

Statement submitted by Plan International

A. About Plan International

Founded in 1937, Plan International is a rights based development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We strive for a just world, working together with children, young people, our supporters and partners. We aim not only to improve the daily lives of girls, but also to advance their position and value in society, whilst actively working with boys and young men to champion gender equality. We believe in advancing children's rights in all contexts, including during displacement and migration, where girls may face additional dangers.

B. Introduction

Plan International welcomes the theme of the 51st session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), "Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration." Marked increases in international migration, stemming from a wide-range of drivers as varied as climate change, the search for better economic opportunities, human rights abuses, conflict, and sudden and slow onset natural disasters, is a significant global trend with tremendous impact on the achievement of girls' fundamental human rights and long-term development outcomes. The reality that many of those in transit pass through or land in cities, makes this year's theme particularly timely for discussion.

Plan International's extensive research has shown that girls continue to be one of the most excluded and marginalized groups in the world, regardless of context. The risks and human rights violations girls and young women face by virtue of the intersecting factors of age and gender, multiply and are exacerbated in displacement and transit contexts, including rights violations such as lack of access to safe, inclusive, quality education; increases in gender-based and sexual violence; risks of child, early and forced marriage; and heightened vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation. Girls with disabilities —as well as unaccompanied and separated girls, are also particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation while on the move, regardless of the reason for their migration.

Issues concerning safety and security, often predicated on entrenched gender norms, restrict girls' and young women's social roles as well as their free movement. Families might place tighter restrictions on girls' movements or give them increased responsibilities around the home. This can create further barriers for girls and young women in relation to accessing necessary services, including essential sexual and reproductive health information and services education and care, and fully realizing their guaranteed human rights. Unmet menstrual hygiene management needs and the stigma around the issue are a particular affront to girls' human dignity and a barrier to their mobility, creating health and safety risks.

Plan International emphasizes that all children, adolescents, and young people (including girls and young women) have the right to make their own free and informed choices and to have control over their bodily autonomy, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, free from coercion, violence, discrimination and abuse. Fulfilling the rights of all children, especially girls in transit, is fundamental to achieving gender equality. However, gender equality and discriminatory social norms mean that girls and young women often lack the voice, agency

and autonomy to make their own decisions in relation to their sexual and reproductive health and rights and are frequently denied access to quality sexual and reproductive health information and services leaving girls vulnerable and unable to protect themselves for unwanted and early pregnancy, sexual transmitted infections, as well as from complications relating from pregnancy and child birth.

C. Recommendations

Plan International urges the 51st session of the CPD to stress the critical need for Member States to:

- Prioritize the promotion, protection, and full realization of human rights of all girls and young women, with particular emphasis on their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the central role of girls' human rights and empowerment in achieving gender equality, sustainable development, and sustainable peace.
- Promote urgent measures taken to address pervasive and discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes that serve as root causes of gender inequality and gender-based violence, such as where necessary, the reform of legislation, policies and structures to eliminate discrimination. Plan International believes that it is crucial to challenge gender inequality and social norms which hinder fulfilment of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of children, adolescents and young people, and in particular of girls and young women.
- Commit to and adequately resource data collection disaggregated by age, sex, ethnicity, religion, disability, location, wealth, marital status, sexual orientation and gender identity, and migratory status with due protections for privacy and human rights. This must include the age range 10 to 14 years in order to make younger adolescent girls and their needs visible and track progress against commitments, policies and programmes on girls and young women. All data collection must further include girls in transit who often fall through gaps including data collection related to the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.
- Take all necessary measures, including removing practical, financial and structural barriers, to ensure that all girls have access to safe, quality, gender-sensitive, and inclusive education. In addition, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) should be accessible for all children, adolescents and young people, in both formal and non-formal educational settings. CSE should be provided in a way that is non-judgmental, non-discriminatory, scientifically accurate, accessible, inclusive, rights-based, gender-transformative and adapted to the evolving capacity of the child, adolescent or young person. Plan International believes that all children, adolescents and young people, without discrimination, are entitled to comprehensive sexuality education to gain knowledge, explore values and attitudes, and develop the skills they need to make conscious, healthy and respectful choices about relationships and sexuality.
- Ensure all children have access to gender-responsive, rights-based, adolescent and youth friendly sexual and reproductive health and rights services, including in conflict and humanitarian settings. This is particularly essential for girls in transit, especially unaccompanied and separated girls, child brides, and young mothers. The services should be available and accessible to the most vulnerable and excluded adolescents and young people. It is essential that health services be available and accessible for everyone, regardless of age or marital status and

respect privacy and confidentiality, be adapted to the evolving capacity of the child and should be free from requirements for judicial, spousal, parental, or guardian consent.

- Ensure that all girls and young women have access to separate and hygienic sanitary facilities in all public spaces, especially schools. They should also have access to accurate information about menstruation and to clean sanitary supplies.
- Identify and implement efforts to address early, unintended and unwanted adolescent pregnancy for all girls and young women, including girls in transit. Adolescent pregnancy is a major contributor to maternal mortality and morbidity, which are grave violations of girls' rights. Adolescent pregnancy can also be a driver for, and a consequence of, child, early and forced marriage. Prevention requires efforts to challenge gender discriminatory norms and ending violence against girls; strengthening girls' agency and ability to make autonomous and informed decisions about their reproductive health; ensuring the provision of CSE and ensuring that health systems and services are accessible to and meet their specific needs.
- Promote measures to address the high prevalence of child, early and forced marriage among migrant populations. Many girls and young women who are in transit or living in vulnerable situations and informal settlements (including in urban settings) find themselves at an increased risk of child, early and forced marriage due to increased poverty, insecurity, and a lack of access to education as well as the often misguided perception that this option will reduce the likelihood of sexual violence. Prevention requires a holistic approach including engagement with parents and communities to tackle the harmful gender norms that underlie such practices; implementing, monitoring and enforcing laws and policies that provide for a minimum age of marriage at 18 without exception; ensuring that all marriages are required to be registered (including customary and religious marriages); and ensuring that married girls and women are able to continue their education and access vocational and skills training programmes.
- Increase targeted policy and funding efforts towards achieving strong, positive outcomes for adolescent girls on the move through dedicated and flexible interventions. Adolescent girls have inherent strength and power to change their futures and the world around them in spite of the difficult and dangerous contexts in which they live in and the challenges they face. Adolescent girls, including those on the move, should be provided the space to voice their opinions and concerns, and supported to implement solutions as key actors, rather than bystanders, in their own protection and development.

Sustainable development, sustainable peace, and the full realization of universal human rights hinges on the achievement of gender equality. Lack of access to essential sexual and reproductive health services for all girls and young women, including those in transit, is a human right and critical for the achievement of their full potentials. We must address the rights and needs of girls in all contexts if we hope to achieve the laudable goals the international community has set for itself