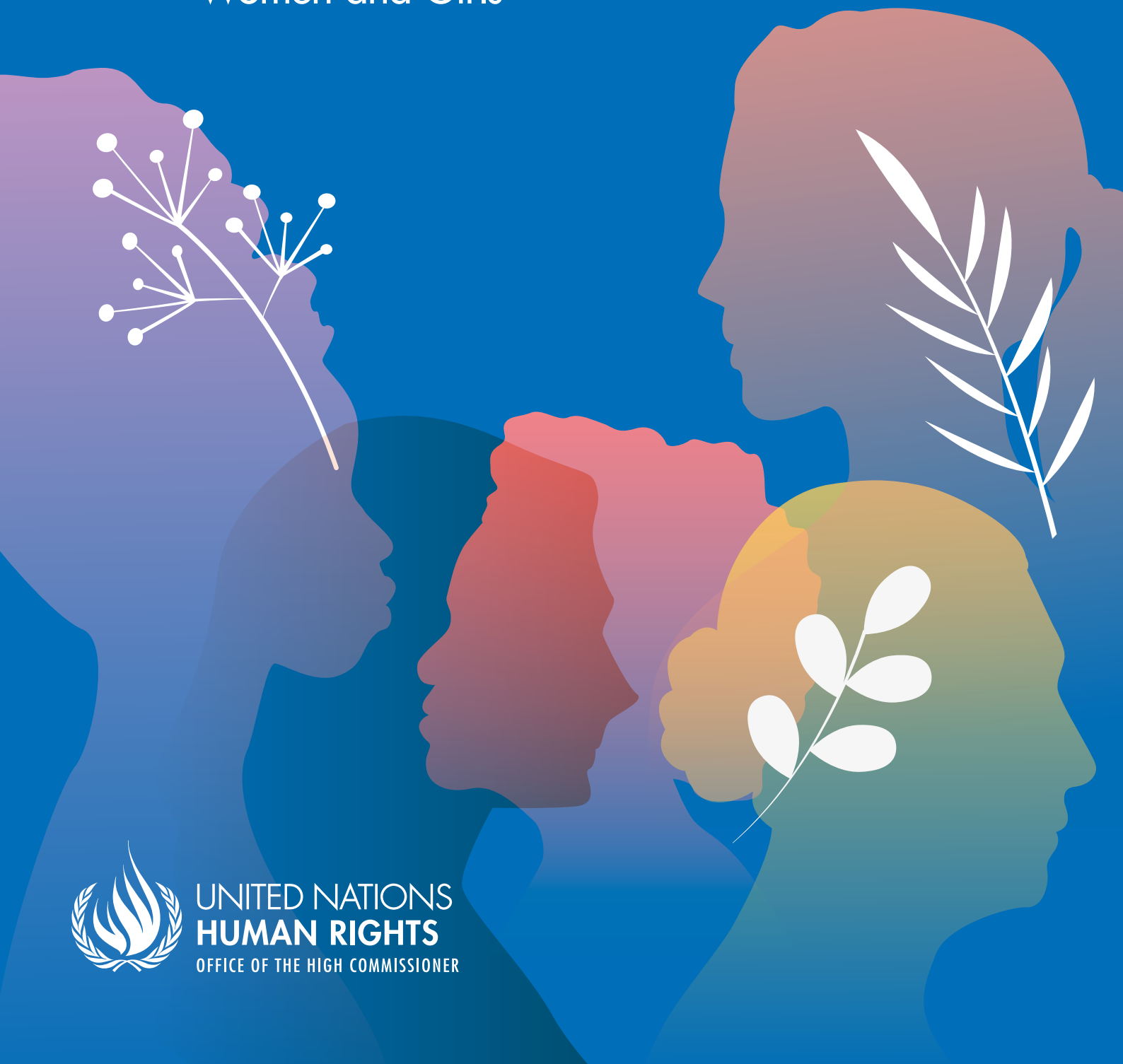
ADVANCING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

The Fifteenth Anniversary of the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

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HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

New York and Geneva, 2026

United Nations publication, issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

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OHCHR acknowledges, with appreciation, the financial support of the Government of the Republic of Korea towards the development of this publication.

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HR/PUB/25/4
Sales No.: E.26.XIV.1
ISBN: 978-92-1-157752-5
eISBN: 978-92-1-154686-6

Cover image, adapted throughout the publication: © Adobe Stock, image by Stafeeva.

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Forewords

Foreword by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The establishment of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls in 2010 was an important step for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. It demonstrated the international community's resolve to intensify efforts to tackle gender inequality and discrimination worldwide.

The present publication provides an overview of the Working Group's work on women's rights and gender equality, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Some 15 years after the Working Group was established, and 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action, there has been important progress in the human rights of women and girls.

The number of women in parliaments around the world has more than doubled and more than 160 countries have passed laws to address domestic violence. Some 50 million more girls have been enrolled in schools globally since 2015.

However, progress has been slow and uneven, and no country in the world has reached full gender equality. Millions of women and girls continue to be affected by discrimination in law and in practice.

For example, every 10 minutes, a woman is killed by an intimate partner or family member. The gender pay gap will take an estimated five generations to close. Moreover, according to a recent World Bank survey, legal frameworks in 105 economies still deny women equal rights in marriage, divorce, inheritance or decision-making about family and household matters.

All this is happening against a backdrop of coordinated efforts to roll back the progress made on women's rights and gender equality. There is a troubling resurgence of patriarchal and conservative narratives that seek to normalize misogyny and gender-based hatred and restrict and relegate a woman's role only to the family, caregiving and procreation.

More than ever, we need to join forces to build on the advances achieved so far and accelerate progress to advance a gender equal world.



Volker Türk
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Foreword by the Chair of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Around the world, the promise of equality for women and girls remains one of the most powerful – and most unfulfilled – commitments of our time.

As the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls marks its fifteenth anniversary in 2025, the imperative to eliminate discrimination against women and girls is more urgent than ever.

Over the past decade and a half, the Working Group has been at the forefront of documenting discrimination against women and girls, identifying persistent barriers to gender equality and providing practical guidance to States, civil society and other stakeholders, in close collaboration with and with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Our work has illuminated the lived realities of women and girls in all their diversity, amplifying voices too often unheard and keeping the principle of substantive equality at the heart of global human rights discourse.

Despite undeniable progress in relation to the human rights of women and girls – with major achievements in education, participation and legal and policy reform – the world now stands at a crossroads. A growing global backlash against the rights of women and girls, driven by retrogressive movements, threatens to erode hard-won gains and undermine the foundations for future progress.

Globally, not a single indicator under Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality has been met or even almost met. Active resistance to gender equality has been identified as a major cause of stagnation and, in some areas, of outright reversals of the gains achieved in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Patriarchal power structures continue to shape laws, institutions and everyday life, intersecting with discrimination based on race, ethnicity, caste and other forms of exclusion. Prevailing economic models still rely on and exploit women's unpaid care and support work, perpetuating poverty and inequality.

And yet, in response to those challenges, women and girls everywhere continue to mobilize with extraordinary courage and creativity. Across every region, they are leading struggles for justice, peace and sustainability, demonstrating that even in the face of repression, progress remains possible.

As we commemorate 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and 25 years since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the world must push forward, not back, on gender equality. We cannot afford to lose the ground so painstakingly won.

The present publication offers both a retrospective and a vision. It reflects on the Working Group's 15 years of work to address discrimination against women and girls in every sphere: political and public, economic and social, family and cultural, health and safety. It also highlights our efforts to define and confront gender apartheid and brings together testimonies of girls and young women from every region, alongside the insights of current and former Working Group members.

More than a record of achievement, the publication is a call for renewed action. We hope it will inspire continued commitment to gender equality and the realization of the human rights of women and girls everywhere.

The mandate of the Working Group is more vital than ever. In a rapidly changing world, the Working Group continues to expand its focus to address emerging challenges, including in the digital sphere – one of our key priority areas. The digital age brings new opportunities, but also new risks: artificial intelligence and other technologies are reinforcing gender bias and exclusion when not designed with gender equality in mind. Online spaces have become sites of gender-based violence and harassment and the digital divide continues to exclude the full participation in public life of many women and girls.

It is time for States to honour their obligations and renew their commitment to substantive equality, delivering on the promises of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the women and peace and security agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Realizing the rights of half of humanity is fundamental to achieving societies that are just, inclusive and sustainable. We remain steadfast in our commitment to advancing equality and ensuring that no woman or girl is left behind.



Claudia Flores
Chair, Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Foreword by the Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

UN-Women congratulates the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls on the fifteenth anniversary of its establishment; a milestone that coincides with the founding of UN-Women 15 years ago. Since the Working Group began its activities, UN-Women has consistently supported its efforts, which are closely aligned with our mission to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls worldwide.

Together with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Working Group plays a critical role in strengthening the system-wide efforts of the United Nations to promote and protect women's human rights. That work is integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals; Goal 5 is not only dedicated to gender equality as a stand-alone goal but it also underpins progress across the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2025 also marks 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which laid out a bold vision for gender equality and urged Governments to "revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex". Since then, coordinated action, including with civil society and women's human rights defenders, has driven meaningful progress.

Today, more girls are in school and there are more women in parliaments, boardrooms and the judiciary. Legal barriers are being dismantled and protective policies are gaining ground. Violence against women and girls is now widely recognized as a global scourge. However, significant gaps persist between global norms and the lived realities of women's human rights. Today, we are witnessing a growing pushback, not only through regressive legal and policy changes, but also through the weakening of institutions tasked with advancing gender equality. Women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are often those left furthest behind.

Women's rights are not negotiable. In the face of a resurgence of narratives rooted in centuries of discrimination, we must stand firm. Hard-won gains must be defended. Laws and policies must be backed by adequate resources and the institutions responsible for promoting and implementing women's rights must be fully funded and supported to fulfil their mandates. Above all, we must continue to affirm: women's rights are human rights – universal, indivisible and for all women and girls.

UN-Women remains committed to working alongside the Working Group and all partners to eliminate discrimination against women and girls and to drive progress towards a future in which all women and girls can enjoy their rights fully and equally.



Sima Bahous
Executive Director, UN-Women

Foreword by the Permanent Representatives of Mexico and Chile to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva (main sponsors of the mandate)

Fifteen years ago, the United Nations took an historic step by establishing the mandate of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls. It was a recognition that the persistent and systemic inequalities faced by women and girls demanded not only attention, but a sustained, expert-driven mechanism within the special procedures system to identify, monitor, analyse and respond to patterns of gender-based discrimination wherever they occur.

For Mexico and Chile, which have had the privilege of leading the resolution that renews the mandate of the Working Group – with Mexico having championed it since its conception and Chile joining as co-lead in 2022 – the creation of the Working Group, with the support of women's movements and organizations, represented a transformative contribution to the United Nations human rights architecture. The Working Group has since become a trusted voice, a catalyst for change and a bridge between global human rights norms and the lived realities of women and girls.

Looking back, it is deeply moving to see how the Working Group has evolved. Over the past 15 years, it has stood beside women and girls in every region, listening to their stories and carrying them into the halls of the United Nations. It has spoken truth to power with clarity and compassion, insisting that the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not a distant aspiration, but a legal and moral imperative.

The mandate has enriched the United Nations system in countless ways. It has brought rigorous legal analysis to some of the most entrenched patterns of discrimination, while identifying new and emerging forms of gender-based discrimination. It has provided States with relevant guidance and recommendations that are both ambitious and achievable. It has worked in partnership – with other special procedures, treaty bodies, civil society and the very people it exists to serve – to keep the rights of women and girls at the heart of the United Nations human rights agenda.

For Mexico and Chile, sponsoring the mandate has been more than a diplomatic initiative. It has been, and continues to be, an expression of our values: the belief that societies thrive when all their members can participate equally, fully and meaningfully, without fear or prejudice; that democracy is stronger when the voices of women and girls are heard; and that sustainable peace and development are impossible without gender equality.

We are especially proud of the openness of the Working Group to the voices of young women and girls. By creating spaces for younger generations to speak, it has challenged us all to look to the future – to build a world in which equality begins from the very first years of life.

As we mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Working Group, we acknowledge that the journey is far from

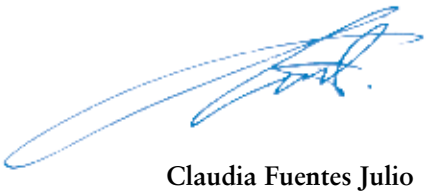
complete. Around the world, we see progress but also a backlash. We continue to hear calls for gender equality, but also a worrying trend of voices repeating old arguments used to deny it. In that context, the Working Group's role is more essential than ever – as a shield to protect hard-won gains and as a guide to the challenges ahead.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all current and former members of the Working Group, whose dedication, expertise and integrity have been instrumental in shaping the mandate's significant impact. We also extend our gratitude to the committed staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for their continued support for the Working Group's work and activities. Their collective efforts have ensured that the mandate is not merely a mechanism, but a movement within the United Nations – one that listens, learns and acts with purpose.

To mark the fifteenth anniversary, we reaffirm our unwavering support for the mandate and our shared determination to continue walking alongside it. We are convinced that its ongoing work is indispensable to the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations human rights system as a promoter and protector of the rights of women and girls. We remain committed to ensuring that the promise of gender equality, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls, are not simply aspirations, but a lived reality for women and girls everywhere.



Francisca Méndez Escobar
Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva



Claudia Fuentes Julio
Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva



I. Introduction

The achievements of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls over the past 15 years are documented and celebrated in the present commemorative volume. It stands as a tribute to the tireless efforts of its members, in which the evolution of the mandate and its impact on addressing discrimination against women and girls globally are showcased.

The publication not only commemorates the Working Group's achievements within the larger framework of the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on women's rights and gender equality, but also serves as a testament to the enduring fight for gender equality.

Bringing together reflections from current and former Working Group members, as well as the voices of girls and young women from across different regions, the authors offer readers a comprehensive understanding of the Working Group's impact and aim to inspire future generations to continue the important work of eliminating discrimination against women and girls worldwide.

A. Establishment of the mandate

The Working Group is one of the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. It was established on 1 October 2010 by the Council in its resolution 15/23, adopted by consensus.[1] The mandate holders were subsequently appointed in March 2011 and assumed their functions in May 2011. Its creation marked a milestone on the long road towards equality for women and girls, addressing the international community's recognition that, three decades after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, no State had achieved full gender equality. The mandate has since been extended every three years, in 2013,[2] 2016,[3] 2019,[4] 2022[5] and 2025.[6] When renewed in 2019, the mandate's name was changed from the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice to the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, as the Human Rights Council had requested the Working Group to examine the specific forms of discrimination that girls faced.[7] The Working Group has incorporated an approach focused on the rights of girls into its work,[8] meeting with girls and young women during its country visits and sessions, carrying out specific consultations with them for its thematic reports and offering an interactive and accessible microsite that provides graphic, summarized and user-friendly versions of its reports.[9]

The establishment of the Working Group was the result of a long process within the United Nations to address the persistence of laws that discriminate against women.[10] In 2005 and 2006, during the Beijing+10 review, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted two resolutions on the advisability of the appointment of a special rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women.[11] Following two reports by the Secretary-General to the Commission on the

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1 Human Rights Council resolution 15/23.
2 Human Rights Council resolution 23/7
3 Human Rights Council resolution 32/4.
4 Human Rights Council resolution 41/6.
5 Human Rights Council resolution 50/18.
6 Human Rights Council resolution 59/14.
7 Human Rights Council resolution 41/6, para. 11.
8 For more information on the Working Group's engagement with girls and young women, see chapter IV, "Working to end discrimination against girls".
9 See https://unworkinggroupwomenandgirls.org. The original microsite was made possible thanks to generous contributions by former member Elizabeth Broderick who also facilitated pro bono work from Mahlab. The current version was financed by a voluntary contribution from the Republic of Korea.
10 Fareda Banda, "The United Nations Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and practice", in *Women's Human Rights: CEDAW in International, Regional and National Law*, Anne Hellum and Henriette Sinding Aasen, eds. (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 62–94.
11 Resolutions 49/3 and 50/3.

Status of Women in 2006 and 2007[12] and a study commissioned by OHCHR in 2008,[13] concluding that the time may have come to establish a mandate, the Human Rights Council requested, in 2009, a thematic study on discrimination against women, in law and practice, and how the issue was addressed throughout the United Nations human rights system.[14] In the report, presented to the Council at its fifteenth session, OHCHR concluded that stronger measures were needed, including the establishment of a new thematic mechanism.[15] While certain States expressed opposition and resistance on the ground of unnecessary duplication, the Council, recognizing persisting gaps in the protection of the human rights of women and girls, established the mandate of the Working Group to intensify global efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls.

From the outset, the Working Group has been operating in close coordination with other special procedures and United Nations entities, reinforcing existing standards and initiatives while contributing its distinctive viewpoints. Complementing the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, who focuses specifically on violence, the Working Group brings an independent and comprehensive approach to addressing discrimination against women and girls in all its forms. It engages with all States, irrespective of whether they have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and provides analysis and guidance on laws, policies and practices.



The Secretary-General, António Guterres, met with Working Group members and its secretariat at Headquarters in New York, 2024.
UN Photo/Loey Felipe

12 E/CN.6/2006/8 and E/CN.6/2007/8.
13 Fareda Banda, *Project on a Mechanism to Address Laws that Discriminate against Women* (OHCHR, 2008).
14 Human Rights Council resolution 12/17, para. 15.
15 A/HRC/15/40.



Current members of the Working Group, from left to right: Haina Lu, Claudia Flores, Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, Laura Nyirinkindi and Ivana Krstić. OHCHR Photo

B. Membership

The Working Group is composed of five independent experts of balanced geographical representation, one from each of the five United Nations regional groups, appointed by the Human Rights Council for three-year terms, renewable once, for a maximum of six years. They serve in their personal capacity, on a voluntary and unpaid basis. Members act collectively as a group and produce work in the name of the mandate.

The Working Group designates a Chair and a Vice-Chair from among its members. The role of Chair rotates annually,[16] with the handover usually occurring in the summer. The Chair's role is to coordinate and represent the collective, supported by a Vice-Chair who is also designated on a rotating basis[17] and who normally assumes the role of Chair during the subsequent cycle. That rotation reflects the Working Group's democratic and collegial spirit, as the role of Chair is a facilitative role assumed by whichever member is available to lead at a given time, with all members having their turn. All members contribute equally to decision-making. Together, those arrangements ensure continuity, inclusivity and shared ownership of the mandate.

As at December 2025, the members are:

- Claudia Flores (Western European and other States – United States of America), Chair
- Ivana Krstić (Eastern European States – Serbia), Vice-Chair
- Dorothy Estrada-Tanck (Latin American and Caribbean States – Mexico)
- Haina Lu (Asia-Pacific States – China)
- Laura Nyirinkindi (African States – Uganda)

[16] Given that members usually serve for six years (two terms of three years), certain among them either chaired for extended periods or took on the role of Chair twice during their terms of office. Most recently, Dorothy Estrada-Tanck chaired from 1 October 2022 to 31 July 2024 and Melissa Upreti from 1 June 2021 to 30 September 2022.

[17] Here again, certain members, most recently Ivana Radačić, served as a Vice-Chair twice during their terms of office.



2017–2023 members of the Working Group, from left to right: Ivana Radačić, Melissa Upreti, Elizabeth Broderick, Dorothy Estrada-Tanck and Meskerem Geset Techane. OHCHR Photo



2011–2017 members of the Working Group, Kamala Chandrakirana, Mercedes Barquet, Frances Raday, Eleonora Zielińska, Emna Aouij, with the OHCHR secretariat, during the Working Group's inaugural session, 11 June 2011. OHCHR Photo

All current members assumed their functions on 1 November 2023, with the exception of the member from Latin American and Caribbean States, Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, who assumed her functions on 1 November 2020. The seat on the Working Group in respect of Latin American and Caribbean States has followed a different cycle due to the death and resignation of previous members from the region in the early years of the mandate, as indicated below.

Former members include:

2017–2023

- African States: Meskerem Geset Techane (Ethiopia)
- Asia-Pacific States: Melissa Upreti (Nepal/United States)
- Eastern European States: Ivana Radačić (Croatia)
- Latin American and Caribbean States: Alda Facio (Costa Rica), 2014–2020; and Dorothy Estrada-Tanck (Mexico), appointed in 2020
- Western European and other States: Elizabeth Broderick (Australia)

2011–2017

- African States: Emna Aouij (Tunisia)
- Asia-Pacific States: Kamala Chandrakirana (Indonesia)
- Eastern European States: Eleonora Zielińska (Poland)
- Latin American and Caribbean States: Mercedes Barquet (Mexico), appointed in 2011, passed away in 2012; Patricia Olamendi Torres (Mexico), appointed in 2012, resigned in 2013; and Alda Facio (Costa Rica), 2014–2020
- Western European and other States: Frances Raday (Israel/United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

C. Conceptual framework

In shaping its conceptual framework, the Working Group underscored that eliminating discrimination against women and girls demanded a comprehensive, coherent, human rights-based approach. Such an approach places women and girls at the centre of efforts to hold States accountable for meeting their obligations under international standards guaranteeing civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.[18]

The Working Group has addressed the elimination of discrimination against women and girls in all areas of life (for more details, see chapter II) and across their full life cycle from the perspective of the obligations of States to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of women and girls. It recognizes the essential roles played by national, regional and international human rights mechanisms, as well as by grass-roots activists, in ensuring that those rights are fully realized.

While the Working Group's mandate covers all women and girls, it acknowledges that women and girls are not a homogeneous group. It adopts an intersectional approach, with explicit attention paid to women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, recognizing that their experiences of discrimination are often compounded by diverse factors, including race, ethnicity, age, caste, disability, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status and socioeconomic background.

Furthermore, the Working Group has consistently emphasized that women and girls are not one of many disadvantaged or marginalized groups, as they are often treated by some. They constitute half of humanity and, in many cases, the majority of each of the groups in conditions of vulnerability. Therefore, addressing persistent discrimination and the backlash against the rights of women and girls must be both a stand-alone goal and a mainstreaming issue.

In its conceptual framework, the Working Group affirms that transforming patriarchal norms and dismantling male privilege cannot be achieved without the accountability of men and boys for the construction of gender equality.[19] The Working Group calls for a shift from the passive engagement of men and boys to their active responsibility for dismantling systems of power that privilege them and harm women, girls and gender-diverse persons. It also means acknowledging that rigid and harmful gender roles limit men and boys, as well, and that when they are liberated from gendered stereotypes and expectations, they experience greater freedom in expressing care and emotional presence, to the benefit of their families and the broader community.[20] Men's responsibility and participation involve personal, interpersonal and institutional accountability, strong partnerships with women's movements and a commitment to feminist principles, solidarity and substantive gender equality in all actions.



A journalist reviews Working Group materials during the press conference concluding its country visit to Thailand, 2024. OHCHR Regional Office for South-East Asia Photo

[18] See A/HRC/20/28.
[19] See A/HRC/WG.11/37/1.
[20] See A/HRC/WG.11/43/1.



Dorothy Estrada-Tanck reports to the Human Rights Council as the Chair of the Working Group, Geneva, 2024. Human Rights Council Photo

D. Working methods

The Working Group carries out its mandate in accordance with the resolutions of the Human Rights Council and in a spirit of constructive dialogue with member States, civil society stakeholders, United Nations entities, as well as national, regional and international human rights mechanisms. The Working Group exercises its mandate in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Special Procedure Mandate Holders of the Human Rights Council[21] and the Manual of Operations of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council,[22] including by preparing annual thematic reports, conducting country visits and sending communications to States and other actors, contributing to the development of international human rights standards and engaging in advocacy, raising public awareness and providing advice for technical cooperation.

Each year, the Working Group prepares a thematic report and presents it, together with country visit reports, to the Human Rights Council in an interactive dialogue at its June session. It also orally presents the same thematic report to the General Assembly in October. Furthermore, it orally reports to the Commission on the Status of Women in March. Since 2024, the statement of the Chair of the Working Group has been included in the opening segment of sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, alongside those of the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences. In its thematic reports, the Working Group focuses on priority themes identified by the members, addressing discrimination against women and girls across all areas of life, as well as emerging global challenges. They are informed by questionnaires, consultations and expert contributions from States, United Nations entities, regional mechanisms, civil society actors, the private sector and academics from all regions.

[21] Human Rights Council resolution 5/2. See www.ohchr.org/en/documents/procedural-documents/code-conduct-special-procedures-mandate-holders-human-rights-council.

[22] See www.ohchr.org/en/documents/procedural-documents/manual-operations-special-procedures-human-rights-council.

The Working Group conducts up to two country visits every year at the invitation of Governments.[23] Those visits usually last 10 days and involve two members of the Working Group. They allow in situ reviews of the situation of human rights of women and girls, involving dialogue with all relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the capital, as well as other regions of the country. Every country visit culminates in an end-of-mission statement presenting preliminary findings. Subsequently, a detailed report is submitted to the Human Rights Council with recommendations to the State concerned. The country visit reports serve as advocacy tools for national actors to monitor the implementation of the recommendations made and contribute to the body of international human rights standards on the rights of women and girls, also feeding into the work by other human rights mechanisms, such as the universal periodic review, treaty bodies, in particular the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and other special procedure mandates. Between two and five years after the visits have taken place, the Working Group sends follow-up letters to the Governments and civil society in the countries visited, requesting information on the status of implementation of its recommendations.[24]

Through its communications procedure,[25] the Working Group sends allegation letters, urgent appeals and other letters to States and non-State actors concerning allegations of discriminatory laws or draft laws, policies and practices and of individual and group cases of violations of the human rights of women and girls. Those are made public through the joint special procedures communications reports to the Human Rights Council and through the searchable online special procedures database of communications.



Working Group members Laura Nyirinkindi and Claudia Flores on a country visit to Zimbabwe, Ndarama High School in Masvingo, 2025. OHCHR Photo

[23] For more information on country and other visits by special procedures, see www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures-human-rights-council/country-and-other-visits.

[24] For more information on country visits by the Working Group, including follow-up reports, see www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls/country-visits.

[25] For more information on the special procedures communication procedure, see www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures-human-rights-council/what-are-communications.

Furthermore, to engage in advocacy and awareness-raising and to contribute to the development of international human rights standards, the Working Group carries out other initiatives, including public statements and press releases, to draw attention to serious situations or to mark significant dates. It also presents amicus curiae briefs to national and international courts or quasi-judicial bodies, as well as to United Nations treaty bodies, to contribute to legal deliberations on issues within its mandate; issues guidance documents (formerly known as position papers) to provide conceptual clarity on complex or contested issues, informed by research, consultations and country-level evidence; participates in events; and contributes to the work of other parts of the United Nations human rights machinery or United Nations entities.



Claudia Flores addressed the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women as the Chair of the Working Group, New York, 2025. UN Photo/Loey Felipe



Working Group members Ivana Krstić and Haina Lu deliver a press conference at the end of their visit to Thailand, 2024. OHCHR Regional Office for South-East Asia Photo

The Working Group is also a member of the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women, launched in March 2018 and comprising seven United Nations and regional (Africa, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean) independent expert mechanisms on discrimination and violence against women and girls. It coordinates strategies, takes joint action and strengthens the implementation and visibility of frameworks protecting the rights of women and girls. The Working Group chaired the Platform between 1 February 2023 and 29 February 2024, leading joint actions to counter the backlash against the reclamation of the rights of women and girls and amplify the activism of girls and young women. That included the coordination of common statements marking international days and the organization of events, such as a virtual briefing on the Platform for civil society organizations in preparation for the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

As a consistent feature of its work, the Working Group collaborates closely with all special procedure mandates, reflecting the broad and cross-cutting relevance of gender and the human rights of women and girls. That includes engagement in joint communications, statements, press releases, calls for input and other joint activities. Recent examples include a joint press release reaffirming the central role of gender in advancing human rights and equality, led by the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, whom was joined by the Working Group and another 37 special procedure mandates.[26] Another recent example is the Working Group's contribution to the 2025 thematic report, "Nexus between gender equality and the right to development", of the Special Rapporteur on the right to development,[27] whose findings and the Working Group's work carry mutually reinforcing messages. The Working Group also cooperates closely with special procedure country mandates, particularly in addressing discrimination against women and girls in pressing contexts, such as situations of conflict.



First meeting of the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women during the 169th session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States in Boulder, Colorado, 2018. From left to right: two supporting staff members; Sylvia Mesa, Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention; Alda Facio, Working Group on discrimination against women and girls; Feride Acar, Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence; Margarette May Macaulay, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Rapporteur on the Rights of Women; Dubravka Šimonović, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; Dalia Leinarte, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; two supporting staff members. Photo © Dubravka Šimonović

[26] See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/un-experts-reaffirm-central-role-gender-advancing-human-rights-and-equality.
[27] A/HRC/60/25.



Session of the Working Group in Geneva, closed meeting, 2023. OHCHR Photo

E. Sessions

The Working Group is mandated to hold three formal sessions each year, typically twice in Geneva, in January and October, and once in New York, in May. However, in 2024 and 2025, those sessions had to be reduced to two due to the liquidity situation in relation to the regular budget and this trend might continue.

Sessions provide a platform for engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including member States, other special procedure mandates, treaty bodies, OHCHR staff, United Nations agencies and programmes, national human rights institutions, regional human rights mechanisms, other international organizations, civil society organizations and women and girls human rights defenders, the private sector and academics. Such exchanges help refine thematic priorities and foster cooperation and synergy.

Since 2019, the Working Group has also committed to hold, whenever possible, regional convenings, with a view to enhancing its accessibility and visibility among stakeholders based in various regions. The first such convening took place in October 2019, in Addis Ababa, and was followed by one in Bangkok (July 2022). The current members are determined to hold regional convenings on an annual basis, including to compensate for the decrease in the official number of sessions, and have so far managed to do so thanks to voluntary contributions from several member States, with the first one taking place in South Africa (October 2024) and the second one in Serbia (September–October 2025).

The Working Group provides updates on its sessions and related activities in its annual thematic reports to the Human Rights Council.



Working Group members Claudia Flores, Ivana Krstić and Dorothy Estrada-Tanck on a visit to the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg during the regional convening for Southern Africa, 2024. OHCHR Photo



The Working Group met with members of different universal and European supervisory bodies, including a judge of the European Court of Human Rights, a member of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and a former member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Regional convening for the Balkans, Belgrade, Serbia, 2025. OHCHR Photo



The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, met with the Working Group in Geneva, 2025. OHCHR Photo

F. Cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The effective discharge of the Working Group's mandate is made possible through close cooperation with OHCHR. The latter supports all special procedure mandates, including the Working Group, providing substantive as well as logistical assistance. As with all other special procedures working groups, the Working Group is entitled to be supported by an OHCHR secretariat consisting of three human rights officers (although staff capacity has been uneven due to the recurring liquidity situation). That support anchors the mandate institutionally while preserving the experts' full independence and encompasses all aspects of the mandate's implementation, from organizing sessions and country visits to assisting with reports and communications and facilitating interaction with States, United Nations entities, regional mechanisms and civil society. Through its privileged position at the centre of the whole human rights system, OHCHR has systematically acted as a bridge, reinforcing the Working Group's cooperation with other human rights mechanisms and amplifying its visibility. At the same time, the Working Group has been supporting gender mainstreaming efforts throughout the United Nations system, especially in the context of its sessions and country visits.

The Working Group collaborates closely with the OHCHR Women's Human Rights and Gender Section, ensuring that the substantive work carried out is mutually reinforcing. Through that cooperation, the Working Group has contributed to OHCHR-led reports through inputs, thematic discussions of the Human Rights Council and capacity-building workshops. OHCHR has, in turn, facilitated the dissemination and implementation of the Working Group's guidance and recommendations, ensuring their integration across the broader work of OHCHR on the human rights of women and girls. OHCHR has also been actively supporting the engagement of the Working Group in major global forums on women's rights, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, and its linkages to efforts of United Nations entities, notably UN-Women. It has also helped to facilitate meetings of the Working Group with human rights treaty bodies, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. That is a part of the Section's strategy of strengthening synergies among human rights mechanisms, while preserving the independence of both OHCHR and the mechanisms.

That collaboration has taken place in the wider context of the institutional core priority of OHCHR to advance an inclusive gender equality agenda. At global, regional and national levels, OHCHR has persistently advocated for the need to deepen and further advance human rights norms and standards around women's human rights and gender equality. OHCHR works with the Working Group and all special procedure mandate holders, human rights treaty bodies, States, national human rights institutions, civil society and other stakeholders worldwide to facilitate equal participation of women and girls in all their diversity in civil, political, economic, social and cultural life. Building on the sustained collaboration with OHCHR, the Working Group's thematic analyses have intersected with the broader work of OHCHR on the human rights of women and girls (see chapter II for details).

Moreover, the Working Group has received invaluable support from geographic desk officers, as well as staff in regional and country offices, in relation to both country visits and communications.

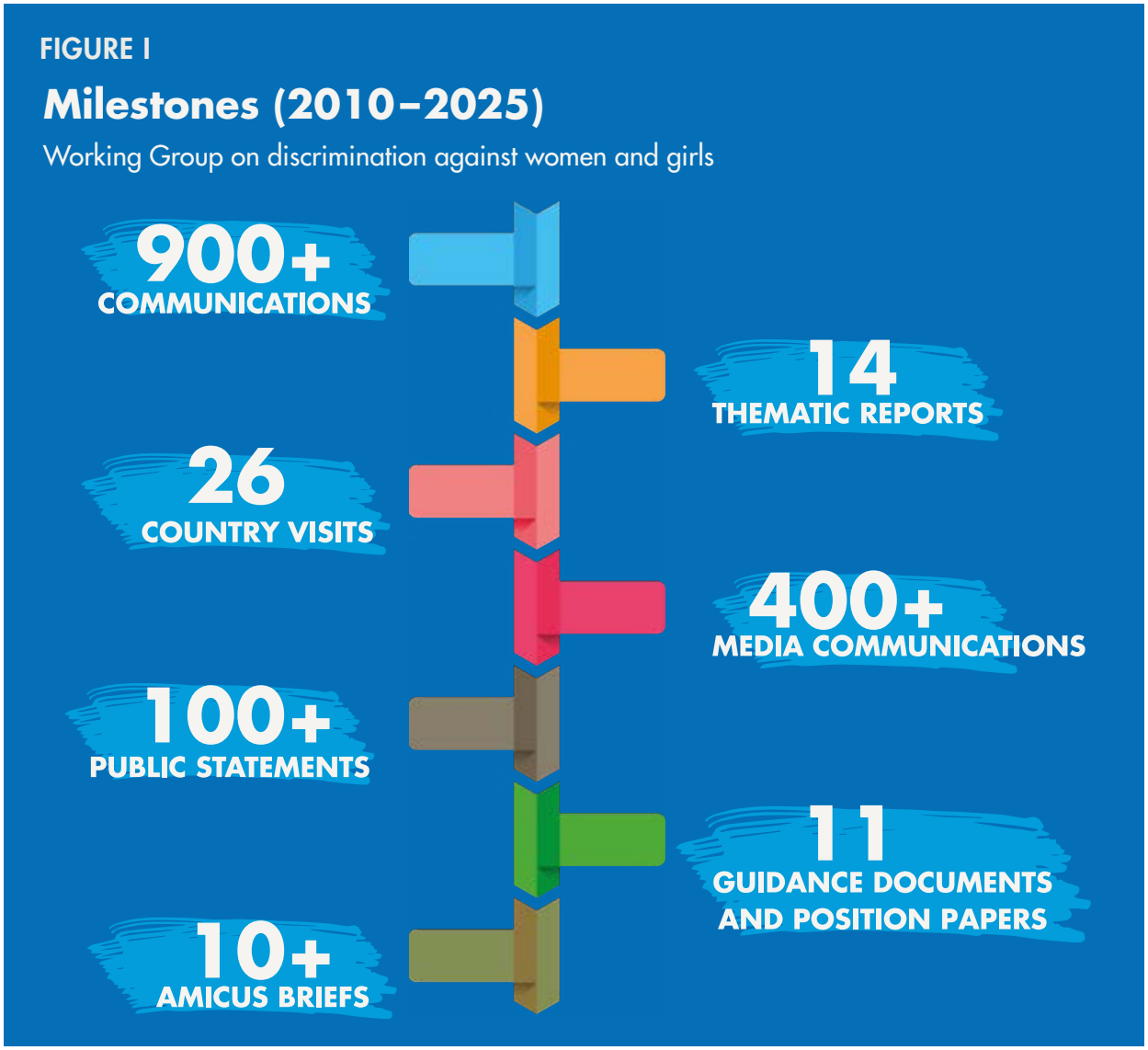
G. Milestones

Over the past 15 years, the Working Group has carried out a broad range of activities across all regions and at multiple levels, from country visits and communications to thematic reporting, guidance and advocacy. Those are illustrated in figures I and II below.

FIGURE I

Milestones (2010–2025)

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls



Source: created by OHCHR through Canva.com.

FIGURE II

Country visits (2010–2025)

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

26 COUNTRY VISITS

6 African States	7 Asia-Pacific States	4 Latin American and Caribbean States	4 Eastern European States	5 Western European and other States
Zimbabwe, 2025	Thailand, 2024	Dominican Republic, 2024	Romania, 2020	Malta, 2023
Mauritania 2023	Afghanistan, 2023	Honduras, 2018	Poland, 2018	Greece, 2019
Chad, 2017	Maldives, 2022	Peru, 2014	Hungary, 2016	United States, 2015
Senegal, 2015	Kyrgyzstan, 2022	Chile, 2014	Republic of Moldova, 2012	Spain, 2014
Tunisia, 2013	Samoa, 2017			Iceland, 2013
Morocco, 2012	Kuwait, 2016			
	China, 2013			

Source: See www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls/country-visits.



Working Group members Frances Raday and Alda Facio on a visit to Chile, 2014. OHCHR Photo



Laura Nyirinkindi addresses the opening of the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women as the Chair of the Working Group, New York, 2025. UN Photo/Manuel Elías

H. Impact

The Working Group has had an impact at all levels – international, regional and national, contributing to reforms in law and policy, developments in jurisprudence and strengthened advocacy.[28]

Its thematic reports have influenced the language of Human Rights Council resolutions on the elimination of discrimination against women and girls, have been referenced by regional human rights mechanisms and United Nations agencies and have informed reports by the Secretary-General to the Commission on the Status of Women. They have also inspired national public strategies, policies and programmes. In Guatemala, the 2020 Working Group thematic report on women's human rights in the changing world of work was used to design a national labour policy together with targeted actions for the economic empowerment of women and girls from marginalized communities, while its other reports inspired sensitization campaigns on new masculinities and the implementation of a comprehensive sex education programme. In Lebanon, the reports were used to develop and amend laws and policies. In Mexico, certain judicial decisions, including one decriminalizing abortion, were inspired by the Working Group's reports and the 2023 thematic report on gendered inequalities of poverty contributed to the development of a public strategy on care, with authorities systematically considering the Working Group's conclusions in designing and implementing public policies. In the Republic of Moldova, the reports served as a reference in the drafting of a national action plan on human rights. In Qatar, the national human rights institution drew on the 2015 thematic report on cultural and family life to make recommendations to repeal discriminatory laws and practices. In Spain, the parliament referred to the reports in legislative initiatives. Civil society actors have also mobilized the reports, as in Italy, where grass-roots activists working on the issue of obstetric violence relied on the 2016 thematic report on health and safety to strengthen their advocacy.[29]

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[28] See www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/achievements-mandate-working-group-issue-discrimination-against-women; A/HRC/56/51; and A/HRC/38/46.

[29] Ibid.

Country visits have contributed to triggering important changes. Examples include: the establishment of regulations on gender parity in elective posts in Chad; an amendment to the legislation in Greece to recognize that sex without consent is rape; the consideration by the parliament of a law to combat gender-based violence for the first time in Kuwait; the development of an implementation plan based on the Working Group's recommendations following its visit to Mauritania; a series of amendments to the legislation on gender equality in the Republic of Moldova, including gender quotas for government positions and political party electoral lists, and the establishment of a national human rights institution; the re-establishment of the practice of distributing emergency contraception in Peru; the halting of plans for the reinstatement of corporal punishment in schools in Samoa; the creation of a committee to reform discriminatory provisions in the Family Code of Senegal; reforms to extend paternity leave from two to four weeks, criminalize stalking and forced marriages and grant greater protection for women victims and survivors of violence and trafficking in Spain; and the promulgation of a new Constitution containing ground-breaking provisions for women's human rights in Tunisia.[30]

Communications, usually issued jointly with other special procedure mandates, have contributed to bringing about positive changes in national legislation and practices. In several States, nationality laws were revised so that women could transmit citizenship to their children on an equal basis with men, and marriage laws were amended to establish the same minimum legal age for girls and boys, contributing to ending child marriage and ensuring equality. For example, in Guatemala, the Working Group's communications informed national efforts to change discriminatory legislative provisions and practices, including establishing the minimum age for marriage and counteracting regressions in family law. In Argentina, communications and an oral intervention before the Senate contributed to the adoption of legislation providing for safe, legal and affordable access to abortion. Urgent appeals have also drawn attention to restrictions on women human rights defenders worldwide and secured the release of several of them from detention. In addition, communications have supported the acquittal or release of women imprisoned or prosecuted under discriminatory laws, for charges such as "indecent dress", adultery, apostasy, having suffered a miscarriage or having defended themselves against sexual violence. In one instance, a communication helped to bring about the



Working Group member Meskerem Geset Techane on a visit to Mauritania, 2023. OHCHR Mauritania Photo

[30] Ibid.

distribution of free sanitary pads in Brazil to women prisoners and those in vulnerable situations, as well as low-income students enrolled in public schools.

Amicus curiae briefs have contributed to landmark judicial outcomes. These include the decriminalization of abortion in the Republic of Korea, the reinsertion into formal education of girls who had been expelled from school due to pregnancy in the United Republic of Tanzania,[31] and ensuring justice for women who had been arbitrarily detained because of their sex work in Nigeria. In addition, the Working Group submitted an intervention in a case before the European Court of Human Rights in which it found that Poland had violated the right to respect for private and family life (art. 8) due to the legal uncertainty surrounding access to abortion, after a judgment by the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland in 2020.



Working Group member Frances Raday on a country visit to Hungary, Hungarian Parliament Building, Budapest, 2016. OHCHR Photo

[31] See chapter IV for more details.

The Working Group has lent its expertise on the rights of women and girls to various international and regional processes, ensuring that a rights-based perspective is incorporated into global efforts to achieve equality and eliminate discrimination. It provided substantive inputs, for example, to: in 2025, the Committee on the Rights of the Child in relation to draft general comment No. 27 on children's right to access to justice and to an effective remedy; in 2024, the Policy on Slavery Crimes of the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court; the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in relation to general recommendations No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems and No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women; the International Labour Organization Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190); and the Human Rights Committee in relation to general comment No. 36 (2019) on the right to life. The Working Group also collaborated with the Working Group on Business and Human Rights to develop draft guidance for national action plans to implement the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Further contributions include those to the Committee on World Food Security Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition, to Directive 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence and to processes aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Working Group has also participated in training sessions and consultations with a broad range of actors.



Working Group member Dorothy Estrada-Tanck and supporting staff on a visit to the Dominican Republic, Ministry for Women, Santo Domingo, 2024. Behind them are portraits of the Mirabal sisters, in whose honour the General Assembly designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. OHCHR Photo



Working Group members Ivana Krstić and Laura Nyirinkindi participate in a series of events on sexual and reproductive health rights in Brazil, 2025. Photo © Conectas

I. Global context: gender-based discrimination and the gender backlash

Although many legal and policy reforms have been adopted to advance the human rights of women and girls around the world, progress has been uneven and remains insufficient. Discrimination continues to affect women and girls in both public and private life, during times of peace and conflict. It cuts across national, cultural and religious boundaries and is often driven by patriarchal stereotypes and entrenched power imbalances that are reflected in laws, policies and practices.

In 2018, taking stock of its first six years of work, the Working Group was one of the first United Nations mechanisms to raise the alarm about the global resurgence of retrogressive narratives and a coordinated backlash undermining the universality of the rights of women and girls, reversing progress made towards gender equality, particularly in the areas of family and cultural life and sexual and reproductive health rights.[32] The Working Group has defined a gender backlash as the denial or retrogression in the recognition, enforcement and realization of the rights of women and girls, a phenomenon that destabilizes the foundation of the human rights system and makes inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies impossible.

In 2024, after six more years of work, the Working Group confirmed that the backlash had intensified, reaching extreme forms in certain contexts, such as gender apartheid in Afghanistan[33] (see chapter III for more details). Concerningly, the backlash is now targeting not only specific rights, but also the very concept of gender as a social construct, the understanding of which is central to dismantling the inequality of women and girls.[34] Those attacks, often led by transnational anti-gender movements, put at risk hard-won gains in areas such as sexuality and reproduction, gender equality education and the prevention of gender-based violence.

In the face of the escalating backlash, the continued existence of the Working Group's mandate is essential. As an independent expert mechanism with a global reach, it is uniquely placed to monitor, expose and respond to such coordinated attacks, to reaffirm the universality of the human rights of women and girls and to guide States and other actors towards achieving substantive gender equality for all.

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32 See A/HRC/38/46.
33 See A/HRC/56/51.
34 See A/HRC/WG.11/41/2.

J. A vision of substantive gender equality: the CREATE framework

Since its inception, the Working Group has grounded its mandate in the principle of substantive gender equality, in the understanding that true equality requires not only removing formal discrimination, but also transforming structural, systemic and historical disadvantages, including entrenched patriarchal power relations. That vision demands that laws, policies and practices address the root causes of inequality, dismantle systemic barriers, redistribute power and resources and make the human rights of women and girls a lived reality rather than a theoretical entitlement.

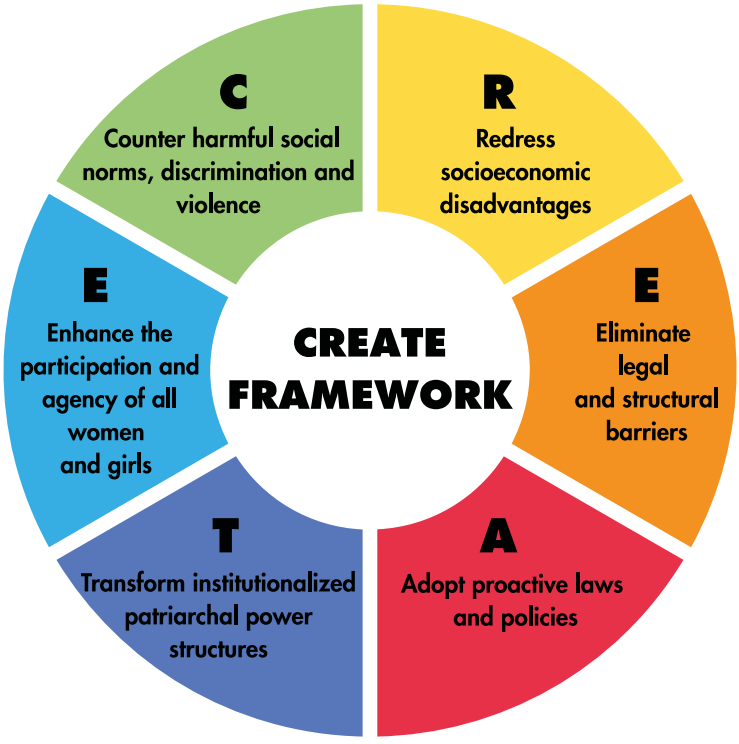
As the Working Group entered its third and current mandate cycle in 2023, it reaffirmed its commitment to substantive equality as the overarching framework of its work.[35] It reiterated that substantive gender equality is essential to the dignity and rights of all women and girls. It called for approaches that are transformative, grounded in international human rights law and responsive to the realities of women and girls in all their diversity.

To operationalize that vision of substantive equality, the Working Group has introduced the CREATE framework: a holistic, feminist, human rights-based tool designed to help States and other stakeholders advance and sustain substantive gender equality, while responding effectively to the growing gender backlash.

FIGURE III

CREATE Framework for achieving substantive gender equality

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls



Source: created by OHCHR through Canva.com.

[35] See A/HRC/56/51 and A/HRC/WG.11/42/1.



Working Group member Dorothy Estrada-Tanck explaining the CREATE Framework at the event "25th Anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: A Shared Commitment", organized by Spanish Women in International Law (SWIIS) and the Association of Spanish Graduates in Security and Defence (ADESyD), Madrid, 2025. Photo © SWIIS and ADESyD

The six mutually reinforcing pillars of the CREATE framework call upon States and other actors:

- To counter harmful social norms, discrimination and violence
- To redress socioeconomic disadvantages, with an intersectional and life-cycle approach
- To eliminate legal and structural barriers, including direct, indirect, intersectional and structural discrimination
- To adopt proactive laws and policies to promote substantive gender equality
- To transform institutionalized patriarchal power structures
- To enhance the participation and agency of all women and girls in all spheres of decision-making.

The CREATE framework is not a checklist, but an integrated, action-oriented road map. It equips States to translate their international human rights obligations into tangible results. Through the CREATE framework, the Working Group underscores that achieving substantive gender equality is both a legal duty and an urgent imperative for building inclusive, just and sustainable societies.

Anchored in substantive gender equality and guided by the CREATE framework, the Working Group continues to work with States, civil society, United Nations partners and other stakeholders to dismantle discriminatory laws, policies and practices, resist regression and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls, everywhere.



II. The Rights of Women and Girls: Between Progress and Regression

Over the past 15 years, from its establishment to the present, the Working Group has addressed discrimination against women and girls across all areas of life by structuring its work around four key domains: political and public life; economic and social life; family and cultural life; and health and safety.

The Working Group has documented how structural, sociocultural, economic and legal barriers continue to obstruct the equal participation, access and enjoyment of the rights of women and girls in each of these areas.

Building on that body of work, the following sections synthesize the Working Group's findings and engagements, taking stock of both progress and setbacks, while also highlighting promising practices and emerging challenges across the four domains.

A. Political and public life

The political and public life of a country is a broad concept that encompasses the exercise of power in legislative, executive, judicial and administrative institutions, as well as participation in civil society and local governance structures. As defined by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, it spans institutions ranging from public boards and councils to political parties, trade unions, professional associations and community-based organizations.[36]

Despite global commitments and notable progress, women and girls remain underrepresented across all levels of political and public life. Women hold just 27.2 per cent of seats in national parliaments globally and only six countries have achieved gender parity (50 per cent).[37] Women comprise only 22.9 per cent of cabinet ministers worldwide and leadership at the highest levels remains rare, with just 25 countries in which women serve as Heads of State or Government.[38] At the level of local governments, women constitute 35.5 per cent of elected members.[39] In the judiciary, while women make up about 40 per cent of judges, representation significantly declines in higher courts, particularly in leadership positions.[40] Women's involvement in peacebuilding also remains limited: in 2023, women made up only 9.6 per cent of negotiators, 13.7 per cent of mediators and 26.6 per cent of signatories to peace agreements and ceasefire agreements.[41] As at 2024, women made up only 21 per cent of Permanent Representatives, with just 7 per cent of all ambassadors since 1947 being women and 73 countries that have never appointed a female representative.[42] Female representation in diplomatic missions continues to lag behind men, especially in top-ranking roles.[43]

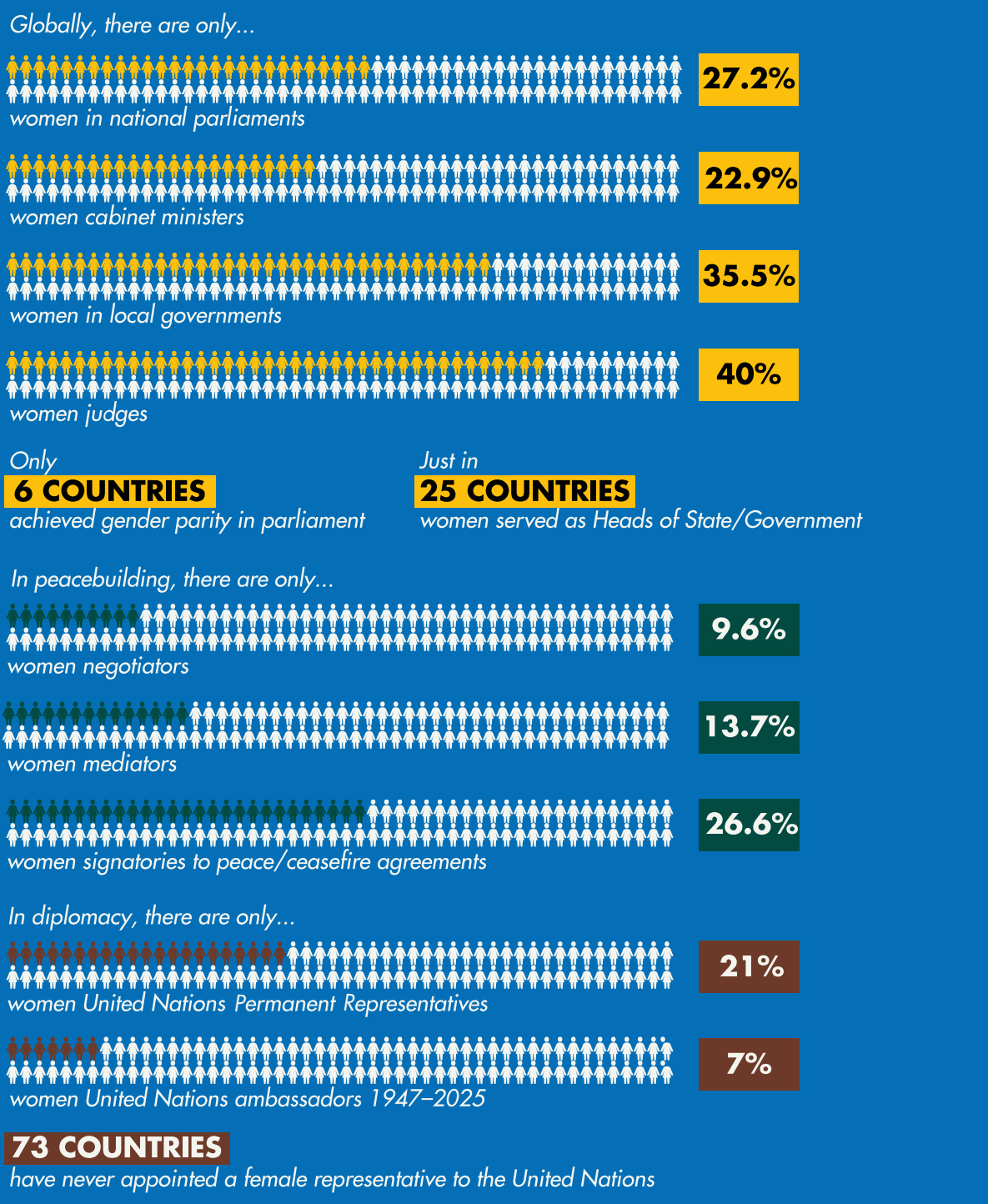
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36 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 23 (1997).
37 Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women, "Women in politics: 2025". Available at www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/women-in-politics-map-2025.
38 Ibid.
39 UN-Women, "Women in local government". Available at https://localgov.unwomen.org.
40 United Nations, "International Day of Women Judges, 10 March 2025". Available at www.un.org/en/observances/women-judges-day.
41 S/2024/671.
42 United Nations, "International Day of Women in Diplomacy, 24 June 2025". Available at www.un.org/en/observances/women-in-diplomacy-day.
43 Ibid.

FIGURE IV

Political and public life: global overview (2025)

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls



Source: created by OHCHR through Canva.com using references cited in the text above.



Working Group members Melissa Upreti, Alda Facio, Meskerem Geset Techane and Ivana Radačić met with a group of women human rights defenders in Sydney, Australia, 2019. OHCHR Photo

1. LAYING THE FOUNDATION: STATES' OBLIGATIONS AND GENDER PARITY

In 2012, in its first-ever report[44] to the Human Rights Council, the Working Group laid out a legal and conceptual foundation based on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (arts. 4, 7, 8 and 9) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (arts. 2, 3 and 25), affirming women's right to participate in political and public life as a fundamental component of human dignity and substantive equality.

In 2013, the Working Group devoted its first thematic report[45] to the issue of discrimination against women in public and political life, with a focus on times of political transition. In the report, the Working Group stressed that women's participation in political and public life must be equal to that of men to be meaningful, calling for gender parity (50/50). It also emphasized that women's equality in political and public life can be fully realized only in conditions of democracy, as women must be able to exercise their rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, movement and association in order to participate equally. The Working Group underlined that political transitions do not always lead to inclusive democracy and long-lasting peace. Rather, such transitions require the participation of autonomous women's movements. Among the key constraints identified were widespread structural and societal discrimination against women in the family, caregiving responsibilities, violence against women and marginalization by political parties and other non-State public actors.

In particular, the Working Group noted that women human rights defenders were disproportionally exposed to stigmatization and harassment, due to the perception that they were challenging accepted norms and stereotypes about femininity and the role of women in society. It recommended that States take specific steps towards achieving parity in political decision-making and leadership at all levels through a multifaceted approach that was responsive to the different obstacles faced by women, including those arising from multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Such an approach must encompass, among others, a coherent set of social and economic policies directed at the family, workplace and marketplace, along with positive action to empower women, including the right mix of special measures, both temporary and permanent.

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44 A/HRC/20/28.
45 A/HRC/23/50.



Working Group member Melissa Upreti with a group of Indigenous women leaders from Canada, Mexico, Peru and the United States at the side event "Indigenous Women Just Want Fundamental Human Rights" of the twenty-second session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, April 2023, New York. © Izzy Valencia/Infinity Visuals

2. IDENTIFYING PROMISING PRACTICES IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE

In its 2017 report[46] to the Human Rights Council, the Working Group stated that a promising practice in the area of women's participation in political and public life required: removing the barriers that limited women's access to leadership, whether cultural, economic, institutional or religious; eliminating disempowering stereotypes and gender-based violence; achieving parity for women in decision-making spaces; and ensuring the gender-sensitive mainstreaming of policymaking and budgeting.

The Working Group presented two case studies illustrating promising practices: one from India, where the introduction of quotas significantly expanded women's political representation while highlighting the need for complementary policies and civil society engagement to sustain impact; and one from Tunisia, where women's active participation in post-revolution constitutional reform led to the adoption of a progressive, rights-based framework, demonstrating the power of civic engagement and international standards in securing legal guarantees for gender equality.

[46] A/HRC/35/29.

3. RESISTING REGRESSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVISM OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

In 2018, as the Working Group took stock of the first six years of its mandate, it warned of a global resurgence of conservative and retrogressive narratives threatening the hard-won gains of women and girls, noting intensified barriers to women's participation in political and public life.[47] Despite the rise of global movements such as #NiUnaMenos and #MeToo and the emergence of new digital platforms for women's political expression and activism, the Working Group noted that rising fundamentalism, political populism, authoritarianism and the prioritization of corporate greed over human rights further marginalized women, with women human rights defenders facing increasing harassment, intimidation and violence. The Working Group urged States to mount a robust and coordinated response to counter anti-rights rollbacks undermining women's equality in political and public life.

In 2022, the Working Group dedicated its thematic report[48] to the political and public participation and activism of girls and young women. In the report, the Working Group highlighted the leadership of girls and young women in advancing gender equality, social justice and environmental sustainability worldwide. Despite their significant contributions, they face systemic barriers in their activism, rooted in common misperceptions around youth participation in political and public life, restricted autonomy, paternalistic control and tokenistic forms of inclusion. For girls and young women, those challenges are further exacerbated by discriminatory gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms, exposing them to heightened risks of harassment and violence, including punitive family and societal responses and sexual, domestic and digital violence. The Working Group emphasized that girls and young women activists advocating for human rights are human rights defenders and, as such, must be afforded robust legal protection. It called upon States to recognize and promote the dignity and agency of girls and young women, eliminate structural barriers and ensure a safe environment for their activism.



Working Group members Melissa Upreti and Elizabeth Broderick on a visit to Kyrgyzstan, during a final debrief with the United Nations country team, 2022. OHCHR Photo

47 See A/HRC/38/46.
48 A/HRC/50/25.



The Working Group met with judges and attorneys at the Vojvodina Bar Association in Novi Sad, Serbia, during the regional convening for the Balkans, 2025. OHCHR Photo

4. TOWARDS SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY: DISMANTLING BARRIERS IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE

In 2024, amid escalating regressions and pushbacks against the rights of women and girls, as the Working Group entered a new mandate cycle adopting substantive equality as its overarching framework, it reaffirmed its focus on persistent and emerging challenges in political and public life.[49] It emphasized that achieving gender equality required not only legal reform but also structural and cultural transformation to remove barriers that continued to restrict the equal participation of women and girls, including in decision-making and leadership. It underscored that formal equality before the law was insufficient unless accompanied by specific measures to dismantle the entrenched sociocultural and institutional practices that perpetuated discrimination.

The Working Group also reiterated its long-standing call for States to establish parity, including through temporary special measures, and emphasized the need to address discrimination against women and girls in the digital world, where online violence, misinformation and algorithmic bias increasingly shaped the conditions of public and political participation of women and girls.

[49] See A/HRC/56/51.

Reform of discriminatory nationality laws: the case of Malaysia

The Working Group has consistently emphasized that the elimination of discrimination against women in political and public life necessitates the reform of discriminatory nationality laws.[a] Women's capacity to participate in political and public life is defined by their citizenship and nationality, yet many nationality laws continue to deny women the right to confer nationality on their children or spouses on an equal basis with men.

Between 2014 and 2024, the Working Group issued three communications to the Government of Malaysia, raising concern over discriminatory nationality laws.[b] In doing so, it drew on the consistent position of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, as reflected in its general recommendation No. 32 (2014) on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women and in its concluding observations on Malaysia,[c] namely that equal nationality rights are essential to eliminate discrimination against women in public and political life.

In March 2025, a landmark settlement in the *Suriani Kempe & Ors v. Government of Malaysia* case, together with constitutional amendments passed in 2024, enabled Malaysian women to transmit citizenship to their overseas-born children on an equal basis with men. That development marked a significant milestone towards substantive gender equality, demonstrating the impact of sustained advocacy and international engagement. That progress reflects broader advocacy efforts to which the Working Group and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have contributed. Nevertheless, concerns remain regarding delays in implementation and the persistence of gender-discriminatory provisions in the nationality law – including the denial of women's right to confer nationality on a non-citizen spouse on an equal basis with men and of men's right to confer nationality on their children born outside of legal marriage – which contribute to statelessness and perpetuate patriarchal norms. The Working Group remains attentive to those challenges and committed to monitoring developments closely, in dialogue with civil society, States and relevant stakeholders, while continuing to highlight that the reform of nationality laws is a cornerstone of women's equal participation in political and public life.

[a] See the Working Group's 2017 position paper on discrimination against women in nationality: www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls/discrimination-against-women-nationality.

[b] Communications MYS 7/2014, MYS 6/2021 and MYS 3/2024.

[c] CEDAW/C/MYS/CO/3-5, paras. 33 and 34; and CEDAW/C/MYS/CO/6, paras. 34 and 35.



Working Group members Frances Raday and Kamala Chandrakirana on a country visit to China, 2013. OHCHR Photo

5. JOINT ADVOCACY WITH THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE AREA OF POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE

OHCHR works to support gender parity in political and public life through the work of human rights mechanisms, including recommendations by treaty bodies and special procedures.

Most recently, general recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems was developed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, with the close substantive and logistical support of OHCHR over a two-year period, through an inclusive and consultative drafting process. It involved the expertise of the Committee's secretariat, thematic teams, country and regional offices, special procedures, including the Working Group, five regional consultations (hosted by UN-Women), five expert group meetings (hosted by academia and civil society),[50] multiple exchanges with States Parties and a public call for inputs and comments from a wide range of stakeholders, including States, the United Nations system, academia and civil society. The Working Group provided thematic inputs grounded in more than a decade of work on parity, women's political participation, intersectionality and the role of women human rights defenders.[51] In November 2024, OHCHR, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Working Group participated in the Symposium "Transforming Decision-Making: The Power of CEDAW's GR40 in Advancing Women's Equal Representation", organized by GQUAL to advance gender parity in global decision-making and to translate the general recommendation into actionable strategies across diverse sectors. The Working Group's then Chair, Laura Nyirinkindi, also published an *Opinio Juris* blog as part of the campaign. To support the implementation of the general recommendation, OHCHR has provided targeted capacity-building sessions to staff in OHCHR country offices participating in the OHCHR Gender Accreditation Programme.

The Working Group and OHCHR also share a strong common commitment to the expansion of an inclusive civic space in which women human rights defenders in all their diversity can operate. Those efforts include providing technical support and advice to country and regional offices with regard to their work on and with women human rights defenders on issues around protection networks, protection strategy, capacity-building and engagement with human rights mechanisms. Both the Working Group and OHCHR regularly pay tribute to women human rights defenders and feminist movements worldwide, reaffirming the commitment to amplifying their voices and supporting their calls to action.



Working Group members Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, Elizabeth Broderick, Meskerem Geset Techane and Melissa Upreti at the regional convening of the Working Group in Bangkok, 2019. OHCHR Photo

[50] Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Women at the Table, GQUAL, the American University Washington College of Law, the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at the Australian National University and the University of Buenos Aires.

[51] Laura Nyirinkindi, "Gender parity, power and influence – the path less taken", in *Transforming Decision-Making: The Power of CEDAW's GR 40 in Advancing Women's Equal Representation – Symposium Collection* (GQUAL and *Opinio Juris*, 2025), pp. 31–36.

B. Economic and social life

Economic and social life refers to the full spectrum of rights to participate in, benefit from and contribute to society through access to work, fair conditions of work, social security, an adequate standard of living, education and health systems.

Today, despite advancements, no country has succeeded in closing the gender gap in all aspects of economic and social life, and women and girls continue to face discrimination. While 94.9 per cent of the global gap in educational attainment has been closed, gains are not matched in women's economic participation, with only 60.5 per cent of that gap closed.[52] In 2024, the global female labour force participation rate was 49.1 per cent, compared with 73.1 per cent for men.[53] Women continue to earn 20 per cent less[54] and perform 2.5 times more hours of unpaid care and domestic work than men a day,[55] restricting their ability to engage in paid employment. They also face pension gaps of 30 to 40 per cent.[56] Women are overrepresented in informal and vulnerable employment, as nearly 60 per cent of women's employment globally is in the informal economy and, in low-income countries, it is more than 90 per cent.[57] In many countries, women continue to face legal barriers to owning or inheriting property, including marital and family property, accessing land and credit or opening a bank account and, in some contexts, still require their husband's permission to work. Barriers in access to health services, particularly to sexual and reproductive healthcare, further undermine women's economic autonomy and social participation. Gender-based violence further weakens the economic and social potential of women and girls, who are disproportionately represented among the world's poor, with current projections indicating that 342.4 million women and girls will be living in extreme poverty by 2030.[58]



Session of the Working Group in New York, where members met with women human rights defenders, 2019. OHCHR Photo

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52 See World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap 2024: Insight Report – June 2024* (Geneva, 2024).
53 See https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS and https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.MA.ZS.
54 International Labour Organization, *Global Wage Report, 2018/19: What Lies Behind Gender Pay Gaps* (Geneva, 2018).
55 See UN-Women and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024* (New York, 2024).
56 World Economic Forum, "What is the gender pensions gap and what can we do about it?", 30 October 2024.
57 International Labour Organization, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, 3rd ed. (Geneva, 2018).
58 UN-Women and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023* (New York, 2023), p. 8.

FIGURE V

Economic and social life: global overview (2025)

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Globally, progress in education is not translating into women's economic participation...



Source: created by OHCHR through Canva.com using references cited in the text above.



Working Group members Kamala Chandrakirana and Emna Aouij on a visit to Morocco, where they met with the National Human Rights Council in Rabat, 2012. OHCHR Photo

1. LAYING THE FOUNDATION: STATES' OBLIGATIONS AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

In 2012, in its first report to the Human Rights Council,[59] the Working Group stressed that the right to the substantive equality of women and girls in access to economic and social life is a human right, core to their human dignity. States have obligations to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in those areas and provide equal opportunities, ways and means for women's empowerment, in accordance with international human rights law. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are the key human rights instruments guaranteeing those rights. Certain International Labour Organization conventions on gender equality in work further reinforce that framework.[60]

In 2014, the Working Group dedicated a thematic report[61] to the issue of addressing discrimination against women in economic and social life, with a focus on times of economic crisis. In the report, the Working Group underscored that women's unequal position in economic and social life was rooted in discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes that confined them to undervalued and informal forms of work and assigned them primary responsibility for unpaid care. During economic crises, austerity measures have disproportionately affected women, heightening job insecurity and exacerbating their unequal share of unpaid care. The Working Group warned of the systemic failure to integrate the biological function of reproduction and the gendered role of unpaid care work into macroeconomic policy in a way to ensure that reproduction and care worked well with the overall economic empowerment of women. It welcomed promising practices from the Nordic countries towards a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities. The Working Group urged States to eliminate discriminatory laws restricting women's participation in all spheres of work, extend protections to informal women workers, recognize care and maternity as economic and social rights and adopt special measures to accelerate de facto equality.

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59 A/HRC/20/28.

60 The Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), and the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

61 A/HRC/26/39.

2. IDENTIFYING PROMISING PRACTICES IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE

In its 2017 report,[62] the Working Group identified promising practices in promoting women's equality and empowerment in economic and social life as requiring measures that supported equal opportunity and equal enjoyment of benefits, as well as accommodation for gender-specific needs. That includes legally mandated paid parental leave for men and women in formal and informal sectors. The Working Group presented a case study from Iceland illustrating promising practices in the context of the financial crisis. Grounded in a feminist analysis of the crisis, the Government combined short-term and long-term measures to prevent disproportionate impacts on women. Although cuts were made to healthcare, primary education and parental leave, the reallocated funds were used to increase basic unemployment benefits, social protection allowances and disability pensions, particularly benefiting older women, women with disabilities and women-headed households. In parallel, the Government rolled out gender-responsive budgeting, appointed gender-equality experts in ministries, adopted corporate board quotas and implemented national action plans on gender equality and violence prevention, supported by monitoring mechanisms such as a "welfare watch" to track the most pressing welfare issues and propose gender-responsive measures. That case illustrated that protecting social welfare systems and applying targeted gender-responsive measures during economic crises can help preserve gains on women's rights and support healthy recovery. The integration of feminist analysis into Government research and policy, coupled with efforts to raise public awareness of women's human rights issues, can contribute to a more enabling environment for progressive reform, breaking away from masculinist and neoliberal financial models.

In the same year, the Working Group issued a position paper on women's land rights,[63] highlighting that insecure land rights undermined women's economic independence and autonomy and urging States to eliminate discriminatory laws and practices to ensure women's equal land rights.



Working Group members Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, Ivana Krstić, Claudia Flores and Laura Nyirinkindi with the Commission for Gender Equality in Johannesburg during the regional convening for Southern Africa, 2024. OHCHR Photo

62 A/HRC/35/29.
63 See www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls/insecure-land-rights-women-threat-progress-gender-equality-and-sustainable-development.



Working Group members Ivana Krstić and Haina Lu on a visit to Thailand, Songkhla Women's Correctional Institution in Hat Yai, 2024.
OHCHR Regional Office for South-East Asia Photo

3. RESISTING REGRESSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSFORMATIVE REDISTRIBUTION

In 2018, as the Working Group entered a new mandate cycle, it raised the alarm about the growing global backlash against the rights of women and girls.[64] It noted that, while women's economic empowerment had proven to be among the least contested issues relating to gender equality, the underlying cultural, social and political drivers of economic inequality remained largely unaddressed. The Working Group called upon States to counter anti-rights regression and reaffirm equality in all spheres of life, including economic and social life.

In 2019, the Working Group centred its thematic report[65] on the theme of women deprived of liberty. In the report, the Working Group emphasized that women's lack of access to economic opportunities, resources and services constricted their choices and created economic insecurity, often resulting in a deprivation of their liberty. Those risks are heightened for women experiencing multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination. In order to minimize deprivation of liberty resulting from women's poverty, the Working Group called upon States to ensure universal, non-discriminatory access to education, health, legal and social services, to eliminate legal barriers to women's employment and enforce labour protections across all sectors, including domestic work, with a view to formalizing informal labour.

In 2020, the Working Group examined the issue of women's human rights in the changing world of work in a thematic report.[66] It observed that global trends, such as technological shifts and intensified globalization, were reshaping the world of work. While those trends have the potential to advance gender equality in the workplace, such progress is contingent on dismantling systemic discrimination against women and girls. In the report, the Working Group underscored that addressing systemic discrimination in the changing world of work required rethinking economic structures that relied

64 See A/HRC/38/46.
65 A/HRC/41/33.
66 A/HRC/44/51.

upon unpaid care and unequal power relations. The experts urged States to ensure freedom from violence and harassment, recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, disrupt gendered patterns of labour and support women's collective action.

In 2023, the Working Group focused, through feminist and human rights-based approaches, its thematic report[67] on the gendered inequalities of poverty. In the report, the Working Group underscored that poverty and inequality were not inevitable, but rather the result of structural discrimination embedded in political, economic, social, cultural and legal systems. It emphasized the need to transform dominant economic models and policy frameworks that perpetuated poverty and marginalization, particularly of women and girls experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. It highlighted the vital role of social movements in advancing feminist and decolonial alternatives centred on redistribution and revalidation of labour, investment in care, wealth redistribution, and equitable and sustainable use of global resources. It called upon States, international economic institutions and corporate actors to adopt transformative measures, including grounding all (socioeconomic) laws and policies in human rights, ensuring universal gender-responsive social protection, realizing the right to care, enacting tax justice, debt cancellation and equitable trade, and guaranteeing women's equal participation and accountability in decision-making, labour markets and corporate governance.



Working Group member Meskerem Geset Techane on a visit to Mauritania, where she met with Imraghen women, associations and cooperatives in Mamghar, 2023. OHCHR Mauritania Photo

[67] A/HRC/53/39.



Haina Lu presents the Working Group's thematic report on the gendered dimensions of care and support systems to the Human Rights Council, Geneva, 2025. Human Rights Council Photo

4. TOWARDS SUBSTANTIVE GENDER EQUALITY: CENTRING CARE AND SUPPORT

In 2024, as the Working Group entered a new mandate cycle guided by an overarching framework centred on substantive gender equality, it reiterated its call to States to conduct a feminist and human rights-based review of socioeconomic policies and strategies to enact necessary structural reforms.[68]

In 2025, the Working Group dedicated its report to the gendered dimensions of care and support systems,[69] emphasizing that, while care and support work was essential for societies and economies, it remained unrecognized, undervalued, underpaid and unprotected, and continued to fall disproportionately on women and girls. Moreover, despite providing the majority of care and support, women and girls, especially those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, often do not receive the care and support they need.

The Working Group stressed that existing care and support policies were insufficient and fragmented and amounted to gender discrimination; it called for their transformation. It urged States to build gender-responsive, inclusive and sustainable care and support systems, including by: promoting the equal participation of boys and men in unpaid and paid care and support; strengthening legal, labour and economic protections for paid and unpaid care and support workers; providing gender-responsive and universal basic care and support, including healthcare, education and social protection; and actively working for systemic change to develop a care-centred administration, economy and community.

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68 See A/HRC/56/51.
69 A/HRC/59/45.

Eliminating discrimination against sex workers and securing their human rights

Within the sphere of economic and social life, the Working Group has consistently addressed the human rights situation of women sex workers as a group facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Through guidance documents, country visits and amicus curiae briefs, it has underscored the urgent need to eliminate stigma, exclusion and criminalization and to secure sex workers' equal enjoyment of rights.

In 2023, the Working Group issued a guidance document on eliminating discrimination against sex workers and securing their human rights.[a] It recognized that sex workers worldwide faced widespread violations, including arbitrary arrest and detention, violence by State and non-State actors, denial of access to healthcare and social services, barriers to justice and exclusion from economic and social life. Adopting a human rights-based and self-determination approach, the Working Group underscored the principles of agency, bodily autonomy and free decision-making, affirming that sex workers were entitled to equality, dignity and the full enjoyment of all human rights. Drawing on extensive consultations with sex workers across regions and on international human rights standards, the Working Group stressed that criminalization and punitive measures entrenched stigma, exacerbated vulnerability and fostered unsafe working conditions. It called for the full decriminalization of adult voluntary sex work as the approach best suited to protect health, safety, dignity, equality and socioeconomic rights, and urged States to ensure sex workers' access to services, justice and protection from violence, while addressing intersecting forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status, race and class.

In its country visits, the Working Group has documented persistent violations of the rights of sex workers. A recurrent concern has been barriers to healthcare, including discrimination against sex workers living with HIV/AIDS,[b] and broader obstacles to essential services in many countries.[c] The Working Group has also noted their heightened exposure to violence and abuse, including harassment, extortion and sextortion by law enforcement and pervasive violence and stigmatization in several countries.[d] Recognizing that those harms are enabled and entrenched by criminalization, the Working Group has consistently urged States to ensure that women in sex work are not criminalized, including in Samoa,[e] Kuwait,[f] the United States[g] and Senegal[h] and has explicitly called for the decriminalization of sex work in Zimbabwe,[i] Thailand,[j] Malta[k] and Romania.[l]

Beyond country visits, the Working Group has also intervened before national courts, including through amicus curiae briefs in Nigeria concerning the arbitrary arrest and detention of women suspected of sex work, underscoring its call for decriminalization and protection of sex workers' rights.[m]

[a] A/HRC/WG.11/39/1.
[b] Observed for example during country visits to Zimbabwe (report forthcoming, end of mission statement available at www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/women/wgdawg/statements/2025-08-08-eom-zimbabwe-wgdawg-en.pdf), Thailand (A/HRC/59/45/Add.2), Honduras (A/HRC/41/33/Add.1) and Senegal (A/HRC/32/44/Add.1).
[c] Observed for example during country visits to the Dominican Republic (A/HRC/59/45/Add.1), Kyrgyzstan (A/HRC/53/39/Add.1), Romania (A/HRC/47/38/Add.1), Poland (A/HRC/41/33/Add.2) and Honduras (A/HRC/41/33/Add.1).
[d] Observed for example during country visits to Thailand (A/HRC/59/45/Add.2), the Dominican Republic (A/HRC/59/45/Add.1), Romania (A/HRC/47/38/Add.1), Poland (A/HRC/41/33/Add.2), Honduras (A/HRC/41/33/Add.1) and the United States (A/HRC/32/44/Add.2).
[e] A/HRC/38/46/Add.1.
[f] A/HRC/35/29/Add.2.
[g] A/HRC/32/44/Add.2.
[h] A/HRC/32/44/Add.1.
[i] Report forthcoming. End of mission statement is available at www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/women/wgdawg/statements/2025-08-08-eom-zimbabwe-wgdawg-en.pdf.
[j] A/HRC/59/45/Add.2.
[k] A/HRC/56/51/Add.2.
[l] A/HRC/47/38/Add.1.
[m] See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/Amicus_Brief_1_Nigeria.pdf; www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/Amicus_Brief_2_Nigeria.pdf; www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/Amicus_Brief_3_Nigeria.pdf; www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/Amicus_Brief_4_Nigeria.pdf; www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/Amicus_Brief_5_Nigeria.pdf; and www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/Amicus_Brief_6_Nigeria.pdf.

5. JOINT ADVOCACY WITH THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE AREA OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE

OHCHR publications on women's rights to land and other productive resources[70] were built on the Working Group's earlier analysis and the thematic discussion at the Human Rights Council on women's rights in socioeconomic spheres (on "human rights-based and gender-responsive care and support systems" in 2022 and on "the implementation of States' obligations on the role of the family in supporting the human rights of its members" in 2024). Those discussions, which OHCHR supported, benefited from contributions by the former and current members of the Working Group. More recently OHCHR has implemented Council resolution 54/6 on the centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective, the first resolution on the issue. As mandated by the resolution, OHCHR presented a report on the human rights dimension of care and support,[71] which was informed by the work of the Working Group and in turn further informed the above-mentioned Working Group's report on the gendered dimensions of care and support systems,[72] which was presented to the Council in the same year, keeping the momentum going.



Working Group visit to Morocco, Women's Souaber Association of production of couscous in Khemisset, 2012. OHCHR Photo

[70] OHCHR and UN-Women, *Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources*, 2nd ed. (New York and Geneva, 2020) and OHCHR and UN-Women, *Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources*, 1st ed. (New York and Geneva, 2013).
[71] A/HRC/58/43.
[72] A/HRC/59/45.

C. Family and cultural life

Cultural life encompasses all forms of conduct, organization and human behaviour in society, including family, language, religion, philosophy, law, government, art and sport. It is a living, dynamic and evolving set of processes that ties together the framework of individual and collective lives and the expression of human rights. Women and girls have the right to leadership and meaningful participation in creating, shaping, contesting and recreating their cultures. Families take diverse forms and are sites of evolving social and cultural norms. Globally, only a little more than one third of households consist of a couple with children (38 per cent) and most families take alternative forms, including extended (27 per cent), couple only (13 per cent), one person (13 per cent), single parent (8 per cent) and non-relative (2 per cent).[73] Legal definitions that fail to reflect the true diversity of family structures and discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity have a distinct negative impact on historically marginalized groups, including LGBTIQ+ persons.

Despite global advancements, women and girls continue to face legal and practical barriers to substantive equality and non-discrimination in cultural and family life. In many countries, discriminatory family laws and practices restrict women's rights in areas such as decision-making on marriage, divorce, childbearing, economic resources, property and inheritance. That reflects a global history of legal systems that have upheld men's power to control their wives' activities, property and financial resources, and guardianship of children. Today, approximately 25 per cent of countries still do not grant women equal rights to enter marriage and initiate divorce.[74] Entrenched patriarchal norms in the family impose a disproportionate share of domestic labour and care and support work on women and girls, drive their exclusion from education and public participation[75] and often result in harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. Globally, 71 per cent of countries have yet to set 18 as the minimum age of marriage for men and women without exceptions, leaving 640 million women and girls alive today who were married in childhood.[76] More than 230 million girls have been subjected to female genital mutilation.[77] Those harmful practices severely undermine the life opportunities, autonomy and safety from violence of women and girls. Across the life cycle, inequalities persist into older age: older women are often deprived of land and property in widowhood through discriminatory inheritance practices,[78] continue to shoulder caregiving for spouses, children and grandchildren without recognition[79] and those without resources or livelihoods may be neglected by their families and involuntarily isolated in the home or in a substandard care facility.[80]

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73 UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020: Families in a Changing World* (New York, 2019). In the study, UN-Women uses the term "lone parent". In keeping with its previous thematic reports and guidance documents, the Working Group instead refers to "single parent", which it considers the more appropriate terminology from a human rights perspective. See also, A/HRC/WG.11/43/1, para. 9.

74 *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.I.2).

75 See A/HRC/50/25.

76 United Nations Population Fund, "Child marriage", available at www.unfpa.org/child-marriage.

77 United Nations Children's Fund, "Female genital mutilation (FGM)", available at https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/female-genital-mutilation.

78 See www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls/insecure-land-rights-women-threat-progress-gender-equality-and-sustainable-development.

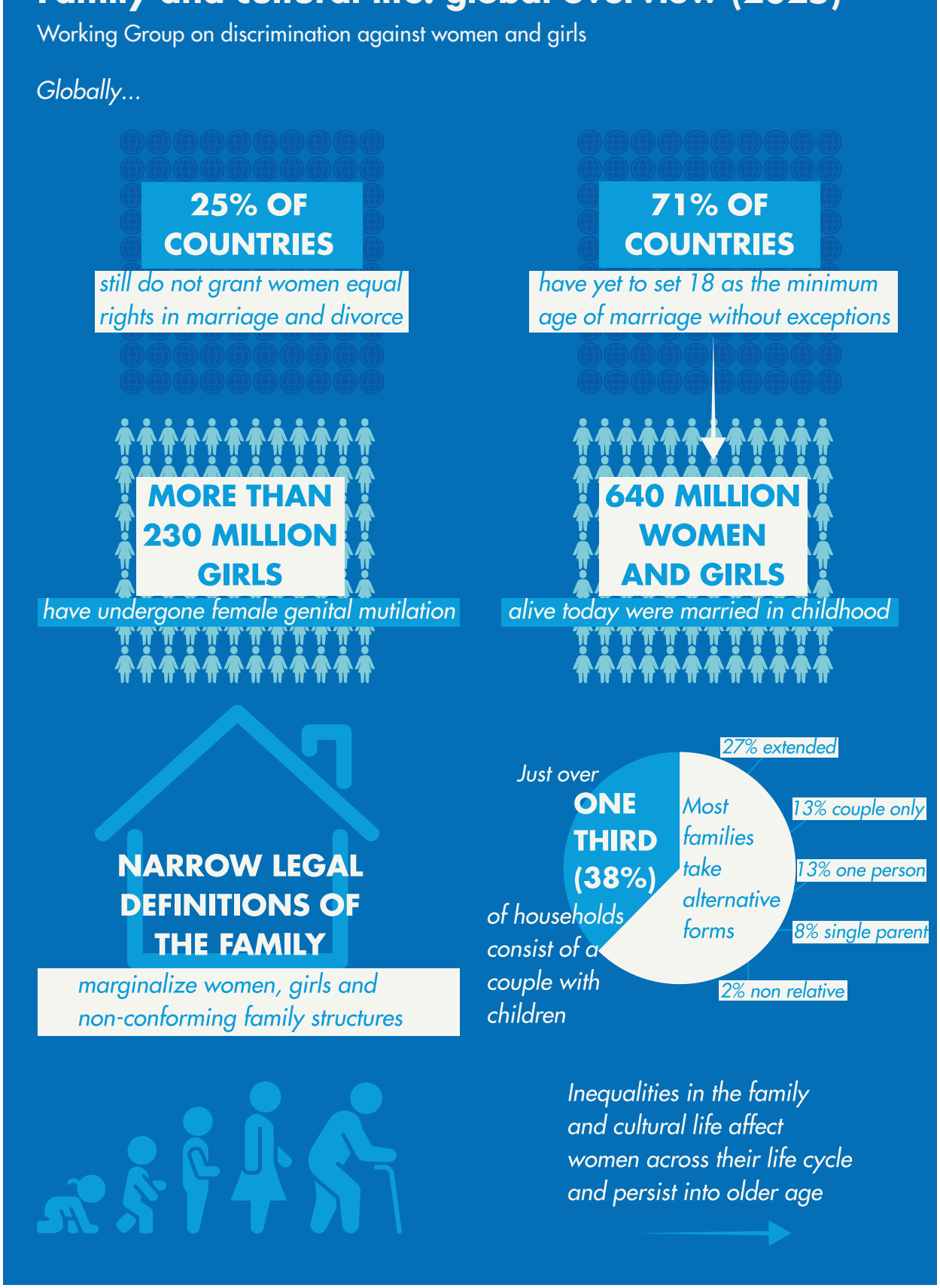
79 See A/HRC/59/45.

80 See A/HRC/41/33.

FIGURE VI

Family and cultural life: global overview (2025)

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls



Source: created by OHCHR through Canva.com using references cited in the text above.

1. LAYING THE FOUNDATION: STATES' OBLIGATIONS TO ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION IN FAMILY AND CULTURAL LIFE

In 2015, the Working Group devoted its annual thematic report[81] to the issue of discrimination against women in family and cultural life. It laid out a legal and conceptual foundation grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (arts. 16 and 27 (1)), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (arts. 5, 13 (c) and 16), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 15) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (art. 23), affirming women's equal right to shape, contest and participate in cultural and family life as a fundamental aspect of human dignity and substantive equality. States are required to take effective measures to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women and girls in laws, cultural practices and the family, whether such discrimination is committed by State agents or private actors. The Working Group noted the persistence of a global discriminatory cultural construction of gender, often tied to religion, and the continued reliance of States on cultural justifications for adopting discriminatory laws or for failing to uphold international human rights standards. In the report, the Working Group denounced the use of cultural and religious narratives to justify harmful practices, such as child and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, so-called honour crimes and restrictions on women's autonomy, which are incompatible with international human rights standards. Women and girls who transgress dominant cultural norms, including single women, widows, LBTIQ+ women and women human rights defenders, are especially at risk of violence and marginalization. The Working Group also stressed that discrimination against women and girls all too often started in the family, where women and girls were deemed inferior to men and boys and where they experienced patriarchal control over their lives and bodies. That includes discrimination in a number of areas of family life, such as consent to enter into marriage, dowry obligations, the right to possess and manage property, sexual relations, requirements regarding modesty and freedom of movement, guardianship and custody of children, divorce and division of matrimonial assets, the punishment of adultery,[82] the right to remarry following dissolution of the marriage or death of the husband, the status of widows and inheritance. In the family, women and girls suffer human rights abuses such as domestic violence, including marital rape. The Working Group underscored that discrimination within the family could not be viewed as a private matter, as failure to ensure the equality of women and girls within the family undermined any attempt to ensure their equality in all areas of society. It called for States to ensure that the right to equality and non-discrimination took precedence over all customary, religious and traditional norms, including in plural legal systems, with no possibility of exemption, waiver or circumvention. The Working Group also affirmed the imperative to recognize and protect diverse family forms, while eliminating all forms of marriages that denied the rights of women and girls, including child and forced marriage, polygamy and temporary marriage.



Group visit to Zimbabwe, Louis Mount Batten Primary School in Harare, 2025. OHCHR Photo

[81] A/HRC/29/40.
[82] See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/AdulteryasaCriminalOffenceViolatesWomenHR.pdf.

2. IDENTIFYING PROMISING PRACTICES IN FAMILY AND CULTURAL LIFE

In its 2017 report,[83] the Working Group identified promising practices in cultural and family life as requiring firm guarantees of the equality, autonomy and self-determination of women and girls, along with full legal and societal recognition of their role as agents of cultural transformation. States must dismantle discriminatory laws and norms, especially in areas such as marriage, divorce, parenting, inheritance, mobility and access to financial resources. Beyond eliminating formal discrimination, States must proactively foster substantive equality by implementing sustained efforts to dismantle patriarchal gender stereotypes and attitudes. The Working Group highlighted a promising practice from Armenia, where civil society actors partnered with the Ministry of Education to embed gender equality into national curricula and teacher training. Despite a strong backlash rooted in patriarchal norms, the initiative institutionalized gender-sensitive education and demonstrated the potential of education systems to foster long-term cultural change supported by strategic alliances and public institutions.

Building on that earlier work, the Working Group has more recently highlighted a range of legal, policy and community-based measures from across all regions.[84] In countering harmful social norms, discrimination and violence, it highlighted the first-ever regional treaty on violence and discrimination against women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the legalization of same-sex marriage in several countries in the region and expanded rights for same-sex couples in parts of Eastern Europe. In redressing socioeconomic disadvantages, it cited measures in Asia, Latin America and Western Europe to mandate domestic workers' registration in social security systems and the extension of paid maternity leave to 26 weeks in India. In eliminating legal and structural barriers, it noted reforms in several Asian States addressing discriminatory property and inheritance laws, including one prohibiting village rules that revoked women's land rights and another carrying out large-scale land title conversions to increase joint ownership titles with women as co-owners. In adopting proactive laws and policies, Czechia reformed family law to guarantee high standards for paid and unpaid leave, flexible work and public assistance, with conciliation rights made personal and non-transferable. In Rwanda, parliamentary gender quotas have placed women in strategic decision-making roles on healthcare, education and anti-gender-based violence policy, illustrating how women's equal participation in political and public life is also key to reshaping cultural norms and influencing family relations. In transforming institutionalized patriarchal power structures, it cited community-led "husbands schools" in Africa promoting shared caregiving and reforms in some Middle Eastern and North African countries granting women equal inheritance rights. In enhancing the participation and agency of all women and girls, it noted safe spaces and youth empowerment programmes in Africa that fostered girls' leadership and a children's parliament in Latin America that promoted girls' engagement in democratic debate, both of which strengthened girls' ability to challenge restrictive gender roles within their families and communities. Those examples show how structural legal reforms, policy innovation and community action can dismantle entrenched inequalities in family and cultural life.



Group members Melissa Upreti and Elizabeth Broderick on a visit to Kyrgyzstan, where they met with rural women and local activists, 2022. OHCHR Photo

[83] A/HRC/35/29.
[84] See A/HRC/WG.11/43/1.



Working Group members Meskerem Geset Techane and Alda Facio on a visit to Chad, 2017. OHCHR Photo

3. RESISTING REGRESSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF ENSURING EQUALITY IN FAMILY AND CULTURAL LIFE

In 2018, as the Working Group entered a new mandate cycle, it raised the alarm over a growing global backlash against the rights of women and girls, driven by the rise of nationalist, fundamentalist and conservative political and religious movements.[85] The Working Group noted that nowhere had that backlash been more acute than in the domains of family and cultural life and sexual and reproductive health rights. In those areas, patriarchal narratives, couched in cultural, religious or moral terms, such as the "protection of the family" and "traditional values", have been increasingly deployed by anti-rights lobbies opposing the so-called gender ideology, portraying gender equality as an imposed threat to the family, marriage and religious freedom. The Working Group reiterated its call for States to promote recognition of the fact that cultural, religious and family values were not incompatible with the human rights of women and girls and to uphold the equality of women and girls as a fundamental tenet of international human rights law that must be protected, respected and fulfilled in all States and at all levels of society, including within the family. It underscored that the family, while entitled to protection, could not serve as a pretext to entrench discrimination. It reaffirmed that the interdependence of human rights could not be overlooked: without confronting discrimination in family and cultural life, no meaningful or sustainable progress on gender equality could be realized.

[85] See A/HRC/38/46.

4. TOWARDS SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY: SECURING RIGHTS IN THE FAMILY

In 2024, as the Working Group entered a new mandate cycle, it raised the alarm about the intensifying global backlash against the rights of women and girls and renewed its commitment to substantive equality as the overarching framework of its work.[86] To counter the gender backlash, the Working Group reiterated its calls for coherent, systematic, comprehensive and coordinated efforts to reaffirm the universality of the rights of women and girls, as well as the inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated nature of all human rights, and urged States and international and regional organizations to uphold an integrated approach to the advancement of gender equality, explicitly including the elimination of discrimination against women and girls in family and cultural life.

In 2025, the Working Group issued a guidance document on the rights of women and girls in family life,[87] underscoring the family's dual capacity to either uphold or undermine equality and dignity. It stressed that families took many forms, including single-parent, intergenerational, LGBTIQ+, extended and other non-traditional arrangements. It warned that narrow legal definitions of the family marginalized women, girls and non-conforming family structures, restricting access to property, housing, inheritance, custody and social services, and reinforcing patriarchal control over bodies, reproduction and resources. Applying a substantive equality approach and using its CREATE framework, the Working Group urged States to: (a) counter harmful norms cloaked in tradition or family values; (b) redress socioeconomic disadvantages arising from intergenerational discrimination and harms such as child marriage, widow inheritance, intimate partner violence, marital rape and the erasure of older women's rights; (c) eliminate legal and structural barriers, including inequitable divorce, inheritance or custody laws and the undervaluation of unpaid care and support work; (d) adopt forward-looking laws guaranteeing equality in marriage, parenting, reproductive autonomy, property and inheritance; (e) transform institutionalized patriarchal power structures in law, policy and practice; and (f) enhance the participation and agency of all women and girls in decision-making on family law and policy.

Reform of discriminatory male guardianship laws: the case of Kuwait

Laws and practices requiring women to obtain a male guardian's permission to travel, work or access services constitute discriminatory and degrading limitations on women's agency, violating their rights to freedom of movement, education, work, privacy and family life. The Working Group has consistently emphasized that eliminating discrimination against women in family life requires dismantling male guardianship systems.[a]

In 2023, the Working Group addressed a communication to Kuwait regarding restrictions on women's mobility rooted in male guardianship provisions,[b] as part of a larger series of communications to African and Asia-Pacific States raising concerns over that issue.[c] In response, the Government reported a positive development: the Constitutional Court had ruled that the requirement for a husband's consent for a wife to obtain a passport was unconstitutional, finding it incompatible with article 12 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. That ruling marked a significant step in dismantling patriarchal legal barriers, showing how sustained international engagement can drive reform and advance gender equality.

[a] See A/HRC/41/33.
[b] Communication KWT 1/2023.
[c] Communications ARE 4/2023, BHR 4/2023, EGY 4/2023, IRN 16/2023, IRQ 4/2023, JOR 4/2023, KWT 1/2023, LBN 4/2023, OMN 1/2023, QAT 2/2023, SAU 9/2023, SYR 3/2023 and YEM 2/2023.

[86] See A/HRC/56/51.
[87] A/HRC/WG.11/43/1.



Working Group visit to Malta, Saint Margaret College Erin Serracino Inglott Middle School, Cospicua, 2023. OHCHR Photo



Working Group members Frances Raday and Alda Facio on a country visit to Peru, 2014. OHCHR Photo

5. JOINT ADVOCACY WITH THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE AREA OF FAMILY AND CULTURAL LIFE

In 2016, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights presented a thematic report on the protection of the family entitled "Protection of the family: contribution of the family to the realization of the right to an adequate standard of living for its members, particularly through its role in poverty eradication and achieving sustainable development",[88] mapping out relevant international human rights standards. In the report, the High Commissioner built on the Working Group's earlier work in that area, including its 2015 thematic report[89] on eliminating discrimination against women in cultural and family life, with a focus on the family as a cultural space, and on its leadership in ensuring that Human Rights Council resolutions on the protection of the family reflected the right of women and girls to equality in the family. At the initiative of the Chair of the Working Group, the Chair of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures issued a statement on behalf of all special procedure mandate holders on the occasion of the 2014 annual meeting of special procedures, expressing concern at the lack of a reference to gender equality within the family in Council resolution 26/11.[90] That system-wide intervention followed the 2014 letter of the Chair of the Working Group to the President of the Council on the same issue. In the wake of those efforts, equality language was subsequently included in Council resolutions. In 2015, the Working Group led a joint letter to the President of the Council, together with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, welcoming that progress and calling for recognition of family diversity and for stronger action

88 A/HRC/31/37.
89 A/HRC/29/40.
90 See A/HRC/28/41, annex X.

to eliminate discrimination and violence within the family.[91] OHCHR also supported the organization of intersessional discussions of the Council on the role of the family and family-oriented approaches, policies and programmes in the promotion and protection of human rights and sustainable development (2025), on the protection of the family and human rights of older persons (2018) and on protection of family and disability (2017), and the panel discussion of the Council on the implementation of States' obligations on the role of the family in supporting the human rights of its members (2024). OHCHR also commissioned research on the human rights of women wearing the veil in Western Europe in 2019.[92] The Working Group actively contributed to those processes, including through its participation in Council panel discussions, bringing to the table more than a decade of analysis of family and cultural life. The Working Group's 2025 guidance document on the rights of women and girls in family life was built on that collaboration.



Working Group member Elizabeth Broderick on a visit to Greece, Moria refugee camp, Lesbos, 2019. OHCHR Photo

D. Health and safety

Health encompasses the full spectrum of the physical, mental and social well-being of women and girls, as defined by the World Health Organization.[93] It covers the underlying determinants of well-being, such as bodily autonomy, freedom from violence, access to information and non-discriminatory, affordable and effective healthcare services, including those specific to women's biological and reproductive functions. Safety is an integral component of the health of women and girls.

Despite global advancements, significant gaps remain in the enjoyment of women and girls of their right to health and safety. Globally, an estimated 260,000 women died from maternal causes in 2023, equivalent to more than 700 maternal deaths every day, and approximately one every two minutes, with the highest risks borne by those in fragile and conflict-affected settings.[94] Nearly all of those deaths are preventable.[95] Among the underlying causes, unsafe abortion remains a major contributor: globally, 45 per cent of all abortions are unsafe, resulting in between an estimated 13,865 and 38,940 preventable maternal deaths annually, predominantly in developing countries.[96] Each year, an estimated 21 million girls aged 15–19 in low- and middle-income countries become pregnant, with approximately half of these pregnancies unintended.[97] For adolescent girls worldwide, pregnancy and childbirth remain among the leading causes of death and often result in their exclusion from education and employment, affecting their enjoyment of many other rights. More than 200 million women facing a range of intersecting barriers who wish to avoid pregnancy are not using modern contraception. Millions more lack the ability to manage menstruation safely and with dignity. Globally, one in three women continues to experience physical and/or sexual violence.

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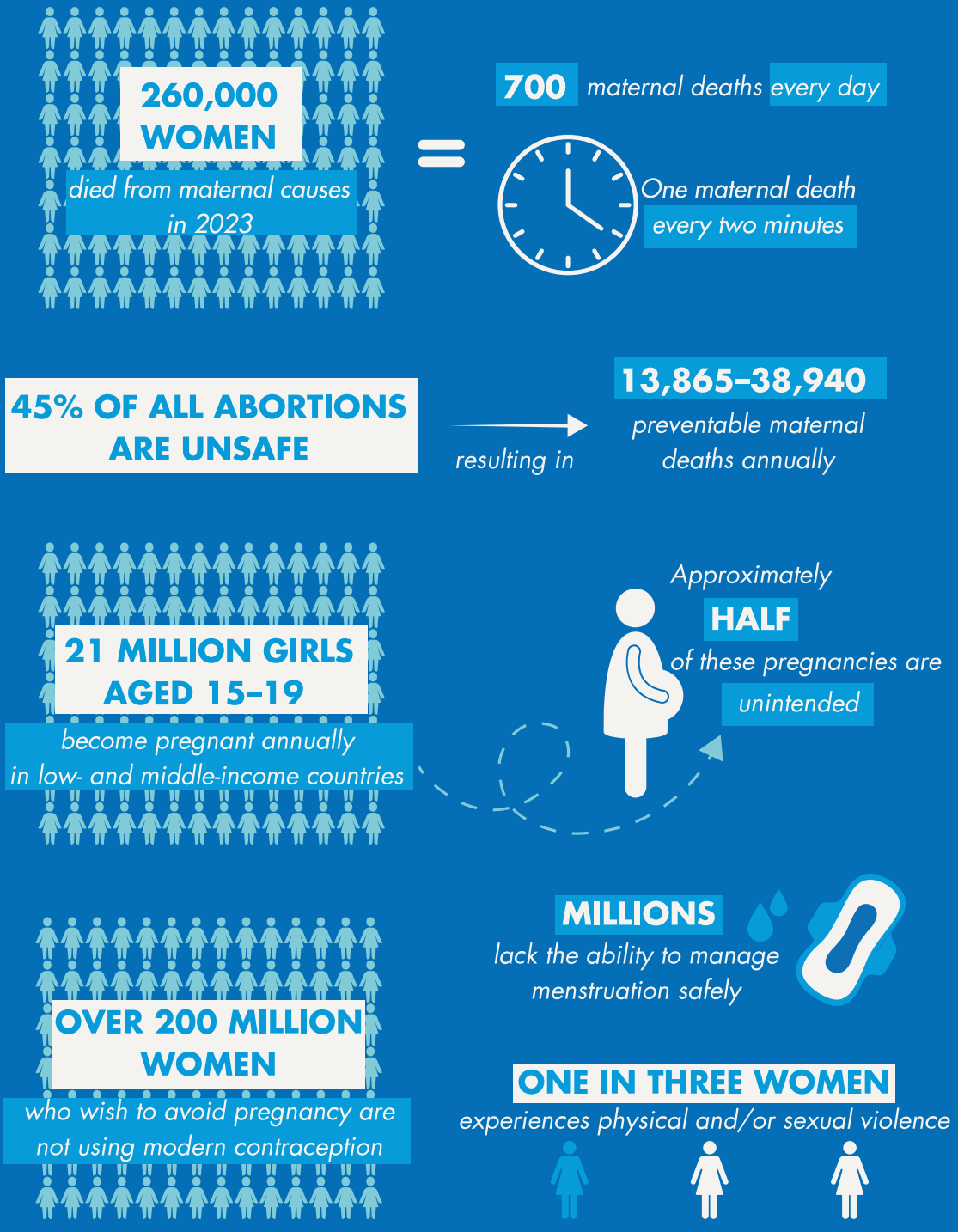
91 See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/JointLetterPresidentHRCProtectionFamily.pdf.
92 See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/VeilinEuropereport.pdf.
93 Constitution of the World Health Organization, preamble.
94 World Health Organization, *Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2023: Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division* (Geneva, 2025). See also A/HRC/60/43.
95 See A/HRC/60/43.
96 World Health Organization, *Abortion Care Guideline*, 2nd ed. (Geneva, 2024).
97 World Health Organization, *WHO Guideline on Preventing Early Pregnancy and Poor Reproductive Outcomes Among Adolescents in Low- and Middle-Income Countries* (Geneva, 2025).

Figure VII

Health and safety: global overview (2025)

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Globally...



Source: created by OHCHR through Canva.com using references cited in the text above.

1. LAYING THE FOUNDATION: STATES' OBLIGATIONS TO EQUALITY IN HEALTH AND SAFETY

In 2016, the Working Group devoted its annual thematic report[98] to the elimination of discrimination against women with regard to health and safety, focusing on the instrumentalization of women's bodies. It laid out a legal and conceptual foundation grounded in the recognition of sexual and reproductive health rights in international and regional human rights instruments and reaffirmed in consensus agreements, including the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action. Those enshrine women's rights to equality and to the highest attainable standards of health, to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and to healthcare services, including those related to reproductive and sexual health. In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development affirmed that women's sexual and reproductive health was central to their overall health and well-being. Denying women control over their own bodies or subjecting them to discrimination in matters of health and safety strikes at the core of their human dignity, a value, alongside equality, recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the very foundation of freedom, justice and peace. States have a duty to guarantee women's equality in health and safety. Failure to do so may, in some cases, amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, torture or even a violation of the right to life.

In the report, the Working Group exposed the instrumentalization of women's bodies to serve politicized, patriarchal agendas and documented widespread violations, including denial of autonomous, affordable and effective access to healthcare, criminalization of health services needed only by women and humiliating treatment in health settings. The Working Group stressed that substantive equality in health and safety required differential treatment responsive to women's distinct biological needs, life-cycle specificities and disproportionate exposure to gender-based violence. Central to equality is the guarantee of non-discriminatory access to quality reproductive health services, including comprehensive sexuality education, contraception, comprehensive safe abortion care, maternal healthcare and cancer screening. In the report, the Working Group underscored that intersecting factors such as socioeconomic, minority and ethnic status, religion, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability and bodily diversity exacerbated the discrimination that women faced and undermined their ability to protect their health and safety. It paid particular attention to the compounded discrimination experienced by women in poverty, women with disabilities, women living with HIV/AIDS, migrant, Indigenous, rural, minority and LBTQI+ women and women deprived of liberty. It called upon States to dismantle legal, economic and cultural barriers, regulate both public and private health actors and uphold their due diligence obligations, warning that preventable ill health and deaths among women were a costly and tragic result of systemic inequality.

2. IDENTIFYING PROMISING PRACTICES IN HEALTH AND SAFETY

In 2017, the Working Group produced a thematic report[99] offering a compendium of promising practices to eliminate discrimination against women. In the report, the Working Group emphasized that promising practices in health and safety required a differentiated, rights-based approach that placed women's right to dignity, autonomy and self-determination at the centre of law and policy. A key case study from Kenya illustrated the transformative potential of mobilizing the law for social change through the *160 Girls* strategic litigation. Brought under a progressive constitutional framework, the precedent-setting High Court decision held the police accountable for their systematic failure to address rampant sexual violence against girls who were victims of rape, ordering reforms in police training and practice. The case's enduring impact came from sustained follow-up: a nationwide police training programme on rape investigation, community legal education on girls' rights and police obligations, peer-to-peer engagement, public awareness campaigns and practical tools, such as a smartphone application providing guidance on the steps to take in rape investigations. That integrated strategy, driven by a coalition of civil society organizations, feminist lawyers and State institutions, resulted in marked improvements in investigation quality and conviction

[98] A/HRC/32/44.
[99] A/HRC/35/29.

rates. The Working Group highlighted that as a model for combining legal remedies with structural, institutional and societal change to advance the rights to health, safety and justice of women and girls.

In the same year, the Working Group issued a position paper on women's sexual and reproductive health rights, setting out the legal framework, key principles and urgent priorities for action.[100] It underscored the obligation of States to ensure the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of sexual and reproductive health services, free from stigma and coercion, and to remove legal and policy barriers. In the position paper, the Working Group also called for comprehensive sexuality education, recognition of intersecting forms of discrimination and accountability mechanisms.

Additional promising practices in the area of health and safety highlighted by the Working Group in its later reports include: the constitutional recognition of sexual and/or reproductive rights and the designation of sexual and reproductive health services as essential; the inclusion of all medicines recommended as necessary for women's health in the World Health Organization Model List of Essential Medicines; the public subsidization of the cost of women's health-related services for everyone, with subsidies to women of a given age or income; and the prohibition of discriminatory higher pricing for women than men by health insurance companies due to perceived higher costs associated with women's reproductive health needs.[101] Furthermore, in the context of crises, including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Working Group has underscored the following as promising practices in the area of health and safety: the expansion of access to self-managed medical abortion, including through telemedicine; the role of community-based midwifery in ensuring intercultural, quality care in remote areas; the implementation of a "circle of accountability", a community-led monitoring effort bringing together local communities and governmental and other actors to ensure accountability for sexual and reproductive health rights; national human rights institutions and court interventions and independent investigations by national and specially appointed international commissions to expose shortcomings in the design and/or implementation of crisis responses and violations of the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls, while offering guidance on reparations and structural reforms; and the mobilization of male parliamentarians and activists in promoting positive messages on fostering non-violent masculinities and encouraging positive behaviours among men and boys.[102]



The Working Group met using online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021. OHCHR Photo

[100] See www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls/womens-autonomy-equality-and-reproductive-health.
[101] See A/HRC/32/44.
[102] See A/HRC/47/38.



Working Group member Meskerem Geset Techane on a visit to Mauritania, where she met government officials in Nouakchott, 2023.
OHCHR Mauritania Photo

3. RESISTING REGRESSION: SAFEGUARDING THE HEALTH AND BODILY AUTONOMY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

In 2018, as the Working Group entered a new mandate cycle, it observed a global rise of fundamentalism and a backlash against the rights of women and girls, sharply affecting sexual and reproductive health rights.[103] Politicized religious conservative movements in numerous countries have influenced decision-making to halt or rollback progress in this area, with concerted efforts to restrict access to contraceptives and abortion care. Some countries have been advancing criminal punishment for women's sexual or reproductive conduct, including adultery,[104] sex work[105] and termination of pregnancy. The Working Group stressed that criminalizing behaviour attributed only to women was discriminatory, as it denied their autonomous decision-making and failed to address their specific health and safety needs, including reproductive and sexual health. It reiterated that criminalizing the termination of pregnancy was one of the most damaging manifestations of the instrumentalization of women's bodies, exposing them to risks to their health and lives. It recalled that international human rights law accorded rights to those born, rejecting arguments that set these against the rights of a fetus. The Working Group called upon States to ensure respect for women's rights to make decisions about their own bodies. In line with that position, the Working Group has also intervened before national and regional courts through amicus curiae briefs challenging restrictive abortion laws and policies in Brazil, El Salvador, Poland, the Republic of Korea, the United States and Northern Ireland, reinforcing the incompatibility of criminalization with international human rights standards.[106]

In 2021, the Working Group examined how crises, such as armed conflict, pandemics, natural disasters, political instability and other emergencies, affected the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls.[107] It found that discrimination, gender-based violence and the politicization of women's

[103] See A/HRC/38/46.
[104] See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/AdulteryasaCriminalOffenceViolatesWomenHR.pdf.
[105] See A/HRC/41/33.
[106] See amicus curiae briefs by the Working Group concerning abortion laws and policies in El Salvador (2023), Poland (2021), the United States (2021), the Republic of Korea (2019), Brazil (2017) and Northern Ireland (2017).
[107] See A/HRC/47/38.

bodies intensified in such contexts, with States often restricting essential services such as safe abortion care, contraception, maternal healthcare, cancer screening and HIV treatment. The Working Group stressed that sexual and reproductive health rights were systematically neglected, not because of a lack of resources or technical knowledge but due to the widespread disregard for women's dignity, bodily integrity and autonomy. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed those systemic failures, as service suspensions, supply chain disruptions and diversion of resources from reproductive health led to higher rates of maternal mortality, unplanned pregnancies, child marriage and female genital mutilation. The Working Group underscored that sexual and reproductive health rights were integral to women's rights to life, liberty, security, freedom from torture, privacy, health, education, work and equality. Failure to ensure them is discriminatory and constitutes a major crisis in itself. The Working Group urged States to treat sexual and reproductive health rights as essential at all times and to integrate them into crisis preparedness and recovery.

In 2023, the Working Group joined the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and the Special Rapporteur on the right to education in issuing a *Compendium on Comprehensive Sexuality Education*,[108] providing a rights-based framework for delivering age-appropriate, scientifically accurate and culturally relevant sexuality education. It underscored that such education was an essential element of the right to health, a proven means of preventing gender-based violence, harmful practices and unplanned pregnancies and a critical enabler of the capacity of women and girls to make informed decisions about their bodies and lives, while fostering a culture of equality.



Working Group members Eleonora Zielińska and Kamala Chandrakirana on a visit to Samoa, 2017. OHCHR Photo

[108] See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/health/sr/Compendium-Comprehensive-Sexuality-Education-March-2023.pdf.



Session of the Working Group in Geneva, during which it launched the guidance document "Conscientious objection to abortion: key considerations", 2025. OHCHR Photo

4. TOWARDS SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY: PROTECTING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS FROM A BACKLASH

In 2024, as it entered a new mandate cycle, the Working Group reaffirmed substantive equality as the guiding framework of its work and warned that the backlash against gender equality was not only persistent but escalating, with sexual and reproductive health rights among the most acutely targeted areas.[109] To counter that backlash, the Working Group urged States to adopt an integrated approach to gender equality that included eliminating discrimination in sexual and reproductive health.

In the same year, the Working Group issued a guidance document[110] on denial of access to abortion care due to conscientious objection. Defining conscientious objection as "the practice of health-care professionals refusing to provide abortion care on the basis of personal conscience or religious belief",[111] the Working Group underscored that, when conscientious objection was unregulated or misused, it created significant barriers to the access of women and girls to lawful and essential reproductive healthcare. The Working Group emphasized that conscientious objection was an individual, not an institutional, practice and that States must strictly limit its scope, ensure timely referral to non-objecting providers and prohibit its use in emergencies in which delay would endanger a pregnant person's life or health. It warned that failure to regulate conscientious objection effectively entrenched discrimination, exacerbated inequalities, particularly for marginalized women, and could amount to gender-based violence. It called upon States to establish robust legal and policy frameworks that prevented conscientious objection from impeding access to abortion, to monitor compliance and to guarantee that reproductive health services remained universally accessible, affordable and stigma free. The guidance document was accompanied by the issuance of a pamphlet on how international law protected access to abortion in cases of conscientious objection.[112]

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109 See A/HRC/56/51.
110 A/HRC/WG.11/41/1.
111 World Health Organization, *Abortion Care Guideline*, p. xiii.
112 See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/20250213-qanda-wgdaw-guidance-v4.pdf.

5. JOINT ADVOCACY WITH THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE AREA OF HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Working Group collaborates closely with the OHCHR Women's Human Rights and Gender Section, building on the solid human rights foundation in the area of sexual and reproductive health rights and mutually benefiting from each other's expertise with a common objective: supporting the implementation of relevant international standards while aiming at dismantling harmful patriarchal norms seeking to control women's bodies.

OHCHR has contributed to the dissemination of the progressive standards on sexual and reproductive health rights developed by the Working Group, in particular at the country level in the follow-up to country visits. OHCHR has also consistently involved the Working Group in expert consultations in the field of sexual and reproductive health rights in the context of Human Rights Council-mandated work and other activities, such as capacity-building workshops and awareness-raising activities. On 24 July 2025, OHCHR published a report on an update to the technical guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the elimination of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.[113] The Working Group participated in the preparatory consultation for the report and contributed to the elaboration of the updated guidelines, drawing upon its long-standing expertise on the theme.



Working Group member Melissa Upreti on a visit to Maldives, health centre in R. Maduvvari, 2022. OHCHR Photo

[113] A/HRC/60/43.

Reform of discriminatory laws and policies undermining girls' sexual and reproductive health rights: the case of the United Republic of Tanzania

The Working Group has used amicus curiae briefs to challenge discriminatory laws affecting the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls. In June 2021, it submitted an amicus curiae brief to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in a case challenging the policy of the United Republic of Tanzania on permanently expelling pregnant girls from school.[a] In the submission, the Working Group argued that the practice violated multiple human rights, including the rights to education, equality and sexual and reproductive health, and entrenched gender-based discrimination by punishing girls for pregnancy while leaving the role of men and boys unaddressed. It further highlighted how the policy perpetuated cycles of poverty and exclusion, disproportionately harming girls in rural and marginalized communities. In November 2021, the Committee of Experts found the United Republic of Tanzania in violation of its human rights obligations and the Minister of Education announced a policy change: girls aged 12 to 19 who left school due to pregnancy would be allowed to return to formal education after giving birth. That marked a significant victory for girls' rights in the country and demonstrated the impact of sustained advocacy and strategic litigation in dismantling structural barriers to the health, education and equality of women and girls.

Voices from the ground: testimony of a girl advocate

The following words from a Tanzanian girl advocate illustrate how the policy reform is experienced on the ground and the continuing challenges faced by young mothers.

Princess Jasmeen Mavura, 16 years old

"As a girl advocate in the United Republic of Tanzania, I joined discussions on the re-entry policy allowing pregnant girls to return to school, adopted after the African Committee's decision in a case in which the Working Group had submitted an amicus curiae brief. Thanks to the policy change, I have seen positive progress in my country, with many girls going back to class after giving birth, especially in urban areas. I believe that this has helped reduce the long-standing problem of permanently excluding young mothers from school. I have also noticed greater public awareness about girls' right to education, with a growing number of support programmes and initiatives organized by civil society. Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly in rural areas, as young mothers continue to face stigma from peers and teachers and resources are very limited. I believe teachers should create a safe and respectful environment, welcoming young mothers back to school and offering them counselling and support. Other students should help young mothers regain their confidence in the classroom, standing against stigma and bullying. Civil society should also challenge stigma by raising awareness on girls' rights, working with religious leaders and the media."

[a] See www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/ACERWC-amicus-curiae-ANZANIA.pdf.



The Working Group met with Nem Presa Nem Morta, Neither Incarcerated Nor Dead, an umbrella organization for the decriminalization of abortion, São Paulo, Brazil, 2025. Photo © Conectas



III. Working to End Gender Apartheid

A. Addressing gender apartheid: the Working Group's engagement on Afghanistan

As part of its mandate to address discrimination against women and girls worldwide, the Working Group has paid particular attention to situations in which such discrimination is most extreme. Afghanistan has been a priority area for the Working Group, especially since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, as nowhere else in the world has there been an assault as extensive, deliberate and all encompassing on the rights and dignity of women and girls. As part of its engagement with the country, the Working Group has devoted sustained attention to documenting violations, analysing the legal implications and advocating for international recognition of the institutionalized and systematic discrimination against Afghan women and girls as amounting to gender apartheid, as well as for the codification of this violation as a crime against humanity.

B. The 2023 joint visit and report on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan

In fulfilment of Human Rights Council resolution 51/20, in which the Council requested the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group to prepare a joint report on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan,[114] the two mandates conducted a joint visit to the country from 27 April to 4 May 2023. The preparation of the report also included extensive interviews with Afghan women inside and outside the country, in virtual and in-person formats, both before the country visit and during the visit itself, as well as the analysis of a survey of more than 2,000 women across 18 provinces.[115] The joint country visit, carried out in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, included meetings with a diverse range of women and girls, civil society, religious leaders, United Nations entities, diplomatic missions and the de facto authorities. The experts observed the widespread and systematic discrimination suffered by women and girls through a series of decrees issued by the Taliban, restricting all aspects of the lives of women and girls, including education, employment, freedom of movement, attire, participation in public life and access to public spaces and services. Women have been wholly excluded from political and public life, denied secondary and tertiary education and removed from most areas of work, while peaceful protest has been met with harassment, arbitrary detention, violence and reprisals.

Following the visit, in the joint report presented to the Human Rights Council at its fifty-third session in June 2023, the two mandates concluded that the pattern of large-scale, systematic violations of the fundamental rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, driven by the Taliban's discriminatory and misogynistic policies and harsh enforcement methods, constituted gender persecution and an institutionalized framework of gender apartheid. Recalling the definition of apartheid in article 7 (2) (h) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the experts noted that it could be adapted to encompass gender apartheid, a concept that the Working Group studied further in its guidance document on the issue in 2024.[116]

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[114] A/HRC/53/21.
[115] Survey carried out by Bishnaw, published in March 2023.
[116] A/HRC/WG.11/40/1.

Gender apartheid

The Working Group has affirmed that gender apartheid can be understood as: "inhumane acts committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one group over another group or groups, based on gender, and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime".[a]

[a] A/HRC/WG.11/40/1, para. 3.

Applying that understanding of gender apartheid to the grave situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, in the joint report, the experts underlined that States, other actors and the international community as a whole had a responsibility to take decisive action to end such practices, just as was done to dismantle racial apartheid in southern Africa. The experts called for urgent, sustained and coordinated international action, grounded in human rights and accountability, to end violations and to ensure the direct and meaningful participation of Afghan women and girls in all decisions concerning the future of the country. The experts stressed that Afghan women and girls continued to resist and struggle for their human dignity, however exhausting it may be. Their strength and determination to exercise their rights through creative and peaceful initiatives, in the face of extreme repression, is a profound expression of resilience. Their efforts deserve recognition, nourishment and support from the international community. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has also referred to gender apartheid in relation to the disappearance of women from public life in Afghanistan, in its 2025 concluding observations on the country.[117] Similarly, the High Commissioner for Human Rights has denounced the situation of gender apartheid in Afghanistan, including in his 2025 global update at the fifty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council.[118]



Joint country visit to Afghanistan of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group, 2023. OHCHR Photo

Reflections from Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, Chair of the Working Group during the 2023 joint visit

"It was, of course, deeply challenging given the very grave situation of women and girls in the country, but at the same time an inspiration to see what they are doing there. As someone there put it, there are different rocks on top of them, blocking their actions, rights and freedoms – but they are the water under the rocks. They continue not only to survive, but to work, to fight and to persevere. Feeling their strength feed us was one of the greatest highlights of the visit."

[117] CEDAW/C/AFG/CO/4, paras. 13 and 14.
[118] Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at the fifty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council, available at www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/03/turbulence-and-unpredictability-amid-growing-conflict-and-divided.



Working Group members Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, Claudia Flores and Laura Nyirinkindi met with Richard Goldstone and South African women human rights defenders and academics to discuss gender apartheid, during the regional convening for Southern Africa, at Bertha House, Cape Town, South Africa, 2024. OHCHR Photo

C. Advancing recognition of gender apartheid in international law

The Working Group has taken a leading role in shaping the global understanding of gender apartheid simultaneously as a contravention of a jus cogens norm, a grave and systematic human rights violation and a distinct crime against humanity. It has collaborated with Afghan women and different organizations and initiatives – such as the Atlantic Council, the Malala Fund, the End Gender Apartheid campaign and the South Africa working group on gender apartheid (composed of South African former and current judges, lawyers, academics and activists cooperating with Afghan women). It has done so to maintain global awareness of this severe violation and crime and to reaffirm substantive gender equality as a fundamental right and a cornerstone of the whole international human rights system. In February 2024, it issued the above-mentioned guidance document with inputs to the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly on the draft articles on prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity, urging States Members and observers of the United Nations to explicitly codify gender apartheid in article 2 of the draft articles. The Working Group underscored that existing international law did not fully capture the institutionalized, mass character of gender-based oppression exemplified by the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan, and that explicit codification would allow for recognition, prevention and accountability, not only in Afghanistan, but wherever regimes imposed comparable systems of exclusion and domination on the basis of gender.[119] It called upon States to seize the moment to embed the prohibition of gender apartheid in international law as a matter of urgency. Since then, the Working Group has continued uniting forces to denounce the continued violations experienced by Afghan women and girls, support their struggle and call for accountability and the end of the violations.[120] Notably, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has amplified the Working Group's call for the codification of gender apartheid in its general recommendation No. 40 (2024), identifying it as crucial for ensuring full accountability for gender-based crimes (para. 11). That call was echoed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in his statement at the launch of the general recommendation.

[119] OHCHR, "Iran's proposed hijab law could amount to 'gender apartheid': UN experts", press release, 1 September 2023.
[120] OHCHR, "Afghanistan: international community must reject Taliban's violent and authoritarian rule, say UN experts", press release, 14 August 2025.

D. Gender apartheid: the sharpest edge of the escalating global backlash on gender equality

In its 2024 annual thematic report[121] to the Human Rights Council, the Working Group examined the global phenomenon of the escalating backlash against gender equality, warning that in some contexts the backlash had reached extreme forms of gender inequality that had not been met with an adequate global response. One of the most devastating expressions of that rollback in relation to the rights of women and girls is gender apartheid as imposed by the Taliban in Afghanistan. The insufficient and at times muted reaction of States is deeply troubling in the face of such a backlash and a concerning portent for States' response to other extreme cases of women's rights violations.

The Working Group called for an unequivocal international response, urging the upholding of the universality of the rights of women and girls and the recognition of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity.

The Working Group's sustained work on Afghanistan has been grounded in close collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan. That partnership has been central to documenting violations, advancing the legal recognition of gender apartheid and ensuring that the voices of Afghan women and girls are heard at the international level.



Working Group member Dorothy Estrada-Tanck participated alongside Nobel Peace Laureate Malala Yousafzai in a high-level panel discussion on gender apartheid in Afghanistan, organized by the International Peace Institute, the Atlantic Council and the Malala Fund, New York, 2024. Photo © End Gender Apartheid Campaign

[121] A/HRC/56/51.

Reflections from the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett

Could you reflect on your mandate's collaboration with the Working Group to date?

"I have worked closely with the Working Group on the situation in Afghanistan since I assumed my mandate in May 2022. That includes regular communication, joint visits and reports and public interventions. That collaboration has had a few important impacts. From a personal perspective, I have been able to benefit from the incredible knowledge, expertise and experience of the members of the Working Group – both individually and as a collective. More broadly, the collaboration, I think, has allowed us to highlight the severity of the situation in Afghanistan, especially for women and girls, uniting our voices not only to call out the Taliban's appalling conduct, but to advocate for effective international action. Finally, the collaboration sends an important message to Afghan women and girls – that they are not forgotten and that their strength, courage and resilience is seen, heard and amplified."

Are there any specific experiences or insights from that collaboration that have influenced or enriched your approach to the human rights of women and girls, gender equality and your overall work?

"Two things stand out: one is the Working Group's ongoing support and reinforcement of the positions that I have taken on gender-related issues in Afghanistan; the other is the expertise contributed to my analysis and mandate by the Working Group. It has taken a consistently clear, solid and at times ground-breaking position on Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Working Group has been survivor-responsive in its approach, consistently listening to the experiences and demands of Afghan women and girls."

Could you share your key takeaways from the 2023 joint visit and subsequent joint report?

"The jointly drafted report to the Human Rights Council in June 2023 was a particularly close and rewarding piece of collaboration, based as it was on a joint country visit to Afghanistan. The visit to Afghanistan was necessary and rewarding but also challenging. The challenges were related to logistics, security and policy. There were inspiring conversations with Afghan women and their appreciation for the visit was heartening, however, it was necessary to take security precautions to avoid exposing interlocutors, especially women, to risk. We had the impression that women who dissent are targeted by the Taliban and that even speaking with us could lead to reprisals. A policy-related issue arose because shortly before we arrived, the Taliban had barred female United Nations staff from coming to work. We insisted on the core relevance of the United Nations country team to stand up for the women and United Nations principles. As to the substantive examination of the overall situation in the country, the report analysis found not only gender persecution by the Taliban but also laid the ground for a justification of the developing concept of gender apartheid. During that period, and at other times, the gender responsive analysis by the Working Group enhanced my reports and statements on Afghanistan."

The 2023 joint visit and report marked the first time special procedures had outlined gender persecution and gender apartheid. Following that, how have you continued to integrate a gender lens into your work?

"Both my 2025 report, 'Access to justice and protection for women and girls and the impact of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination',[a] and my 2024 report, 'The phenomenon of an institutionalized system of discrimination, segregation, disrespect for human dignity and exclusion of women and girls',[b] attempt to be gender responsive and a description and analysis of the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan lies at their core."

Specifically, how do you combine thematic issues with the geographic focus of your mandate to ensure that a gender lens is at the core of your work?

"Gender equality is not only a stand-alone issue, it intersects with every aspect of my work as the Special Rapporteur and it is essential to adopt a gender lens throughout my work – including the substantive issues I investigate, the analysis I conduct, the team I work with and the individuals and organizations I engage with. Adopting a gender lens requires examining how gender norms, power relations and structural inequalities shape the experiences of the people of Afghanistan – not just women and girls, but also men, boys and gender-diverse persons. It also requires examining how other identities – for example, being from a minority or marginalized background – can compound risks and vulnerabilities or increase invisibility within systems, structures and society more broadly."

What inspired you to work on the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan? Is there a particular moment or experience that made you realize the importance of this work? What keeps you motivated, despite the many challenges?

"It goes back many years because I started working as an adviser to one of Afghanistan's foremost women human rights defenders, Sima Samar, in 2003. There was a moment in 2020 that was pivotal. I was advising the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, working with a small group planning institutional change. The group worked together closely. The youngest member, a woman who had not long graduated, was making an especially vital contribution. One day, en route from her home to one of our meetings, the Commission's car she was travelling in was targeted and blown up. Both she and her driver were killed. I was already committed to working in support of Afghan women but that incident had a massive impact on me. Since becoming Special Rapporteur, I have continued to be in awe of the courage, capacity and perseverance against the odds of Afghan women and girls. Their drive for their human rights, especially education, stands out. That they are treated by the Taliban as inferior human beings because of their gender is an atrocity. Despite daunting challenges that will always keep me motivated."

What is the future you would like to see for Afghan women and girls?

"My hope for the future of Aghan women and girls is rooted in an unwavering belief that their rights and dignity will be restored and they will be back on the long road to equality. That is a future in which girls can go freely to school, women can lead, teach, create and thrive without fear or restriction and participate fully and meaningfully in public life. A future in which Afghan women and girls shape their own destinies and contribute fully not only to a just and inclusive Afghanistan, but a fairer and more equal world. A future in which girls have Afghan female role models that they can aspire to. Women have for a very long time been central to the cultural, intellectual and social fabric of Afghanistan, there have been setbacks in the past and I firmly believe in their power to reclaim their space in society, not as victims but as agents of change."

How can people around the world, including youth, as well as States, organizations and institutions, support Afghan women and girls? What actions can they take to stand up for the human rights of Afghan women and girls?

"Addressing the multifaceted crisis in Afghanistan is complex. This is why I continue to advocate for an 'all tools' approach, one which comprises a range of interventions that when combined exceed the sum of their parts and maximize the potential for the emergence of a safe, stable and inclusive Afghanistan. That strategy includes placing women's rights, voices and agency at the centre of all discussions and processes relating to Afghanistan, establishing clear human rights benchmarks for engagement with the Taliban, ensuring that there is no normalization without significant, demonstrable, verified improvements in human rights, ensuring international accountability and codifying gender apartheid as an international crime, and providing strengthened and sustained support for civil society, in particular Afghan-led and women-led non-governmental organizations."

Are there any other additional personal reflections or experiences you would like to share regarding your work on the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan or collaboration with the Working Group?

"I would in particular like to share how much I have especially appreciated close cooperation with the then Chairs of the Working Group, Melissa Upreti and later Dorothy Estrada-Tanck. Both have been accessible, supportive and amazingly good mentors on the rights of women and girls. And the Working Group as a whole has always given Afghanistan priority, seeing the drastic situation there as indicative of a global rollback on gender equality, taking a strong line and agreeing that if there are no consequences for the Taliban and their fellow travellers, then what can we hope for elsewhere. Afghanistan is where the buck must stop.

Happy fifteenth anniversary to the Working Group. Congratulations! You are very much needed. Long may you continue to grow even stronger and I celebrate with you."

[a] A/HRC/59/25.

[b] A/HRC/56/25.



Working Group member Dorothy Estrada-Tanck participated in a Human Rights Council side event on gender apartheid, 2024. OHCHR Photo



IV. Working to End Discrimination against Girls

The Working Group places girls and young women at the centre of its mandate, recognizing their important contributions to advancing equality and the profound transformative potential of their activism. Girls and young women are agents of change who possess knowledge, resilience and strategies that are indispensable to building more equal societies. In contexts in which their rights are under attack, young women and girls are organizing, resisting and leading movements for justice, often at great personal risk. Listening to their voices and experiences has been essential to understanding the specific forms of discrimination that they face and the barriers that limit their participation. In its country visits, sessions and dedicated consultations, the Working Group has sought to create safe and enabling spaces in which girls and young women can share their realities, articulate solutions and shape recommendations.[122] The present chapter contains testimonies from girls and young women across all regions with whom the Working Group has engaged. They speak of the obstacles that they confront, but also of their determination, leadership and vision for change. Their voices remind us that the struggle for gender equality is intergenerational: progress is sustained only when girls and young women are supported to take part as full and equal partners in shaping the future. The Working Group has therefore emphasized the need to strengthen protection for girl human rights defenders, to dismantle the stereotypes that silence their voices and to amplify their participation in decision-making at every level.



The Working Group met with girls and young women from the "La Luz de las Niñas" Entreculturas Initiative, Geneva, 2025. Photo © Entreculturas

[122] As explained in chapter I, since 2019, the Working Group has been mandated by the Human Rights Council to examine the specific forms of discrimination that girls face. The Working Group has incorporated a girls' rights approach into all areas of its work.

The following are the testimonies and voices that guide our understanding and our action:

Namaku

Country: South Sudan
Age: 20

"As a young woman in my country, I face challenges like limited access to education and societal norms that hinder my voice in decision-making. Being a young activist often feels overwhelming, yet it is crucial for fostering change.

I envision a future where every girl has equal opportunities and is free from discrimination and empowered to participate fully in society. The Working Group has been a beacon of hope, offering resources and mentorship that motivate us to persevere.

During our meeting with the Working Group in January 2024, I felt uplifted and understood, surrounded by others who share my struggles and aspirations. To further enhance support, I believe the Working Group could offer more workshops on leadership and advocacy, equipping us with practical skills to drive meaningful change in our communities.

Together, we can build a future where our voices are not only heard but celebrated."

Naty

Country: Spain
Age: 15

"Today, it can be difficult for young people to get involved in youth activism, especially for young women and girls, due to a lack of resources and also barriers that adults sometimes put in our way.

In the future, one thing we should work on is achieving equal opportunities for girls and boys, so that we can all participate in important decision-making spaces. That can be achieved by giving girls and boys from childhood the resources and tools they need to develop areas such as leadership, communication and problem-solving, especially as in today's society we lack these skills that are so important for the future.

The Working Group makes important contributions by allowing girls and young women to participate in spaces such as their sessions."

Dheysi

Country: Peru
Age: 14

"In this process of reflection and training on gender equality with Plan International and the Working Group, I have noticed with concern the limited knowledge among young people my age about the consequences of gender-based violence on our personal and community development. We have normalized its various manifestations in our relationships. There is still also a lack of recognition of women's contribution to society, a reality that is exacerbated by the lack of opportunities for development.

I dream of a future where all women and girls, especially those who still live in spaces of extreme violence, believe in themselves and in their ability to achieve great things and know the opportunities they have to develop and transform their lives. I dream they know they can change the world, that their voice has power and that they deserve to be recognized for who they are and all they can contribute. We need to continue raising our voices, fighting against injustice and working for a fairer world for all."

Khameng

Country: Thailand
Age: 24

"As a young woman from an ethnic minority and the daughter of migrants, growing up has been difficult. I was born in Myanmar in a situation of war and later fled to Thailand. Even in places of safety, my rights remained limited. Without legal status, I faced restrictions on accessing education and work. When the Working Group visited Thailand, I shared my experience with them together with other girls and young women.

What changed my path was access to community organizations that gave me safe spaces, skills and confidence. I was able to continue my education and now work to defend the rights of Indigenous youth. I believe that the Working Group and the United Nations as a whole should support organizations working with girls and young women like me, giving us opportunities to participate in activities that build our resilience and push us to move forward to a better place than where we started."



The Working Group secretary, Ilona Alexander, met with a young activist from Finland in Geneva, 2025. Photo © Plan International

Milica

Country: Serbia
Age: 20

"As a young woman living in Serbia, I face challenges on a daily basis. As an activist, I often have to work harder to be taken seriously and to have my efforts acknowledged. When I started attending meetings, questions and attention were consistently directed towards my male colleagues, while my opinions were overlooked. I had to show much more effort, patience and tolerance.

As a young woman witnessing so much violence in my country, fear has always been present, especially knowing how easily we become targets. Young women are more exposed to hateful and sexualized comments, which adds another layer of vulnerability. This is a struggle that women around the world experience, yet it also motivates me to keep striving to be the change I want to see in society.

I hope that girls and women in Serbia will one day be uplifted and celebrated for their work and achievements. I envision a society where violence against women is no longer normalized, where victims are taken seriously instead of ridiculed on national television and where women feel safe to speak out, knowing they will be protected.

The Working Group is helping to make this possible by providing a platform for girls and women to speak and to be heard. By creating space for young women to share their experiences and by listening to them with care, it offers a sense of safety and recognition – a rare and powerful experience in an environment where women are too often silenced. When it visited Serbia in October 2025, it showed us tools for action and concrete pathways for seeking accountability and change."

Nonceba

(name changed for confidentiality)
Country: South Africa
Age: 16

"Growing up as a girl in Nyanga, South Africa, means navigating daily threats of violence, invisibility and systemic silencing. Our communities are shaped by inequality, where girls are often expected to shrink and survive instead of thrive.

When the Working Group visited us in October 2024, it felt like the world finally saw us. Their presence reminded me that our voices matter far beyond the borders of our township. It gave me hope and reminded me that we, as girls from forgotten places, have the power to influence change at the highest levels. That day, I felt proud, powerful and heard.

The Working Group must continue to create meaningful platforms for township and rural girls to lead conversations, shape policies and hold power. We are not asking to be rescued – we are demanding the space, respect and tools to lead."

Alliyah

Country: United States
Age: 21

"The biggest challenge facing girls and young women in my country and region is visibility. We are living in a time when division among groups is promoted instead of recognizing the importance of diversity and unity. That lack of visibility and acknowledgement of gender inequality has deeply affected many young girls. It has also resulted in harmful cuts to youth leadership programmes, international humanitarian aid and health research focused on girls and young women. Although this reality is alarming, I believe progress made towards gender equality over the past decade cannot be halted. I envision a world where every young girl and woman has the autonomy and freedom to make the decisions that are right for her life and where data show that girls are living healthy, happy and fulfilling lives.

It would be great to continue meeting with the Working Group to facilitate dialogue and support me and other young participants in gaining a deeper understanding of its work."

Maggie

Country: Lebanon
Age: 18

"As the Working Group marks its fifteenth anniversary, I want to acknowledge its impact in uplifting the voices of girls worldwide.

Working with the Group has been an insightful and valuable experience. Engaging in discussions with girls from different backgrounds reinforced the importance of youth-led advocacy and meaningful representation. Seeing our ideas contribute to real conversations and decisions highlighted how critical it is to ensure young voices are included in shaping policies and initiatives.

The Working Group's dedication to advocacy has strengthened the push for more inclusive spaces where girls can actively participate. Its approach to research and engagement has demonstrated the power of collective action in addressing key challenges and driving progress.

As we celebrate this milestone, I want to recognize the commitment the Working Group has shown in supporting and elevating young voices. I look forward to seeing its continued efforts to expand its reach and impact.

Congratulations on 15 years of dedication and progress!"

Mariela

(name changed for confidentiality)
Country: Dominican Republic
Age: 15 years

"As a girl from a rural community called Cabral in Barahona, I have to work very hard to be able to dream. Girls and young women here have so many home chores that we hardly have time for school. Many of my friends stopped studying because they got pregnant or married young. Going to university is a dream, but transport is expensive and there are no nurseries for young mothers. Water never arrives here and school bathrooms have no doors, so we feel embarrassed. Migrant girls from Haiti have a harder time, as they fear being arrested on their way to school or the hospital. I want a future where we can study in peace and safety and our voices are heard. When girls' rights are protected, the whole community advances.

When the Working Group visited the Dominican Republic, I shared my experience with them together with other girls. I appreciated having this safe space where our voices and worries could be heard."

Emma

Country: Uganda
Age: 22 years

"Interacting with the Working Group was an amazing opportunity for me as a young woman from an Indigenous tribe in Uganda, the Karamojong, to air the challenges girls in my country and region face. The Working Group provided a safe space for sharing and I learned there is no better way of solving a problem than sharing it first. That experience was memorable and inspiring. I was proud to be part of the discussion and represent girls and young women from my community. I believe my testaments informed the Group's work.

The Working Group puts youth at the forefront through empowerment and research. That opened my eyes to how often youth are sidelined. I hope the Group builds on local structures in the countries it engages with for greater hands-on impact on girls' lives.

As the Working Group celebrates its fifteenth anniversary, I appreciate its beautiful work. May this milestone mark continued growth and engagement with girls."

Reem

Country: Ethiopia
Age: 19

"Upon hearing about the opportunity to participate in consultations with the Working Group, I was thrilled because it is committed to ensuring that the voices of girls and young women are heard, including at the United Nations. As an 18-year-old girl at the time, it was my first experience participating in such an inclusive and diverse consultation, where girls and young women from all over the world came together.

During the consultation, I expressed my heartfelt concern about the many 'inclusive' spaces that are not truly inclusive, the underrepresentation of my peers and the lack of visibility for young girls in prominent spaces – which affect how girls perceive women's success.

The experience was enriching in every way. I wrote my first long statement, heard and learned from the struggles of other girls, reflected on our discussions and suggested solutions.

I appreciate the Working Group for that invaluable experience. Happy fifteenth anniversary!"



The Working Group met with girls and young women from the "La Luz de las Niñas" Enreculturas Initiative, Geneva, 2025. Photo © Entreculturas



V. In their Own Words: Reflections from Current and Former Working Group Members

This chapter contains personal reflections from current and former members of the Working Group in response to a set of common questions.[123] The testimonies offer an insight into members' experiences during their time with the Working Group. Together, they highlight the importance of collective work, the transformative power of encounters with women and girls in every region and their sustained commitment to ending discrimination against women and girls and advancing substantive gender equality.

A. Why did you decide to join the Working Group?



Claudia Flores
(United States, 2023–2029)

"I chose to join the Working Group because I believe that it is one of the few spaces within the United Nations system where we can both confront entrenched power and reimagine what equality could look like. I was drawn by the mandate's independence and creativity – the possibility of shaping norms, amplifying voices that are too often ignored and pressing Governments to account for their choices. At the same time, the Working Group provides a rare opportunity to work collectively with other feminist experts across regions, to weave together our distinct experiences into a shared vision of equality. For me, the mandate represents both responsibility and possibility: responsibility to those who look to us for solidarity and possibility to advance a more expansive understanding of human rights that centres connection, dignity, equality and freedom."



Ivana Krstić
(Serbia, 2023–2029)

"When I studied international human rights law, I saw the special procedures as the pearl of the system, unique in their independence, flexibility and capacity to respond quickly to pressing human rights concerns. What inspired me most was their closeness to people's realities and their ability to bring forward the voices of women and girls whose experiences might otherwise remain invisible. My motivation for joining the Working Group was not only to teach and reflect on law, but also to listen to voices that are often unheard and to try to make a difference. I wanted to connect theory with practice and to see how international standards can respond to the everyday struggles for equality and dignity. That experience also gave me the chance to continue learning from diverse regional perspectives and from the extraordinary expertise of my colleagues. For me, the mandate is both responsibility and privilege: responsibility to those who look to us for solidarity and accountability, and privilege to work collectively towards reimagining a more equal world for women and girls. The Working Group reminds me

[123] The chapter does not include testimonies from all former members of the Working Group, but only from those who could be reached and who generously agreed to share their perspectives. All images featured in this chapter and in annex IV were provided by the members, who authorized their use.

every day that human rights are not abstract principles, but lived realities shaped by courage, resistance and hope of women and girls around the world."



Haina Lu

(China, 2023–2029)

"My motivation to join the Working Group stems from a deep-seated commitment to advancing gender equality, combined with a strong belief in the unique value of diverse perspectives, including those shaped by my experiences as a human rights scholar and practitioner from China. Through decades of research and engagement in international human rights law, particularly on women's rights and social justice, I have witnessed both the transformative power of effective policies and the persistent, complex barriers women and girls face worldwide. I am driven by a desire to contribute meaningfully to dismantling those barriers, especially the intersectional discrimination affecting the most marginalized. My position allows me to serve as a bridge – connecting different contexts, amplifying underrepresented voices and contributing to the development of more nuanced, effective and applicable solutions. At their core, eliminating discrimination against women and girls and promoting substantive gender equality are fundamental to achieving justice, peace and sustainable development for all. I am honoured to bring my expertise, national perspective and dedication to this critical mandate on the global stage."



Laura Nyirinkindi

(Uganda, 2023–2029)

"As a young woman lawyer, I interned at the Commission on Human Rights (now the Human Rights Council), which shaped my appreciation for international human rights processes, mechanisms and procedures. I was also quite fortunate to be tutored by Special Rapporteurs during my master's degree studies and to deepen my understanding of the critical work that they did. I went on to carry out extensive human rights work with civil society organizations, Governments and United Nations and African Union agencies, specializing in the rights of women and girls. When the opportunity arose and I received information about the opening for an expert from my region to join the Working Group, I felt ready to contribute my perspectives and experiences at the global level. That is why I applied to join the Working Group, a decision that remains one of the most rewarding of my life."



Dorothy Estrada-Tanck

(Mexico, 2020–2026)

"For me, joining the Working Group was a great opportunity and it also represented an honour to be part of one of the international mechanisms for the protection of human rights, specifically the human rights of women and girls. From my own experience in Mexico and the struggle for human rights, social justice and the transition to democracy, I knew first-hand the value that the standards set by international mechanisms, such as the special procedures, hold for those local and national efforts. We referred to what the special procedures said. They were an inspiration, a source of knowledge and of legal interpretations that served people as tools in their daily struggle and their interaction with the Government and other public actors. That experience led me to think that the special procedures were unique and useful; as one author said, 'the jewel in the crown of the United Nations human rights system'. In that sense, for me, it was like a dream to be part of them. Later, when I already had my life as an academic in international law, the opportunity came up. I very much welcomed it in order to hopefully add value to the human rights of women and girls. I also liked that the Working Group was a collective body, and now being a part of it, I realize how fortunate I am, not only for being part of the special procedures system, but also for sharing the actions with my four colleagues and with a team of extraordinarily committed women. It has been fascinating to learn from the other expert members of the Working Group about how gender equality may be understood or experienced in different cultural and political contexts. Each of us is an expert, a fighter, an activist and a human rights defender in her own right; we then unite all that strength in a synergy and a union that is precious. As a group, we are much more than just the sum of the parts. So, whoever is interested in being part of the special procedures, especially of the Working Group, I would highly recommend it, because the opportunity to live together and listen to women and girls from all over the world and to get to know their struggles, sometimes in extremely difficult conditions and at risk to their lives, is an absolute privilege and it is truly an honour."



Elizabeth Broderick

(Australia, 2017–2023)

"I have always had a deep commitment to women's rights and I think when I decided to join the Working Group it was at a time when we were starting to see some pushback. Twenty-five years on from Beijing, not much had changed and I desperately wanted to be part of global systems change. I had read about the work of the Working Group, I was following it quite closely and so had a great desire to be part of that picture of change."



Meskerem Geset Techane

(Ethiopia, 2017–2023)

"After having worked at the national and continental levels, with national and continental human rights systems for many years, I thought that it was time for me to engage at the global level and work with the United Nations human rights system to contribute to international accountability. Moreover, I was already engaged with the Working Group, I had used its reports in my work and I was already very inspired by its amazing work. I believe that the Working Group has a unique position within the United Nations human rights system; it offers unique tools and platforms. So, I thought it was important for me to leverage the potential of the mandate to advance the gender equality agenda at the global level."



Ivana Radačić

(Croatia, 2017–2023)

"It actually really came to me in a way, in a sense that so many people saw me as a good candidate and then I started thinking about it. And I guess I wanted to be engaged at a more global level. I have been engaged on women's rights as an academic and activist, but I saw it as an opportunity to be engaged more globally and to influence policies at a global level, as well as to get to know women and girls from different corners of the world and do my part in trying to make their lives easier, to contribute to change."



Melissa Upreti

(Nepal/United States, 2017–2023)

"I decided to join the Working Group because I wanted to use my voice to advance women's rights and gender equality. I thought being part of an international women's human rights mechanism would be a great way to do that. As an activist, I had briefed the mandate on several occasions and knew some of the expert members. They were amazing women and I was very inspired to think of myself as being in that kind of role, having the ability to shape standards and norms and call for accountability on issues that I cared about."



Frances Raday

(Israel/United Kingdom, 2011–2017)

"I regarded the establishment of the Working Group as a unique opportunity to build the conceptual and legal basis for a United Nations programme for women's human rights. I welcomed the chance to participate and to apply the knowledge gained from my experience in researching, writing and advocating for human rights in general and women's human rights in particular."



Eleonora Zielińska

(Poland, 2011–2017)

"I believed that this new special procedure devoted exclusively to women could make a significant contribution to eliminating discrimination against women – at least in the area of law. I was particularly hopeful regarding women's reproductive rights. Unfortunately, the regression that we are witnessing around the world has left me deeply disillusioned."

B. What motivates you to keep working to end discrimination against women and girls despite the many challenges?



Claudia Flores

(United States, 2023–2029)

"What keeps me going is not only the urgency of the problem, but the extraordinary resilience and imagination of women and girls who are leading struggles for change all over the world. Every time I listen to women describe how they navigate violence, exclusion or poverty – and how they continue to create beauty, solidarity and resistance – I am reminded that this work is about much more than policy or law. It is about defending our shared humanity. I am also motivated by a conviction that discrimination is not inevitable; it is a choice made by systems and societies and therefore it can be undone. The setbacks and backlash are real, but so is the possibility of transformation."



Ivana Krstić

(Serbia, 2023–2029)

"What motivates me to continue this work, despite the many challenges, is the courage and persistence I witness every day from my colleagues in the Working Group, from the dedicated staff who support us and from the countless women's human rights defenders and organizations we encounter around the world. They do not give up, even in the face of a backlash and resistance, and their determination is a constant reminder that change is necessary and possible. I am also inspired by the fact that, even in moments of regression or disappointment within the human rights system, there are always people fighting back, raising their voices and finding new strategies to combat discrimination. Their bravery gives me strength and it makes me feel that giving up is not an option. What drives me is not only the injustice we still face, but also the vision of what can be achieved if we persist – a world in which women and girls can live with dignity, equality and freedom. I hope that our collective work helps create that future, step by step, by challenging entrenched inequalities, opening up new possibilities and ensuring that the voices of women and girls everywhere are heard and valued. It is this vision of transformation that sustains my commitment and keeps me moving forward."



Haina Lu

(China, 2023–2029)

"I believe that actions can bring changes even when results are not immediate or easily visible. Especially in difficult times, persistence and patience become vital. History has repeatedly shown us how sustained efforts gradually build towards meaningful transformation. Also, I feel it is my duty to keep going because I have the voice and means to act while many women and girls do not."



Laura Nyirinkindi

(Uganda, 2023–2029)

"I care deeply about seeing injustice in all its forms end, especially gender injustice. It runs counter to everything I value to see women and girls face layered, systemic violations of their rights and not act. I know this work can feel thankless and progress can be painfully slow. Yet every effort, no matter how small, helps chip away at the barriers holding women and girls back. What keeps me going? The women and girls who dare to imagine a fairer world; their resilience, their dreams and their refusal to accept inequality as inevitable. They inspire me, and they remind me to hold fast to a simple belief: that our shared humanity, kindness and dignity can guide us forward. This work is not only about policy or protests; it is about a steady, unrelenting commitment to them, to myself and to the possibility of change."



Dorothy Estrada-Tanck

(Mexico, 2020–2026)

"What motivates me the most is seeing what women and girls and the organizations on the ground are doing themselves and how they are contributing in so many transformative ways in all parts of the world. I am also convinced that international mechanisms can be part of this change,

as I explained earlier based on my experience in Mexico. We, as special procedures, can be an anchor, an example and a beacon of light. Knowing that is also a source of inspiration for me to continue forward and, mostly, seeing what women and girls are doing: every time we meet them, we are all surprised, inspired, awestruck about how women and girls, despite all the odds, are courageous; they engage, they continue struggling and they do not lose hope, so we cannot lose hope either. Working as a team also motivates me; working as a collective body that is not speaking with individual voices in a competitive manner, but rather a collective one, even if, obviously, at some points there are difficulties and challenges to overcome. To work as an integrated team and to contribute to this global fight to end gender inequality in constructive ways, to propose initiatives, to be creative and to do so together has been a great source of motivation for me."



Elizabeth Broderick

(Australia, 2017–2023)

"I think what motivates me is the fact that every day in this role you get to work with people who care about creating a more gender equal world. And what I have come to understand is that it is the relentless pursuit of people everywhere in all their diversity – that is what creates change and I think that energy is infectious. So, when we go out and we connect with civil society organizations, with women's rights defenders and others, that energy is absolutely infectious and it energizes me to keep on keeping on. It is the relentless pursuit of ordinary people creating change that absolutely inspires me."



Meskerem Geset Techane

(Ethiopia, 2017–2023)

"For me, the resilience of women human rights defenders, who work tirelessly and fearlessly, even under difficult circumstances and facing great risks, is inspirational. The change they drive and catalyse at many levels gives me hope and energy. The change we want to see may be very slow, and often I feel frustrated, but when I see them and the boundaries they push every day, I feel that our work is not in vain and I must keep going, continuing to do my part."



Ivana Radačić

(Croatia, 2017–2023)

"There are definitely challenges, but in a way, it is because of that that you keep going. Because if you open your heart, and if you really feel the suffering of women and girls and of people of all genders around the world, you cannot stay silent, especially if you have a certain form of privilege. I feel like it is my duty to work on these issues, I have to do my part in trying to co-create more just societies."



Melissa Upreti

(Nepal/United States, 2017–2023)

"The continued existence of discrimination against women and girls in law, policy and practice is really the fuel that keeps me going, and I know it keeps a lot of women like me, who are working to end discrimination against women, going too. I am part of a collective global effort."



Frances Raday

(Israel/United Kingdom, 2011–2017)

"There is no choice except to keep working to end discrimination against women and girls. It is impossible to be passive in the face of threats to reverse or stagnate the gains made in achieving greater equality for women in all fields of life. Reversal or stagnation in the progress towards equal opportunity for women and girls severely damages their prospects of fulfilling their potential in education, employment, economic life or political representation and also undermines their economic sustainability, status in the family and health. This is an injustice that cannot be tolerated. Moreover, it is clear that equality for women and girls is positively correlated with a higher level of human development and is an essential component of social democracy and human rights constitutionalism. In the face of the current decline in social democracy and the rise of illiberal democracies or autocratic constitutionalism, the fight for women's equality is more indispensable than ever."



Eleonora Zielińska
(Poland, 2011–2017)

"My academic work at the University of Warsaw, where I conduct research and teach about violence against women and gender equality and discrimination, continues to drive my commitment. For nearly 20 years, I also served as the Polish expert in the European Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination, which allowed me to expand my activities at a regional level. What motivates me most are the tangible results of my own work and that of my academic colleagues – especially in raising public awareness about gender-based violence and discrimination, and disseminating knowledge of international human rights instruments and relevant international jurisprudence. Sharing our expertise with non-governmental organization activists on effective strategies and best practices has also been extremely rewarding. I am especially proud of my former students, who are well equipped to continue this work – as both academics and activists."

C. Describe your experience as a member of the Working Group: what were the highlights?



Claudia Flores
(United States, 2023–2029)

"Some of the highlights for me have been the encounters with women and girls in very different contexts – those who trusted us with their stories and pushed us to see beyond our frameworks. Whether in rural communities or urban centres, I have been inspired by their clarity about the kind of lives they want and deserve. Another highlight has been the intellectual and personal collaboration with my colleagues in the Working Group. Our diversity of perspective, sometimes even our disagreements, have sharpened my thinking and helped me imagine new approaches to equality. Representing the Working Group in global forums has also been deeply meaningful – not because of the visibility, but because it allowed me to bring into those spaces the voices of women who are too often excluded."



Ivana Krstić
(Serbia, 2023–2029)

"One of the moments that has impressed me most in this role has been listening to girls speak for themselves. Often, in consultations or during visits, I am struck by how clearly and fearlessly they articulate their arguments and defend their rights, sometimes with more clarity and determination than adults. Their voices remind me why this work matters and how important it is to create spaces where the youngest among us can be heard and respected as agents of change. My first country mission, to Thailand, was another highlight. It was a unique opportunity not only to engage actively with the State but also to understand the structures of another country, to meet all relevant stakeholders and to assess both achievements and gaps. The ability to translate these observations into concrete recommendations felt like a direct way to contribute to strengthening systems of protection and advancing equality. Equally significant was the academic visit to Brazil, which allowed me to witness the important struggles taking place in that context. The advocacy of non-governmental organizations for access to safe abortion, the fight of mothers seeking justice for the lost lives of their children, and the severe challenges faced by political activists and women parliamentarians revealed both the depth of discrimination and the resilience of those confronting it. That experience reinforced the critical role of our mandate in drawing international attention to such struggles and situating them within broader human rights frameworks. It highlighted for me the importance of situating those struggles within global human rights frameworks, ensuring that local realities inform international standards and advocacy. Another important part of our mandate for me has been the development of guidance documents and the adoption of soft law standards. Those instruments carry significant creative potential. The development of the CREATE framework on substantive gender equality illustrates how we can offer new conceptual tools to guide States and institutions. At the same time, our work opens up possibilities for advocacy in emerging areas, such as advancing recognition of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity. Those contributions demonstrate how the Working Group can both consolidate existing norms and push the boundaries of international law towards greater protection and equality. Guidance documents provide

tools that women, girls and advocates everywhere can use in their daily struggles for justice. Finally, working alongside my colleagues in the Working Group has been a highlight in itself. We come from different regions and bring diverse experiences and perspectives, yet we share a deep commitment to gender equality. Learning from each other through our differences and through our common ground has been a source of strength and growth for me. It is that spirit of collective engagement, combined with the inspiration from women and girls around the world, that makes this work so meaningful."



Haina Lu

(China, 2023–2029)

"The main highlight has truly been the incredible young women and girls I met – activists who remain resilient, resourceful and deeply inspiring amid challenging environments and personal hardships. They have taught me so much, and their strength continues to motivate me. I also feel incredibly lucky to have shared this journey with my colleagues in the Working Group. Each member brought their own rich experience and wisdom and I learned something unique from every one of them. We have built a supportive and collaborative spirit – when disagreements arose, we always found a way forward together through open dialogue and mutual respect. And I cannot forget the wonderful secretariat team – everyone is not only highly capable and efficient, but also simply a joy to work with. It has been a true privilege to be part of such a dedicated and harmonious group."



Laura Nyirinkindi

(Uganda, 2023–2029)

"Joining the Working Group and meeting the remarkable group of current and former members – as well as other thematic and country mandate holders – has been deeply inspiring. Their dedication to the human rights mission, and their expertise, knowledge and soft skills, continually push me to grow. Engaging with civil society actors and survivors has deepened my understanding of critical issues and of gender beyond legal and political frameworks. Academic visits and regional consultations where we have more time with women human rights defenders, grass-roots leaders, politicians, judges and legislators are consistently eye-opening. Still, my most memorable moments are with young women and girls. Their eloquence, clear vision for a more gender-equal future and ability to express their demands simply and effectively are unparalleled."



Dorothy Estrada-Tanck

(Mexico, 2020–2026)

"Apart from meeting so many committed activists, as I mentioned, the greatest highlight has been meeting the other members of the Working Group, from both the 2017–2023 and 2023–2029 groups that I have been fortunate to bridge. I think they are all completely amazing and incredible women. I admire them, I respect them and I have been able to learn from them. Also to work together with the support team, which consists of wonderful women and men, as well. Committed men, feminist men and this has been truly wonderful to see. Other highlights have been the country visits. Afghanistan was my first country visit – a joint visit with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, which was a highlight – but obviously a very challenging and sad and difficult visit because of the extremely grave discrimination towards women and girls in the country. But at the same time, again, it was so inspiring to meet the women and girls. I remember especially a young woman, 19 years old, who told us, almost in tears, 'Two years ago, I was about to start university. I want to go; I want to study. I will do anything, I will wear "proper hijab", my brother can take me, he has offered – I just want to study!' So, letting them know that they are not alone and grasping their hope and energy renewed our dedication. Another highlight has been meeting the women and girls from all corners of the globe, working for human rights, for gender equality, social justice, to tackle climate change, to have a more responsible relationship with the planet, with each other, to see how women and girls are committed to a just redistribution of power and resources, and to making human rights a reality in their everyday lives. Just to see that and to know that it is happening is a privilege because I think sometimes we do not really realize the true extent of all these movements and of how many women and girls are committed, including girls from a very young age. We have seen girls as young as 10 being committed to gender equality as one of their life causes, together with older women who have spent their whole lives engaged on the same topic."



Elizabeth Broderick

(Australia, 2017–2023)

"There have been so many highlights from being part of the Working Group. I think the main highlight for me has been the learning that I have had from the interactions with women and girls all across the world. I mean, it has been such an immense privilege and an opportunity and if I reflect back, I think that that is the major highlight for me. Of course, there has also been the deep friendships with my colleagues in the Working Group. That has sustained me and I have learned so much from them. And, finally, the ability to be part of changing global systems, establishing new international human rights norms and standards – that has been incredibly rewarding."



Meskerem Geset Techane

(Ethiopia, 2017–2023)

"The highlights of my experience in the Working Group were meeting and working with dynamic women human rights defenders from all over the world. And, they come not just as civil society actors, but also as actors within the State, as actors at the grass-roots and community levels, and even as actors in various policy-making institutions. That also includes the dynamic women members of the Working Group, as well as the wonderful women in the support team. The most interesting thing for me was engaging with girls, girl human rights defenders, while leading a couple of thematic reports, country visits and consultations. The opportunity to work with them, to also co-create the space for them, and to integrate and amplify their voices in our work was dynamic for me. The highlight of this was also girl human rights defenders travelling from afar to attend the session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva during my presentation of the thematic report on girls' activism. We never see girls or children in Human Rights Council interactive dialogues; hence, witnessing their participation, listening to their powerful oral interventions was inspiring and fulfilling."



Ivana Radačić

(Croatia, 2017–2023)

"There were quite a few! There were many beautiful moments at different levels. I think most meaningful and most touching to me were moments with the women and girls themselves, such as in Roma villages during a country visit to Romania or in the villages of Lenca people in Honduras. But it was also beautiful just being part of this group of amazing women and sharing experiences together, such as our team-building exercises, our trip to Australia. Then it was also interesting for me to be in high political spaces and presenting before the Human Rights Council. So, there were interesting moments in respect of different aspects of the mandate, including the relationships among the mandate holders and support staff. But I would say the moments in which I really feel connected on a personal level with the women and girls around the world, often in dire situations, are the ones I appreciate the most."



Melissa Upreti

(Nepal/United States, 2017–2023)

"My experience as a Working Group member has been like no other. As a human rights lawyer, it has been such an honour and a responsibility to be in a position where I had access to the whole range of member States, civil society and so many inspiring human rights defenders, with countless opportunities to hear directly from them and then to examine and process the information received pertaining to a range of women's rights concerns and feed it into different working methods, which have subsequently shaped our thematic reports, country visits and even our communications and resolutions. It has also been an experience through which I have built new relationships and friendships, including with other members of the Working Group, and even with members of the support team, who have worked so closely with us to fulfil the mandate and ensure its success. There is no doubt that it has been six years of hard work, but it has been meaningful, impactful and humbling. There have been many stellar

moments and it is really hard to choose just one, but, more recently, I would say our work on Afghanistan has been a major highlight, where I was able to use my voice to amplify the voices of women in Afghanistan and to challenge what is happening there in terms of the institutionalized discrimination against women, which is so extreme. In fact, it is the most extreme example of institutionalized discrimination that we have documented. For me, personally, leading a couple of country visits and meeting a whole spectrum of people and understanding the different contexts in which law, policy and practice are operationalized, while exploring different solutions and hearing about good practices, have been critical experiences. Being elected by my peers to serve on the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures took my experience to a whole other level where I got to work on behalf of the system as a whole and it made me feel like I was a part of something even more monumental."



Frances Raday

(Israel/United Kingdom, 2011–2017)

"Members serving during the first mandate cycle of the Working Group looked to set out its conceptual basis, an ongoing agenda that would transform women's realities by addressing all aspects of their lives: political, economic, family and health. We sought to balance the ongoing deficit in the realization of women's equality with the gains made. We retained optimism derived from recognition of women's rights as human rights, the good practices of States and the robust commitment of women's human rights defenders. The impetus of our work was our feeling of partnership with those State representatives who have encouraged our work and those women's rights organizations that regard our work as valuable support for their heroic struggles on the ground. On a personal note, the intensive six years of work with five members of the Working Group and the wonderful staff who accompanied us left me with a precious legacy of sisterhood. Our personal, professional and regional diversity lent depth to a shared perception of what gender justice should look like for women and girls everywhere. The work on equal justice, equal opportunity and equal dignity without discrimination of women and girls is a work in progress. I hope our generation has passed on to younger generations the vision and the tools to forge the equal partnership between women and men, which will enable and empower them to meet the unprecedented challenges, for individuals, families, communities and States, which lie ahead. Among the country visits I participated in, I would highlight the one to Peru in 2014 where, following our recommendation on ensuring access to contraceptives and to emergency contraception, emergency contraception became available again in the country in August 2016. We also had considerable success with communications on various matters, including criminal convictions for adultery and for abortions and legislative and constitutional drafting on the issue of women's right to equality. Following a communication addressed to the Sudan in 2014, a young pregnant woman was released from prison and the charges of apostasy and adultery were dropped. Following the official visit to Tunisia in 2013 and a subsequent communication, the newly promulgated Constitution contains ground-breaking provisions that guarantee, protect and strengthen women's human rights. Tunisia also lifted some of its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women."



Eleonora Zielińska

(Poland, 2011–2017)

"The most meaningful experiences for me were the country visits, particularly to the United States and Samoa. In the United States, I was concerned about the low standards of protection for women in employment and healthcare. I hope our exchange of experiences inspired American activists to strengthen their efforts to combat gender discrimination in these areas. In Samoa, I was surprised and deeply impressed by the societal acceptance and understanding extended to transgender individuals – a level of inclusion that is, unfortunately, rare in most parts of the world."

D. How would you summarize the future you want to see for women and girls around the world in one word?

Possibility
Claudia Flores (United States, 2023–2029)

Freedom
Ivana Krstić (Serbia, 2023–2029)

Autonomy
Haina Lu (China, 2023–2029)

Parity
Laura Nyirinkindi (Uganda, 2023–2029)

Justice
Dorothy Estrada-Tanck (Mexico, 2020–2026)

Equality
Elizabeth Broderick (Australia, 2017–2023)

Justice
Meskerem Geset Techane (Ethiopia, 2017–2023)

Oneness
Ivana Radačić (Croatia, 2017–2023)

Dignity
Melissa Upreti (Nepal/United States, 2017–2023)

Empowerment
Frances Raday (Israel/United Kingdom, 2011–2017)

Self-determination
Eleonora Zielińska (Poland, 2011–2017)

Figure VIII

Visions for the future

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls



Source: created by OHCHR through Canva.com.



VI. The Way Forward

The road ahead towards gender equality remains arduous. Despite important progress, no country in the world has successfully eliminated discrimination against women and girls or achieved full equality. Across all regions, an intensifying backlash against their human rights threatens to undermine hard-won gains and block further progress. In some contexts, the backlash has reached extreme forms, including the regime of gender apartheid imposed by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

In the years ahead, the Working Group will continue to advance its mandate with renewed urgency, addressing discrimination against women and girls in all areas of life and counteracting the escalating backlash through all its working tools. Its work will remain firmly grounded in the principle of substantive gender equality, with sustained attention to the distinct challenges faced by women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Building on that framework, the Working Group has identified the following key thematic priorities for its forthcoming annual reports:

Gender equality in our digital lives. Digital technologies bring both opportunities and risks for the advancement of gender equality. Their design, use and content are shaped by entrenched social, economic and political factors. It is crucial to address the distinct effects of digitalization on women and girls and to pursue a deliberately gender-responsive approach, including to artificial intelligence, in order to prevent the entrenchment of discriminatory social norms and stereotypes. The Working Group will examine discrimination against women and girls in the digital sphere and the impact of current and future developments on their rights, well-being and potential.

Access to transitional justice. Hundreds of millions of women and girls around the world live in conflict-affected or highly repressive contexts. Despite being the primary victims, they remain systematically excluded from peace processes, post-conflict reconstruction and recovery efforts. A gendered analysis of access to transitional justice processes and mechanisms during and after crisis is essential to shape interventions that ensure the sustainability of peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts, address the structural conditions that render women and girls vulnerable to violence and gender-based discrimination and ensure accountability for all human rights violations during the crisis phase.

Through these priorities, the Working Group calls upon States to take immediate action. Waiting another century to achieve equality is unacceptable: half of humanity cannot be denied the full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. While States have immediate obligations relating to gender-based discrimination, achieving equality must also be understood as a long-term investment – its impact extends beyond the lives of women and girls today to shape the future of generations to come and to build a global community that protects human dignity more broadly.

Change is possible. The Working Group's vision is sustained by the transformative force of millions of women and girls around the world, who – together with their movements and allies – advance rights, resist injustice and build inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies for all. Their courage and determination are an inspiration and a source of profound hope for the future.



Annexes

Annex I. List of annual thematic reports by the Working Group

Gendered dimensions of care and support systems (A/HRC/59/45), 2025

Escalating backlash against gender equality and urgency of reaffirming substantive equality and the human rights of women and girls (A/HRC/56/51), 2024

Gendered inequalities of poverty: feminist and human rights-based approaches (A/HRC/53/39), 2023

Girls' and young women's activism (A/HRC/50/25), 2022

Women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health rights in crisis (A/HRC/47/38), 2021

Women's human rights in the changing world of work (A/HRC/44/51), 2020

Women deprived of liberty (A/HRC/41/33), 2019

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (thematic analysis: reasserting equality, countering rollbacks) (A/HRC/38/46), 2018

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (thematic analysis: good practices in the elimination of discrimination against women and women's empowerment) (A/HRC/35/29), 2017

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (thematic analysis: eliminating discrimination against women with regard to health and safety) (A/HRC/32/44), 2016

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (thematic analysis: eliminating discrimination against women in cultural and family life, with a focus on the family as a cultural space (A/HRC/29/40), 2015

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (thematic analysis: eliminating discrimination against women in economic and social life with a focus on economic crisis) (A/HRC/26/39), 2014

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (thematic analysis: eliminating discrimination against women in political and public life with a focus on political transition) (A/HRC/23/50), 2013

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (A/HRC/20/28), 2012

Annex II. List of country visit reports of the Working Group by year of visit

Visit to Zimbabwe – report forthcoming (end of mission statement), 2025

Visit to Thailand (A/HRC/59/45/Add.2), 2024

Visit to the Dominican Republic (A/HRC/59/45/Add.1), 2024

Visit to Mauritania (A/HRC/56/51/Add.1), 2023

Visit to Malta (A/HRC/56/51/Add.2), 2023

Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan (A/HRC/53/21), 2023

Visit to Maldives (A/HRC/53/39/Add.2), 2022

Visit to Kyrgyzstan (A/HRC/53/39/Add.1), 2022

Visit to Romania (A/HRC/47/38/Add.1), 2020

Visit to Greece (A/HRC/44/51/Add.1), 2019

Visit to Poland (A/HRC/41/33/Add.2), 2018

Visit to Honduras (A/HRC/41/33/Add.1), 2018

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice on its mission to Chad (A/HRC/38/46/Add.2), 2017

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice on its mission to Samoa (A/HRC/38/46/Add.1), 2017

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice on its mission to Kuwait (A/HRC/35/29/Add.2), 2016

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice on its mission to Hungary (A/HRC/35/29/Add.1), 2016

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice on its mission to the United States of America (A/HRC/32/44/Add.2), 2015

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice on its mission to Senegal (A/HRC/32/44/Add.1), 2015

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (mission to Spain) (A/HRC/29/40/Add.3), 2014

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (mission to Peru) (A/HRC/29/40/Add.2), 2014

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (mission to Chile) (A/HRC/29/40/Add.1), 2014

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (mission to China) (A/HRC/26/39/Add.2), 2013

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (mission to Iceland) (A/HRC/26/39/Add.1), 2013

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (mission to Tunisia) (A/HRC/23/50/Add.2), 2013

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (mission to the Republic of Moldova) (A/HRC/23/50/Add.1), 2012

Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (mission to Morocco) (A/HRC/20/28/Add.1), 2012

Annex III. List of guidance documents and position papers by the Working Group

A. Guidance documents

The rights of women and girls in family life (A/HRC/WG.11/43/1), 2025

Substantive gender equality (A/HRC/WG.11/42/1), 2025

Gender equality and gender backlash (A/HRC/WG.11/41/2), 2024

Conscientious objection to abortion: key considerations (A/HRC/WG.11/41/1), 2024

Draft articles on prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity (A/HRC/WG.11/40/1), 2024

Eliminating discrimination against sex workers and securing their human rights (A/HRC/WG.11/39/1), 2023

Men's accountability for gender equality (A/HRC/WG.11/37/1), 2023

B. Position papers

Women's autonomy, equality and reproductive health in international human rights: between recognition, backlash and regressive trends, 2017

Insecure land rights for women threaten progress on gender equality and sustainable development, 2017

Discrimination against women in nationality, 2017

Adultery as a criminal offence violates women's human rights, 2012

Annex IV. Biographies of current and former Working Group members

A. Current members (2023–2029)



Claudia Flores
(United States) – Chair

Claudia Flores assumed her functions as the Chair of the Working Group on 15 August 2025 for a one-year term. She assumed her functions as a member of the Working Group on 1 November 2023. She is a Clinical Professor of Law at Yale Law School and Director of the Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic. She is also Director of the Law School's Orville H. Schell Jr. Center for International Human Rights. Her teaching, scholarship and law practice have focused on international human rights, constitutional reform, global inequality and State accountability for failures of good governance. She is co-host of *Entitled*, a podcast that explores global debates around human rights. Prior to joining Yale Law School, she was a Clinical Professor of Law at the University of Chicago Law School and Director of the Global Human Rights Clinic.

Claudia Flores and her students have represented clients and partnered with advocates on a wide range of global human rights issues. Recent matters include representing household and care workers before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and documenting regional and State responses to online hate speech in conflict settings. Her work and that of her students has been featured in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Chicago Tribune* and various network television and public radio outlets.

Claudia Flores' scholarship has appeared in the *Chicago Journal of International Law*, the *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, the *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* and *Cardozo Journal of Law and Gender*. She has contributed book chapters to *Gender in Constitutional Law* (edited by Catharine MacKinnon (Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018)) and *From Parchment to Practice: Implementing New Constitutions* (edited by Tom Ginsburg and Aziz Z. Huq (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2020)).

Before joining academia, Claudia Flores' legal practice included both domestic litigation and international advocacy. Between 2013 and 2015, she was a partner in the civil rights practice of Hughes, Socol, Piers, Resnick and Dym and served as lead attorney in collective and class action labour and employment cases on behalf of agricultural workers in temporary foreign labour programmes. She served a four-year term as a UN-Women and United Nations Development Programme legal adviser to the Governments of Timor-Leste and Zimbabwe. She also managed a programme funded by the United States Agency for International Development to combat trafficking in persons in Indonesia. Between 2004 and 2008, she was a staff attorney in the Women's Rights Project of the national office of the American Civil Liberties Union. There, she spearheaded litigation and advocacy to advance the workplace rights of low-wage immigrant women workers.

Claudia Flores received her BA in philosophy from the University of Chicago and her JD from New York University where she was a Root-Tilden-Kern Public Interest Scholar and Sinsheimer Service Fellow. Following graduation, she was a Skadden Arps Fellow in the International Women's Human Rights Clinic at the CUNY School Law. She clerked for Judge Harry Pregerson in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.



Ivana Krstić
(Serbia) – Vice-Chair

Ivana Krstić assumed her functions as the Vice-Chair of the Working Group on 15 August 2025 for a one-year term. She assumed her functions as a member of the Working Group on 1 November 2023. She is a full Professor at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Law, where she teaches international human rights law and other related courses in the Department of International Law and International Relations. She obtained her LLM (2003) at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, along with an LLM (2004) and PhD (2008) at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Law. In the academic year 2006/07, she was a Chevening Scholar working on her dissertation at Exeter College, Oxford University. She is the director

of the Centre for Human Rights and the Institute for Legal and Social Sciences of the Faculty of Law. She coordinates the Legal Clinic for Anti-Discrimination Law, as well as the group of experts of the Faculty of Law, which aims to supervise the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. She is a member of the Law and Gender and Law and Gender, Intersectionality and Diversity team that prepared a strategic study for achieving gender equality at the Faculty of Law. She prepares the special master's programme on gender mainstreaming in all legal disciplines.

As a leading Serbian expert in the area of human rights, she provided expert support in shaping domestic anti-discrimination legislation and policy documents and has been engaged in many projects run by international organizations and entities, such as OHCHR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Since 2015, she has been a member of the European Equality Law Network for both streams, non-discrimination and gender equality, as well as a co-rapporteur of the country report for Serbia in the *Oxford Compendium of National Legal Responses to COVID-19* (edited by Jeff King and others (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021)). She is one of the editors-in-chief of the Springer book series "Gender Perspectives in Law" and participates in the Feminist Judgments in Central and Eastern Europe project. She publishes extensively on the topics of non-discrimination, gender equality and refugee law. She is the newly appointed Sergio Vieira de Mello Chair Coordinator for the University of Belgrade Faculty of Law. Her special area of interest is the role of gender bias in judicial decision-making, as well as the gender perspective in forced displacement.



Haina Lu

(China)

Haina Lu assumed her functions as a member of the Working Group on 1 November 2023. She is a Professor at the Renmin University of China Law School and the Executive Director of the Human Rights Centre of the Renmin University of China. She is also a member of the Human Rights Lawyers' Network of the Law Association for Asia and the Pacific. She obtained a PhD in law from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, a master's degree in international law from the Liberal University of Brussels, an MA from the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights and a BA from the Foreign Affairs College of China.

Her research is focused on women's rights, gender and law, the right to work, employment discrimination, labour-dispute resolution and the rights of migrants and refugees. She has published extensively, both in English and Chinese, in journals such as the *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* and the *Human Rights Quarterly*. She authored a book in English (*The Right to Work in China: Chinese Labor Legislation in the Light of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (Mortsel, Intersentia, 2011)) and two books in Chinese (*National Protection of the Equal Right to Work: An International Law Perspective* (2015) and *Big Data, AI and Women's Rights to Work* (2021)).



Laura Nyirinkindi

(Uganda)

Laura Nyirinkindi assumed her functions as a member of the Working Group on 1 November 2023. She holds a master's degree in international human rights law from the University of Oxford, United Kingdom, and a law degree from Makerere University, Uganda. She is a Senior Managing Consultant of the Pro Initiatives Agency, a human rights firm based in Uganda. She has assumed leadership positions in civil society organizations in Africa, Europe and America as a means to mainstream women's rights in the human rights movement. She served on the Civil Society Committee of the African Development Bank, where she advocated for gender inclusive socioeconomic development on the continent. She is currently the Vice-President of the International Federation of Women Lawyers, promoting transboundary advocacy and common action around shared values and objectives on the rights of women and girls globally.

Laura Nyirinkindi specializes in women's rights and gender equality, governance and the rule of law. Her earlier career activities focused on grass-roots legal education and aid, and strategic litigation for women in situations of vulnerability, girls and marginalized and disadvantaged groups. For 18 years, she has dedicated her efforts to promoting social justice by advocating for

enabling policies and laws, research, documentation, training and capacity-building in relation to States and communities around key actions on the rights and access to justice of women and girls, gender-inclusive democratic governance, women, peace and security, gender-based violence, persons with disabilities, displaced persons and rights-based approaches to development. She has worked in 38 countries, collaborating with African Union institutions, such as the Africa Peer Review Mechanism, and United Nations entities, such as UN-Women, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and OHCHR, and national human rights institutions. She taught international human rights law at Kampala International University, Uganda, for four years and has published several articles on the rights of women in Africa.



Dorothy Estrada-Tanck

(Mexico)

Dorothy Estrada-Tanck[1] assumed her functions as a member of the Working Group on 1 November 2020. She holds a PhD in law from the European University Institute, Italy, an MSc in political theory from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a law degree from Escuela Libre de Derecho, Mexico. She is currently Tenured Professor of Public International Law and International Relations at the University of Murcia Faculty of Law, Spain, and Coordinator of its Legal Clinic. Her academic and professional activities have focused on international human rights law, the rights of women and girls, gender equality, discrimination and violence against women, human security, the human rights of migrants and refugees, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, business and human rights, economic, social and cultural rights, and socioeconomic justice. She has extensive professional experience in legal consultancy, government, State bodies, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, including at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico; OHCHR; the Mexico City Human Rights Commission; the Case Matrix Network of the think-tank Centre for International Law Research and Policy; and the non-governmental organization Fundación CEPAIM, Spain.

Dorothy Estrada-Tanck has published extensively, including as the author of *Human Security and Human Rights under International Law: The Protections Offered to Persons Confronting Structural Vulnerability* (Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2016), which received the 2017 Best Book Award from the Inter-American Bar Association (Washington, D.C.). She is also co-editor of the *Handbook on Migration and Human Rights* (Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2025).

She brings broad academic experience to her role through teaching and research across national, international and European projects, at institutions in Spain, Mexico, Italy, the United States and Canada. Those include Escuela Libre de Derecho and Universidad Iberoamericana (Mexico); Fordham School of Law (New York); IE Law School and the Catholic Institute of Business Administration School of Law (Madrid); McGill University Faculty of Law, where she held an O'Brien Fellow in Residence at the Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism; and Harvard Law School, where she was a Visiting Fellow at the Human Rights Program.

Dorothy Estrada-Tanck regularly participates in consultations with public and civil society stakeholders, speaks at international events and engages in discussions across various dissemination and communication platforms.

B. Former members: second group (2017–2023)



Elizabeth Broderick

(Australia)

Elizabeth Broderick served as a member of the Working Group from 1 November 2017 to 31 October 2023. She is a global leader in cultural reform, driving systemic change on gender equality, human rights, workplace inclusion and leadership. Principal of Elizabeth Broderick & Co.,

[1] Dorothy Estrada-Tanck was part of both the current (third) and second groups, given that the membership for the Latin American and Caribbean States seat of the Working Group has followed a different cycle as explained in chapter I.

she has led more than 35 independent cultural reviews across national and global institutions, transforming workplaces and advancing dignity and belonging. As the longest-serving Sex Discrimination Commissioner of Australia, she led groundbreaking reforms, including paid parental leave and the national gender equality blueprint. She is the Founder of the Champions of Change strategy, a globally recognized movement engaging more than 270 private and public sector chief executive officers and 1.5 million employees to tackle inequality through systemic disruption.

Elizabeth Broderick also serves on the World Economic Forum Global Future Council on the Care Economy and the Advisory Council of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership. She is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Sydney and is Chair of Fondation CHANEL, a corporate philanthropic foundation investing in women and girls worldwide.

She holds a BA in Computer Science and a LLB, and honorary doctorates in law from the University of Sydney, the University of New South Wales and the University of Technology, Sydney, and honorary doctorates from Deakin, Edith Cowan and Griffith Universities.



Ivana Radačić
(Croatia)

Ivana Radačić served as a member of the Working Group from 1 November 2017 to 31 October 2023. She holds a PhD in law from the University of London, an MPhil in criminological research from the University of Cambridge and LLMs from the University of Michigan and the University of Zagreb. She is a research adviser at the Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences in Zagreb and a part-time lecturer at the University of Osijek. She has taught at various universities in Europe, the United States, Central America, Australia and New Zealand. Her research and teaching areas are women's rights, human rights, gender, sexuality and the law, and spirituality, well-being and human rights. She has published extensively in those areas in leading international journals and books and she has authored a book entitled *Seksualno Nasilje: Mitovi, Stereotipi i Pravni Sustav* (Sexual Violence: Myths, Stereotypes and the Legal System (Zagreb, TIM Press, 2014)).

Ivana Radačić has cooperated with international institutions and non-governmental organizations on human rights research, training and litigation and has been involved with drafting national human rights laws and policies. She also worked at the European Court of Human Rights and has litigated women's rights cases before it. She co-authored a training manual for judges on women's access to justice. She served as an expert member of the Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality.

Ivana Radačić is also a certified Kundalini yoga teacher and a graduate of a four-year integrative body-oriented psychotherapy programme, and has trained in multiple therapeutic and healing modalities.



Melissa Upreti
(Nepal)

Melissa Upreti served as a member of the Working Group from 1 November 2017 to 31 October 2023. A human rights lawyer and women's rights advocate, she has spent more than two decades advocating for women's rights through the use of national, regional and international law and mechanisms. She has led fact-finding missions, conducted strategic litigation, strengthened the capacity of civil society organizations and engaged with Governments on legal reform.

Melissa Upreti started her career working for a feminist legal advocacy organization and the Asia Foundation in Nepal. Upon receiving her LLM from Columbia Law School in the United States, she joined the Center for Reproductive Rights, where she was the founding lawyer of the Asia programme and led the conceptualization and launch of the South Asia Reproductive Justice and Accountability Initiative, which resulted in precedent-setting legal decisions on reproductive rights in Asia. She was deeply involved in the first Special Inquiry of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on reproductive rights in the Philippines, and was co-petitioner in the historic *Lakshmi v. Nepal* case, in which the Supreme Court recognized access to abortion as a constitutionally protected right. She worked closely with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to strengthen regional commitments to end child marriage and played a key role in bringing about the adoption of the Kathmandu Call for Action to End Child Marriage in South Asia in

2014. She has written and lectured extensively about women's reproductive rights and legal accountability. Her articles and other publications have been used in courses on human rights, as well as by activists to develop legal strategies.

Melissa Upreti is a Fellow at the University of Toronto Law Faculty's International Reproductive and Sexual Health Law Programme and has held leadership roles in various international non-governmental organizations, including the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University in the United States and the International Commission of Jurists.



Meskerem Geset Techane

(Ethiopia)

Meskerem Geset Techane served as a member of the Working Group from 1 November 2017 to 31 October 2023. She is an international human rights lawyer with more than 20 years of extensive experience and prominent accolades, including being named among distinguished African human rights defenders and influential women lawyers in Africa.

She has previously served in expert groups of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and was involved in developing African Union human rights documents, policies and studies. Moreover, as Deputy Executive Director of the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa, she led litigation and human rights accountability projects across the African continent, encompassing a range of thematic human rights issues in several countries. She currently co-chairs the African Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders.

Meskerem Geset Techane was also a Commissioner for Women's and Children's Rights at the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. She practised law in Ethiopia as a High Court Judge and a Principal Attorney at Meskerem and Associates. Her dedicated service as a lawyer in cases of gender-based violence and in cases involving children earned awards for outstanding pro bono legal aid and her remarkable contribution to justice for women and children. As an active member of Ethiopian civil society, she has convened significant collaborative initiatives, including the Human Rights Working Group, Lawyers for Human Rights and She Leads.

Meskerem Geset Techane served on the boards of local and international human rights organizations and consulted with various United Nations institutions, including UN-Women, OHCHR, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and other well-known international organizations. She has been a visiting scholar at several universities in Africa, Europe and North America. She has lectured and published on various human rights issues, including the rights of women and girls, socioeconomic rights and human rights institutions. She also authored training manuals for lawyers, judges and law enforcement officers on human rights, women's rights and gender justice.

Meskerem Geset Techane holds a LLB from Addis Ababa University and a LLM from the University of Pretoria and is a PhD candidate at the University of Padua.



Alda Facio

(Costa Rica, 2014–2020)

Alda Facio[2] served as a member of the Working Group from 1 May 2014 to 31 October 2020. After leaving her functions as a judge, she has spent the past 25 years advising Governments on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She was one of the founders of the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice during the negotiations for the creation of the International Criminal Court, Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CLADEM), Fundación Justicia y Género, as well as adviser to other organizations, including International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific and JASS. She has written numerous articles and lectured extensively around the world on women's rights issues. Since 2003 she has directed the Women Human Rights Education Institute at the University of Toronto and is a permanent Professor at the University for Peace, where she teaches human rights and gender.

[2] Alda Facio was part of both the first and second groups, given that the membership for the Latin American and Caribbean States seat of the Working Group has followed a different cycle as explained in chapter I.

C. Former members: first group (2011–2017)



Frances Raday
(Israel/United Kingdom, 2011–2017)

Frances Raday served as a member of the Working Group from 1 May 2011 to 31 October 2017. She is a former member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and has taught extensively at various academic institutions in Israel and elsewhere. She is the author of numerous academic books and articles on human rights, labour law and feminist legal theory. She has acted as legal counsel on precedent-setting human rights cases in the Supreme Court of Israel, including women's constitutional rights to equality in religious rituals at public sites and sex discrimination during retirement. She is currently the Director of the Concord Research Centre for Integration of International Law, Haim Striks Law School, Colman.



Eleonora Zielińska
(Poland, 2011–2017)

Eleonora Zielińska served as a member of the Working Group from 1 May 2011 to 31 October 2017. She is currently Professor, Chief of the Comparative Criminal Law Section and Director of the legal clinic at Warsaw University and a member of the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality and non-discrimination. Her work focuses on issues such as gender-based violence, reproductive rights and the legal protection of women's rights in Poland. She has published extensively, including scholarly articles related to gender issues, abortion, HIV/AIDS and medical law. Eleonora Zielińska has been an active supporter of women's rights in Poland and has served as an expert with governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. In recognition of her contributions to human rights, she was awarded the "For Merit to Human Rights Protection" honorary medal by the Commissioner for Human Rights of Poland in 2016.



Emna Aouij
(Tunisia, 2011–2017)

Emna Aouij served as a member of the Working Group from 1 May 2011 to 31 October 2017. She is a Tunisian jurist and diplomat who has devoted her career to the promotion of justice, accountability and women's rights at both the national and international levels. She obtained her Tunisian and French baccalaureates in 1962, before earning a LLM from the Faculty of Law in Tunis in 1966. In the same year, she studied at the École Nationale d'Administration (Cycle Moyen) in Tunis and continued her training at the École Nationale de la Magistrature in Paris from 1966 to 1968, when she graduated. In October 1968, she became the first woman judge in Tunisia, serving as Magistrate Judge for children and personal status, Adviser to the Court of Appeal, Director of the Directorate of International Conventions at the Ministry of Justice and Adviser to the Supreme Court. From 1998 to 2000, she served as the First President of the Cour des Comptes (Court of Accounts), with the rank of Secretary of State. From 2000 to 2005, she represented Tunisia as Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Denmark. She then served as a member of the Comité supérieur des droits de l'homme et des libertés fondamentales (Higher Committee for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms) in Tunis. She has also played a prominent role in international human rights mechanisms. She was a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for three consecutive terms from 1990 to 2002. During her second term, she served as Vice-President for Africa. She also served as Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Chad of the former Commission on Human Rights from 1997 to 1998.



Kamala Chandrakirana
(Indonesia, 2011–2017)

Kamala Chandrakirana served as a member of the Working Group from 1 May 2011 to 31 October 2017. She spent 11 years building the national mechanism of Indonesia on women's human rights, the National Commission on Violence against Women, as Chair

(2003–2009) and Secretary-General (1998–2003). She was a member of the team, set up by the President of Indonesia, to investigate the death of a prominent human rights defender. She is also founder of several non-governmental organizations on women's rights. She is active in a variety of civil society groups, working in the area of peace and social justice in Muslim communities, human rights and democracy, collective memory of past violence and public fundraising for social justice. She is a member of the Global Fund for Community Foundations, an organization dedicated to supporting community philanthropy and social justice initiatives; the Advisory Group on Women, Peace and Security initiated by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; the coordinator for the Indonesia Coalition for Truth and Justice for Past Human Rights Violations; a resource person for the Southeast Asia Women's Caucus on ASEAN; and a member of Musawah's International Advisory Group.



Patricia Olamendi Torres

(Mexico, 2012 and 2013)

Patricia Olamendi Torres served as a member of the Working Group from 1 December 2012 to 11 November 2013, when she resigned due to increasing demands from other professional commitments. She is currently Coordinator of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism for the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women. She has been Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, a Federal Deputy in the fifty-fourth Legislature and Deputy Attorney General for Services to Crime Victims in the Office of the Attorney General of Mexico City. She holds a doctorate in law from the University Institute of Puebla and has authored several publications on discrimination against women, including *El Cuerpo del Delito: Los Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres en la Justicia Penal* (Body of Evidence: the Rights of Women in Criminal Justice (Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2006)), *Las Mujeres en la Legislación Mexicana* (Women in Mexican Law (Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2006)) and *Mujeres, Familias y Ciudadanía: Discriminación y Exclusión en los Códigos Civiles de México* (Women, Family and Citizenship: Discrimination and Exclusion in the Civil Codes of Mexico (United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2008)). She was recognized in 2017 for her significant contributions to law and gender equality by being awarded the National Jurisprudence Award.



Mercedes Barquet

(Mexico, 2011 and 2012)

Mercedes Barquet served as a member of the Working Group from 1 May 2011 to 17 September 2012, when she resigned due to health reasons. She passed away on 17 December 2012. Trained as an anthropologist and sociologist, Mercedes Barquet received her master's degree in social anthropology from the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City and was a PhD candidate in Sociology at El Colegio de México (Colmex). She had a long and distinguished career, including in the academic study of gender, women's issues and discrimination against women. After 1988, she researched and taught extensively as a faculty member at Colmex on feminist theory, gender equality and women's human rights, gender and public policy, citizenship and democratic governance, and represented the professors' union. She was a long-standing member of the Interdisciplinary Programme for Women's Studies at Colmex, an academic centre engaged in the fight for women's rights, and a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*. She was also a member of several academic committees and played an active role in strengthening civil society. She participated in multiple non-governmental organizations and served as a citizen board member and adviser to several public institutions implementing gender policies in Mexico, including as adviser to Mexico City's Human Rights Commission. She also represented Mexico on several key occasions, including as General Coordinator on Social Issues in the National Coordinating Committee during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

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HUMAN RIGHTS
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High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

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Email: ohchr-infodesk@un.org
Website: www.ohchr.org

ISBN: 978-92-1-157752-5

Designed and printed at United Nations, Geneva – 2520335**(E)** – March 2026 – 1683 – **HR/PUB/25/4**