



# RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED ADOLESCENT GIRLS

## 'Internally Displaced Girls in Crisis: Voices from the Sahel'

On 15 July 2020, Plan International, UNFPA, and the Women's Refugee Commission hosted a dialogue focused on better understanding how internally displaced adolescent girls are navigating the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel region and how to address their needs. These recommendations are derived from panellists' contributions and the discussion that followed.

Internally displaced adolescent girls face marginalisation and other specific risks due to their experience of being both young and female. **Despite normative improvements at the international level, progress for internally displaced adolescent girls has been uneven at country level.** Although governments have made strong international commitments under the humanitarian and development agendas – to foster gender equality, to tackle gender-based violence, and to foster participation – there remain significant gaps in implementation.

### Key challenges are:

- **Lack of prioritization.** Tackling discrimination and fostering gender equality are rarely prioritised by governments and other actors responding to internal displacement. In particular, human and financial resources are inadequate to effectively prevent, mitigate, and respond to gender-based violence (GBV).
- **Lack of funding.** Programmes to tackle gender inequalities and respond to GBV remain underfunded in the crisis response. Even when funding is available, it is seldom focused on the long-term needs of adolescent girls, or flexible enough to respond to varying and rapidly-changing country contexts.
- **Lack of accountability.** Internally displaced adolescent girls lack opportunities to safely voice their concerns and hold government, humanitarian, or development actors to account on their commitments. Due to their age and gender, they are often marginalized in their communities and lack access to information on their rights.
- **Lack of trust.** Adolescent girls' trust in local government appears to be eroding in many communities, especially those living in vulnerability and crisis. To achieve transformative social change aimed at eliminating GBV, community leaders must earn the trust and confidence of adolescent girls.

**To address these challenges,** the High Level Panel should include the following recommendations in its report, aimed primarily at governments and other displacement actors:

## **1. Ensure the participation of adolescent girls in policy and response development**

Consultation with adolescent girls, especially those left furthest behind, must be integrated into humanitarian policy and response, including needs assessment and planning. This is in line with the principle that vulnerable and marginalised groups can best identify their own needs and how to address them. Adolescent girls' right to participation is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The High Level Panel should recommend all actors to take concrete measures to ensure the participation of adolescent girls, including those living with disabilities.

## **2. Design and implement effective policies to prevent and respond to GBV**

GBV, with its long-term effects on physical and mental health and wellbeing, is one of the most pervasive obstacles that prevents adolescent girls from fulfilling their potential. The situation is compounded by lack of access to services, as well as a general culture of impunity that leaves perpetrators unpunished. Governments and other actors must improve their capacity to prevent and respond to GBV in all contexts, particularly within marginalised and internally displaced communities. The international community should encourage governments to adopt and implement laws aimed at eliminating and ensuring accountability for GBV and other harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early, and forced marriage.

## **3. Ensure that laws, policies, and responses to internal displacement tackle discrimination and foster gender equality**

National laws and policies are largely inadequate to tackle discrimination and ensure equality of access to services, such as education, protection, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Governments must commit to ensuring that laws, policies, and responses to internal displacement also foster gender equality. Efforts to change social norms at the local level should be strengthened, especially through the engagement of parents, communities, men, and boys as catalysts for positive change.

## **4. Make political and financial commitments to implement responses that are sensitive to age, gender, and diversity**

Although there exist some good policies aimed at tackling discrimination and promoting equal access to services for adolescent girls, implementation is lacking. It is essential that governments make political and financial commitments to ensure that policies and responses are designed and implemented in a way that addresses the specific barriers for adolescent girls.

Donor governments can play a pivotal role in ensuring the needs of adolescent girls are met in every context through peer-to-peer accountability and by providing flexible funding for programmes that include:

- GBV prevention, mitigation and response;
- Systematic age- and gender-sensitive consultation with adolescent girls; and
- Adaptation of responses to tackle barriers related to age, gender, and/or diversity.