



Until we are all equal



# Our Voices for our Tomorrow

Youth reimagining a gender-equal future

Research findings and youth demands for the Summit of the Future

#FutureGirlsWant

unicef   
for every child

# Foreword

By Kathleen Sherwin,  
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The UN Summit of the Future presents a once in a generation opportunity to reaffirm existing commitments to achieve gender equality and a better world for all.

This new participatory research presents the voices of adolescent girls and young people, their vision and recommendations for a gender-equal future. Their message is clear: Policy makers must listen to adolescent girls and include them in decision making in a meaningful, inclusive, and empowering way. Policy makers need to act now: if current trends continue not only will this generation of girls be left behind, but also many future generations.

The poem 'Whispers of Resilience' by 22-year-old Margaret from Sub-Saharan Africa highlights the challenges girls continue to face worldwide. But the poem, like this report, is also a story of resilience, of determined optimism and young people's collective power to transform the world. Let's amplify the voices of adolescent girls as essential co-creators of the future we desire to realise together.



## Whispers of resilience

In shadows cast by fate's cruel hand,  
A tale unfolds of strength and stand.  
A girl of twenty-two dreams untold,  
Denied the chance, her story unfolds.

No school to grace, her parents plea,  
Poverty's grasp, a harsh decree.  
A heinous act, injustices sways,  
Yet her spirit resilient, forever stays.

Marriage forced in youth's tender bloom,  
Pregnancy lost in a darkened gloom.  
Complications birthed sorrow's tide,  
Yet, she weathers on with strength.

Unemployment's grip, a cruel demand,  
Financial woes, an unyielding strand.  
A community where justice sleeps,  
Injustices thrive, the darkness seeps.

She questions how to rise, oppressed,  
No platform found, yet she is blessed,  
Girls' Pact, a beacon in the night  
A shared endeavour, a courageous fight.

In 2054, she dreams to see,  
Her children's world, a brighter plea.  
Educations' doors wide open flung,  
For every girl, where dreams are sung.

Climate's tale, she longs to share,  
A world awakened, showing care.  
A future where hearts are spoken.

In the echo of her resilient voice,  
A symphony of change, a hopeful choice,  
Against oppression, united they sway,  
In Girls' Pact's embrace, a brighter day.

A poem written by Margaret,  
22, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa

By Lauren Rumble, Associate  
Director, Gender Equality, UNICEF

For far too long, adolescent girls – their rights, their priorities, their needs and experiences - have been sidelined when it comes to having the space and being heard in policy decisions that impact their lives - from having voice in community-level school policy-making, to national policy on adolescent health services, to regional and global decision points on the Sustainable Development Goals. UNICEF is delighted to collaborate with Plan International on this important report and to shine a spotlight on the importance of listening to and acting on adolescent girls and young people's voices. The report powerfully reinforces what we heard in a recent digital survey UNICEF rolled out on girls' rights, reaching over half a million young people. Education remains a critical but under-developed tool for advancing gender equality and young people's right to education about their bodies and their rights – and gender gaps when it comes to STEM skills, digital access and the transition to decent, productive and safe work remain inexcusably stark. Access to health, especially sexual and reproductive health rights, is far from realised and under attack in many



contexts. Child marriage, gender-based violence and inequality around care work remain pervasive and action under-funded. Margaret's poem, below, speaks to the importance of poverty, too, in exacerbating these forms of gender inequality.

Yet, like Margaret, girls around the world are dreaming in visionary ways about a different future, and one that they believe is fully realisable. We are with them – if we come together, we can make this vision a reality: a world where girls are free of all forms of violence, child marriage and FGM; where they have the education, skills, health and nutrition services that enable them to thrive; and where they have a seat and a say at the table about their future. Where girls are not just participating, but also leading change for a better world. A different world – a more just, prosperous and safer one for all. And we have the evidence and experience about what works to make this a reality – with the right financing and political will. As world leaders come together at the Summit of the Future, let girls' vision be a call to action to make this so. It is within our reach.

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# Summary

This report presents young people's thoughts, worries, ideas, vision, and recommendations for a gender-equal future. It provides a foundation for informed discussion, generating new participatory evidence on what concrete steps we can take to achieve gender equality and positive futures for everyone. Plan International conducted participatory workshops and an online survey with more than **100 young people from over 35 countries** representing all regions of the world so that the voices of adolescent girls and young people emerge loud and clear during this year's UN Summit of the Future. The overall

objective of the study is to situate youth at the centre of discussions and to highlight the need for a gender-transformative approach to shaping tomorrow's world. The challenges and anxieties of this generation of young people, are exacerbated for girls and young women by persistent gender discrimination, lack of opportunity and the too-common experience of gender-based violence. They know what needs to change and the Summit of the Future provides today's youth with a unique opportunity to shape a new world not only for them but for generations to come.



18-year-old youth leader, Ecuador © Plan International

## Key findings

Adolescent girls and young people who participated in the research are worried about the persistent barriers and gender-based discrimination that threaten girls' rights, opportunities and wellbeing. They worry about the continuing violence against girls and women, early marriage and forced union, a lack of quality sexuality education, unequal responsibilities for care work, and gender discrimination at work. They are concerned about the rollback of rights, far right movements, the resistance to change by some men and boys and the new risks posed by technology and the internet. Young people feel unsafe in a world of climate emergencies, conflicts, wars, and insecurity, and are frustrated by insufficient government efforts to advance girls' rights and gender equality.

Young research participants want a future where gender equality is not just a goal, but a reality that permeates every aspect of society, where stereotypes and biases rooted in racism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression are dismantled. A world where boys are raised to respect and value girls as equals, where girls and women live free from violence and harassment, marry and have children when they are ready, or are free to choose not to. They want access to comprehensive sexuality and gender education, and equal opportunities in terms of education, workplace and political leadership.

They imagine a future where humanity cares for the planet and where technology is used as a tool for inclusion and empowerment, bridging digital divides and providing opportunities for all girls to thrive.

The youth research participants are confident that they can bring about change and want to be involved in decision making. Despite being concerned about where the world is headed young people choose to be optimistic.

- **75 per cent** of the survey participants believe that gender equality will be achieved in their lifetime.
- **90 per cent** believe they will influence significant improvements in gender equality in the next 30 years.

Adolescent girls and young people see the Summit of the Future as a key opportunity – a chance to reform the multilateral system, reaffirm existing commitments to respond to global challenges and ensure gender is a central pillar of these discussions.

- **85 per cent** of survey participants feel positive about the Summit contributing to significant improvements in gender equality.

**These improvements are vital:  
if current trends continue not only will this generation of  
girls be left behind, but also many future generations.**

“I found myself standing in a place I had always dreamed of reaching in my future. Yet, what I witnessed surpassed mere personal aspirations. In that moment, I beheld something far greater than gender; I saw humanity itself. I glimpsed the potential for prosperity within each and every individual. This realisation dawned upon me as a result of our collective efforts to break down existing barriers and pave the way for boundless opportunities to flourish in the days to come.” Azoo\*, 21, Female, South Asia, Workshop

\* All research participant names have been changed: to protect their identities.

## Calls to action

Adolescents and youth participating in the research demand that policy makers:

- Invest in girls' education at all levels, particularly in gender-transformative and comprehensive sexuality education and digital skills
- Involve young people, including girls, in decision-making processes in a systematic, meaningful, inclusive, and empowering way
- Reaffirm commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights, turning pledges into concrete action to urgently deliver on promises to achieve gender equality and a better world for all.

**In any attempt to reimagine the future, a gender-transformative approach must be applied and adolescent girls and young people need to be at the centre of these discussions.**

“What I speak today will impact tomorrow, for my future begins with my voice today. Please, listen to our voices as young people, for the decisions you make today will impact our lives tomorrow.” Furaha, 16, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

## The Girls' Pact for the Future

The UN Summit of the Future will deliver a Pact for the Future, concrete commitments to meet the challenges ahead. Young people must be included in these plans – it is after all their future. To ensure their voices are heard, as part of this research, adolescent girls and young people aged 15-24 from around the world developed the *Girls' Pact for the Future* sharing their concerns with the current state of the world, their vision of a positive future with gender equality at its heart, and clear and actionable recommendations for policy makers to achieve gender equality.

You can download the *Girls' Pact* here: [plan-international.org/girls-pact](https://plan-international.org/girls-pact)



## Introduction

The UN Summit of the Future will produce an action-oriented outcome document called the Pact for the Future,<sup>1</sup> accompanied by a Declaration on Future Generations<sup>2</sup> and a Global Digital Compact,<sup>3</sup> endorsed by participating countries and outlining the way ahead. It presents a once in a generation opportunity to reaffirm existing commitments – the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals – and reform the multilateral system to better respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

**But without ensuring gender is a central pillar of these discussions, we risk recreating a system that does not deliver for girls and young women.**

As stated in the zero draft of the Pact for the Future,<sup>4</sup> Heads of State and Government are committed to safeguarding the future of present generations and those yet to be born. Although gender equality and women's and girls' rights have not received a dedicated chapter in the document, these issues are mentioned throughout. The Pact reaffirms its commitment to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – to date, the most important document for women's and girls' rights – as well as to eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and achieving gender equality. It highlights the importance of women's and girls' participation in technology development, conflict resolution, and leadership in political structures at national and international levels. Moreover, it connects the realisation of women's and girls' human rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, to the achievement of global peace, prosperity and sustainable development.

## Where we are today

The current status of women and girls in the world reveals the magnitude of the challenge ahead of us to truly meet such promises. Eighty-five per cent of countries across the globe are not on track to achieve gender equality, or the Sustainable Development Goals. Many are going backwards.<sup>5</sup>

- None of the SDG 5 indicators are met or nearly met, and neither are most of the gender-specific indicators of the other SDGs.<sup>6</sup>
- Despite commitments to reach the most marginalised and ‘leave no one behind’, member states have not always sustained their efforts.<sup>7</sup>
- Girls and young women still suffer significant inequalities.<sup>8</sup>
- They experience extreme poverty at higher rates,<sup>9</sup> and are more than twice as likely than young men to be out of education, employment, or training.<sup>10</sup>
- Despite progress in education,<sup>11</sup> rates of completion of upper secondary level for girls are running at 60 per cent<sup>12</sup> and the number of out of school and illiterate girls is unacceptable, especially in marginalised communities.<sup>13</sup> Globally, there is an estimated 129 million girls and young women currently out of school.<sup>14</sup>
- Gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue,<sup>15</sup> and child, early, and forced marriage and unions continue to threaten millions of girls’ rights and wellbeing.<sup>16</sup>
- Harmful gender norms and stereotypes perpetuate discrimination and limit girls’ autonomy, particularly in matters related to sexual and reproductive health and rights,<sup>17</sup> and technology access.<sup>18</sup>
- In the face of increased conflicts<sup>19</sup> and extreme events due to climate change,<sup>20</sup> girls’ vulnerabilities are worsening significantly.<sup>21</sup>
- With anti-rights movements gaining traction and targeting education systems, legislative frameworks, and feminist activism,<sup>22</sup> the rollback of women’s and girls’ rights<sup>23</sup> poses concerning threats to the advancement of gender equality and leaves girls’ future at a pivotal juncture.

**At the current pace, it will take us 131 years to close the gender gap.<sup>24</sup>**



As stated by the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, in Our Common Agenda,<sup>25</sup> ‘what’ we want to collectively achieve has been clearly outlined. It is time for world leaders, in partnership with relevant stakeholders, which must include today’s young people, to come up with strategies on ‘how’ to make such aspirations a reality.

A number of helpful reports, analyses and predictions on the future of gender equality have been produced.<sup>26</sup> What is still missing are youth voices articulated in safe and welcoming spaces, properly heard by world leaders, and used to inform and influence the decisions that will ultimately shape the future of adolescent girls and young women.

This research project aims to bring youth voices to the forefront in discussions and decisions around

the UN Summit of the Future. Through an online survey and virtual workshops using participatory futures methods, over 100 young people reflected on two key research questions:

- Should trends continue, what would the future look like for adolescent girls and young women?
- What concrete steps can world leaders take to positively impact adolescent girls’ and young women’s futures and advance gender equality?

This report and the accompanying *Girls’ Pact for the Future* is young people’s collective response to these questions. It discusses potential scenarios for the future based on current trends, pictures what they would like the future to look like, and pinpoints how they think the world can get there.

**Adolescent girls and young people call on policy makers at the Summit of the Future to include them in the decision-making process and to step up global commitments to gender equality and a gender-transformative approach.**

## Methodology

The research for this report was carried out using a variety of methods:

- **Literature Review and Horizon Scanning**
- An **online survey** involving 124 15–24-year-olds from all regions of the world who are members of Plan’s youth networks and the UNICEF Global Girls Advisory Group.
- Five three-hour long **online workshops** with 44 youth participants from different Plan youth groups – seven young men, 37 young women. The process involved the drafting of a *Girls’ Pact for the Future* with key messages and recommendations for policy makers worldwide.
- **Girls Pact Validation Workshops** with 34 youth participants (30 girls and young women; 4 boys and young men) aged 15-24 from all regions of the world.

The methodology was participatory and collaborative, following *UNICEF Youth Foresight Playbook: Designing a Youth-centred Journey to the Future* – co-designed and co-facilitated by the young people taking part in the research. Consent/assent was sought from all participants and parental consent was sought from those under 18. All names have been changed.

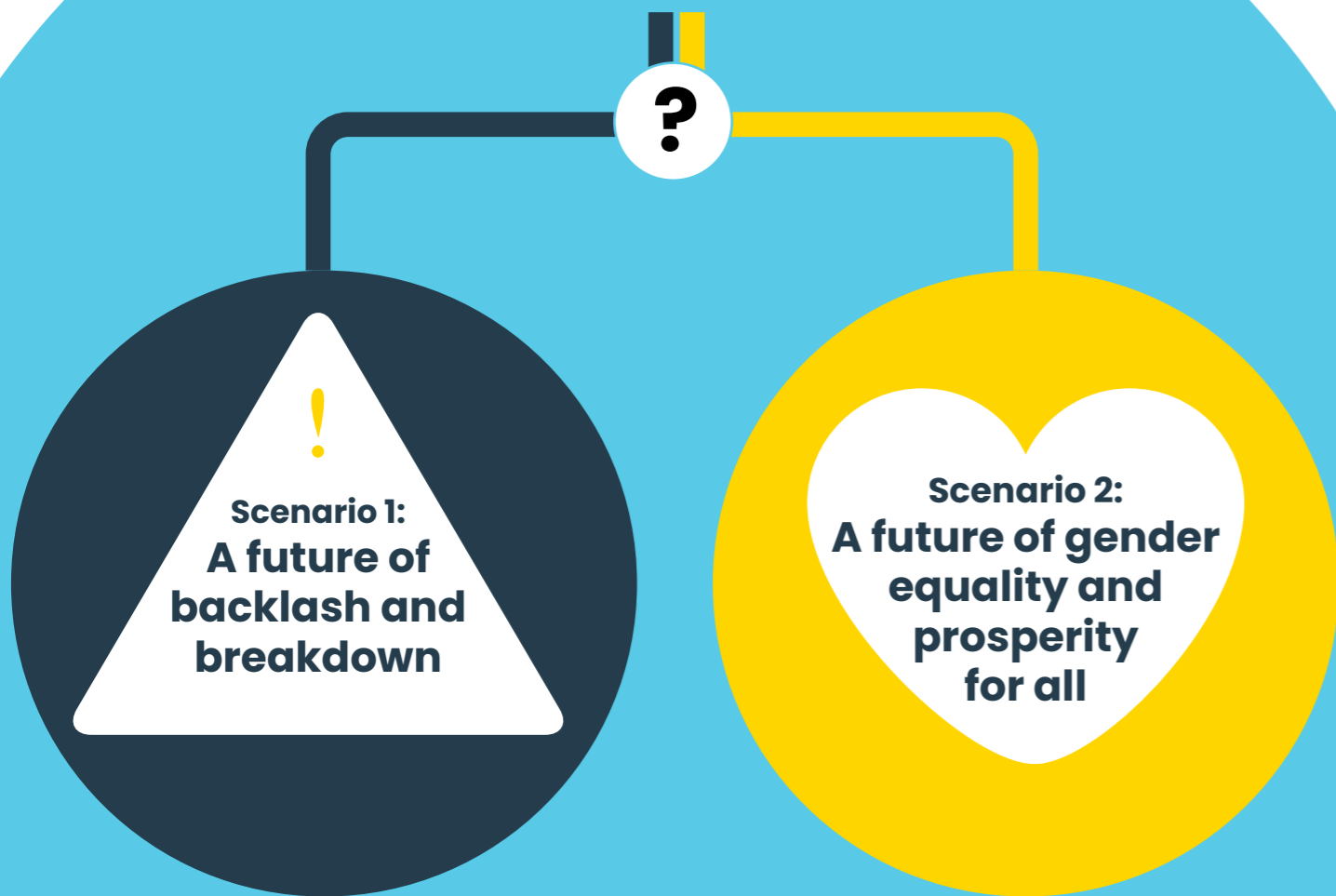
A more detailed methodology can be found in [the annex](#).

# The way ahead: choosing the future

No one really knows what the future will look like. But based on the current state of the world and recent changes concerning gender issues and girls' rights, youth believe that humanity is at a crossroad. If current negative trends continue, the next generation of girls will face significant backlash and the ripple effects will be suffered by the entire society. However, adolescent girls and young people can also see that the seeds of a much more positive future are already part of the present and, if substantially nurtured, could lead to a gender-transformative future with incredible benefits for all.

By reflecting on the implications of changes currently on the horizon, and studying emerging trends, what tomorrow might look like becomes clearer: dependent always on the choices we make today. As part of the research for this report, to examine opposing possibilities and develop two diverse blueprints, workshop participants created a series of Futures Wheels exploring the potential consequences of current developments. Young people can see a pathway full of hope and one that leads to despair.

As a world leader, which future do you choose?



## Scenario 1: A future of backlash and breakdown

⚠️ With the prominent presence of anti-rights movements everywhere, **gender and sex education are increasingly forbidden at schools**. Girls and boys no longer learn how to deal with adolescence-related body changes. Instead, they become victims of misinformation whenever they seek knowledge about their bodies, puberty, and adolescence online. Greater numbers of girls and young women get pregnant at an early age and become sick with sexually transmitted infections. As a result, they face stigma within their families, communities, and friendship circles, and are more likely to drop out of school. Without support, and struggling to find appropriate healthcare services, they become more vulnerable to intimate-partner violence and poverty.

“If women don't have access to education, they will not have political power, their needs will not be addressed. Therefore, they will be subject to oppression by decision makers and politicians.”  
Emily, 22, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Workshop

“[If girls speak up in social media, there will be], people trolling about their content and people will bully them. Because the society is not ready to accept those things. If they don't leave social media, it will affect their personal life, and their mental health, and that will impact their education.”

Kunal, 22, Male, South Asia, Workshop

⚠️ As the backlash also extends to legislation, **harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting are again acceptable around the world** and generate a sense of community among traditional leaders. Abortion is increasingly criminalised, with a rise in death rates occurring both from unsafe abortion and adolescent pregnancies. Protective legislation against gender-based violence has disappeared or been watered down, and the cycle of violence continues to escalate at home and in public spaces, increasing the number of femicides and orphan children. Girls of colour and those identifying as lesbian, bisexual or transgender face heightened risks of discrimination and violence. Women and girls who have managed to survive face a significant toll on their mental health and wellbeing. They are increasingly disempowered and more afraid in public spaces. They rarely speak up.

⚠️ Some girls and young women try to use social media to campaign for gender equality and the protection of women and girls against violence. However, **the more vocal they get, the higher the level of online abuse and harassment**. The intensity of the threats,

combined with family and community shaming and public attacks from policy makers, has a big impact on their mental health and makes them leave social media and stop advocating for their rights. This reinforces negative social beliefs that further discourage girls from being online and increase the gender digital gap.

⚠️ Now, **girls' voices are no longer heard.**

They are absent from the design of policies and technologies. The development of new programmes, services, tools and devices do not reflect girls' needs, experiences and preferences, perpetuating barriers for new generations to be socially and digitally included.

Without gender-related public debates, society reduces girls and women to roles in the household; they are increasingly burned out by unpaid care and domestic work, don't get the chance to learn and exercise critical thinking, and become more susceptible to manipulation by partners, politicians and the media.

⚠️ Because anti-rights and anti-democratic agendas coincide, the number of internal and external conflicts escalate all over the world. Increased poverty, inequality, and instability lead to more **gender-based violence** in all its forms, including sexual violence against women and girls used as a weapon of war. They are particularly targeted in places where women are the heads of households, as this destabilises the entire family and community. With climate change hotspots rapidly increasing, the situation gets worse.

“**Conflict and climate change will lead to poverty. When poverty increases, it will lead to a financial burden to some families. A lot of parents will resolve to marry their children at a very young age in order to solve the financial issue.**”

Catherine, age unknown, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Workshop

⚠️ Some countries use inefficient protective measures against inappropriate male behaviour by creating physical barriers between women and men, girls and boys, in public spaces – an inadequate response to a growing problem. Amid increasing emergencies, governments undermine girls' specific needs, refrain from investing in health and education, and focus on guaranteeing populations' mere survival. **Going to school has become a dangerous endeavour** that girls, especially, are unwilling to pursue, and the adverse ripple effects are intergenerational.

⚠️ Given the harsh local and global context, most women no longer want to have children, but they do not have a choice. **Forced to get pregnant and give birth**, they raise their children on their own – with men abandoning the household or being deployed to conflict zones. Children grow up in poorer, more unstable, and violent environments. The population increase puts more pressure on the environment.

⚠️ Facing adversity, families and the girls themselves seek child marriage as a last resort. Financially dependent on adult partners, adolescent girls experience the overburden of domestic work, domestic violence, trauma, early pregnancy, poor access to healthcare services,

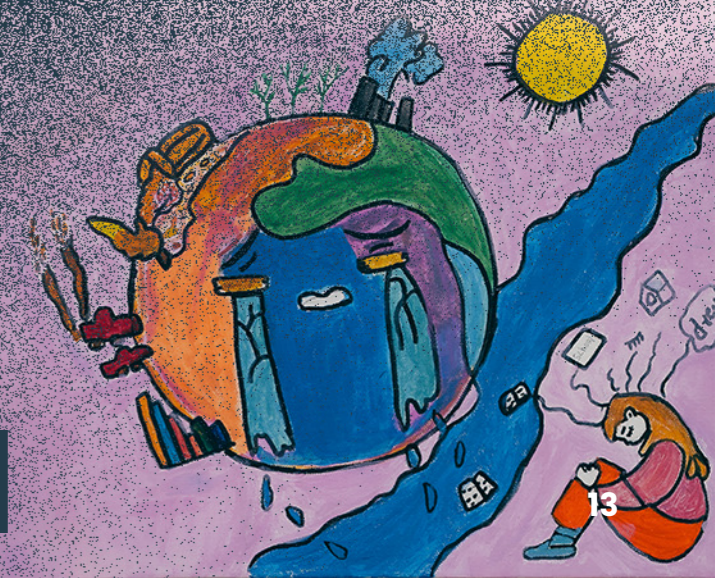
and high rates of maternal mortality. **Not only are their health and lives at risk, but also their children, who become vulnerable to poverty and malnutrition and are more likely to experience child marriage themselves.**

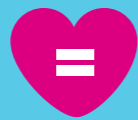
⚠️ Without access to quality education and falling behind in technology, girls struggle to develop critical thinking and access online information and alternative learning platforms. It becomes even **harder for them to find a job or progress in a career**, which in turn leads to increased poverty levels, financial dependency on male family members and partners, less decision-making power over family resources and priorities, and increased vulnerability to gender-based violence. Their contact circle is now limited to a much smaller group of family members and local friends; they get less and less interested, and equipped to participate, in public life, innovate, or contribute to climate action and peacebuilding. Sadly, women and girls also have started disseminating fake news and reproducing anti-democratic and anti-rights discourses without realising the dangers of these to themselves and future generations.

“**Because we are moving in an era where every woman, every person, has to know more about online networks, you have to be fast in this technology. Without that digital literacy, there will be an increase of low-income earners among women. They will become more [financially] dependent, and then we will have more gender-based violence.**”

Aadila, 24, Sub-Saharan Africa, Workshop

⚠️ Trying to escape violent households, some women and girls are forced to migrate and face **barriers to accessing jobs, housing, food, education, and healthcare** in the new destination. As a result, sexual exploitation and trafficking increase.





## Scenario 2: A future of gender equality and prosperity for all



12-year-old girl leads a karate lesson, Bangladesh  
© Plan International / Ziaul Haque

“A great world is waiting for us, everyone is doing everything with no obstacle, no inequalities are there. No one is judging them. All types of gender are equal in there. Everyone is joining all types of facilities like politics, social development, cultural sector, education etc.”

Aarav, 21, Male, South Asia, Workshop

♥ Substantial investment in gender-transformative quality education, combined with a constant increase in the number of girls completing every level of education, has generated **positive impacts in all areas of girls' lives**. Child marriage has rapidly disappeared everywhere and, because girls and boys learn about sexual and reproductive health and rights, there has been a significant decrease in early pregnancy rates. Girls have more time to play, socialise, understand their bodies and sexuality, and build autonomy and self-esteem. When they are adult, they get to choose when, and if, to become a mother. This results in physical and psychological benefits for themselves and their children, who achieve even higher levels of education than their parents.

♥ As boys and girls learn about gender equality from an early age, homes, schools, streets, and the internet are now much safer, and they enjoy good mental health. **Girls' sense of freedom to be themselves, to dream, and to occupy public space is unprecedented.**

“If girls [learn] about their sexual and reproductive health, the number of pregnancies would decrease, and this would bring happier girls with time for themselves.” Sofia, 17, Female, Latin America and Caribbean, Workshop

♥ Harmful gender norms have been pushed back, and changes towards gender equality accelerated. Unconscious biases are gone and words such as “powerful”, “strong”, “confident”, and “empowered” are easily associated with women and girls. This is also thanks to the fact that **men and boys now realise that gender equality benefits them as much as women and girls**. Boys and men get

to be who they are and no longer feel tied to toxic models of masculinity or limited to the breadwinner stereotype. Additionally, they recognise the value of women's and girls' contributions as leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs. Nowadays, women and men, girls and boys share responsibilities equally and work together as a real team.

♥ **Girls feel confident online** as science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), digital literacy, and artificial intelligence proficiency are key components of their school curriculum. They access good quality information for free on the internet and are powerful content creators and digital influencers. Their gender equality activism creates an increasing sense of sisterhood among girls and young women. They shed light on unspoken issues: starting important conversations and identifying and reporting all forms of gender-based violence when they occur. Inspired, girls worldwide take their activism to their communities. Their voices are validated by family and community members and foster positive change in social and gender norms.

“So, you can sometimes learn quite useful things from an influencer on social media, and your teachers are not talking about that. And yeah, sometimes it's even more relevant than the content that we have in schools. [There is] more attention to women's experiences and women sharing experiences with each other and building a kind of online solidarity, the idea of a community and sisterhood.” Fatima, 22, Female, Middle East and North Africa, Workshop



21-year-old young woman learns engineering skills, Kenya © Plan International



♥ In this enabling environment, young women are **free to choose their profession**, and can access great job opportunities. They are productive and efficient in their work, and are successfully progressing in their careers. They are economically empowered and have equal ownership of resources. They are not afraid of job automation because they are supported to pursue higher university-level degrees and work in technology, green jobs, policymaking and peacebuilding. Additionally, technology is increasingly being developed to promote wellbeing and prosperity for all.



18-year-old activist, Switzerland © Plan International / Antoine Tardy

♥ With **girls and women from diverse backgrounds exercising their leadership** in previously male-dominated spaces and occupying decision-making positions equally, policies, services and practices are now well informed about their needs, experiences, interests, and preferences.

“**[Girls in leadership positions] challenge the normalisation of negative gender norms and push back the simplification of gender issues.**” Hanna, 20, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Workshop

♥ While facing climate change-generated adversities, **women and girls are on the frontline supporting communities**, strengthening solidarity and coming together to overcome challenges. With their efforts, nature and humanity increasingly coexist. Similarly, they thrive in leading peacebuilding efforts, and the world is beginning to reach true resolutions as never before. **A kinder, safer, happier, greener, more equal, more prosperous, and more humane world is on the rise** and all genders welcome this longed-for reality.

“**I saw a girl who was happy because she doesn't have to face a world full of sexual harassment and a girl who knows that she has justice, not at a cost, but because she is a human being, and she deserves to be protected by each and every person [...]** a girl who is educated. A girl who does not have to beg for education. Like I did or like I am doing. A girl who has made so many changes at a younger age without struggling about her background about her parents, about her financial status. A girl who is happy and happy to belong in our country or in our world, that respect her.”

Emily, 22, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Workshop



# Hope or despair? scanning the gender equality horizon

What makes adolescent girls and young people able to picture such different scenarios is their capacity to look at the complexity of the present. The seeds of two very different futures are present all around them. They can see, on the horizon, both causes for concern and reasons to hope.



## Causes for concern

Conflict and climate change emergencies, the rollback of rights, and the persistence of violence against women and girls and harmful gender norms make adolescent girls and young people feel deeply worried about the future of gender equality.

The worries expressed by the young people taking part in our research are clearly backed up by other studies and research data.

### Conflict and climate emergencies

Adolescent girls and young people see climate change and an increase in conflict, war, and insecurity around the world as worrying barriers to the progress of gender equality. They worry that women's and girls' rights will be deprioritised in contexts of conflict and highlight the negative effects of war and natural disasters on girls' and women's safety and wellbeing: exacerbating vulnerabilities, increasing violence and exploitation, reducing access to services and education, and impacting their mental health.

#### Fact File

- ⚠ The number of women and girls living in conflict-affected contexts increased by 50 per cent from 2017 to 2022.<sup>27</sup>
- ⚠ In conflict and post-conflict settings, young women not only face higher risks of rape, trafficking, torture, and forced labour, but also experience heightened levels of intimate partner and domestic violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking, and female genital mutilation/cutting.<sup>28</sup>
- ⚠ Two thirds of child, early and forced marriage and union happen in areas where children experience more than one extreme climate event every year.<sup>29</sup>
- ⚠ Girls in crisis settings are nearly 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than those living in countries not in crisis.<sup>30</sup>

“**The occurrence of conflicts, wars, and natural disasters is a significant concern for the progression of gender equality and girls' rights. In such situations, women and girls often face heightened vulnerability and are disproportionately affected. They may experience increased risks of violence, including sexual violence, exploitation, and displacement. Access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and protection can be severely disrupted, further exacerbating gender inequalities.**” Betty, 25, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey



Close up of hands, Paraguay © Plan International

## Rollback of rights

Many adolescent girls and young people participants are concerned about the rollback of rights and the rise of far-right movements preventing advancements in gender equality in the future. They point out that younger generations are increasingly expressing negative views about gender equality, and that governments are increasingly taking “anti-rights” and “anti-gender equality” approaches.

“Government [is] exploiting religion and ‘family traditions’ to suppress our rights and promote anti-rights propaganda.” Remy, 22, Non-binary, Middle East and North Africa, Survey

### Fact File

- ⚠️ Between 2013 and 2017, the anti-gender movement which sees gender as an invention and promotes traditional and harmful gender roles received \$3.7 billion in funding globally.<sup>35</sup>
- ⚠️ Across the world, conservative actors have opposed the use of the term gender in girls’ and women’s rights legislation and policies, arguing that the so-called gender ideology would destroy institutions such as family, marriage, and religion.<sup>36</sup>
- ⚠️ Rights-stripping bills have recently passed in different countries, targeting women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive health and rights and LGBTQI+ rights.<sup>37</sup>

## Insufficient governmental commitments to gender equality

Youth are deeply frustrated with their governments’ actions to promote gender equality. Even if gender equality related policies are there, the commitment to implement them is limited or there is poor coordination.

“The fact that public policies are not yet ready to take account of the gender dimension and the fight against gender-based violence worries me about the progress of gender equality.” Brenda, 23, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

### Fact File

- ⚠️ Between 1997 and 2020, governments around the world implemented or amended 423 national laws concerning sexual health and domestic violence, following 46 per cent of the recommendations of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).<sup>31</sup>
- ⚠️ More than 50 per cent of the countries where data is available fail to have laws forbidding gender discrimination.<sup>32</sup>
- ⚠️ 45 per cent of countries do not establish the need for equal remuneration for work of equal value.<sup>33</sup>
- ⚠️ 60 per cent of countries do not have laws that define rape on the basis of informed consent.<sup>34</sup>

## Gender-based violence, sexual harassment and human trafficking

The persistence of violence against women and girls, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence deeply concerns youth respondents and makes them feel less confident about achieving gender equality in the future. Some youth participants are also specifically concerned about honour killing, femicide, forced recruitment into armed forces, forced unions and human trafficking.

“Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and human trafficking, remains prevalent worldwide. Such violence not only violates the rights of women and girls but also undermines their ability to live free from fear and discrimination.” Mira, 24, Female, Middle East and North Africa, Survey

### Fact File

- ⚠️ One in four ever married or partnered adolescent girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner at least once.<sup>38</sup>
- ⚠️ Currently, more than 1 billion women and girls worldwide (26 per cent) do not have any protection against domestic sexual violence in national legislation.<sup>39</sup>
- ⚠️ In 2022, the United Nations recorded 89,000 instances of deliberate killings targeting women and girls globally. Among these femicides, 55 per cent were perpetrated by current or former intimate partners or individuals within the victims’ circles.<sup>40</sup>
- ⚠️ Women and girls account for 60 per cent of the victims of human trafficking, mainly for sexual exploitation reasons. Female victims are three times more likely to suffer extreme violence during trafficking than boys and men.<sup>41</sup>

## Harmful norms and practices

Youth research participants are concerned that negative gender norms persist around the world, including those that restrict women's and girls' participation, economic opportunities and position in society. They are worried about the persistence of "harmful cultural norms," "cultural and religious perceptions," "traditions" and "customs" and about the perpetuation of child marriage and female genital mutilation.

“In some native communities, gender equality is forbidden due to traditions, beliefs, customs, and morals.” Adea, 20, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

“Early child marriage, and female genital mutilation. Some tribes still practise early girl child marriage, and females who get pregnant do not get the chance to go further in their education. This is a worry because until this is done, our women's rights will be infringed.” Yihana, 20, Female, Middle East and North Africa, Survey

Some youth also describe “tensions,” “fighting” or a “gender war” referring to pushback by boys and men who feel excluded from gender equality efforts.

“It has come to my realisation that some men are mistaking the idea of gender equality, girls' rights and feminism. They assume women are trying to fight men, which I think it is worrying.” Julie, 23, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

### Fact File

- ⚠️ Almost 90 per cent of the world's adult population holds negative perceptions against women, with 50 per cent of people believing men are better political leaders compared to women, 40 per cent believing men are better business executives than women, and 25 per cent believing it is justified for a man to beat his wife.<sup>42</sup>
- ⚠️ Across many countries, there is a growing and widespread male resistance to gender equality policies.<sup>43</sup>
- ⚠️ More than 230 million girls and women around the world have been subjected to female genital mutilation.<sup>44</sup>
- ⚠️ One in five young women aged 20 to 24 years old were married before the age of 18.<sup>45</sup>

17-year-old girl holding her child, Mexico © Plan International

## Limited access to quality gender and sexuality education

Young people see comprehensive sexuality and gender education as key to achieving gender equality and advancing girls' rights, but they are deeply worried about a lack of government commitment to including such topics at school. They are also concerned about the promotion of harmful gender norms, stereotypes, and perceptions of boys being superior to girls in current curricula. A gender-transformative education seems a long way from becoming a reality.

“Everything starts from the education that is still given today to boys [...] who believe themselves as little gods and already see their sisters as being less than them from an early age. This is my only and great concern, because as long as we do not also educate the boys, who will be the future men of tomorrow, to see themselves being equal to the girls/future women, to see them as also human beings in their own right, nothing can change.” Jemila, 21, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

“[In my country], the law on comprehensive sexual education in schools, which was intended to prevent teenage pregnancies [...] was recently vetoed.” Valentina, 21, Female, Latin America and Caribbean, Survey

### Fact File

- ⚠️ Policies, laws, and petitions led by anti-rights movements have targeted comprehensive sexuality education, prohibiting schools from teaching about gender equality, gender diversity and sexual and reproductive health and rights.<sup>46</sup>
- ⚠️ 44 per cent of 15- to 49-year-old married or in-union women are currently not able to make their own choices around their sexual and reproductive health and rights.<sup>47</sup>
- ⚠️ Teenage pregnancy and childbirth remain leading causes of death for girls between 15 and 19 years old.<sup>48</sup>
- ⚠️ 80 per cent of all new HIV infections among adolescents currently occur in adolescent girls.<sup>49</sup>
- ⚠️ Only 15 per cent of adolescent girls are vaccinated against the human papillomavirus, which is key to preventing genital warts and cervical cancer.<sup>50</sup>



Illustration made for the 2021 Asia-Pacific Girls Report: Voice, Choice and Power © Plan International



Close-up of hands typing on a keyboard, Indonesia © Plan International / Ubaidillah Achmad

## Online risks and the digital divide

Youth participants are worried about technological changes and digital risks, including anti-rights language and misinformation about gender equality on social media, online body shaming, online harassment, and AI-generated pornography. The digital divide is also a concerning factor exacerbating gender inequalities.

“Cyberspace can be a breeding ground for abuse, discouraging girls from expressing themselves freely and participating online.”

Nala, 20, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

### Fact File

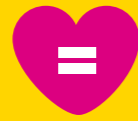
- ⚠️ Girls are 1.8- times less likely than boys to own a smartphone.<sup>51</sup>
- ⚠️ More than half (52 per cent) of young girls globally have experienced online abuse, mostly in social media (68 per cent), and 87 per cent of them believe this is going to get worse.<sup>52</sup>
- ⚠️ Around 90 per cent of the victims of “revenge pornography” are women and girls.<sup>53</sup>
- ⚠️ Due to misinformation and disinformation, one out of four girls feel less confident to share their views online, and one out of five girls stop engaging in politics or current affairs.<sup>54</sup>
- ⚠️ In 74 per cent of countries worldwide, law enforcement agencies and courts are deficient in addressing digital harms effectively.<sup>55</sup>

### Fact File: Alarming predictions for the future

If these trends continue and we miss the opportunity for transformative change at the UN Summit of the Future, the vision of backlash and breakdown risks becoming reality. The projections, listed below, made by the United Nations and other agencies using probabilistic methods for the coming decades, are alarming:

- ⚠️ At the current pace, it will take us 131 years to close the gender gap across Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.<sup>56</sup> It might take 47 years to achieve gender parity in national parliaments, 140 years to achieve gender equality in workplace leadership positions; 286 years to remove gender discrimination in laws and 300 years to eliminate the practice of child marriage.<sup>57</sup>
- ⚠️ In 2030, 25 per cent of women and girls will experience medium to high levels of food insecurity, and eight per cent of women and girls in the world will be living in extreme poverty.<sup>58</sup> In almost one-third of the countries worldwide, extreme poverty is predicted to be at 11 per cent, which is as high as it was in 2015 when the SDGs were adopted.
- ⚠️ We will have 110 million girls out of school,<sup>59</sup> and almost 22 per cent of girls will still lack access to family planning. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be 10 million more girls subjected to child marriage by 2030.<sup>60</sup>
- ⚠️ Due to girls’ and women’s continuous underrepresentation in STEM and an increased digital gap, girls and young women will have fewer employment opportunities and will face extra barriers to participate in the workforce,<sup>61</sup> despite the expected generation of 24 million new “jobs of the future”<sup>62</sup> generated by artificial intelligence, automation, robotics and the green economy.
- ⚠️ By 2030, 60 per cent of girls will experience at least one extreme climate event, and, each year, 12.5 million girls in low- and middle-income countries will risk not completing their education due to climate change-related events.<sup>63</sup> More than 32 million girls will be living in places simultaneously affected by severe and frequent climate events, high levels of poverty and the highest risks of child marriage.<sup>64</sup>
- ⚠️ By 2050, harmful gender norms will persist, with women occupying only 30 per cent of workplace management positions, being far from gender parity in politics, and still spending 2.3 hours more a day on unpaid care and domestic work than men.<sup>65</sup>
- ⚠️ It is estimated that 30 per cent of the urban female population will live in slums and informal settings. If climate change mitigative and adaptive measures are not sufficiently adopted, an additional 158 million women and girls will be pushed into poverty and 236 million into food insecurity.<sup>66</sup>
- ⚠️ There will be 30 per cent more girls living in the countries with the highest risks of both child marriage and extreme climate events.<sup>67</sup>
- ⚠️ Most future forecasts predict the world will have around 200 million environmental migrants, but some projections point that this number can go up to 1 billion people moving internally and internationally to escape environmental changes.<sup>68</sup>
- ⚠️ The scarcity of resources will also exacerbate conflict and geopolitical instability even more,<sup>69</sup> leading women and girls to experience increased intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence<sup>70</sup> and having their rights not seen as a priority.<sup>71</sup>





## Reasons for hope

Even though both data projections and youth participants' horizon scanning paint a bleak picture of the future, there are more hopeful indicators. Advances in girls' education and leadership, as well as campaigns and programming on gender equality make adolescent girls and young people feel optimistic about the future of gender equality. They believe that young people have the power to transform the world if policy makers support them and translate verbal commitment to gender equality into action.

### Girls' improved access to education

Overwhelmingly, youth participants feel positive about increased access to education for girls. Improved access to education is seen as promoting girls' economic empowerment, leading to better job opportunities and progress in their careers. Education is also seen as key to boosting awareness of gender equality and women's and girls' rights: both because this type of content is now more discussed in school and because as girls increase their literacy and critical thinking gender norms are perceived differently.

“I see more young girls and women seeking education in various fields and understanding that their rights should not be violated. It is slow but it is happening.” Remy, 22, Non-binary, Middle East and North Africa, Survey



#### Fact File

- Worldwide, girls exceed boys in completion rates at every level of education and are improving learning outcomes faster.<sup>72</sup>
- 50 million more girls have been enrolled in school globally since 2015. There are also 5 million more girls completing each level of education from primary to upper secondary education.<sup>73</sup>
- Girls who complete secondary education are less at risk of child marriage, early pregnancy, maternal and child mortality, and stunting, and have higher chances of increasing their lifetime earnings.<sup>74</sup>



16-year-old girl is being interviewed after taking over the role of the President of the National Parliament, as part of the Girls' Takeover Initiative for the International Day of the Girl 2023, Timor Leste © Plan International

### Women and girls in leadership positions

Youth participants also see the increasing presence of women and girls in leadership, politics and decision-making as an inspiring trend for the future. They give examples of laws that have been passed in their countries to increase women's participation in politics or of programmes for girls, such as Plan International's Girls Takeover campaign.

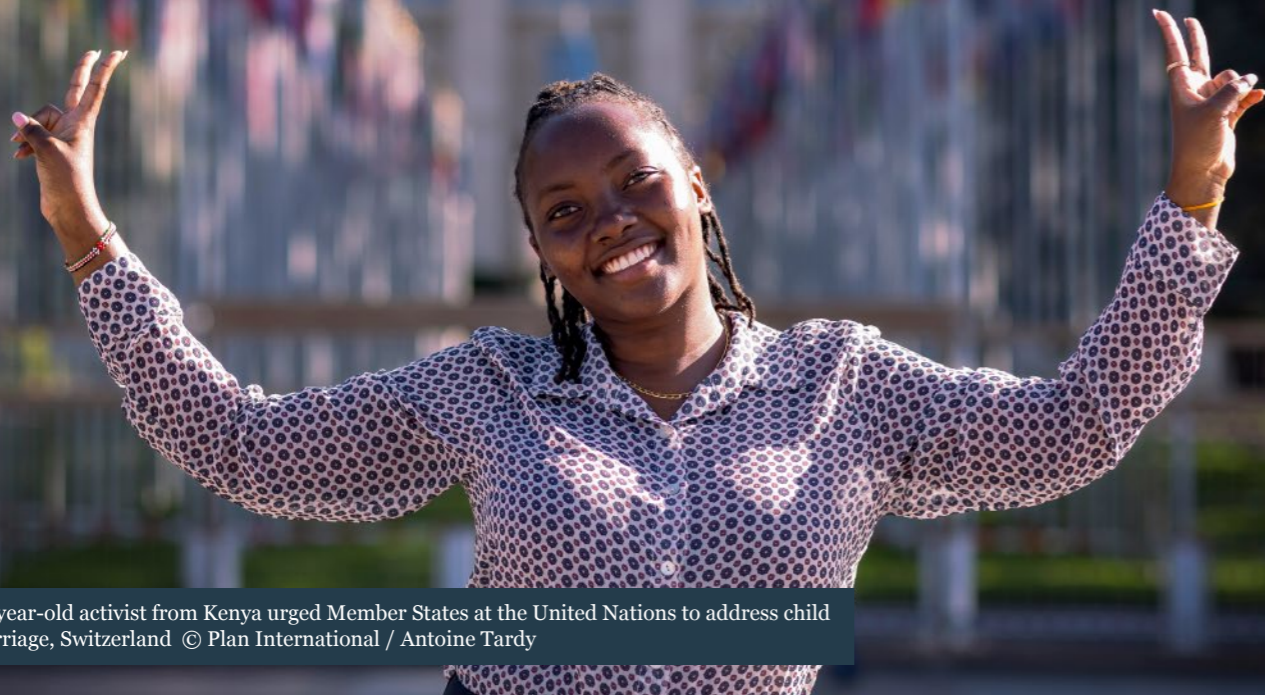
“We're witnessing more women occupying leadership positions in various sectors, including politics, business, and academia. This increased representation not only serves as role models for future generations, but also helps challenge stereotypes and traditional gender roles.” Yana, 24, Female, Middle East and North Africa, Survey

“I got a chance to be part of the Girls Takeover campaign [in my country]. At that age, taking over a big position as an ambassador for a day made me realise big opportunities are not only made for men or a certain gender, but made for all. I realised that change [towards] gender equality starts with a woman or a girl.” Mariam, 24, Female, Middle East and North Africa, Survey

“My country has enacted the two-thirds gender rule that allows women to be nominated for various positions in its national assemblies and in every public and private forum.” George, 24, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

#### Fact File

- Worldwide, women occupy 35.5 per cent of local government seats, 26.7 per cent of parliamentary seats, and 28.2 per cent of management positions in the workplace.<sup>75</sup>
- Women are Heads of State or Government in 31 countries around the world.<sup>76</sup>
- 97 per cent of 29,000 girls and young women surveyed by Plan International believe that it is important to participate in politics.<sup>77</sup>
- 50 per cent of girls and young women believe that, in their communities' view, it is acceptable for girls and young women to engage in political activities.<sup>78</sup>
- Around 60 per cent of girls surveyed by Plan actively campaign about gender equality and gender-based violence, both online and in person, and feel that their activism created positive change beyond their expectations.<sup>79</sup>



24-year-old activist from Kenya urged Member States at the United Nations to address child marriage, Switzerland © Plan International / Antoine Tardy

## Campaigns, advocacy and programming on gender equality

Youth participants feel hopeful about efforts by NGOs and grassroots level organisations that have raised awareness and started conversations about gender equality and girls' rights, including "training," "advocacy events" and "social campaigns" and "empowerment initiatives."

“The great efforts [done] by different players, especially NGOs, to fight gender inequalities by empowering girls and young women will reduce the gap and the many injustices we have been facing all along.” Bakari, 24, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

## Fact File

- 40 per cent of total bilateral official development assistance (ODA) in 2020-21 had gender equality and women's empowerment as a significant objective, and four per cent as a primary objective.<sup>80</sup>
- Between 2020 and 2021, US\$458 million of bilateral ODA was directed to gender-based violence programmes and US\$574 million to women's rights organisations and movements.<sup>81</sup>
- Out of the total ODA from the top ten gender equality donors, 5.56 per cent was gender- and adolescent-targeted.<sup>82</sup>
- Nowadays, 6,343 NGOs enjoy consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), versus 41 back in 1946. These NGOs contribute to the work of the United Nations and Member States through meetings, oral and written statements and events.<sup>83</sup>

**We are at a crossroads. The imagined future of gender equality is still possible if we act now. You choose!**



# The turning point: youth voices for a gender-equal future

Despite dissatisfaction with the status of women and girls today, it is evident that the youth who participated in the research remain hopeful. They believe that if governments follow through with gender commitments and policy implementation and truly include young people in decision-making, gender equality can still be achieved.

- 78 per cent** of the survey participants believe that the world would be more gender equal in 2054 compared to today.
- 75 per cent** of the survey participants feel confident that gender equality will be achieved in their lifetime.
- 90 per cent** of survey participants say they will influence significant improvements in gender equality in the next 30 years.

Their optimism is related to seeing other young people fighting for gender equality and making a difference.

## Young people believe in their collective power to transform the world.

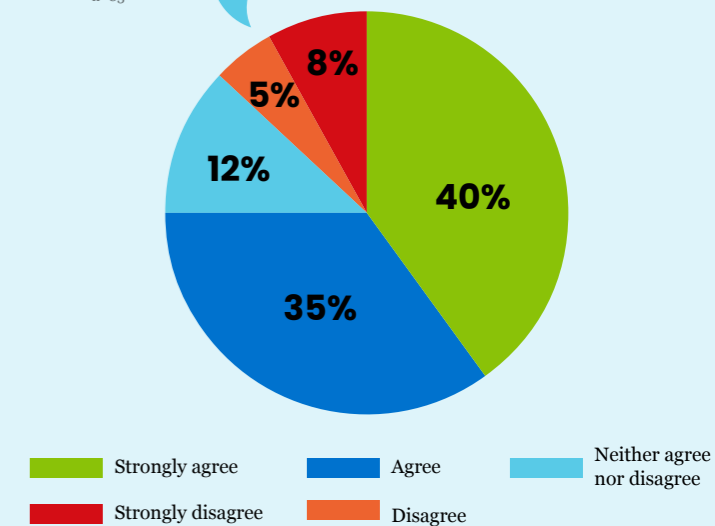
“I am seeing a world (presently) where girls are fighting resiliently for gender equality, and their fight has created a positive impact on Africa and the world. I believe in the future that the world will be more gender equal.” Anika, 17, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

“I'm very optimistic about our future generation and as much as cruel reality we live in. I'm really like hoping for the best. And actually, I believe that our generation is going to take the big steps toward a better future for all of us.” Rania, 18, Female, Middle East and North Africa, Workshop



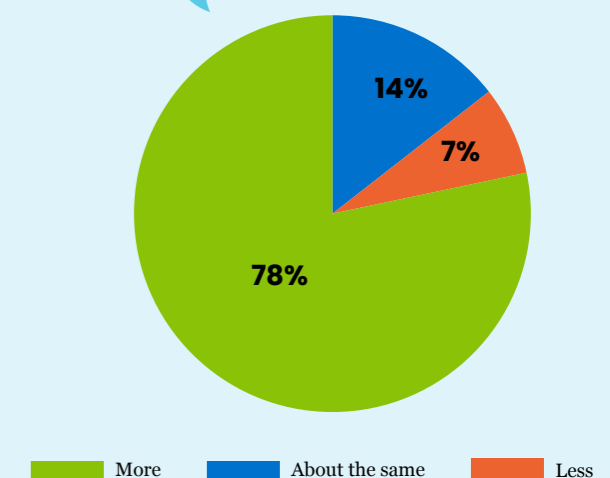
As a young person, I am confident that gender equality will be achieved my lifetime

n=83



Comparing today to the year 2054, do you think the world will be more or less gender equal?

n=83



“I am confident that we can influence the future because we’re trying our best [...] but I am pessimist because [...] sometimes I feel every time we advance like a little bit big setbacks happens [...] I hesitant tiny steps to the front and 10,000 steps to the back.” Fatima, 22, Female, Middle East and North Africa, Workshop

The majority of youth participants (38 per cent) selected younger generations as the group who would make gender equality a living reality, followed by the UN (17 per cent), NGOs (14 per cent) and local communities (12 per cent); only nine per cent selected federal governments.

**Positivity about the future is a conscious choice for adolescent girls and young people – a tool for survival and resilience in the fight for positive change.**

Given the negative trends and limited support described above, young people could easily burn out and be disheartened in their work, but instead they deliberately choose optimism.

“I choose to be optimistic.” Aurelia, 22, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

“I like to go into everything with a confident mind set [...]. I can work on something or go into it with a fresh mentality and just hope for the best, and whatever happens, happens, and I can at least say that I tried my best.” Mimi, 23, Female, North America, Survey

But at the same time, adolescent girls and young people feel that limited commitments or enforcement mechanisms run the risk of further decreasing trust in the UN and multilateralism.

“I think it’s quite important that we talk primarily about enforcement mechanisms at the Summit of the Future. Or I think the UN is gonna become out of date very quickly [...] I think the Summit of the Future has the possibility to be a turning point for the UN or be it’s kind of downfall.” Nora, 19, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Validation Workshop

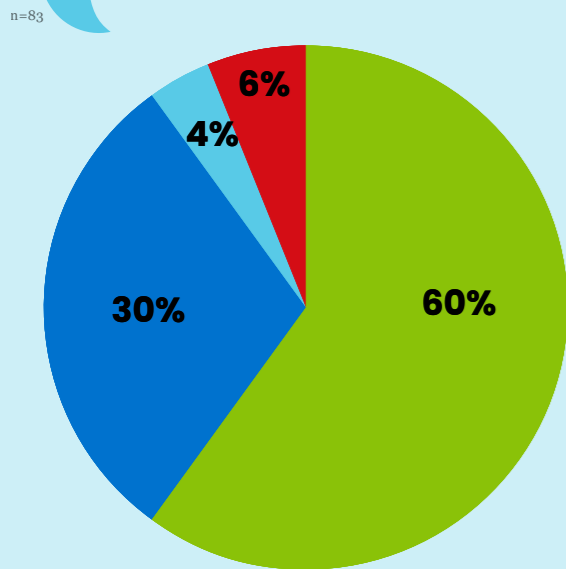
Adolescent girls and young people are also worried that their voices and views won’t be included in international agreements and the next iteration of the Sustainable Development Goals.

“This [the SDGs] may take a lot of time to achieve, but I know that we will achieve this together if we work together, we will achieve this if our voices will be heard. Our voices matter, so I just hope that they will listen to us, so our dreams will come true.” Cecilia, 19, Female, East Asia and Pacific, Workshop

For adolescent girls and young people, the Summit of the Future presents an important opportunity to reaffirm commitments to gender equality and create a system where they can meaningfully participate in decision-making.

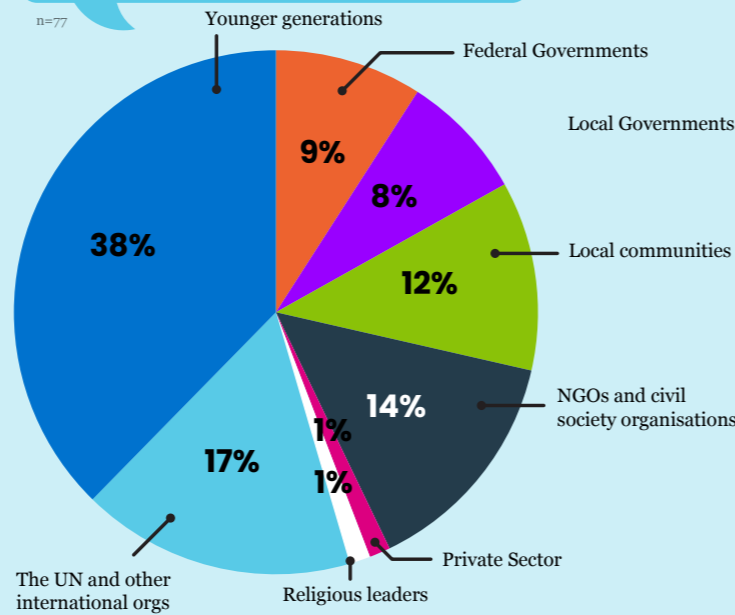
**85 per cent of survey participants believe that the outcomes of the UN Summit of the Future will achieve significant improvements in gender equality in the next 30 years.**

I have the power to influence significant improvements in gender equality in the next 30 years

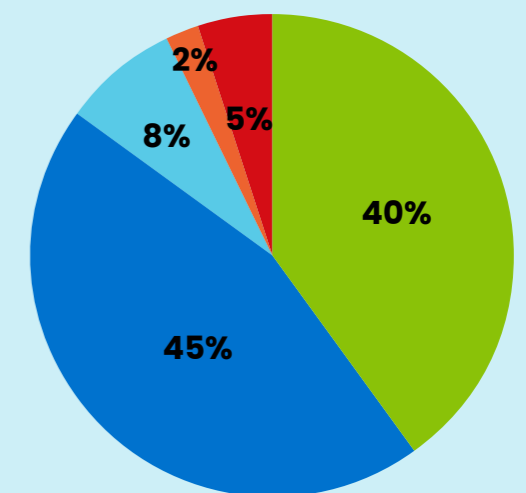
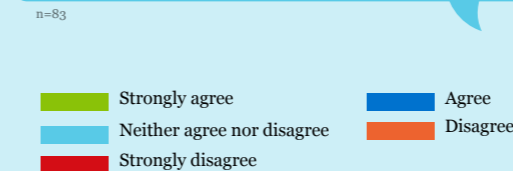


Strongly agree (green), Agree (blue), Neither agree nor disagree (light blue), Strongly disagree (red)

Who do you think has most power to make gender equality become a living reality?



The outcomes of the Summit of the Future will achieve significant improvements in gender equality in the next 30 years



Meaningful youth involvement is a key step to make governments more ambitious on gender equality and achieve the changes young people envision. It must be an essential part of every decision-making process, as a means of making laws, policies, and programmes truly effective for present and future generations

“I feel like often those who are in decision-making spaces just listen to us for the sake of listening, for formalities, then they do very little towards our suggestions and opinions.”

Nia, 24, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Workshop

“There is so much tokenism. The most marginalised and underserved girls are still not heard.” Aurelia, 22, Female Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

If young people’s voices are to be really listened to, and decision-making processes made accessible and safe for adolescent girls and young people, it is clear there is a lot of work ahead.

“I feel like I’m not heard as a youth advocate and unsafe most of the time and I feel like it’s the same for a lot of other advocates.” Fatima, 22, Female, Middle East and North Africa, Workshop

## Recommendations for policy makers

“Gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also an investment in the prosperity, stability, and overall wellbeing of societies. Policies that prioritise and advance gender equality contribute to a more just, equitable, and sustainable future for everyone.” Elizabeth, 18, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey

In the workshops youth participants identified recommendations, outlining what policy makers should do to achieve gender equality. They also shared their thoughts on key actions in the survey and worked individually on specific recommendations to policy makers when drafting the *Girls’ Pact*. The recommendations below were further refined during validation workshops with youth participants.

We call on Member States to put into action the following recommendations...

Our voices matter.  
Young people demand co-creation of a positive future rather than tokenistic involvement.



Young people advocating against child marriage, Nepal © Plan International



## Education and technology

- ✓ **Ensure equal access to quality free education for girls in all their diversity**, including during times of conflict and natural disaster, by eliminating all barriers that prevent girls from attending school. For example, policies to address gender-based violence in schools, special measures for pregnant adolescent girls and young mothers to continue their schooling, and night school and safe and free transportation must all be put in place.
- ✓ **Expand national education financing** by increasing allocation of resources to education ministries to reach the widely endorsed benchmark of at least 15 to 20 per cent of public expenditure. This expansion would mean sufficient funds to invest in quality education that reaches the most vulnerable, especially marginalised girls and youth. This should also include increased funding for teachers' continuous training and development to help more effective learning.
- ✓ **Develop and integrate gender-transformative curriculum and learning materials that promote gender equality and challenge stereotypes and biases.** Include topics such as women's and girls' achievements in all areas of society, how to recognise and challenge stereotypes, engaging

men and boys as allies, comprehensive sexuality education, and the importance of diversity and inclusion. This could include incorporating the Gender-Transformative Education Principles outlined and endorsed in the Transforming Education Summit's Call to Action, "Advancing Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and Through Education." Encourage girls' participation in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) by providing mentorship, role models, and hands-on learning opportunities.

- ✓ **Address gaps in digital access and connectivity and build digital skills and knowledge:** tackle disparities in access to technology, artificial intelligence and internet connectivity that disproportionately affect children with disabilities, and girls and women, particularly in low-income and rural communities. Expand initiatives to provide affordable and accessible technology resources, such as computers, tablets, and internet access, to girls and their families. Equip girls and boys with digital literacy skills to navigate technology and information effectively, safely, and ethically, supporting them to understand both the positive impacts and potential risks of being online.

free quality education

digital literacy skills

financing for education

equal access to technology

## Violence against girls and women

- ✓ **Enact, strengthen and enforce laws that criminalise all forms of violence against girls and women**, including domestic violence, sexual violence, harassment, trafficking, harmful practices and online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. End impunity, make sure that perpetrators are held accountable, and that victims have access to justice, including in conflict and post-conflict settings. Provide training for police officers, judges, and prosecutors on gender-sensitive approaches and victim-centred responses. Establish monitoring bodies to oversee law enforcement and judicial proceedings, regularly collecting data to monitor levels of reporting.
- ✓ **Provide support services and strong referral mechanisms:** establish and fund accessible, holistic, gender-sensitive, confidential, survivor-centred support services in a long-term sustainable way, including safe spaces, shelters, hotlines, counselling, legal assistance, healthcare (including mental health), and professional catch-up programmes. Opportunities for job training, skills development and mentorship should be made available to all survivors, regardless of their background or circumstances.
- ✓ **Strengthen education and awareness-raising efforts to empower individuals to recognise and report violence.** Launch campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms and attitudes that encourage violence against girls and women and foster a culture of victim-blaming. Promote messages of respect and zero tolerance for violence as well as support to survivors in all community, media and educational settings. Provide training for teachers, parents, and community leaders on identifying and addressing signs of violence.
- ✓ **Prioritise the protection of children and young people online:** ensure robust protection and reporting measures are in place through government legislation, internet regulation and private sector action to prevent social media being used to perpetuate sexual violence and abuse and gender stereotyping. Promote a variety of ways for young people to socialise and connect, through social media, but also with the creation of safe and inclusive youth-friendly spaces outside of the online world.
- ✓ **Ensure protection against gender-based violence in conflict zones, including in post-conflict settings:** provide safe spaces and services, humanitarian assistance, legal protections, and training to peacekeeping forces, humanitarian workers, and local communities on gender-sensitive approaches and the protection of girls and women in conflict settings.
- ✓ **Strengthen mechanisms for reporting and participatory data collection:** establish standardised and comprehensive systems that address gender-based violence, obtaining accurate, confidential and detailed information to better understand and monitor the magnitude of the problem and design effective policies and programmes to combat it.

reporting measures

online protection

enact, strengthen and enforce laws

support services

challenge harmful norms

zero tolerance for violence

## Adolescent girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights

- ✓ **Implement comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education within school curricula:** allocate resources to develop and implement curricula that comply with international standards but are contextualised to our countries, addressing topics such as reproductive health, consent, gender equality, and LGBTQIA+ rights, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention, in an age-responsive and non-judgmental manner that breaks down taboos. Such education should aim to combat misinformation for girls and young people as well as for families and communities.
- ✓ **Ensure access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services:** promote awareness of, and guarantee access to, affordable and inclusive sexual and reproductive health services for adolescent girls, including those in rural and underserved areas. Remove barriers such as cost, stigma, and lack of information, and instead, implement strict confidentiality and the creation of safe spaces. Promote access to testing, treatment, and support services for girls at risk of, or living with, HIV and other STIs.
- ✓ **Eliminate barriers related to menstrual health and hygiene:** this includes providing widely accessible information on menstrual hygiene and reducing or removing sales tax on products with the aim of providing free products from 2030 onwards. Prioritise the development and promotion of eco-friendly menstrual products, such as reusable pads or menstrual cups, to reduce environmental impact and promote sustainability.
- ✓ **Promote access to family planning services:** ensure access to information on safe sex and to affordable or free contraception to protect adolescent girls from unintended pregnancies. Legalise or decriminalise abortion in all cases but most urgently for victims of rape. Provide safe and legal abortion services for girls in accordance with international human rights standards and comprehensive post-abortion care and support services.
- ✓ **Combat child, early and forced marriage and unions** by strengthening and enforcing laws that prohibit underage marriage and unions, providing support services for girls at risk of, or affected by, child marriage, and addressing its root causes, including poverty and insecurity. Work closely with community and religious leaders, and other influencers, urging them to denounce and eliminate this practice. Establish initiatives that allow pregnant adolescents to continue with their education without stigma.

## Climate change

- ✓ **Actively involve girls and women in the decision-making,** planning, implementation and monitoring of environmental policy, climate mitigation and adaptation measures and conservation projects. This makes sure that their needs, knowledge, and experiences are taken into account, leading to more effective and equitable solutions. Ensure girls and women are represented in relevant decision-making bodies on environmental policy, including in gender-balanced delegations to intergovernmental spaces.
- ✓ **Strengthen and implement gender-responsive climate policies that protect girls' rights,** recognise and address girls' and women's unique needs and challenges, and support efforts to address environmental injustices, including those due to the impacts of war and conflict, that affect them disproportionately. Implement policies and interventions in line with international climate-related commitments and obligations such as the Paris Agreement. Make sure there is fair access to resources such as land, water, and clean energy technologies, and support initiatives that empower girls and women as stewards of natural resources and agents of sustainable development.
- ✓ **Increase international financing** and ensure equitable investment in climate and environmental programmes between high-, middle- and low-income countries. Individual Member States must acknowledge their role and contribution as the largest producers of gas emissions and finance mitigation measures accordingly.
- ✓ **Promote environmental awareness and empower communities,** by integrating this into school curricula, and strengthening the skills and knowledge of girls and women in vulnerable communities to cope with climate impacts. Provide safe spaces, uphold the right to peaceful protest, fund girl-led groups, and give visibility to the varied girl-led environmental activism and awareness raising, including through content creation and via online platforms.
- ✓ **Strengthen green skills, economic and educational empowerment:** provide girls and women, indigenous people and those living with disabilities with access to green jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities, and financial resources to invest in climate-resilient, future-proof livelihoods and businesses. Support women-led initiatives that promote sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and eco-tourism, contributing to both protecting the environment and alleviating poverty. Promote adaptation and resilience strategies, including training programmes in survival skills, diversifying sources of income, and strengthening community support networks.
- ✓ **Foster green technologies and solutions:** encourage the adoption and development of green technologies and solutions, such as clean cookstoves, solar energy systems, and water-saving devices. These largely benefit girls and women who carry the unequal burden of domestic work, particularly in lower-income countries. Promote access to eco-friendly products and services that reduce carbon emissions, protect natural resources, and improve livelihoods for girls and women, particularly in rural and underserved areas.



## Participation in political processes

- ✓ **Consult and co-create solutions with girls from diverse backgrounds across all areas of public policy and decision-making:** Member States must conduct regular and meaningful consultations with diverse groups of girls and women in accessible and inclusive ways, across all the above interventions, in order to gather their input. This could include townhall meetings, focus groups, and surveys. It could also include creating advisory boards or councils for girls, youth, and women to advise policy makers on issues affecting their demographic, as well as girl-friendly accountability systems that allow girls and youth to monitor government progress.
- ✓ **Support girls to become political leaders:** invest in programmes and initiatives that empower girls and women to develop leadership skills and the capacity to meaningfully engage in political activism and civic life. This could include mentorship programmes, leadership training workshops, and opportunities for civic engagement and advocacy, at all levels from local to international.
- ✓ **Increase funding and support for girl- and youth-led, and community-based organisations working to promote gender equality.** Funding opportunities must be made accessible to girl- and youth groups, with donors increasing the amount of funding available and removing barriers, so more can access flexible, diverse, multi-year grants to support girl and youth-led action.
- ✓ **Implement quotas and other forms of positive affirmative action:** remove institutional barriers that prevent women from attaining and staying in political and public leadership positions. Where representation is lacking, introduce quotas or other enabling policies, including around childcare, to increase the representation of girls and women in all decision-making bodies and political institutions such as legislatures, parliaments, youth parliaments, and councils. Women's participation in peace negotiations must also be prioritised.



## Conclusion

Youth participants strongly believe that gender equality is something we should all strive for; they believe that by liberating ourselves from harmful gender norms, girls and boys, women and men, are freer to be who they are and realise their full potential as human beings.

The UN Summit of the Future presents a once in a generation opportunity to reaffirm existing commitments to gender equality and reform the multilateral system to better respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow. Current trends paint a bleak picture, but the adolescent girls and young people who participated in the research are optimistic that gender equality and a better future for all can be achieved – if we act now. Policy makers need to reaffirm existing commitments and follow through with actions, involving youth in decisions that affect their future.

**“Your job is to listen to your people.  
We are your people, we are your future.  
Will you listen to us?  
This is our voice for our tomorrow.”<sup>84</sup>**

In reading this report, you heard the voices of over 100 15- to 24-year-olds from all regions of the world. Their reflections and recommendations demonstrate the level of engagement and the invaluable contribution young people can make for the benefit of present and future generations. As we prepare for the UN Summit of the Future, let's amplify the voices and perspectives of youth as essential co-creators of the future we desire to realise together – our voice for our tomorrow.

“I love that all the things we put in there are from our hearts, from our imagination. So, I think, in some years, we will see our hopes come true. It will be very, very, interesting when we see all the imagination that we put in this board coming through. It will give us a good push to continue to do all the things that we can to improve our futures as girls.” Tala, 21, Middle East and North Africa, Workshop

# Annex: Methodology

This report is based on research conducted in March 2024 using the following four participatory futures methods:

- **Horizon scanning:** an initial exploratory literature review of existing publications<sup>85</sup> was gathered through the STEEP-V (Social, Technological, Economic, Political, Values) framework to identify the key elements influencing the future of women and girls. Young people also contributed to horizon scanning through an online survey asking about changes in their communities, countries, and the world that make them either worried or hopeful about the future of gender equality. Changes were clustered and analysed under key themes.
- **Online survey:** A short online survey with 14 questions (available in Spanish and English on Microssssss off forms) was shared with 15-24-year-olds from Plan's youth networks and the UNICEF Global Girls Leaders Advisory Group. Data cleaning and descriptive analysis of the 124 responses was conducted using the Stata analysis tool. Participants were between 15 and 24 years old with the large majority being over 20 years (74 per cent). 72 per cent of the survey participants identified as female, 26 per cent as male, 1 per cent as non-binary and 1 per cent preferred not to say. The survey participants represented all regions of the world with most of them living in Sub-Saharan Africa (47 per cent), followed by the Middle East and North Africa (27 per cent), South Asia (14 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (5 per cent), Europe and Central Asia (5 per cent) and East Asia and Pacific (1 per cent).
- **Foresight workshops:** Five three-hour long online workshops (4 in English, 1 in Spanish) with 44 youth participants (7 young men; 37 young women) from different Plan youth groups aged 15-24 were conducted. After a short presentation of the survey findings, young people used the futures wheels tool to reflect on the key implications of current changes for the future of gender equality. This was followed by a meditative envisioning and questing exercise during which youth participants imagined travelling to the year 2054, where gender equality was achieved. They shared their visions about this desirable gender-equal future in words and drawings, and collective world-building boards were created using Miro. Youths were then engaged in a backcasting exercise to develop key concrete actions that policy makers should take between today, 2030 and 2054 to make their desirable future a living reality for all. Finally, youth participants individually drafted a *Girls' Pact for the Future*, with key concerns and messages addressed to policy makers. Sessions finished with a Polak game assessing youth optimism/pessimism about the future of gender equality, and their capacity to influence it. The workshop data was analysed by coding the data and using qualitative content analysis.
- **Girls' Pact validation workshops:** Four 90-minute-long online workshops (all in English) with 34 youth participants (30 young women, 4 young men) aged 15-24 from different Plan youth groups, the UNICEF Global Girls Leaders Advisory Group and the UNICEF Innocenti Youth Foresight Fellows were conducted. During the workshops we gathered feedback on the *Girls' Pact* to ensure that youth voices are adequately represented.

**Ethics, safeguarding and wellbeing:** The research obtained ethics approval from Plan International's Ethics Review Team – a registered IRB. All processes adhered to Plan's Framework for ethical MER and Safeguarding policy. Consent/assent was sought from all participants and parental consent was sought from those under 18. Participants were transparently informed about our intentions and how their data would be used. The research did not ask any personal questions and no personal sensitive information was collected. To avoid anxious feelings about the future we presented the future as a place of agency and empowerment. All the names have been changed to protect participants' identities.

**A participatory and collaborative approach:** The research followed the ten principles of UNICEF's *Youth Foresight Playbook: Designing a Youth-centred Journey to the Future*. We took a participatory approach, working with young people as co-designers of the methodology, co-researchers, and co-facilitators, and asking them for feedback on the research products. The workshops were scheduled to work with participants' schedules. The tools were collaborative, and we created a safe environment where youth felt respected and free to express their opinions and to experiment with their thoughts with no right or wrong expectations.

**Global inclusion:** As a member of the Leave No One Behind Partnership,<sup>86</sup> Plan International is committed to augmenting the voice of marginalised groups. Youth participants were from diverse backgrounds from over 35 countries representing all regions of the world. To ensure participation of young people with limited technological access or special needs, we provided data bundles, designed the workshops to be accessible on a phone and provided additional support to participants with special needs. However, it is important to note that due to its small sample size, the online approach and English language focus, the research is not representative of the global population of young people.



You can download the Girls' Pact here:  
[plan-international.org/girls-pact](https://plan-international.org/girls-pact)

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- 86 The Leave No One Behind Partnership aims to make SDG implementation and public policies more inclusive and accountable towards those who are furthest behind by making their voices heard and count. Plan International is one of the 100 organisations working together to deliver a scalable solution for filling data gaps on marginalised groups. For more information see <https://icscentre.org/our-work/leave-no-one-behind/>



Until we are all equal



## About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge.

For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal.

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**Photos used in this report are not photos of the research participants.**

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