

Youth Version of the Report of The Expert Group Meeting on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child

## Stop discrimination and violence against girls

You have the power to do something



**Before you begin...**

Before you begin reading this document about how experts think discrimination and violence against girls should be stopped, we would like you to answer a question:


*If you were the head of your country for one day, what would you do for girls?*

**Now...**

Read on to learn what the experts think...and then answer the questions at the end of each section to tell us what you think should be done. Send us your answers by **15 January 2007**. You can send your responses in 3 ways:

- **Online:** Log on to Voices of Youth (<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>) and click on "Stop discrimination and violence against girls" to fill in the online questionnaire.
- **Email:** [voy@unicef.org](mailto:voy@unicef.org), with "Stop discrimination and violence against girls" in the subject line.
- **Mail:** Voices of Youth, 3 UN Plaza, New York City, NY 10017, USA.

## GLOSSARY

Below is a short definition of some of the words and expressions you will find in the report. They will have this symbol  so you can easily recognize them in the text.



### Key institutions

**CSW: Commission on the Status of Women** – a branch of the UN that makes policies to promote the rights of women.

**DAW: Division for the Advancement of Women** – a branch of the UN that organizes the CSW.

**UN: United Nations** – an international organization that was created in 1945 to bring all nations of the world together to work for peace and development, based on the principles of justice, human dignity and the well-being of all people.

**UNICEF: United Nations Children’s Fund** – a branch of the UN that works to promote the rights to survival, protection, development and participation of all children.

### Important international agreements

**CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** – an agreement signed by most countries that defines discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action.

**CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child** – an agreement that sets out the legal rights for all children (0-18 years), including the right to an education, health, information, participation, skills and opportunities to grow and develop. The CRC is signed by almost all countries.

### Terms or phrases:

**Discrimination** – when a person is mistreated because of factors such as their race, gender or religion.

**Empowerment** – the process of gaining control of your own life by getting knowledge, opportunities, skills and tools that no one can take away from you.

**Exploitation** – the act of mistreating someone by taking advantage of them, using them selfishly, or benefiting at their expense.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** – refers to all procedures – generally based on tradition or culture – that remove part or all of a girl or woman’s sexual parts.

**Gender** – refers to a set of qualities and behaviours expected from a female or male, girl or boy by society. Gender is different from sex which only refers to the biology of girls and boys, and women and men.

**Gender equality** – the belief that all people, whether they are girls or boys or women or men, have the same worth and rights and should have the same opportunities.

**HIV** – a virus (the Human Immunodeficiency Virus) that damages the body’s ability to defend itself from illness. HIV is transmitted mostly through sexual relations or sharing needles. A person can live a long and healthy life with HIV.

**HIV/AIDS** – HIV can develop into Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Without proper treatment, AIDS can and does kill many people. In many countries, there is little or no treatment available for people living with AIDS.

**Human rights** – international law has agreed that every human being, regardless of their race, culture, gender, religion or physical characteristics, has the basic and universal right to be treated fairly and without cruelty.

**Human rights violations** – actions, attitudes, or abuses that violate the basic rights of a human being. These violations are illegal and break international law.

**Internally displaced person (IDP)** – someone who has been forced to leave their home for reasons such as human rights violations or war, but has not moved to another country.

**Lesbian girls** – girls who are physically and emotionally attracted to other girls.

**Mentors** – Older people that can give some advice and guidance to young people.

**Non-governmental organization (NGO)** – organizations that are not associated with governments and often work in communities to protect and help those that need it.

**Nomadic** – communities of people who move from place to place instead of settling down in one location.

**Norms** – standards of behaviour that are maintained by society and culture.



**Obstetric fistula** – a serious medical condition in which a hole (fistula) develops between the vaginal area and anus (behind), making the girl unable to control her bladder.

**Peers** – people of the same age or equal standing.

**Peer education** – education through interaction between a group of people of the same age and status, for example talking with your friends to learn about HIV and AIDS.

**Prostitution** – when a person has sex, or takes part in sexual activities, with another person in return for money, favours or any other form of payment.

**Refugee** – someone who has been forced to leave their home for reasons such as human rights violations or war. Because refugees do not feel protected by, or safe in, their country they move to another country.

**Violence** – any action or abuse that is intended to cause injury or harm to others.



*"Children devoid of all the basic necessities in life are taken advantage of... they are exploited at the hands of people in numerous ways leaving them scared, helpless and vulnerable."  
- girl, 19 years old,  
United Arab Emirates*



## What is the Commission on the Status of Women?

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established in 1946 and meets every year to prepare recommendations and reports to the United Nations. The CSW aims to promote women's rights and achieve equal rights for women and men, girls and boys. This year, the member governments of the CSW will meet from February-March 2007 to focus on "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child." Discrimination means that a person is treated based on something other than their individual worth, such as their race, gender, or religion. Discrimination often leads to violence.

## Experts' report

In September 2006, in Florence, Italy, a group of experts on the situation of girls throughout the world came together to write a report on what they think the world and its leaders should do for girls. Their report will be presented during the 2007 CSW at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and will be used to inform the discussions and final recommendations of the member governments.

## Why a youth version of the experts' report?

The purpose of this youth version of the experts' report is to give you a chance to react to what experts are saying. Your voice and the voices of young people around the world, especially young girls from rural or problematic areas, will be heard in response to the problem of discrimination and violence against girls. Recommendations or suggestions you make will be included in the youth response presented at this important UN event.

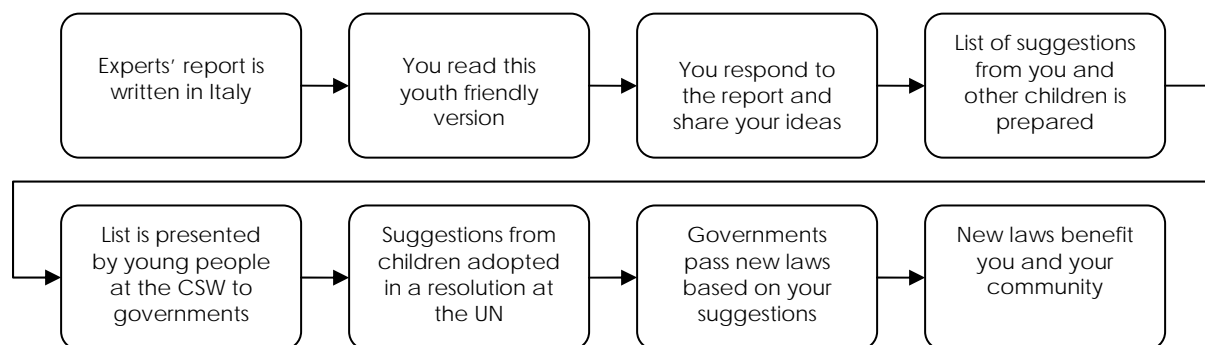
## What is in the experts' report?

In each section of this youth version of the report you will find an explanation of an issue, what the experts are saying about this issue, some facts and quotations to think about, and two questions to discuss and answer. The two questions at the end of each section will ask you what is missing in the report and what can be done to solve the problems described.

As you read, try and see if you can think of anything the experts might have left out or forgotten. You know your own situation better than anyone else! You can also think about what can be done to solve the problems that are described, and who should be responsible for doing it. Keep in mind that there are a lot of people that can help, including parents, care givers, guardians, teachers, religious leaders, police, health care providers, lawyers, local politicians, NGOs, governments, the UN and other children and young people.



## Will my suggestions have an impact?

You might wonder how your suggestions can make an impact. Take a look at the illustration below to see how your suggestions could become a law or a policy:





## I. LAWS AND POLICIES



### PUTTING THEM INTO PRACTICE

*You might have experienced  discrimination and  violence for no other reason than because you are a girl. How can this go on while people, and sometimes even the police, are watching? Are there not laws that make this illegal?*



In fact, laws do exist to protect you from discrimination and violence; which is your right. And it is your government's duty to make sure these laws are put into practice.

Almost every country in the world has committed to making sure all children – girls and boys – have a right to survival, development, protection and participation. This includes the right to an education, health services, knowledge, skills, opportunities to grow and develop, to express one's opinion and to be heard, and a life free from discrimination. Countries have shown their commitment to making sure these rights are protected by signing international agreements such as the  Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the  Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). By signing these agreements, every government takes on the responsibility of putting in place national laws and policies that fulfil these rights.

But it is one thing to make promises at the  United Nations Headquarters in New York – and yet another to make sure these promises actually protect you and all the girls in the world. Unfortunately, many countries have different understandings of what children's, girls' and  human rights actually are, and therefore do not always protect girls the way that was intended when these agreements were signed.

In many countries the national laws do not reach many communities because there is no effective law enforcement in place, such as courts and police, and human rights violations still take place in the "hidden spaces" within a family or the community.

The following human rights violations are discussed in the expert report:

- **Son preference** – Because many cultures value boys more than girls, many girls do not even get the chance to be born, and those who are born often do not get the same access to food, shelter, education, and health care as boys.
- **Child and forced marriages** – Many girls are forced into marriages and into harmful sexual relations while they are still children.
- **HIV and AIDS** – Girls are a lot more affected than boys by HIV and AIDS partly because they often do not have the power to protect themselves from the virus or access to treatment for the disease.
- **Harmful traditional practices** – Many families and communities still practice old traditions that have proved to be very harmful for girls, such as early marriage or Female Genital Mutilation.
- **Conflict situations** – Girls are too often recruited into armed conflicts as child soldiers, or they become targets of violence and rape in conflict situations.
- **Sexual exploitation and slave-like practices** – Many girls are forced into prostitution and child labour long before they are physically and emotionally ready for sexual activity or any type of difficult or dangerous labour.
- **The “female” work burden** – Girls are often expected to help with chores in their own homes as well as work for pay in other people’s homes. These girls then have less time and fewer opportunities for play, education and personal development.



#### Food for thought

If you marry before you turn 18 do you think you will have the same opportunities for an education and to do what you really want, than if you marry later?

## The experts’ recommendations

A lot needs to be done, by everyone, and especially by governments and NGOs that work on human rights and international law. Sometimes governments only take action

after they get pressured by their citizens and local organizations. Some of the suggestions outlined in the expert report are:

- More people need to know about the conventions (CRC and CEDAW) that protect girls' and women's rights. This can be done if governments give more support for education about these rights to families and communities.
- International laws and policies should focus more specifically on the rights and needs of girls and be consistent with the international agreements governments signed.
- National laws should be the same as international laws on the rights of girls, and all laws that discriminate against girls should be removed.
- Law enforcement (such as the police), the judicial agencies (the legal courts) and local organizations should be trained to take action when violations happen in families and communities.
- When governments report to the United Nations they should be required to report on the situation of girls.



*"Every day in almost every part of India a girl is raped in public transport, or one is molested at malls and market places in front of people who remain silent and do nothing. Even the police constables abuse and insult the victims and their families." - girl, 16 years old, India*

**? Questions to think about and answer:**

- Look at the list of human rights violations. Do you think any are missing? If so, which ones would you add and why do you think they are important?
- What can be done to make sure laws and policies are put into practice and who should be responsible for making sure it happens?

## II. DISCRIMINATION

### RECOGNIZING AND FIGHTING INEQUALITY BETWEEN GIRLS AND BOYS

*As you are growing up, you might face a set of expectations of what you should be doing with your life.*

*You might be expected to help with chores around the house, to let boys and men make decisions for you, to have sex, and to marry and have children while you are still a child. You may not be expected to take control of your own life or make decisions for your own future. You may not be expected to say “no” when men around you ask you for something. Why do these situations exist in many parts of the world today?*



**Fact:** 115 million children around the world are not in primary school – more than half of them are girls.

📖 Gender norms and gender structures are the main reasons for the 📖 discrimination and 📖 violence that many girls face. The expectations of girls described above have been part of society for so long that they have become generally accepted as 📖 norms in many societies. There are many reasons why these norms and structures exist, among them are:

- **Lack of opportunities for ownership** – Existing laws in some countries make it difficult for many girls and women to own their own property, and to receive money from their parents (inheritance). Without money, many girls are forced to rely on men to survive.
- **Tradition and religion** – Sometimes the expectations we have of girls are based on old traditions and on religious beliefs that can be very hard to change, especially if they are reinforced by local laws.
- **Looking at girls as objects** – Girls, even at a very young age, are often viewed as objects, rather

**Food for thought**



Why do you think there are more boys than girls in school?

than human beings. As a result, girls are often marketed or sold as property.

- “Hidden spaces” – Discrimination and violence often happen behind closed doors within the family or community, where it is never discovered by people who could help. People also often feel it is not their business to mix into others’ family affairs.

## The experts’ recommendations

You might think there is not much that can be done about all these expectations and traditions that have been around for so long, but there is.

- We must help people talk openly about how  gender norms and roles can lead to  discrimination and violence.
- We must work to educate everyone - girls, boys, mothers, fathers, guardians, religious leaders, teachers, community leaders, doctors, nurses, lawyers – about the rights of girls, and encourage and help them to take action against discrimination.
- We must find community leaders (such as priests, politicians or teachers), especially men and boys, who will partner with women and girls to make sure everyone has the same rights and opportunities.
- We cannot be afraid to intervene and to question gender roles within a family a girl’s rights are being violated.



*“[i]n a number of countries, girls are given less food than boys. Girls may also be given poorer quality food than their brothers. And because girls may receive less medical care than boys, girls’ under-nutrition may go undetected, leading to serious health problems...” - girl, 20 years old, Republic of Korea*

### ? Questions to think about and answer:

- Look at the list of causes of discrimination and violence. Do you think any are missing? If so, which ones would you add and why do you think they are important?
- What can be done to stop discrimination and violence against girls and who should be responsible?

### III. INVISIBLE GIRLS

#### FINDING AND PROTECTING GIRLS WHO ARE HIDDEN AND FORGOTTEN



*Imagine if you were invisible. Imagine if no one paid any attention to you, listened to you when you spoke or took your needs into consideration. Maybe you do not have to imagine this at all. Maybe this is your reality, as it is for so many girls in the world today. Maybe you are also in great need of help and do not have access to it. Maybe you are “invisible”.*

**Fact:** In Sub-Saharan Africa (the southern part) 75 per cent of new cases of HIV infections are girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 24.

Invisible girls are not protected by existing policies and programs. They are often in places that are hard to reach (rural, war torn countries), or they are made to feel so ashamed of their situation that they are afraid to speak up about their problems. These invisible girls then grow up to be invisible women. While there are many girls in this situation, the experts' report identifies the following groups of invisible girls:

#### Food for thought

Why do you think girls are more vulnerable to HIV infection than boys?

- Girls infected or affected by HIV and AIDS
- Girls who are having sex but do not have access to health care
- Girls with disabilities
- Girls subjected to FGM
- Girls suffering from obstetric fistula
- Girl brides
- Girl mothers
- Girls who are sexually abused or raped
- Girls who are exploited
- Girls who are forced to marry members of fighting forces
- Girls who must act as parents, home keepers, bread winners and protectors of younger siblings
- Girls who work in other people's homes
- Girls who are sold into slavery
- Girls who are associated with fighting forces
- Girls who are nomadic
- Girls who are refugees or internally displaced
- Girls in prison
- Girls who are lesbians

## The experts' recommendations

We have to figure out how to find the invisible girls and how we can help them out of their situation. We also need to make sure these invisible girls participate in making the decisions that affect them. The experts' report has outlined the following suggestions for how to find and protect these invisible girls:



- There should be more research done on invisible girls so we can find out where and who they are, and what they need.
- There should be programs that deal especially with these groups of girls – programs that can reach them in their community and find and help them even if they are invisible.
- There should be good methods to see whether programs that reach the invisible girls are actually helping them (this is often called monitoring and evaluation).



*"I am the one who does all the housework... I do the cooking and take care of the household items. [My brother] just eats and goes outside to play." - girl, 10 years old, Ethiopia*

### ? Questions to think about and answer:

- Look at the list of groups of invisible girls. Do you think any groups are missing? If so, which ones would you add and why do you think they are important?
- How can community leaders, young people, and others better find and protect invisible girls? Who should be responsible for helping invisible girls?


## IV. EMPOWERMENT


### TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE

What is  empowerment? You might have heard the word used in many different cases and places. Empowerment is the process of gaining control of your own life by getting skills, tools, knowledge and opportunities that no one can take away from you. People around you, such as friends, parents, teachers, community workers and more can help to empower you too. When you are empowered, you are in a much better position to make decisions regarding your own life and future, and to protect yourself from  human rights violations.





**Fact:** In Asia, at least 60 million girls are 'missing' from the population because parents would not let them be born and grow up – because they are girls.


You can also be disempowered if the environment around you is not safe and supportive. It is important to fight the discrimination and  gender norms that disempower girls. But sometimes even the governments have not been willing to do this, either because they do not realize how important it is or because of traditional and cultural beliefs. The experts' report outlines four areas they think need to be developed to empower girls:

- **Safe and supportive spaces** – Girls need places where they feel safe to express themselves and where they can learn and play on their own terms. The right to learn and the right to play are both included in the  Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- **Education and access to information** – A good education is a very important part of being empowered, and all schools should consider the needs of girls and provide safe spaces for learning.

#### Food for thought

What do you think a "safe space" should look like?

Schools can also help  mentors and teachers develop skills to better protect and support girls. Empowerment through education can also take place outside the formal school system, both through  peer-to-peer education and through participating in youth organizations and other activities.

- **Participation** – Girls should be allowed to participate in making the decisions that affect them and their futures. Participation can be one of the most powerful forms of empowerment since it lets you really think through the issues and judge the outcomes of the decisions made. It is important, though, that participation happens the way girls want it, and not necessarily in the way adults want it.
- **Social assets** – Most girls gain their social skills, meaning the way they talk and act around other people, through their families and their schools. But what about the girls that grow up without a family and do not get the opportunity to go to school? It is important to find ways to connect these girls with peers (friends of the same age or equal standing) or mentors (older people that can give some advice) that can help everyone gain the social skills they need.

## The experts' recommendations

Governments, international and local organizations, and community members need to focus a lot more of their work on empowering girls. Schools have a particularly important role to play, and governments should make sure that the schools have what they need to help girls, including enough money. Also, the following can be done:



- Governments should ensure that education and health care is free for all children.
- Girls should have safe spaces where they can participate in key decisions.
- More money should be given to organisations working with girls.

### ? Questions to think about and answer:

- Look at the four strategies for empowering girls. Are there any strategies for empowerment you think are missing? If so, which ones would you add and why do you think they are important?
- What else can be done to empower girls and who should be responsible for doing it?

*“Young people can bring about change in all aspects of their lives. Often we have been ignored, but it is time that our voices are listened to. Young people worldwide should have a vision and a mission...”*  
young woman, 20 years old. Venezuela

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ANSWER

These are the same questions that appear at the end of each section. Think about and discuss them and then send us your answers by **15 January 2007**. You can send us your answers in 3 ways:

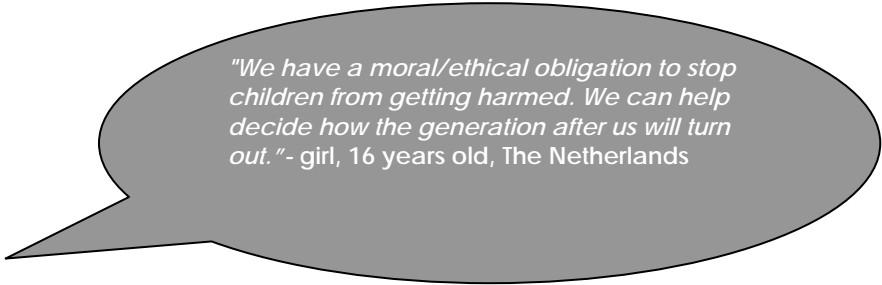


- **Online:** Log on to Voices of Youth (<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>) and click on “Stop discrimination and violence against girls” to fill in the online questionnaire.
- **Email:** [voy@unicef.org](mailto:voy@unicef.org), with “Stop discrimination and violence against girls” in the subject line.
- **Mail:** Voices of Youth, 3 UN Plaza, New York City, NY 10017, USA.

## ? QUESTIONS

- Look at the list of human rights violations. Do you think any are missing? If so, which ones would you add and why do you think they are important?
- What can be done to make sure laws and policies are put into practice and who should be responsible for making sure it happens?
- Look at the list of causes of discrimination and violence. Do you think any are missing? If so, which ones would you add and why do you think they are important?
- What can be done to stop discrimination and violence against girls and who should be responsible?
- Look at the list of groups of invisible girls. Do you think any groups are missing? If so, which ones would you add and why do you think they are important?
- How can community leaders, young people, and others better find and protect invisible girls? Who should be responsible for helping invisible girls?
- Look at the four strategies for empowering girls. Are there any strategies for empowerment you think are missing? If so, which ones would you add and why do you think they are important?
- What else can be done to empower girls and who should be responsible for doing it?

## THANK YOU!



*"We have a moral/ethical obligation to stop children from getting harmed. We can help decide how the generation after us will turn out."* - girl, 16 years old, The Netherlands

## REFERENCES

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## WHO WE ARE

**WGG: Working Group on Girls** – The Working Group on Girls of the NGO Committee on UNICEF and its international Network on Girls is a coalition of NGOs committed to promoting the rights of girls in all areas and stages of their lives and assisting girls to develop their full potential.

**VOY: Voices of Youth** – Voices of Youth is an Internet portal created by UNICEF for young people who want to know more, do more and say more about the world, and which links children and young people from over 180 countries with an opportunity to explore, discuss and take action on complex human rights and development issues.