



Transformative Actions for Adolescent Girls and Young People

Recommendations for the Pact for the Future
from Adolescent Girls and Young People

"We want our voices to be heard, and we want to engage with you in building a gender equal future that fulfils girls' rights. We refuse to settle for anything less than full equality and justice for girls everywhere. Together, let us create a world where every girl can thrive, where their rights are upheld, and where their potential knows no bounds. Let every word of the Pact for the Future, Declaration on Future Generations and Global Digital Compact be a firm commitment to the future laid out here."

The Girls' Pact for the Future, 2024

Why is the Summit of the Future important?

The Summit of the Future (SoTF) is a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinvigorate global action, recommit to fundamental principles, and further develop the frameworks of multilateralism so they are fit for the future". As such, it provides a critical window of opportunity to increase commitment to and investment in adolescent girls' rights in the 2030 agenda and post-2030 development framework.

The need to focus on adolescent girls and young women

Girls continue to be the largest excluded group in the world. They face discrimination and abuse simply for being young and female. At all stages of their early lives up to adulthood, girls face distinct disadvantages that are directly related to this double discrimination. When factors like poverty, ethnicity, disability intersect and where gender stereotyping and unequal power relations prevail, girls' disadvantage is magnified. Too often girls are falling between the

dominant agendas of women's and children's rights. While there have been improvements in this area, with girls being included in international commitments including the Sustainable Development Goals, more actions remain to be taken so they can fully enjoy their rights. Further, adolescent girls who are facing distinct needs and challenges are at risk of being left behind. More than halfway into the 2030 agenda, adolescent girls are still being denied their rights, face discrimination, and are underestimated in their potential as change-makers. As we approach the Summit of the Future, adolescent girls continue to be invisible in global policymaking and development agendas. Contemporary global challenges disproportionately affect girls and adolescents, especially those in developing countries and those living in crisis.

Top 8 Transformative Actions for Adolescent Girls and Young People

The transformative potential of adolescent girls and young people are often overlooked in policy-making and international commitments.

Recognizing this, in May 2024, Plan International, in partnership with UNICEF, launched the [Girls' Pact for the Future](#), which laid out adolescent girls' and young people's vision for a gender-equal future and proposed several recommendations to achieve it. Building on the results of the Girls' Pact for the Future, these same young people have identified the eight actions from the [Revision 5 of the Pact for the Future](#) that they believe will be most impactful in addressing the barriers they currently experience.



8 Transformative Actions for Adolescent Girls and Young People:

✔ Action 6

We will invest in people to end poverty and strengthen trust and social cohesion.

✔ Action 31

We will ensure that science, technology and innovation improve gender equality and the lives of all women and girls.

✔ Action 8

We will achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as crucial contribution to progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

✔ Action 34

We will invest in the social and economic development of children and young people so they can reach their full potential.

✔ Action 9

We will strengthen our actions to address climate change.

✔ Action 35

We will promote, protect and respect the human rights of all young people and foster social inclusion and integration.

✔ Action 14

We will protect all civilians in armed conflict.

✔ Action 36

We will strengthen meaningful youth participation at the national level.





With this, we call on Member States to:

Protect, strengthen, commit to, and champion

the below Transformative Actions in the negotiations for the Pact for the Future, and in all ways possible in the Summit of the Future in September and beyond;

Make commitments and investments

for adolescent girls and young people in the Summit of the Future; and

Commit to implement Transformative Actions

beyond the Summit of the Future.



Transformative Action #1

1

✔ Action 6

We will invest in people to end poverty and strengthen trust and social cohesion.

Why is this Action transformative for adolescent girls and young people?

- Poverty has been among the drivers of many human rights violations that girls and young people face including child, early, and forced marriage and unions; lack of access to education and health services; denial of sexual and reproductive health and rights; and gender-based violence, among others.
- Girls and young women make up the majority of the world's 628 million unemployed young people who have neither an education nor vocational training. Gender inequality and discrimination are preventing girls from going to schools and getting the skills they need to access decent work and break out of poverty.
- Young women are more likely to be paid lower wages- if they are paid at all- and be the first to lose their jobs. They also perform most care and domestic work.

Investing in girls' economic empowerment is essential to achieving gender equality. Enabling girls to learn throughout their lives and develop key skills can transform lives, communities, and entire countries. Each extra year of education boosts girls' wages by up to 20%.

Young women with secondary education could expect to make almost twice as much as those with no education. The economic empowerment of girls must start early, when gender stereotyping begins- and must continue throughout their lives. This includes dedicated efforts to challenge perceptions about what is acceptable for women to do, providing vocational training and life skills, access to loans and savings groups, and education on how money works.



Transformative Action #2

2

✓ Action 8

We will achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as crucial contribution to progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

Why is this Action transformative for adolescent girls and young people?

- There has been little overall progress on gender equality at the global level between 2015 and 2020.
- The SDG framework substantially underrepresents adolescent girls; of 232 SDG indicators less than 8% are gender- and adolescent or youth-specific. Whilst some progress has been made, a significant portion still face denial of their rights and entrenched discrimination.
- Deeply rooted cultural norms and stereotypes, combined with a lack of appropriate funding, continue to hinder progress towards gender equality under the SDGs.

Funding lies at the heart of the success of the SDG Agenda. Investing in girl-led and girl-centred initiatives - properly carrying out the commitment to youth participation could be transformative.

Investing in data will be critical to monitoring SDG progress, ensuring accountability, and increasing our understanding of girls' ongoing and emerging challenges and disadvantages. Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are key components to the achievement of gender equality and the fulfilment of the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

With six years remaining to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there needs to be a concerted increase in commitments, action, and investment to ensure that all adolescents can realize their rights to health and wellbeing, especially regarding ensuring their sexual and reproductive health and rights.



Transformative Action #3

3

✓ Action 9

We will strengthen our actions to address climate change.

Why is this Action transformative for adolescent girls and young people?

- Climate change is a social and intergenerational injustice; those who have contributed least are most impacted.
- Discriminatory social and gender norms mean that girls and women, as well as other marginalized groups, are often more affected by climate change, yet have the fewest resources to cope.
- Research estimated that climate-related events in 2021 would have prevented at least four million girls from completing their education in low- and middle- income countries⁶ and if current trends continue, by 2025 climate change will be a contributing factor in preventing at least 12.5 million girls from completing their education each year.
- Health services, including SRH services in crisis settings often fail to reach vulnerable groups and are insufficiently prioritised and resourced. Climate-related disasters also contribute to increases in harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and unions due to the growing impoverishment of communities.

Girls' education is strongly linked with impactful climate action. Quality education is crucial in strengthening girls' adaptive capacities, increasing their knowledge and skills on how to address climate change, and advance climate and social justice.

Member States should recognize the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on girls and young women, as well as their capacity to take part and lead climate actions and solutions. There is a need to support and increase girls' participation and leadership in decision making in climate change mitigation and adaptation but call for the inclusion of girls and young women in these processes.

Transformative Action #4

4

✔ Action 14

We will protect all civilians in armed conflict.

Why is this Action transformative for adolescent girls and young people?

- Adolescent girls and young women experience crises differently to boys and women and are particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation.
- During a crisis, girls, especially those separated from their parents, face an elevated risk of abuse and exploitation. To survive and care for their families, adolescent girls and young women are often sexually exploited in return for food and money or fall prey to human trafficking.
- Girls' and young people's movement may be severely restricted in humanitarian settings when families are worried about their safety. These constraints limit girls' ability to attend school and access programs and services and prevent them from developing support networks critical to their wellbeing.
- Severe hunger is one result of humanitarian crisis and conflicts. As the reality of the crisis unfolds, the specific and differential impact of hunger on girls often remains neglected. Women and girls account for 70% of the world's hungry. As a result of gender inequality, girls and women regularly eat less and last in countries facing conflict, famine, and hunger.
- Food insecurity places girls at risk of gender-based discrimination and violence.

Member States should invest in policies and programs that will address the gendered impact of crisis and conflicts. Interventions must be tailored to the specific needs of adolescent girls and young women, with comprehensive, cross sectoral programming that address both immediate lifesaving and promotes long-term resilience. Such programs must include sexual and reproductive health and rights, protection, education, health services, and economic crisis.



Transformative Action #5

5

✔ Action 31

We will ensure that science, technology and innovation improve gender equality and the lives of all women and girls.

Why is this Action transformative for adolescent girls and young people?

- Compared to their male peers, girls online face more threats of sexual violence. As an increasing share of our lives are spent online, we are also seeing harassment and abuse take new forms in the online space. Girls are targeted online just because they are young and female, and if they are politically outspoken, disabled, Black or identify as LGBTIQ+, it gets worse. This is psychologically damaging and can lead to actual physical harm.
- Girls, adolescents, and young women often have less access to technology and the internet compared to boys and men. Particularly in developing countries, girls and women struggle to afford technology and internet access.
- The gender technology gap also negatively impacts countries' potential for economic growth and development.

Governments and society as a whole need to monitor this abuse rigorously and social media companies must use their technological skills and financial resources to put freedom online for girls and young women at the heart of their agenda.

Without equal access to technology and the internet, girls and women are not able to equally participate in our even more digital societies. If governments equip girls with digital skills through prioritizing education in ICT subjects, they will help girls thrive in economies. Technology can also be a powerful tool for girls to become activists and lead change on issues that affect them.

Transformative Action #6

6

✔ Action 34

We will invest in the social and economic development of children and young people so they can reach their full potential.

Why is this Action transformative for adolescent girls and young people?

- According to the 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report, 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. This progress calls for efforts to double down in the remaining years to 2030 as there are 122 million girls still out-of-school around the world today.
- Investing in girls' education transforms communities, countries, and the entire world. Girls who receive an education are less likely to marry at a young age and more likely to lead healthy and productive lives. Girls' education strengthens economies and reduces inequality.
- Adolescent girls experience significant challenges in accessing information and services on health, and sexual and reproductive health, including comprehensive sexuality education. They are often denied the autonomy or knowledge to make informed decisions to be able to exercise a healthy, safe, and enjoyable sexuality. This is particularly true for girls and young women who live in poverty, in crisis or emergency settings or who belong to vulnerable and excluded groups, who often face additional risks to their health and wellbeing due to the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination.

Girls' education goes beyond getting girls into school. We need education systems to become 'gender-transformative'. Gender-transformative education aims to remove barriers to education and boost progress towards important social shifts. It equips and empowers stakeholders, students, teachers, communities, and policy makers, to examine, challenge, and change harmful gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls and women. A life-course and age-responsive approach is necessary for sustainable development, recognizing key stages in children's and girls' lives. This means that policies and program design, implementation and financing must be gender-transformative and responsive to age and the specific discrimination that they face.



Transformative Action #7

7

✔ Action 35

We will promote, protect and respect the human rights of all young people and foster social inclusion and integration.

Why is this Action transformative for adolescent girls and young people?

- Gender discriminatory social norms are among the greatest barriers to girls' and young people's ability to enjoy their rights. In most contexts, these norms limit their access to education, employment opportunities, health and sexual and reproductive health rights, participation, and leadership, among others. They are also among the main causes of gender-based violence in various settings.
- Gender-based discrimination can be compounded by other intersecting identities, such as disability; ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds; LGBTIQ+ identity; age; marital status; among others.
- With regards to disability, women and girls may have different types of disabilities that may or may not come with functional limitations. This can lead to lower economic and social status; increased risk of violence and abuse; and limited access to education, health care including sexual and reproductive health and rights, information, services, justice, as well as civic and political participation. These barriers hinder their full and effective participation across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum.

Member states should adopt a gender-transformative approach that tackles the root causes of gender inequality and challenges the unequal power relations, and an intersectional approach that recognizes the intersecting identities of people especially girls and young women, that contribute to the forms of discrimination and barriers that they are facing.

Gender equality and sustainable development can only be meaningfully achieved with these two approaches.

Transformative Action #8

8

✔ Action 36

We will strengthen meaningful youth participation at the national level.

Why is this Action transformative for adolescent girls and young people?

- Adolescent girls and young women from many different countries can be found organizing global movements, tackling diverse issues.
- One of the most significant ways to advance gender equality is to support and resource feminist activism. However, feminist organizations – especially in the low and lower middle-income countries – continue to operate on shoestring budgets.

Girls and young people in all their diversity are experts in their own lives and have the right to participate in decision-making processes especially where decisions that affect them are made.

Any action towards gender equality will fail to create lasting change if it is not shaped by, co-created, or implemented in partnership with those who will be impacted. There is a need to shift the necessary power and resources to young people specifically - with a focus on promoting girls' leadership, opening space within formal structures and resourcing girl- and youth-centred action.

Summary

Plan International believes the way to achieve the objectives of the Summit of the Future is to intently listen to and urgently respond to the calls of girls and young women. This includes ensuring that the text of the Pact for the Future, and especially that of these 8 Actions, strongly promotes gender equality, human rights, and the meaningful participation of adolescent girls and young people.

We reiterate our call to Member States to:

- ✔ **Protect, strengthen, commit to, and champion the below Transformative Actions in the negotiations for the Pact for the Future, and in all ways possible in the Summit of the Future in September and beyond;**
- ✔ **Make commitments and investments for adolescent girls and young people in the Summit of the Future; and**
- ✔ **Commit to implement Transformative Actions beyond the Summit of the 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.**

You can download the research report here:
plan-international.org/publications/our-voices-for-our-tomorrow





Until we are all equal

About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization 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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