



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
5 December 2021

Original: English

---

### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-sixth session

14–25 March 2022

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Climate change is the defining challenge of our time and poses a critical threat to our future. As the world's largest voluntary movement, with 10 million Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in 152 countries, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts actively engages girls in leadership opportunities through its non-formal educational methodology, global programmes and advocacy campaigns. The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts advocates girls and young women have the right to inherit a liveable planet. In many countries around the world, girls and young women are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation because they are more likely to live in poverty, they have less access to basic human rights and face systematic violence that escalates during periods of instability, such as natural disasters.

We call on UN Member States to demonstrate strong will and commitment to address the disproportionate impacts of climate injustice and rights violations of girls and young women, to make space for genuine participation of girls and young women and to sufficiently address the impact of the pandemic on women's economic empowerment by investing in mechanisms that respect girls' and women's agency. This statement is written based on the consultation with girls and young women from our global Movement.

### Need for gender responsive approach to climate change

When natural disasters occur, women and girls are disproportionately impacted and are particularly vulnerable due to multidimensional inequalities that persist in society across social, economic, cultural and institutional processes. Risks from climate change are linked to further inequalities and exclusions such as increase in violence, early marriage, loss of education and economic empowerment.

In rural communities around the world women usually take on the crucial daily responsibilities to run their households; cooking, cleaning and childcare, as well as farming responsibilities. In more deprived areas, girls and women do not receive the access to education they need and deserve. Women are often without any land rights or decision-making powers.

Girls and young women are hit hard - the intersecting issues of poverty, natural disasters, higher risk of violence, access to nutrition and loss of education need to be recognised when creating policies and programmes for girls. While the Sustainable Development Goals in Goal 5.2 and 5.6 refer to adolescent girls' experiences there is a failure to acknowledge that girls experience violence before the age of 15. Goal 16 seeks to measure rates of violence against children within the broader context of peaceful and inclusive societies and Goal 13 identifies the impacts of climate change, but lacks a gender lens that recognises the unique vulnerabilities of girls.

World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts calls on national governments and the international community to actively include girls and young women in climate change and environmental sustainability processes by:

- Meeting and strengthening their commitment under Article 3 of the UN Climate Change Convention, which states: The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.
- Ensuring equitable access to resources (i.e. to land, water, sanitation, clean energy, safe shelter and locally grown food, etc.) for all girls, young women and

their families. This will increase their resilience to climate change, and in turn, their ability to remain in school, to access employment and live a stable life.

- Disaggregate national data on SGD targets and recognise intersection in issues that disproportionately affect girls and women e.g. Climate change, nutrition, gender-based violence and body autonomy
- Ensure girls and young women have access to relevant information and opportunities to develop their skills through both formal and non-formal climate change and environment education
- Governments should provide support to low-income families, in particular single-parent families and female headed households

### **Women and Girls' participation in decision-making in climate change action**

A youth consultation conducted by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girls Scouts in 2020 found that the environment is the top concern for Girl Guides and Girls Scouts between the ages of 13 and 17 years old, in over 100 countries. In addition, 70 per cent of respondents felt that being a girl makes it harder for them to achieve their goals, because they feel people do not believe in their potential. Despite the fact that girls and women can and do play a critical role in responding to environmental degradation and climate change, they are often excluded from relevant wider discourse, and their participation in decision making at all levels is limited. This further undermines their ability to influence measures designed to address these issues. The World Association of Girl Guides and Girls Scouts believes that girls and young women must participate at all levels of decision making and, in the design, delivery and implementation of all relevant environmental programmes, in order to shape a sustainable and equal future for us all. World Association of Girl Guides & Girl Scouts has identified the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, to ensure climate action and environmental sustainability, as one of the priority issues on which to take a stand, speak out, and take action.

Women and girls' participation in decision making is hindered through a number of key barriers, notably, a lack of opportunity, enshrined societal gender 'norms' and a lack of agency as a result of patriarchy.

As stipulated in Article 12 of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts calls on national governments and the international community to:

- Ensure effective and meaningful participation and equitable representation of girls and young women in all stages of work towards environmental sustainability. Girls and young women's inputs must be sought, valued, and listened to, rather than simply numerical participation.
- Prioritise partnerships with youth, young women's and children's organisations recognizing the disproportionate effect of these issues on young people and the importance of empowering organisations that work with them.
- Empower girls and young women to conduct research on the quality of the environment and to communicate their findings to the wider community.

### **Ensuring women and girls' empowerment**

The empowerment of women everywhere is contingent on eradicating harmful and dangerous social norms and human rights violations experienced by girls and young women from the earliest years of their lives. Furthermore, the health and social impacts of COVID-19 have been devastating, and have detrimental consequences for the economic empowerment of women and girls' futures.

Women and girls face unequal burden of care and domestic responsibilities, limiting their access to secure work and education. Where national economic growth slows, employers struggle to retain staff, and efforts to close the gender gap in many workplaces are likely to be deprioritised. Women now face further roadblocks in reaching positions of leadership and accessing opportunities for professional development (reports by McKinsey & Company, 2021).

The majority of girls and young women consulted in our global survey (76 per cent) thought that children's education in their countries got worse because of COVID. In most countries girls are not consulted in social, civic or political life, including within the spaces they occupy where the state has both a mandate and an influence. 1.3 million girls are currently out of school. This number has increased as a result of the pandemic with millions unlikely to return as a result of child marriage, early pregnancy, caregiving responsibilities, forced labour and reduced income of families resulting in reprioritisation of educating the girl child (Shadow pandemic by UN, 2020). For those in school, pervasive gender norms often prescribe responsibilities, opportunities or praise to students based on their gender, leaving girls behind.

Access to non-formal education in school and outside of school has now become even more critical with so few spaces dedicated to responding to girls' needs and making them aware of their rights. Non-formal educational settings, youth groups and girl-only safe spaces rarely benefit from government funding and often rely on voluntary contributions.

### **Risks to health and well-being**

Our work and consultation with girls and young women also found alarming vulnerabilities for girls and young women's wellbeing, which inevitably impacts their agency and economic empowerment. 90 per cent girls and young women consulted are worried about their future, mentioning they are afraid of not being safe, of not being able to graduate and of not being back to school. From over 2000 girls and young women polled, half said that the COVID crisis has made it harder for them to eat healthy food, and others raising concerns on access to basic healthcare and menstrual hygiene materials. Girls and young women also reported experiencing low confidence, isolation low self-esteem during the pandemic. The majority (89 per cent) of girls and young women consulted strongly believe that there should be laws or guidelines suppressing the promotion of beauty standards.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure the gender dimension is considered across all policies, budgets, programme and projects to enable girls and young women's needs to be visible and addressed.
- Invest in formal and non-formal education to ensure 12 years of free, safe, quality education.
- Allocating funds for training and resources to build girls' and young women's capacity to take action on issues impacting them, providing adequate budgets for relevant ministries to support and scale up their actions.
- Adopt, strengthen and enforce laws and policies to address violence against women and girls including ensuring that policies and measures against violence and harassment at schools and work are put in place and implemented during and after the Covid-19 crisis.

- Regulate media and social media, to ensure it promotes positive online and digital practices, and actively enforce clearer signposting to support young people on their mental health.
  - Ensure access and opportunities for young women to be consulted and appointed in decision making positions.
  - Appoint women to leadership positions to ensure gender parity in all spheres of decision making.
  - Implement laws and amend inadequate/out-dated laws that harm women and girls' rights.
-