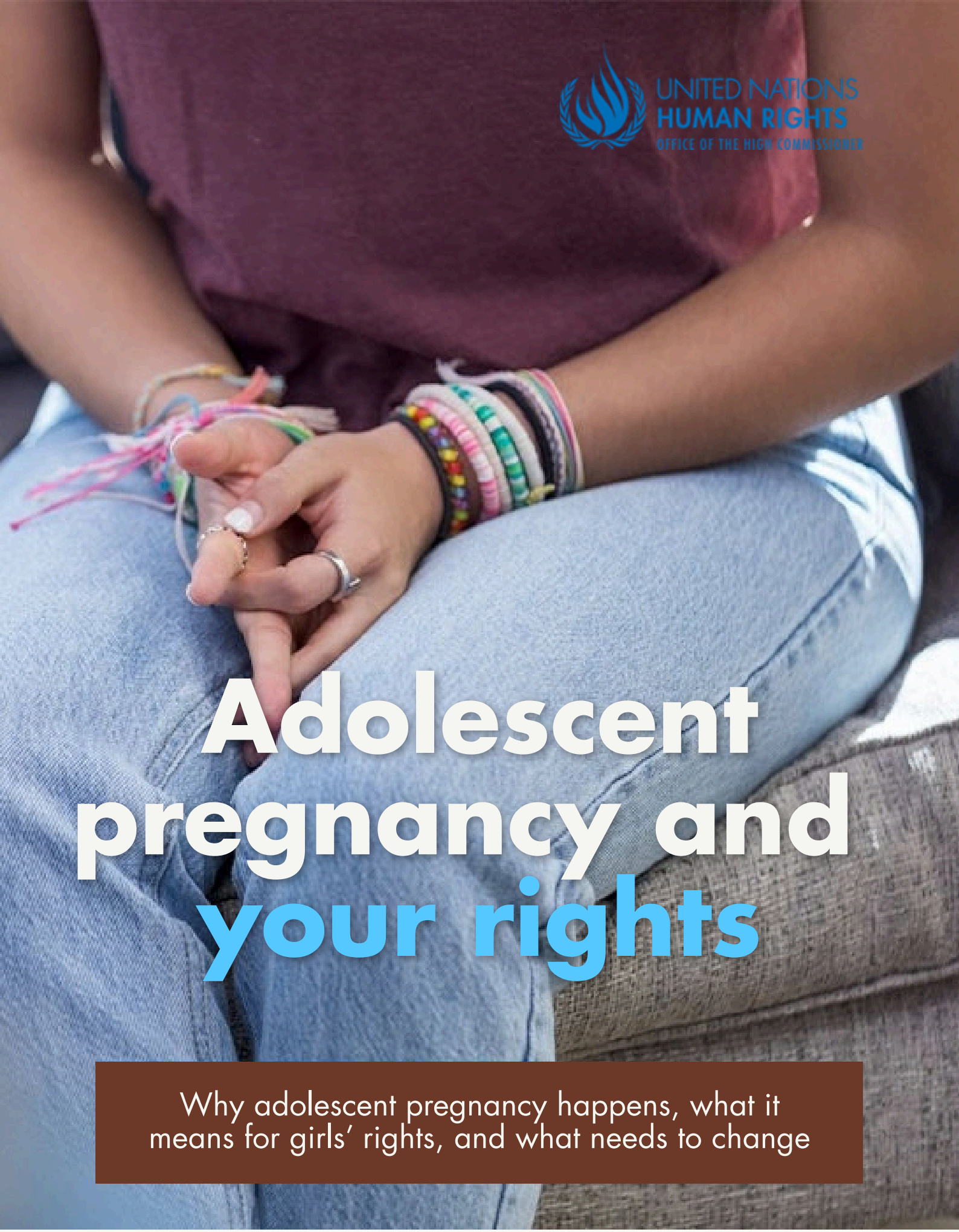

Adolescent pregnancy and your rights

Why adolescent pregnancy happens, what it means for girls' rights, and what needs to change

Adapted for adolescents - *Accelerating progress towards preventing pregnancy among adolescent girls (2026)* - A/HRC/62/62
United Nations Human Rights Office (OHCHR)

About this guide

Every year, millions of adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 become pregnant and give birth around the world.

Many are not ready, or do not want this to happen.

Adolescent pregnancy is not about individual choices.
It is about whether governments are doing enough to protect adolescents' rights.

What a girl can do in her life depends on many things:

- Can she go to school?
- Can she get accurate information about her body and health?
- Can she get healthcare when she needs it?
- Is she safe from violence and child marriage?
- Is she treated equally?
- Can she have a say in decisions about her life and future?

These are all connected to girls' human rights.
When girls cannot enjoy these rights, they can face a greater risk of becoming pregnant. Pregnancy and childbirth can be dangerous for girls' health and, in some cases, can put their lives at risk. Pregnancy can also affect a girl's education and opportunities for the future.
Pregnancy and motherhood at a young age can make it harder for girls to enjoy their rights.



***A government** makes decisions about how a country is run and is responsible for providing many of the services people need, like schools and hospitals.*

***Child marriage** is when someone under 18 gets married.*



In 2026, the United Nations Human Rights Office (OHCHR) looked at what can be done to prevent pregnancy among adolescent girls. Its findings were published in a report about adolescent pregnancy and human rights.

This is a shorter version of that report for adolescents. It explains why adolescent pregnancy happens, how it is connected to human rights, what can help prevent it and what needs to change. It brings together what some adolescent girls shared and information from experts, UN organisations, civil society and governments.

Governments have the main responsibility for preventing adolescent pregnancy, but boys and men, families and communities all have a role.

A note before you read:

This document includes difficult subjects. If something worries or upsets you, please stop reading. You could talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, teacher, health worker or another trusted adult.



The United Nations Human Rights Office (OHCHR) is the part of the UN that works to promote and protect human rights.

The United Nations (UN) is an international organisation made up of countries that work together on shared issues, including peace, development and human rights.

1. Adolescent pregnancy and human rights

Every child, including adolescents, has rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child explains the rights of every child under 18. Nearly every country in the world has agreed to respect these rights.

You have human rights throughout your life

Many human rights are important for preventing adolescent pregnancy and protecting girls who become pregnant. These include the right to:

- life, survival and well-being
- be heard and have a say in decisions that affect you
- privacy
- protection from violence
- health
- education
- an adequate standard of living, including basic things like food, clean water and shelter.

Children have these rights without discrimination. This means you should not be treated unfairly because of who you are, where you come from or your situation. When adults make decisions that affect children, including adolescents, they should think carefully about what is best for them and respect their rights. This is called considering the child's best interests.

These rights are connected



Without education, accurate information, protection from violence and healthcare, girls can face a greater risk of pregnancy. They may also find it harder to make decisions about their bodies and lives and get the information and care they need.



***Contraception** means ways to prevent pregnancy, like condoms or birth control pills.*

2. Your views matter

To understand why adolescent pregnancy happens and what needs to change, we need to listen to adolescents.

If you are under 18, you have the right to express your views about matters that affect you and have them taken seriously.

Being listened to is your right.

Governments have a responsibility to listen to you and take your views seriously.



3. What do we know about adolescent pregnancy?

In 2025, about 12.3 MILLION girls aged 10 to 19 gave birth worldwide.

Adolescent pregnancy is a big concern, even though fewer adolescent girls are giving birth than in the past. Many adolescent pregnancies are not wanted and can be dangerous for girls' health.

Some girls face greater risk.

Adolescent pregnancy happens more often in some countries and communities than in others. Girls who face poverty, unfair treatment or fewer opportunities can be at greater risk. This includes some girls from different racial or ethnic groups, Indigenous girls, girls with disabilities, girls who have migrated or been forced to leave their homes, and girls living in places affected by conflict.

We do not have all the information.

It is difficult to know exactly how many adolescent pregnancies there are.

- Fear or shame may stop girls from telling others about a pregnancy.
- Some laws can make people less likely to report a pregnancy.
- Services may collect information but do not always share it with each other.

This makes it harder to understand which girls are most affected.



***Indigenous peoples** are groups with a long history connected to a particular land, culture and community.*

4. What increases the risk of adolescent pregnancy?

Adolescent pregnancy happens for various reasons. Some girls face several risks at the same time.

Gender inequality



Girls often have less say, less freedom and fewer opportunities than boys. They may not be able to make decisions about their own lives and bodies, including whether to have sex or use contraception. Shame or negative attitudes about adolescent sexuality can also make it harder to get information or sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Child marriage



Child marriage can take away a girl's freedom and choices, including whether to use contraception or when to have children. It can also increase her risk of becoming pregnant while she is still an adolescent.

Sexual violence



Sexual violence and abuse is when someone forces, pressures or tricks another person into doing something sexual that they do not want to do. This includes rape and sexual exploitation.
Sexual violence is never a child's fault. No girl should ever be forced to do something sexual or be forced to become or stay pregnant.



***Sexual and reproductive healthcare** is healthcare about your body, sexual health, pregnancy and having children. It can include information, contraception and pregnancy care.*

***Sexual exploitation** is when someone takes advantage of a person for something sexual, for example, in exchange for money, food or somewhere to stay.*

Poverty

Poverty can make it harder for girls to stay in school, get healthcare and have the opportunities they need. Lack of money, food or a safe place to live can also increase the risk of child marriage or sexual exploitation.

Education

Girls who leave school can face a greater risk of becoming pregnant. Pregnancy can also make it harder to continue their education. Pregnant students and adolescent mothers may also face unfair treatment or pressure to leave school.

Unfair treatment and other barriers

Unfair treatment can make it harder for some adolescents to get information, healthcare, education or help when they need it. This can increase their risk of violence and pregnancy.

Wars and emergencies

Wars, disasters and other emergencies can make it harder to go to school or get healthcare, contraception and medicines. They can also increase the risk of sexual violence, sexual exploitation and child marriage. During emergencies, adolescents' rights to healthcare, information, education and protection must still be respected.



5. Adolescents' rights during pregnancy and after birth

If a girl is pregnant or has given birth, her human rights must be protected. This means she should:

- have respectful and appropriate healthcare and support, including access to safe abortion care
- be supported to continue her education or return to school
- have information she can understand and use to make decisions
- be protected from violence and unfair treatment.



An abortion is a way of ending a pregnancy using medicine or medical care. It is a fundamental right and should always happen in safe, respectful conditions with informed consent.

Informed consent means having all the necessary information to make a decision, understanding what will happen and agreeing to it without being pressured or forced.

6. What information, healthcare and support do adolescents need?

Adolescents need accurate information and support to make decisions about their health and prevent pregnancy, which is often dangerous at that age.

Accurate information

Comprehensive sexuality education is learning about bodies, growing up, relationships and sexuality. It helps children and young people understand their health and rights and develop respectful relationships.

Comprehensive sexuality education can help adolescents learn about:

- bodies and puberty
- relationships, respect and equality
- how being a girl, boy or having a diverse identity can affect your choices and how much say you have
- contraception and pregnancy
- sexual health
- protection from violence.

Research shows that comprehensive sexuality education can help prevent adolescent pregnancy and help adolescents make informed choices.



***Sexual health** is about your body, sexuality, relationships and staying healthy and safe.*

***Puberty** is the time when a child's body starts changing and growing into an adult body. It usually starts between the ages of 10 and 14, although it is different for everyone.*

Learning about **gender discrimination**, when people are treated unfairly because they are a girl, a boy or have a diverse identity, is especially important. It can affect their choices and opportunities in life.

Healthcare

Adolescents need healthcare they can use without being treated unfairly. They need accurate information and access to contraception

Some adolescents find it difficult to get healthcare because it is too far away or costs too much, because they need permission from a parent or another adult, or because they fear shame, unfair treatment or other people finding out. Their personal information should be kept private.

Laws and policies

Laws should:

- not stop adolescents getting information, contraception or healthcare because of their age or because they do not have permission from an adult
- not punish adolescents of similar ages for having sex when they both agree to it
- not treat abortion care as a crime



7. Change is possible

Countries in different parts of the world have shown that it is possible to reduce adolescent pregnancy.



South-East Asia

In one country, the government made adolescent pregnancy a national priority and brought different services together.

the adolescent birth rate fell by about

2/3

2012 — 2022



Latin America

In one country, the government combined sexuality education and healthcare, including abortion care, with support in schools and communities and action on sexual violence.

the adolescent birth rate fell by more than

1/2

2013 — 2022



West Africa

In one country, the government strengthened sexuality education and healthcare, took action on child marriage and made abortion care legal.

the adolescent birth rate fell by about

2/5

2001 — 2020



Western Europe

In one country, the government made sure that health, education, social services and local government worked together to prevent adolescent pregnancy.

the adolescent birth rate fell by more than

2/3

1998 — 2021



What do these examples show?

There is no single solution. Progress can happen when:

- different services work together
- governments commit and invest enough money in sexual and reproductive healthcare
- countries learn from what is working elsewhere

8. What needs to happen now?

Governments have the main responsibility for protecting adolescents' rights and preventing adolescent pregnancy. This means addressing the unfairness and barriers that put some girls at greater risk.

Keep girls safe

- End child marriage and prevent sexual and other violence.
- Make sure children can safely report violence and get help.

Make sure girls can learn

- Provide free, good-quality education, including comprehensive sexuality education.
- Support pregnant students to stay in school and adolescent mothers to return.

Make healthcare easier to get

- Make sure adolescents can get affordable healthcare, contraception and abortion care.
- Protect their privacy and remove barriers to healthcare.

Support girls facing the greatest barriers

- Tackle poverty and unfair treatment.
- Make sure services reach all adolescents, including those who live far from cities and those affected by wars and emergencies.

Make laws protect rights

- Make 18 the minimum age for marriage, with no exceptions.
- Remove laws and rules that stop adolescents getting the healthcare they need.
- Do not punish adolescents of similar ages for having sex when they both agree, or treat abortion care as a crime.

Promote equality and respect

- Challenge unfair ideas about how people are expected to behave because they are a girl, a boy or have a diverse identity, as well as harmful ideas about motherhood, contraception and adolescent sexuality.
- Involve girls, boys, women and men in promoting equality and respect.

Listen to adolescents and check progress

- Involve adolescents safely in decisions that affect them.
- Listen to their experiences and check whether action is making a difference.



9. Who else has a role?

Governments and public services have the main responsibility, but they need to work with others too.

National human rights institutions can check what governments are doing, look into problems people report and recommend changes.

Boys and men should respect girls' rights and choices, share responsibility for preventing pregnancy and challenge harmful ideas.

Families and communities can support girls' rights and challenge harmful ideas and unfair treatment.

Civil society and youth-led organisations can provide information and support, call for change and help young people have a say.

Countries that provide international support can help make sure adolescents have the information and healthcare they need.



***National human rights institutions** are independent organisations that help protect people's human rights.*

***Youth-led organisations** are civil society organisations led by young people.*

***Civil society organisations** are groups that work to help people and communities protect their rights and improve their lives.*

Need support?

If something in this document worries or upsets you, you do not have to deal with it on your own. You could talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, teacher, health worker or another trusted adult. There may also be support services for children and adolescents where you live.

Find out more

Accelerating progress towards preventing pregnancy among adolescent girls (2026), A/HRC/62/62

Thank you

Thank you to the adolescent girls who shared their views and experiences, and to everyone else who helped make the original UN document possible.