

# Manifesto for Adolescent Girls' Rights

A NEW NARRATIVE



# Our Moment, Our Power, Our Future

Growing up is often framed as linear, but power doesn't unfold so neatly. We're told that life moves predictably from babies to toddlers, children to preteens, adolescents to adults. Yet adolescence is not simply another phase to pass through. It's one of the most defining periods of our lives.

One moment we are children with big dreams; the next, we are labeled too much — too loud, too emotional, too ambitious, too defiant. Society rushes adolescent girls\* into responsibility while denying us authority. We are stereotyped as impulsive or fragile, told we need protection, and dismissed as disruptive when we demand our rights.

When the world ignores our needs, rolls back our rights, and locks us out of decisions that shape our future, we respond. The world often sees adolescent girls as problems to be solved rather than leaders with solutions. We reject that narrative. We are not waiting for permission to lead. We are already leading.

We are a distinct group. Not children. Not yet women. Adolescent girls have our own realities, priorities, and leadership. Our voices, rights, and aspirations must be recognized not as an afterthought, but as a force shaping policies, systems, and the future. Our rights are human rights. We are diverse, powerful, and capable of shaping the world around us. When we come together, we create change that lasts.

**As adolescent girls ourselves, we write this manifesto to claim our rights and lead as we were always meant to.**

\* For the purpose of this manifesto, we define adolescence as the period when girls begin to be sexualized by their communities and societies. While this occurs at different ages across cultural contexts, we define adolescence as spanning ages 10–24, reflecting both its onset and the extended transition to adulthood. In this manifesto, girl refers to anyone who has lived experience as a girl or identifies as a girl.





## Our Current Reality: A Crisis of Exclusion and Rollbacks

Over the past 30 years, important progress has been made in recognizing the rights of adolescent girls due to sustained advocacy by girls and our allies. In 1994, the ICPD Programme of Action affirmed that adolescents are rights holders whose empowerment is essential for sustainable development. In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action formally recognized the rights of the Girl Child. These milestones reflect decades of organizing and insistence that girls be seen.

But recognition has not always translated into reality and progress has been uneven. Despite global commitments, too many adolescents and youth are still waiting for those promises to reach us.

There has been a 39% decrease in the number of girls out of school over the past 20 years. And still, 122 million girls remain out of school globally. Nearly 4 in 10 adolescent girls and young women do not complete secondary education.

Fifty million girls have experienced sexual violence.

One in five girls still enters child, early, or forced marriage.

Nearly 12 million adolescent girls aged 15-19 were expected to give birth in 2025 alone, and complications from pregnancy and childbirth remain a leading cause of death for girls our age.

Conversations around adolescent girls are gaining momentum. There is growing recognition of the need to engage us meaningfully and support our leadership. But too often, engagement stops at tokenism. Girls are included as participants, yet our voices are not genuinely heard or acted upon. We are consulted, but not trusted with power.

The global systems meant to serve us do not meet our needs. Our priorities are often fragmented across institutions, addressed inconsistently, or overlooked altogether. When policies fail to meet our needs, accountability is rare.

At the same time, hard-fought gains for girls are being rolled back amid broader backlash against gender equality, democracy, and human rights. In a time of intersecting global crises, adolescent girls — who have contributed the least to these challenges — are bearing their consequences.



## From Tokenism to Accountability

Visibility is not enough. It requires meaningful participation in shaping solutions. It requires decision-makers to answer to us. It requires policies that reflect our lived realities and consequences when commitments are broken.

We cannot move forward with symbolic inclusion. Adolescent girls must be meaningfully involved at every stage, from planning to implementation to evaluation. Governments and institutions must not only make commitments; they must respond to our voices and be accountable for their actions.

We demand change. Around the world, adolescent girls, alongside youth activists and advocacy organizations, are organizing, pushing for accountability, and working to reshape the future on our own terms.

We are not asking to be included as a gesture. We are asserting our right to shape the decisions that affect our lives.



## Our Vision: A New Narrative for Adolescent Girls

We are told many stories about adolescent girls:

- "Girls naturally mature faster than boys."
- "Girls are physically weak and need protection and care."
- "Since girls will leave home to get married, there is no need to invest in their education."
- "Girls are too young, not smart enough, and cannot make decisions about their own lives and bodies."
- "Adolescent girls' needs are no different from those of younger children or adult women."
- "Girls and young women lack the capacity to influence their communities or countries."

Narratives are not neutral. They shape decisions – and those decisions shape our lives.

Too often, the dominant narratives about adolescent girls focus on vulnerability instead of strength, protection instead of power, limitation instead of leadership. We are socialized to carry expectations that silence us and shrink us.

### **We refuse these narratives.**

We refuse to be tokenized, co-opted, or reduced to statistics. We refuse to be treated as passive beneficiaries instead of leaders. The way the world sees adolescent girls must change — because how we are seen determines how we are supported, funded, protected, and trusted.

**It is time for new narratives shaped and led by us, adolescent girls.**

### **Adolescent girls are diverse.**

We are not yet women and no longer children. We are not a single story. Our identities span race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, parenthood status, and socioeconomic background. Any narrative about us must reflect that complexity.

### **Adolescent girls are leaders.**

We do not just need seats at the table. We need real influence over decisions. Leadership requires trust, resources, and space to act.

### **Adolescent girls' rights are non-negotiable.**

Our rights to health, education, safety, and political participation are not privileges. They are human rights.

### **Adolescent girls deserve the conditions to thrive.**

Governments and institutions must create policies that respond to our realities and ensure accountability when they fail to do so.



## Adolescent Girls' Demands: What Must Change Now

To advance adolescent girls' rights, we must dismantle the systems of oppression and the stereotypes that sustain them. We have to change the structures that limit us and build pathways for leadership, accountability, and justice.

This manifesto reflects the full reality of our lives. Our safety, our health, our education, our economic security, our political participation, and our environment are deeply connected. When one is denied, the others are affected. We cannot afford progress that is partial.

We demand action across the following priorities, and beyond:

- Safety, security, and freedom from violence
- Autonomy over our bodies and health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Education as a right
- Political and economic empowerment
- Climate and environmental justice

These aren't abstract issues. They shape whether we're safe at home, whether we finish school, whether we have control over our bodies, whether we can earn a living, and whether we inherit a planet we can actually live on.

**In solidarity with our peers, partners, and feminist collectives, we uplift girl- and youth-authored, evidence-based agendas that reflect our lived realities. These are not just documents to cite. They outline concrete demands and priorities that decision-makers can act on now.**

### WE HIGHLIGHT:

[African Young Women's Manifesto](#)  
(Nalafem Collective, 2020)

[Beijing+30 Global Youth and Adolescents Recommendations](#) (Beijing+30 Youth Steering Committee and Young Feminist Caucus, 2025)

[Cotonou Youth Action Agenda](#)  
(Major Group on Children and Youth, ICPD Youth Platform, and UNFPA, 2024)

[Delivering with and for Adolescent Girls: Five Game-Changing Priorities](#)  
(UNICEF, 2024)

[Girls Get Equal Manifesto](#)  
(Plan International, 2022)

[Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Adolescent and Youth Engagement](#) (FP2020, IYAAP, and PMNCH, 2020)

[Let Them Know: A Youth-led AYSRHR Global Roadmap for Action](#) (IYAAP and the 120 Under 40 program, 2022)

[Solidarity Statement on Girls' Education and Gender Equality](#)  
(UN Girls' Education Initiative, 2025)

[The Girls' Pact for the Future: Youth reimagining a gender-equal future](#)  
(Plan International and UNICEF, 2024)

[Youth Declaration by the She Leads Climate Cohort](#)  
(Plan International, 2025)



## **Resistance and Reclamation: Our Voices Will Not Be Silenced**

We recognize that this movement faces fierce opposition. Anti-rights actors, patriarchal systems, and extremist ideologies will continue to attack our rights. The backlash is real. It is coordinated. It is loud.

But we are not afraid. We are organized, we are strategic, and we are ready.

**This is our era.  
This is our manifesto.  
This is our revolution.  
We are adolescent girls,  
and we are claiming our power.**

### **Acknowledgments and Methodology**

The Girls' Manifesto was co-drafted between December 2024 and April 2025 by a Girls Co-Creation Group of 10 adolescent girls (ages 11–23), with support from Amplify Girls and Women Deliver. Group members were nominated through advocacy organizations within the Girls Deliver Community and were affiliated with Fundación Oxlajuj N'oj, Plan International, Women Deliver, and the Working Group on Girls. Grounded in a girl-led virtual workshop with 36 girl and youth advocates, as well as an in-person workshop during the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York, the Manifesto reflects the voices and priorities of its girl authors.

Cover art by Ruth Eskender (she/her), Visual Artist and Advocate

Artist's statement: "This work centers on a powerful female figure who embodies the beauty, strength, and resilience of adolescent girls."

