



## Key messages

### International Day of the Girl 2022

11 October

### "Our time is now—our rights, our future"

In 2022, we commemorate the **10<sup>th</sup> anniversary** of the **International Day of the Girl (IDG)**. In these last 10 years, there has been increased attention on issues that matter to girls amongst governments, policymakers and the general public, and more opportunities for girls to have their voices heard on the global stage. Yet, investments in girls' rights remain limited and girls continue to confront a myriad of challenges to fulfilling their potential; made worse by concurrent crises of climate change, COVID-19 and humanitarian conflict. Girls around the world continue to face unprecedented challenges to their education, their physical and mental wellness, and the protections needed for a life without violence. Girls with disabilities face additional barriers to accessing support and services. COVID-19 has worsened existing burdens on girls around the world and worn away important gains made over the last decade.

With adversity, however, comes **resourcefulness, creativity, tenacity, and resilience**. The world's 600 million adolescent girls have shown time and time again that given the skills and the opportunities, they can be the **changemakers** driving progress in their communities, building back stronger for all, including women, boys and men.

Girls are ready for a decade of acceleration forward. It is time for us all to stand accountable – with and for girls – and to invest in a future that believes in their agency, leadership and potential.

## A call to action

From October 2022 – October 2023, we will collectively call for greater attention, investment and action on:

- **Supporting the leadership of adolescent girls** at the forefront of change efforts, including by hearing their voices, responding to their asks, and nurturing spaces for their inclusion in decision-making.
- **Increasing resources for and investments** in adolescent girls, including for the networks and organizations that support quality and inclusive education and prioritize their well-being.
- **Improving access to and uptake of inclusive adolescent girl-centered services** at all times but especially in crisis response and recovery

## Data: 10 years in numbers

1. **FGM:** In 31 countries with nationally representative prevalence data, 34 per cent of adolescent girls aged 15-19 today have undergone the practice compared to 41 percent in 2011.
2. **EDUCATION:** The total number of out-of-school girls today is lower than in 2012, but 3 million more girls of primary school age are out of school today than ten years ago.
3. **HIV:** 60,000 fewer adolescent girls are infected by HIV today than in 2012. But today, nearly six times as many adolescent girls are newly infected with HIV than boys in Sub-Saharan Africa.
4. **LITERACY:** Since 2012, the gender gap in youth literacy has closed globally, but 1 in 4 adolescent girls and young women in West and Central Africa are illiterate today.
5. **CHILD MARRIAGE:** Over the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children has declined globally from 23 percent to 19 percent. Nearly 1 in 5 is still too high.

## Key messages on adolescent girls, especially on mental health, safety and education

- 1. Girls are worth the investment - when girls thrive, we all thrive.** The world is home to more than **600 million adolescent girls** aged 10–19 years, the largest number in history. Equipped with the right resources, opportunities and an enabling environment, these girls will become the largest generation of female leaders, entrepreneurs and change-makers the world has ever seen. It also means the stakes are high if we don't urgently prioritize the future and well-being of all girls. UNICEF is calling on governments, private sector and civil society partners to **increase their targeted investments in adolescent girls** including their education, health, protection and their overall leadership.
- 2. Mental health is a major concern. Adolescents around the world bear the brunt of unaddressed mental health conditions,** with half of all conditions starting by age 14<sup>1</sup>. Most cases go undetected and untreated.
- 3. Adolescent girls need schools to re-open urgently and unconditionally.** With an estimated **616 million children**<sup>4</sup> affected by full or partial **school closures**, and many more from pandemic restrictions, girls and boys are reeling from the loss of learning and psychosocial support they would get from school. School closures have further threatened equitable access to education among migrant and displaced children, with online learning an unrealistic option for many of them. Worldwide, 24% of adolescent girls 15-19 are not in employment, education or training compared to 13% of boys.<sup>2</sup> This problem is only getting worse: over 11 million girls<sup>3</sup> may not go back to school after the COVID-19 crisis. It has been estimated<sup>4</sup> that as many as half of all secondary school-age refugee girls may not return to the classroom once schools reopen. Schools and other learning settings bring children and adolescents together in safe environments where they can access mental health support, feel a sense of belonging and benefit from supportive relationships with teachers and peers, as well as serve as a protective factor against harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.
- 4. Learning is every girl's right.** Some countries still discriminate against girls by not allowing adolescent mothers back to school. Additionally, **stigma associated with**

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<sup>1</sup> [#OnMyMind: Better mental health for every child](#)

<sup>2</sup> ILO 2022, re-analysed by UNICEF

<sup>3 5 2</sup> UNESCO, 2021. "Keeping girls in the picture. Over 11 million girls may not go back to school after the COVID-19 crisis."

<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/girlseducation>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Nyamweya, Naomi, 'Displacement, Girls' Education and COVID-19', Education for All blog, Global Partnership for Education, 26 June 2020 (cited in [Uncertain Pathways: How gender shapes the experiences of children on the move, UNICEF](#)).

**pregnancy** during the pandemic is a driver of emotional distress and school dropout<sup>5</sup>, which may lead to an increased number of girls being forced to marry when still children. In refugee camps and humanitarian settings, evidence<sup>6</sup> suggests that girls generally face greater obstacles to realizing their right to learn than boys. Internally displaced and refugee girls are less likely to attend school than boys and, in conflict settings, girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys. In several countries, girls also discussed how the psychological impacts of sexual and gender-based violence were compounded by enduring stigma<sup>7</sup>.

5. **Girls deserve quality healthcare.** Globally, nearly 1 in 6 young women (aged 20-24) give birth before age 18. In sub-Saharan Africa, over 1 in 4 young women (aged 20-24) give birth before age 18<sup>8</sup>. In eastern and southern Africa, girls account for 86 per cent of new HIV infections among adolescents<sup>9</sup>. Refugee women and girls commonly face high barriers<sup>10</sup> to health care and may miss out on public health information, grappling with language barriers, fear of navigating the health care system, and restrictive gender roles and norms. Health services must be age appropriate and accessible to all girls when and where they need them<sup>11</sup>.
6. **Menstrual equity protects dignity, builds confidence, and strengthens sexual and reproductive health and rights.** Every day 800 million people menstruate, yet 2.3 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation<sup>12</sup> and face stigma, harassment and social exclusion during menstruation. Adolescent girls are particularly at risk. A lack of access to menstrual health and hygiene restricts girls' mobility and personal choices. It affects attendance in school and participation in community life. And it compromises their safety, causing additional stress and anxiety. Lack of basic and private WASH services and products that are accessible to adolescent girls with disabilities are a major barrier to adequate management of menstrual hygiene<sup>13</sup> causing them to be more likely than girls without disabilities to miss out on social activities, school or work due to difficulties managing

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<sup>5</sup> BMJ, [Impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on adolescent pregnancy and school dropout among secondary schoolgirls in Kenya](#), and UNESCO 2021, [When schools shut: gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures](#).

<sup>6</sup> Source: Birchall, Gender, Age and Migration; United Nations Children's Fund, Education Uprooted: For every migrant, refugee and displaced child, education, 2017 (cited in [Uncertain Pathways: How gender shapes the experiences of children on the move, UNICEF](#)).

<sup>7</sup> ON MY MIND. How adolescents experience and perceive mental health around the world. A companion report to The State of the World's Children 2021.

UNICEF global databases based on national surveys including DHS and MICS

<sup>9</sup> UNAIDS 2022 estimates.

<sup>10</sup> Source: Jesuthasan, Jenny, Zara Witte and Sabine Oertelt-Prigione, 'Health-Related Needs and Barriers for Forcibly Displaced Women: A systematic review', Gender and the Genome, 19 December 2019 (cited in [Uncertain Pathways: How gender shapes the experiences of children on the move, UNICEF](#)).

<sup>11</sup> Globally, only about 2% of government budgets are spent on mental health, and the lost economic benefits of tackling young people's mental disorders globally amount to \$ 390 billion each year. Out of a total of 3,099 social protection and labour market measures adopted in response to the pandemic between March 2020 and August 2021, only 12 per cent targeted women's economic security and only 7 per cent provided support for rising unpaid care demands.

<sup>12</sup> [UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, 11th August 2022](#). Awaiting details of formal citation.

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF, Seen, Counted, Included. Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities, p. 122

menstruation<sup>14</sup>. These challenges are particularly acute in humanitarian crises. UNICEF is committed to menstrual health and hygiene interventions that improve access to materials and facilities<sup>15</sup> and to supporting girls' improved access to quality

7. **Girls with disabilities face multiple and intersectional discrimination** in the exercise and enjoyment of their rights<sup>16</sup>. They are often at greater risk, both within and outside the home, of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation<sup>17</sup> and are up to three times more at risk of rape than girls without disabilities and are twice as likely to experience other forms of gender-based violence<sup>18</sup>.
8. **Gender inequality has life-long consequences.** Childhood and adolescence are key periods when girls **internalize harmful social and gender norms**. Now is the time to disrupt stereotypes and ensure that all girls—and boys—are protected. Otherwise, they are more likely to suffer from and perpetuate the same harmful social and gender norms when they are adults. UNICEF calls on all partners: governments, the private sector, media and communities to champion gender equality in their work and to help combat stereotypes that hold girls back. The media has a special role to play in highlighting inequities and empowering girls' voices, leadership and agency.
9. **Progress is possible**, but we need to accelerate action to ensure the human rights of all girls. Today, a girl is about one-third less likely to be subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) than 30 years ago, and approximately one in five girls today are married as children compared to one in four girls becoming child brides a decade ago. However, this progress is not enough to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target of eliminating both practices by 2030, and COVID-19 has further set us back: with an additional two million cases of FGM and 10 million child marriages likely to occur in the next decade as a result of the pandemic. Further, evidence shows that increasing scarcity, poverty, insecurity, displacement, climate change, and conflict amplify drivers of child marriage and FGM, and make girls even more vulnerable.

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<sup>14</sup> UNICEF, *Seen, Counted, Included. Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF - [Menstrual hygiene: Gender inequality, cultural taboos and poverty can cause menstrual health needs to go unmet.](#)

<sup>16</sup> A/HRC/RES/47/15, Preamble and para 5.

<sup>17</sup> A/RES 61/106 of 13 December 2006, Preambular paragraph (q).

<sup>18</sup> UN, Report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on the activities of the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women, Note by the Secretary-General (A/HRC/44/3-E/CN.6/2020/8, para 15), para 15. Vid: Stephanie Ortoleva and Hope Lewis, "Forgotten Sisters - A Report on Violence against Women with Disabilities: An Overview of Its Nature, Scope, Causes and Consequences", Northeastern University School of Law Research Paper, No. 104- 2012, Northeastern University, Boston 2012. The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities found that girls with disabilities are disproportionately affected by different forms of gender-based violence, such as physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse; bullying; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; institutionalization; female infanticide; trafficking; abandonment; domestic violence; or forced sterilization, and invasive and irreversible involuntary treatment.

## Ways to get involved

## #DayoftheGirl #IDG2022

- **Join the [IDG 24-hour Virtual Forum](#), convened by Plan International.** There are over 20 events to inspire you, expand your perspective, and help you celebrate 10 years of #IDG!
- **Share human interest stories, blogs and videos** of girl changemakers, and the inspiring networks and organizations that are resourcing girls, letting girls lead, and strengthening services for girls. Let's collectively amplify their leadership, actions, and impact to inspire others.
- **Engage government officials, policymakers and stakeholders** to make more targeted investments that tackle inequalities experienced by girls, especially while accessing mental health and psychosocial support services in the face of conflict, forced migration, natural disasters, and the effects of climate change
- **Engage diverse female influencers** across industries to be the face of change we want girls to see as possible. Role models speak a thousand words. Let's change the global conversation and public perception of girl leaders.
- **Amplify your commitment** to raising awareness about and addressing factors that hold girls in your country and region back

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### More resources

[International Day of the Girl 2022 - official website](#) and concept notes in [English](#), [Arabic](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).