political space and resources, consistent application of common definitions, and normative language that is age and gender-sensitive would facilitate complementarity and synergies across efforts. This includes within the:
 - Mandates of all future investigations and inquiries conducted on behalf of Commissions of Inquiry, Fact-Finding Missions and other accountability mechanisms;
 - Human Rights Council Resolutions;
 - Reports and briefings by UN Special Mandate Holders; and,
 - Recommendations to UN Member States under the Universal Periodic Review.

Humanitarian donors, including donor governments, and relevant inter-agency actors, should:

- **Urgently increase multi-year, sustainable, and flexible funding for standalone gender equality in humanitarian settings programming, as well as gender-based violence prevention, mitigation, and response and gender-sensitive child protection.** This should include funding for child and gender-sensitive mental health and psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive health services, and information for child survivors of violence.
- **Invest in both technical support and flexible financial resources for women’s civil society organizations providing frontline prevention and response services and information in humanitarian settings.** Humanitarian donors should adhere to commitments under the Grand Bargain, including ensuring that at least 25 percent of funding goes directly to local and national responders.
- **Mandate recipients of donor funding to ensure a rapid gender analysis and sex and gender, age, and diversity-disaggregated data informs strategies and activities throughout the program cycle,** from design and implementation through evaluation. All proposed projects should be gender-sensitive at a minimum.