



The path to girls' empowerment in Latin America and the Caribbean:

5
Rights

Empowerment, or the process of strengthening knowledge and capacities to enjoy the power, freedom, information and support to make informed decisions and act upon them, is a key strategy to overcoming the gender inequalities that affect the lives of millions of girls and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean. UNICEF promotes the empowerment of girls and adolescents so they can make their dreams come true and live up to their full potential.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals and UNICEF's Gender Action Plan, we have prioritized five rights that pave the path towards girls' empowerment. These rights, indivisible from other rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), are explained below, along with key data and actions directed at governments, schools, health centres, legal systems, civil society groups, families and communities to fulfil girls' rights and support their empowerment.

UNICEF's Gender Action Plan (2018-2022) includes the following 5 priorities that constitute a platform for girls' empowerment:

- 1. Guarantee gender-responsive adolescent health.**
- 2. End child marriage and early unions.**
- 3. Prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence, including in emergencies.**
- 4. Close gaps in girls' education.**
- 5. Promote access to information and supplies for menstrual hygiene.**



Key actions to fulfill our rights

Health

What are our rights?

We have the right to enjoy good health and have the information and tools necessary to prevent illness and receive appropriate care when we are sick. We have the right to affordable, accessible and quality health services.



Key Information

- Adolescent pregnancy rates in the region are among the highest in the world (**74 live births for every 1,000 are to adolescent girls between 15 and 19 years old**). The rate is even **higher among adolescents that live in poverty, rural areas and with low levels of education**.
- The risk of maternal death is **4 times higher** for adolescents under **16**.
- **1 in 5** girls in the region is **overweight or obese**.
- **1 in 4** girls **13 to 15** years old in the region reports having seriously considered **suicide**.
- More than **35%** of adolescent girls **15 to 19** years old report **not knowing that condoms prevent HIV transmission**.



What do we need to enjoy this right?



1. **ENJOY SAFE SPACES** where we can express our concerns, needs, questions and opinions about our health.



2. **ACCESS CORRECT AND RELEVANT INFORMATION** about healthy practices so we can make informed decisions about our bodies and wellbeing.



3. **ACCESS SAFE, GIRL-FRIENDLY SERVICES WHERE WE CAN REPORT VIOLENCE WITHOUT BEING STIGMATIZED**, where we can go to be protected and receive care for our physical and mental health.



4. **SUPPORT OUR FAMILIES** to talk to us, openly and honestly, about our health. We need to be able to have frank dialogue with our parents, peers and romantic partners.



5. **ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE, EQUITABLE, ACCESSIBLE, ACCEPTABLE AND EFFECTIVE SERVICES** that give us information to prevent unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STI) and HIV/AIDS, and information about nutrition and care for our physical and mental health, and general wellbeing.

Key actions to fulfill
our rights

Freedom from violence

What are our rights?

We have the right to live without fear, with people we love and who love us. We have the right to not be hurt or punished, regardless of our gender identity or sexual orientation. We have the right to live in an environment free of violence, exploitation and abuse, and to receive protection when we need it.



Key Information

- **1.1 million adolescent girls** in the region have experienced **sexual violence** or other forms of sexual abuse.
- **4** out of **10 adolescent** girls have experienced intimate partner **violence** in their lifetime, and **1 in 10** between **15** and **19** years old **justifies intimate partner violence**.
- **1** in **4 girls** in the region gets **married before** she is **18 years old**.
- Girls who marry young are more likely to suffer physical, sexual and psychological violence.
- In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, the rate of child marriage and early unions is **twice as high** among less educated women than among women who have completed secondary school (**25%** and **12%**, respectively).



What do we need to enjoy this right?



1. **ENSURE SAFE SPACES**, free of violence, for all girls, without distinction of any kind. Our homes, schools, streets, parks and transportation should not be places we are afraid of.



2. **PROMOTE CULTURAL SHIFTS** that create conditions for non-violent, respectful and positive interpersonal relationships for all children and adolescents, in families, schools and communities.



3. **ENFORCE ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES AND LAWS** related to physical, mental and sexual violence against girls. End impunity.



4. **RECEIVE INFORMATION ABOUT WHERE TO GO IF WE FACE VIOLENCE** to receive quality care and support in dignified and confidential settings. We also need appropriate programmes and services to build our full potential, delay marriage, prevent unwanted pregnancy and help us build non-violent romantic relationships.



5. **INCLUDE US IN OFFICIAL DATA ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**, especially among girls 10-14 years old and LGBTI young people, to make sure that policies, programmes and services address the types of violence we live.

Key actions to fulfill our rights

Education

What are our rights?

We have the right to inclusive and quality education, regardless of our ethnicity, religion, or if we live with a disability, in rural areas or emergency contexts. We have the right to complete our education and develop the necessary skills to participate in the workforce with fair and equal conditions, opportunities and treatment.



Key Information

- In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, factors that negatively affect adolescent girls' secondary education include: household **poverty**, **living in rural or marginalized urban areas**, and belonging to **indigenous communities**.
- Girls and adolescents tend to have **lower performance** in **science** and **math** than their male peers.
- **1 in 4** adolescent girls in Latin America who live in **rural areas** and in **poverty do not go to school**, but do unpaid domestic chores and care work.
- **Girls, boys** and **adolescents** frequently feel unsafe on the way to and from school: more than **a quarter** of girls asked in **11 countries** report **"never"** or **"rarely"** feeling safe on the way to school.
- **7** out of **10 boys** and **girls** with disabilities do not attend school.



What do we need to enjoy this right?



1. **PROMOTE OUR LEADERSHIP** at school and within the community, empower and inform us about our rights through education.



2. **RECEIVE AN EDUCATION THAT PREPARES US FOR TODAY AND THE FUTURE** with the necessary knowledge and skills to: 1) finish secondary school, 2) access tertiary education, 3) access decent employment, and 4) advocate for our rights and those of our communities.



3. **GUARANTEE AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION** that considers our diversity and responds to the specific needs of those who live in remote areas, are affected by violence, have a disability, are mothers or are pregnant, or are living through a humanitarian crisis.



4. **GIVE US QUALITY, PRACTICAL TEACHING METHODS** that includes educational projects that do not perpetuate discrimination and promote our access to knowledge, science, new technologies and those areas not traditionally female.



5. **DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES FOR ALL GIRLS TO LEARN**, expanding and adapting options for out of school girls or those that face difficulties in finishing secondary school.

Key actions to fulfill
our rights

Water and Sanitation

What are our rights?

We have the right to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities that consider our specific needs as girls. We have the right to receive timely, accurate information about menstruation, and to access girl-friendly infrastructure to manage our menstruation safely, privately and with dignity - without any suffering any form discrimination.



Key Information

- Approximately **500 million women** and **girls** worldwide lack the necessary facilities and supplies to manage their menstrual cycle with **dignity, privacy and safety**.
- In various countries around the world, **women** and **girls** bear the bulk of the responsibility for collecting water for their **homes and/or communities**.
- In rural areas of **Colombia**, **34.8%** of girls surveyed report **not knowing anything about menstruation** before menarche, while **45%** do not know or did not respond to the question 'where does menstrual blood come from'.
- In the Mosquitia region of **Honduras**, **55%** of girls surveyed report **not feeling comfortable** to go to school when they have their period.
- In the rural area of **Beni, Bolivia**, the poor conditions of school bathrooms (such as cleanliness, availability of soap, menstrual hygiene supplies, trash bins and privacy) **restrict girls' behavior and school attendance**.



What do we need to enjoy this right?



1. **LET US TALK** about menstruation in safe spaces where we can express our concerns, receive support and information about what menstruation is and how to manage it, as well as its relationship with pregnancy.



2. **END STIGMA** about menstruation in our families, communities and schools to help us overcome taboos and prejudice.



3. **ENSURE ACCESS** to water and sanitation infrastructure as well as hygiene supplies to promote good hygiene practices in schools.



4. **IMPROVE** teaching practices and skills of educators so they can take a holistic approach to sexual, reproductive health and menstrual hygiene in schools, so that we can learn practical, concrete skills to manage our menstrual and personal hygiene.



5. **ENCOURAGE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION** of responsibilities among men and women, girls and boys, related to water collection and general hygiene practices in our families and communities. Caring for family and personal hygiene should not only be women's and girls' responsibility.

Key actions to fulfill our rights

Participation

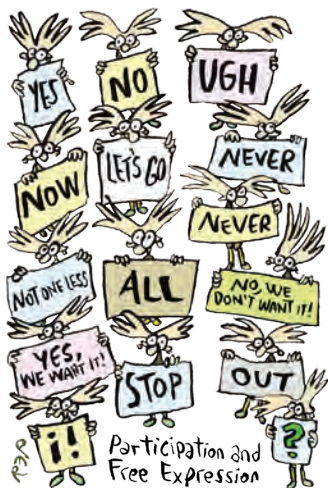
What are our rights?

We have the right to express ourselves freely and to have opinions on topics that affect our personal, social, economic, religious, cultural and political life. We have the right for our opinions to be heard and taken seriously. We have the right to participate in decision-making in our countries, communities and schools, and participate in social, cultural and athletic activities.



Why does it matter to us?

- Because it gives us the chance to develop new **skills** and build our **self-esteem**.
- Because it empowers us to challenge **abuse** and **demand** our rights be respected.
- **Because we have a lot we want to say.**
- Because we think **adults** are often mistaken.
- Because we think our contributions can lead to better **decision-making**.
- Because we **think it's** our right to be **heard** when our **life is at stake**.
- Because we want to contribute to making the **world** a **better place**.
- Because it can be **fun**.
- Because it gives us the chance to meet **girls** and **boys** from other **places**, of other **ages** and who have had different **experiences**.



What do we need to enjoy this right?



1. PROVIDE US TOOLS AND SKILLS that help us form our opinions and points of view and boost our participation in various spaces, including at school, in local government bodies, the media and other child and adolescent development spaces.



2. HAVE SAFE AND APPROPRIATE SPACES to express our opinions and concerns in a free and safe way, where adults listen and value what we have to say.



3. RECEIVE INFORMATION ABOUT TOPICS THAT INTEREST US, IN WAYS THAT WE UNDERSTAND so we can learn and be able to better express our opinions to our families, our peers and within our communities.



4. BENEFIT FROM OPPORTUNITIES to participate in designing and overseeing public policies, programmes and services so that they respond to our needs and interests.



5. TO KNOW OUR PARTICIPATION MATTERS by measuring its impact in social, cultural and political spaces and so that our actions make the world a better place for everyone.

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UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child in everything we do. Together with our partners in the Latin America and Caribbean region, we work in 36 countries and territories through 24 Country Programmes in a region of 630 million people, of which 195 million are children and adolescents.

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