



2021 GENDER JUSTICE ADVOCACY FRAMEWORK

A Roadmap towards
equality

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CREATED
EQUAL.**

Global Gender Justice Programme

2021 ADVOCACY FRAMEWORK

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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It is a joy and a privilege to share this manual with you.

This framework is based on the invaluable work of ACT members, who are working for gender justice. The guidance given in this document is curated from the words and work of our members and strategic partners.

The focus is on the six priority areas of the ACT Global Gender Justice Programme: SGBV, Transformative Masculinities, SRHR, Economic Justice, Family Law and Migration and Displacement. In addition, a section on Climate Justice has been included, to connect with ACT's programmatic work in this area.

However, this is a live document, which will continue to evolve, and be strengthened, as we journey towards gender justice. Our roadmap is an open and participatory space, inviting to dialogue, not shying away from difficult conversations, but engaging in love and respect. Ongoing conversations with members focusing on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) rights, will be added to this document in due course.

This framework is a programmatic tool, which is designed to support members to engage in dialogue, mobilise behind shared objectives, and inspire us in our work for advancing gender justice. It is a resource of the Gender Justice Programme and is overseen by me, as the Gender Justice Programme Manager. Edits and additions will be made on an annual basis, following the guidance of the Gender Reference Group and related Task Groups, which are working tirelessly to develop theological and right-based analysis to support the work of our members everywhere.

We hope you will find this framework useful in your daily work, to transform oppressive power structures and unjust systems and to promote equality at the local, national, regional, and global level.

Rev. Dr. Elaine Neuenfeldt

ACT Alliance Gender Programme Manager

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AC - Action Coalition
AU - African Union
ASEAN - Association of South-East Asian Nations
BPfA - Beijing Platform for Action
CpoA - Cairo Plan of Action
CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO - Civil Society Organisation
CoP - Community of Practice
CPD - Commission on Population and Development
CSW - Commission on the Status of Women
DWD - Discrimination based on Work and Descent
ECOSOC - United Nations Economic and Social Council
EU - European Union
FBA - Faith-based actor
FBO - Faith-based Organisation
FGM - Female Genital Mutilation
GCM - Global Compact on Migration
GCR - Global Compact on Refugees
GE - Gender Equality
GEF - Generation Equality Forum
GJ - Gender Justice
GJRG – Gender Justice Reference Group
HRC - Human Rights Council
HRD - Human Rights Defender
IATF - Inter-Agency Task Force
ICESCR - International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
ILO - International Labour Organisation
IOM - International Organisation for Migration
IHL - International Human Rights Law
MFAC - Multi-Faith Advisory Council
NAP - National action plan
NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation
NHLC - Nairobi High-Level Commission
OAS - Organization of American States
OHCHR - United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDG - Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV - Sexual and Gender-Based violence
SRHR - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SOGIE - Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression
TG - Task Group
ToT - Training of Trainers
UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN – United Nations
UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change
UNGP - United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
UNOGP - UN Office on Genocide Prevention
UNWG - United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights
UNSCR 1325 - UN Security Council Resolution 1325

UPR - Universal Periodic Review
VNR - Voluntary National Review
WHRD - Women's Human Rights Defender

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACT Alliance is the largest coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and church-related organisations engaged in humanitarian, development, and advocacy work in the world, consisting of 135 members working together in over 120 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, race, or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards.

Gender Justice is one of the priority themes identified in the current ACT Alliance Global Strategy. In order to achieve this milestone, ACT created a Gender Justice Programme with a primary objective to enable the coalition to become a leading faith-based alliance speaking out for gender justice and equality. Through the programme, ACT is also seeking to develop structures and processes that will deliver a strong record of results and effective programming that respond to intersecting inequalities.

The Government of Sweden, through Sida, has agreed to fund ACT's Global Gender Justice Programme for a four-year period through its Strategy for Global Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Rights. Sida funding is used to support the capacity of the Gender Justice Programme and of ACT Member organisations through focus on four programmatic outcomes: (i) ACT members are committed to promote changes in attitudes and structural arrangements towards a more gender just distribution of power; (ii) the programmatic work contributes to gender just societies; (iii) ACT Alliance is a global progressive force for gender justice, contributing to the SDGs and connecting the national to the regional and global levels; and (iv) the programme providers' capacity and quality of gender justice interventions in the programme area are enhanced. This framework aims to contribute to the delivery of outcomes (i) and (iii). For this reason, the Sida funding supported the development of this Advocacy Framework, which aims to set out the key position and messaging of the ACT Alliance, in particular for its Global Gender Justice Programme.

This framework aims to support implementation of the ACT Alliance Global Strategy and the ACT Alliance Advocacy Strategy. The ACT Alliance Advocacy Strategy provides guidance for policy and advocacy work on all the thematic priorities of the global strategy, including gender justice. The Advocacy Strategy considers the central role of member and forum capacity and engagement on advocacy, partnerships, communications and public messaging, innovation and measurement of change and impact. The strategy provides the top-level guidance that orients the approach presented in this framework.

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INTRODUCTION

ACT Alliance's structure is unique, with national, sub-regional and regional forums that bring local, national, regional, and international church-related organisations to work together under the same principles and standards, bringing different skills and expertise to support each other and leverage collective action in humanitarian, development, and advocacy engagement. Thanks to the presence of national ACT Forums in over 50 countries, and of its global secretariat in several strategic locations (Amman, Bangkok, Brussels, Geneva, Nairobi, New York, San Salvador and Toronto), ACT Alliance is able to bring local and regional concerns to the global arena. Conversely, global trends and development can be transmitted to the regional and national levels using these structures.

With a view to furthering and ensuring ACT's global gender justice policy and advocacy capacity and impact, the Secretariat commissioned the development of a Gender Justice Advocacy Framework. This framework was developed by a consultant with the guidance of Gender Justice staff, members' colleagues, and the voluntary Reference Group structures. This framework aims to promote the implementation of two outcomes of the ACT Alliance Global Gender Justice Programme, namely: Outcome 1 that enables and mobilises ACT Alliance members' commitment to promote changes in attitudes and structural arrangements towards a more gender just distribution of power; and Outcome 3 that uses ACT's unique position and networks to act as a global progressive force for gender justice, contributing to the SDGs and connecting the national to the regional and global levels.

This framework is divided according to the strategic themes prioritised by the Gender Justice Programme with sub-sections on: (i) human rights agreements and instruments; (ii) key messages; (iii) faith perspectives; and (iv) influencing tactics. This is supposed to be a tool for all ACT members operating at the different levels and contexts. Its messaging can be used in international, regional, and national fora by ACT members. It aims to increase the impact of individual and joint work, to increase the level of coherence between the different messaging produced by different ACT structures and members as well as to ignite discussions that are conducive to more collaboration.

ACT Alliance does not shy away from tackling difficult issues. While addressing difficult issues, we aim to 'take people on a journey' and do so in a respectful, dialogical, and diaconal way. That is, ACT Alliance is committed to working in a spirit of ecumenical diakonia (serving together). Diakonia is an expression of what churches are and do. The commitment to unity and sharing includes a mission to serve in the world, participating in God's mission of healing and reconciliation, and of lifting up signs of hope.

In this sense, this advocacy framework is supposed to be a non-prescriptive tool that points out common public positions while intentionally being a tool for contextualised and some adaptable work. That is, this tool is supposed to be adjusted and translated into each specific context. This means taking into consideration any risks and nuances present at any given time while also striving towards the same goals and level of coherence. The idea is to ensure that there is a thread cutting across all our advocacy work, regardless of whether it is being delivered at the global, regional, or local level. In addition to that, we aim to retain this tool as a living document that will be responsive to new developments and challenges.

AUDIENCE

ACT Members: The Gender Justice Advocacy Framework has been designed specifically to aid ACT Alliance members in their Gender Justice advocacy. By identifying/outlining ACT Alliance's position on several key thematic areas, members can integrate these key messages in their own Gender Justice advocacy work. This will also help members understand how to contribute to the wider impact of the Alliance by using the same messages in their own context and realm of influence. The intention is to enhance ACT Alliance's coordinated global gender advocacy.

Thematic Task Groups: Apart from informing advocacy initiatives of the membership, the framework will provide reference material to support the development of briefing papers that are set to be developed by established time bound task groups. These briefing papers will become the backbone of the thematic areas of the gender justice programme. Members will then be able to draw from task groups to gain more technical knowledge on the thematic area of interest and ideally build a stronger gender programme that incorporates ACT Alliance's overall messaging.

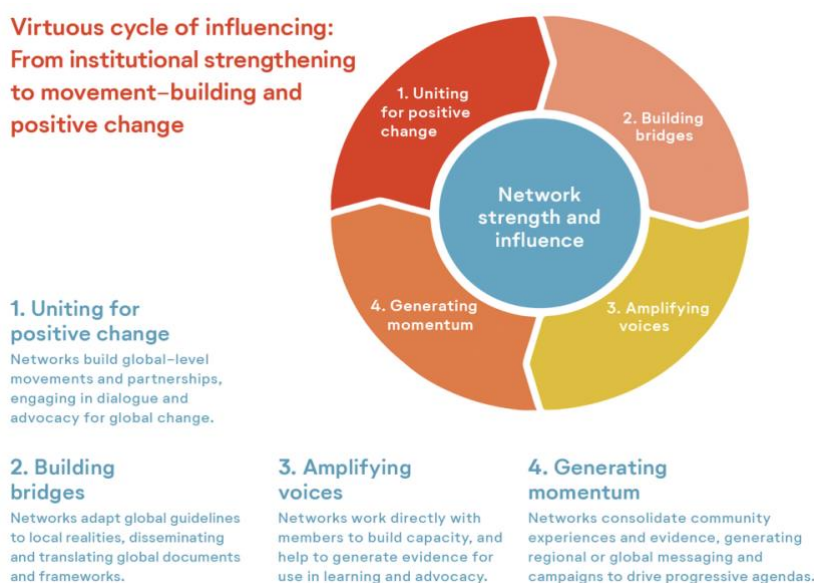
Staff: The full staff structure of the Alliance will benefit from the existence of the framework. The framework will inform advocacy messaging and communications materials as well as the design of new programmes, such as those on climate justice, migration, peace as well as humanitarian, that aim to mainstream gender justice components.

ADVOCACY SPACES

ACT Alliance contributes to positive and sustainable change in the lives of people affected by poverty and injustice through effective advocacy at local, national, regional, and global levels. This advocacy is faith- and rights-based, grounded in evidence and rooted in the experience of forums and members. ACT tries as much as possible to have coherent and clear messages that can be a force for transformative change. Members of the alliance have produced, either individually or as a collective network, a myriad of statements, briefs, papers, and reports that help clarify what is our specific take on issues that are dear to us and the communities we serve. For example, ACT Alliance has issued a [manifesto](#) (see annex) and a [pledge](#) as way to promote the [#ACT4Gender Justice Campaign](#), the springboard of the Gender Justice Programme. The Gender Justice Manifesto¹ states that ‘our values, as people of faith, call upon us to open our arms and minds and embrace our sisters and brothers whoever they might be, whatever walk of life they might come from or difficulties they had to endure.’ It also says that **it is our call and our responsibility to stand on the side of others without prejudice nor judgement as we are one in humanity.** ‘For we are tasked by God to feed, shield and love those who need us the most.’

Key Spaces:

Advocacy is an integral part of ecumenical diakonia, with faith-based and rights-based actions affirming each other (without neglecting the sometimes-inherent tensions between the two, and the diversity in the membership on advocacy issues). Therefore, ACT Alliance’s advocacy is both grounded in Christian faith and following a human rights-based approach. It expresses global solidarity with poor and marginalised people everywhere, recognising their agency and innate human dignity. ACT Alliance advocacy supports and amplifies the voice of all people and communities pursuing their rights. Supporting their efforts to hold all those with power to account for the realisation of these rights. This includes upholding the role and space for civil society to advocate freely. Therefore, our advocacy speaks to policy makers at all levels, including faith powers, private sector actors, multilateral institutions, and other critical stakeholders. We contribute to advocacy cycles or cycles of influencing, which means we do not see our participation in a particular advocacy space as ‘one off’ or disconnected from our work at other levels.

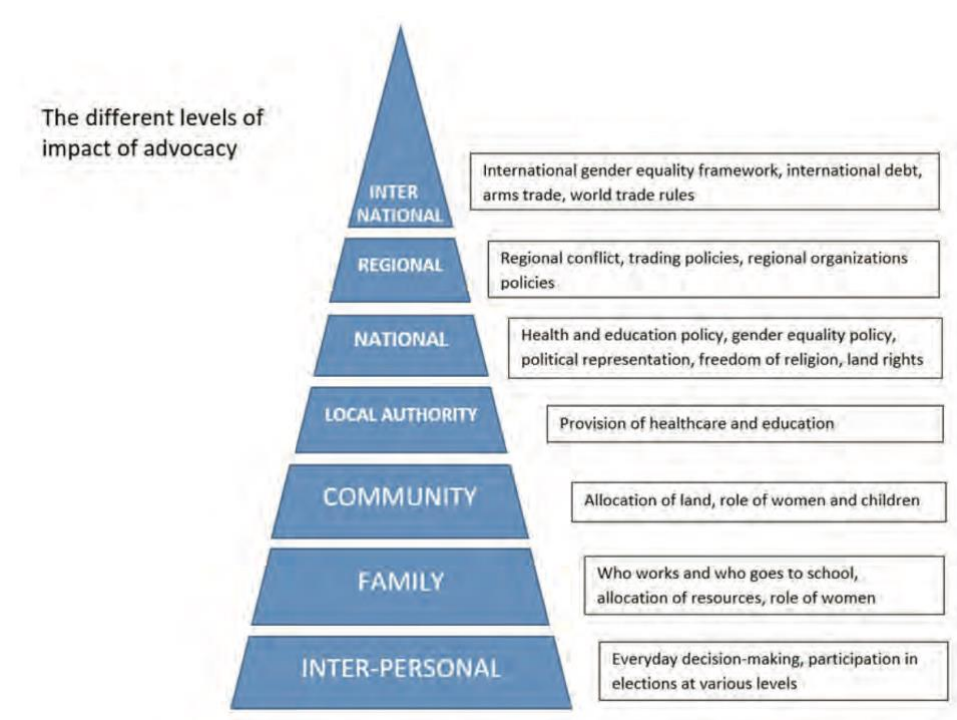


(Source: [Robert Carr Fund for Civil Society Networks](#))

¹ See more at <https://actalliance.org/gender-manifesto/>.

ACT’s advocacy is rooted in the lived experiences of our members, and the communities and partners we work for. We strive to have a bottom-up approach that is grounded in evidence and derives from the perspective of those living in the Global South.

We aim to have a localised approach to advocacy and to maximise our impact at different levels:



(Source: [Norwegian Church Aid, Advocacy Training Manual on UNSCR 1325](#))

Negotiated outcomes developed at global, regional, and national level carry significant political weight and value in terms of their impact in communities and for agencies working to advance the gender justice agenda. **“Faith is not distant or far removed from the affairs of the world. In fact, our faith must be lived and expressed in concrete terms.”**² For this reason, to the extent that it is possible, it is important for ACT and its members to keep abreast of ongoing and upcoming negotiations and events. Historically, ACT has engaged or encouraged members to engage in the following advocacy spaces:

Space	Mandate	Opportunities	Guidance	Strategies	Pointers	Level	Link to Other Levels
CSW	Reviewing the Beijing PfA	Annually contribute to written statements; oral	Generation Equality Campaign Toolkit	Theme varies every year, so it is important	Reach out to UN Women country/regional	Global	Links to national delegations who contribute

² ACT Ubumbano, Interfaith Brief on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights - “Created in Gods Image”: Southern Africa Faith Leaders Support Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights for All, at 4, available at <https://www.actubumbano.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Interfaith-Brief-on-Sexual-and-Reproductive-Health-and-Rights.pdf>.

		statements; events; outcome document negotiated in March		to adapt existing messages to these opportunities	offices		to outcome documents and host official side events
CPD	Reviewing the ICPD PoA	Annually contribute to written statements; oral statements; events; outcome document negotiated in April	UNDP guidance	Theme varies every year, so it is important to adapt existing messages to these opportunities	Reach out to UNFPA country/regional offices	Global	Links to national delegations who contribute to outcome documents and host official side events
HLPF	Tracking the implementation of the SDGs	Annual opportunity to influence ECOSOC events normally held in July	The Women's Major Group hosts monthly sessions on the SDGs and human rights	Reach out to the UN Major Groups working at the specific annual them of the HLPF and collaborate with them	Be sure to spell out how Agenda 2030 is linked to human rights agreements	Global	National VNRs feed up to global tracking
CEDAW	Monitoring CEDAW's implementation	Contribute ahead of specific CEDAW session reviewing your country of interest and/or submit individual complaints	Women's Major Group webinar on the SDGs and CEDAW and CEDAW guidance	Invite CEDAW Committee members to events discussing national level progress and challenges	Develop shadow report to your country's CEDAW review	Global	National level shadow reports feed up to global monitoring
UN-ECA	Promote economic and social development	Attend Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and/or contribute to the Beijing PfA anniversary reviews	UNECA ToR and rules of procedure	Organise a parallel event jointly with other coalitions and networks	Remember that these spaces are often linked so try to highlight experiences from	Regional	Build up to Beijing PfA global review

					other regions to foster South-South learning		
UN-ESCAP	Act as a hub for regional cooperation on sustainable development	and/or contribute to the Beijing PfA anniversary reviews	UNESCAP guidance on regional processes and dialogue	Organise a parallel event jointly with other coalitions and networks	Highlight experiences from other regions to foster South-South learning	Regional	Build up to Beijing PfA global review
UN-ECE	Promote economic integration	Attend events related to the EU GAPIII and/or contribute to the Beijing PfA anniversary reviews	UNECE ToR and rules of procedure and CONCORD analysis	Organise a parallel event jointly with other coalitions and networks	Highlight experiences from other regions to foster South-South learning	Regional	Build up to Beijing PfA global review
UN-ECLAC	Contribute to economic development and coordinate actions	Follow thematic intergovernmental events and/or contribute to the Beijing PfA anniversary reviews	ECLAC publication on gender affairs	Organise a parallel event jointly with other coalitions and networks	Highlight experiences from other regions to foster South-South learning	Regional	Build up to Beijing PfA global review
VNRs	Conduct regular country-led and country-driven inclusive reviews	Produce a CSO shadow report to base on the VNRs handbook and organise events during the VNR process and in the build-up to HLPF	VNRs handbook, Q&A and OHCHR guidance on VNRs and human rights	Consult country page to check VNRs, statements and UN webcast from the sessions at HLPF	Look at the UN country strategy in preparation for VNRs advocacy	National	Build up to SDGs global review
UPRs	Improving the human rights situation on	Influence the summary of information of prepared by	OHCHR guide and HRP UPR guide	Attend the Human Rights sessions on	Do not see this as additional works but	National	Feeds into HRC session and global reviews

	the ground	OHCHR by submitting shadow review to national State report and take part in the HRC interactive dialogue		a periodic basis to ensure a thread to your work and push for rights to be sustained	rather a continuation of your own priorities		
NAPs	Create strategies for the implementation of UNSCR 1325	Contribute to NAPs by linking peace makers and faith engagement on peace at all levels	OHCHR guidance and WILPF toolkit	Map how States prioritise different aspects of WPS and work with champion countries	Ensure the NAPs work goes beyond NAPs by promoting a culture of peace	National	Influences the WPS anniversaries and global reviews
Delegations	Coordinate contributions to events such as CPD and CSW	Government delegations should and national level UN offices are our first port of call	UN delegate preparation guide	Reach out to individual members of delegations and set up an informal meeting to build the relationship	Look out for meetings organised by national delegations in the year preceding global meetings	National	Influence the events that will be organised at global level and the outcome documents

Global:

- The UN **Commission on the Status of Women** (CSW) has been traditionally one of the main targets at the global level. CSW is global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.³ The CSW is instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women. CSW takes place annually (in March) at the UN Headquarters, New York City. It usually lasts two weeks, with the standard format being comprised of a first week focused on high-level events, side-events, and parallel events and with a second week being focused on the negotiation of the outcome document (with some additional side and parallel events). The CSW outcome document relates to progress and gaps in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing PfA), its follow up policies, as well as emerging issues that affect gender equality and the empowerment of women. This is an important way for Member States to agree on further actions to accelerate progress and promote women's enjoyment of their rights in political, economic, and social fields. Each year there is a [theme](#) for CSW and civil society has a chance

³ See more at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw#:~:text=The%20Commission%20on%20the%20Status,and%20the%20empowerment%20of%20women>.

to influence the [outcome document](#) by: presenting a [written statement](#) ahead of the annual meeting; organising a [side event](#) with Member States; hosting a [parallel event](#) through NGOCSW; and/or [influencing the negotiation](#) during CSW itself. All this needs to be planned and follow the instructions for [registration](#). It is equally important to note that during the anniversary years of the Beijing PfA (every five years), there is no negotiated outcome document.

- The UN **Commission on Population and Development** (CPD) is responsible for reviewing the implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD PoA) at national, regional, and international levels. The CPD is also responsible for tracking population changes and their effects on economic and social conditions globally. The CPD is responsible for reporting to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 5 (in particular 5.6), which relates to health and gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.⁴ Outcomes agreed at the CPD: (i) inform both UNFPA and Pop Division priorities of work including what data to collect, what analysis to run, and which reports to write; (ii) inform on gaps on both implementation, data collection and resources; (iii) identify emerging issues and key actions for governments, UN agencies and CSO's to focus on; and (iv) set of global priorities to influence regional and national priorities. The annual CPD meeting usually takes place around April in New York City. Like CSW, CPD creates opportunities for civil society engagement based on the [annual theme](#) of CPD.
- The **High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development** (HLPF) is responsible for reviewing the implementation of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (Agenda 2030). The Forum meets annually under the auspices of the [Economic and Social Council](#) for eight days (usually in the middle of the year), including a three-day ministerial segment and every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the [General Assembly](#) for two days. As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda encourages member states to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven” (paragraph 79). These national reviews are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the HLPF.⁵
- The **Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (CEDAW Committee) is a body of [independent experts](#) that monitors implementation of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW). Countries who have become party to the convention are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights of the Convention are implemented. During its sessions the Committee considers each State party report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the State party in the form of concluding observations. In accordance with the [Optional Protocol to the Convention](#), the Committee is mandated to: (i) receive [communications](#) from individuals or groups of individuals submitting claims of violations of rights protected under the Convention to the Committee; and (i) initiate [inquiries](#) into situations of grave or systematic violations of women's rights. These procedures are optional and are only available where the State concerned has accepted them. Specific CEDAW standards will be referred to throughout this document. For now, it suffices to say that many activists use CEDAW as a key instrument to hold governments accountable and argue, in fact, that this is the most effective international mechanism to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. This is because the CEDAW Committee reporting system make Governments accountable for their omissions to protect their citizens from discrimination and abuse. It is important to note that there are many intersections between the other advocacy spaces such as CSW and CPD and human rights mechanisms such as CEDAW. As a result of these links, ACT has been moving progressively towards more advocacy in this space.

⁴ See International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition (ISRRRC): Comments on the Methods of Work of the Commission on Population and Development.

⁵ See more at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>.

- There are other important global events that touch upon gender justice such as the annual meeting of the UN Climate Change [Conference of the Parties](#) (COP) and the UN Security Council annual [Open Debate](#) on **Women, Peace & Security** (WPS) that tracks the implementation of the landmark [UN Resolution 1325](#) (UNSCR 1325), which for the first time, enshrined the essential role of women in securing and maintaining peace. You can learn more about the WPS process [here](#). A chart with the UN principal organs can be found [here](#) and an advocacy training manual produced by Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) on UNSCR 1325 can be found [here](#).

Regional:

- At the **African Union** (AU) level, there are two core human rights bodies: the [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) based in Addis Ababa and the [African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) based in Arusha. The African Union Commission (AUC)'s Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) has kicked off a series of engagement on the validation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) Scorecard and Index (MPSI). The Scorecard and Index is an innovative contribution to the body of tools that seek to enhance accountability and assess the progress on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) and the implementation of the Maputo Protocol.⁶ More information on the [Maputo Protocol](#) at the SGBV section below. It is important to note that the UN has an active [Economic Commission for Africa \(ECA\)](#) which was in charge of the organisation of [regional review meetings](#) in the build-up to the Beijing PfA 25th anniversary (Beijing + 25) events. As the other ECOSOC regional bodies, UNECA is not uniquely a regional body but part of the UN system, but with regional autonomy. The regional Economic Commissions are mandated to and required to be part of most UN processes, including the SDGs and the Beijing +25 reviews.
- At the **Asia-Pacific** level, there is no region-wide inter-governmental system – such as treaties, courts, commissions, or other institutions – to protect and promote human rights. However, steps have been taken at a sub-regional level to strengthen human rights.⁷ For example, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) [Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights](#) was inaugurated in 2009 by 10 Member States parties. The establishment of the AICHR demonstrates ASEAN's commitment to pursue forward-looking strategies to strengthen the regional cooperation on human rights.⁸ The AICHR will initially focus on human rights promotion and will not receive or investigate complaints of human rights violations. It is nevertheless important to note that the UN has an active [Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific \(ESCAP\)](#) which was in charge of the organisation of [regional review meetings](#) in the build-up to the Beijing PfA 25th anniversary (Beijing + 25) events.
- At the **European Union** (EU) level, the main human rights body is the [European Court of Human Rights](#) based in Strasbourg. In 1998, the European human rights system was reformed to eliminate the European Commission of Human Rights, which previously decided the admissibility of complaints, oversaw friendly settlements, and referred some cases to the Court – in a manner similar to the current [Inter-American System](#). Now, individual victims may submit their complaints directly to the European Court of Human Rights.⁹ One of most important gender justice instruments at EU level is the [Istanbul Convention](#) which will be mentioned in the SGBV section below. It is important to note that the UN has an active [Economic Commission for Europe](#) (UNECE) which was in charge of the organisation of [regional review meetings](#) in the build-up to the Beijing PfA 25th anniversary (Beijing + 25) events.

⁶ See more at <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200623/maputo-protocol-scorecard-and-index-introduced-monitor-implementation-womens>.

⁷ See more at <https://www.asiapacificforum.net/support/international-regional-advocacy/regional-mechanisms/#:~:text=Unlike%20Europe%2C%20Africa%20and%20the,level%20to%20strengthen%20human%20rights>.

⁸ Read the Commission's terms of reference at <https://aichr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/TOR-of-AICHR.pdf>.

⁹ See more at <https://ijrcenter.org/european-court-of-human-rights/#:~:text=The%20European%20Court%20of%20Human,European%20Convention%20on%20Human%20Rights>.

- At the **Organization of American States** (OAS) level, there are two core human rights bodies: the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) (IACHR) based in Washington, DC, and [Inter-American Court of Human Rights](#) (IACtHR) based in San Jose. Both bodies can decide individual complaints concerning alleged human rights violations and may issue emergency protective measures when an individual or the subject of a complaint is in immediate risk of irreparable harm. The Commission also engages in a range of human rights monitoring and promotion activities (including through its various rapporteurs), while the Court may issue advisory opinions on issues pertaining to the interpretation of the [Inter-American](#) instruments at the request of an OAS organ or Member State.¹⁰ The most important gender justice instrument at OAS level is the [Convention of Belem do Para](#) which will be mentioned in the SGBV section below. It is important to note that the UN has an active [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean \(ECLAC\)](#) which was in charge of the organisation of [regional review meetings](#) in the build-up to the Beijing PfA 25th anniversary (Beijing + 25) events. As mentioned above, the regional Economic Commissions are mandated to and required to be part of most UN processes, including the SDGs and the Beijing +25 reviews.

National:

- Advocacy at a national level (for both new policies and the implementation of existing policy packages) is vital. National level advocacy serves a different purpose that is complementary to advocacy done at regional and global level. This is because governments have a set of responsibilities and obligations to hold their national actors to account through the enactment of new laws and policies. As well as the use of their accountability powers to implement existing laws and policies. National level advocacy may also link to regional global processes and enhance the legitimacy of advocacy efforts at these levels. There are many ways of having a bottom-up approach to global advocacy. For instance, civil society actors may coordinate with social movements, networks, and national platforms ahead of global events such as CSW and CPD. They may also reach out to **Member State Delegations** in charge of events such as CSW and CPD. CSOs can influence the language of the outcomes document by being in touch with their national delegation to the CSW. Many states, churches and/or national level institutions have delegations represented at the event. Building relations with national delegations can take time and needs to happen before and after the event. See, for example, the [US delegation for CSW 65 in 2021](#).
- The connection with Member State delegations is helpful as one plans for side events but also as one tries to influence the negotiation of the outcome documents. As stipulated in paragraph 84 of the 2030 Agenda, regular reviews by the HLPF are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and shall provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders. **Voluntary National Reviews** (VNRs) aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilise multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The VNR countries are expected to submit comprehensive written reports that will be made available in the VNR database. In addition, each VNR country will also provide main messages summarising their key findings. These main messages are also posted in the VNR database. Those interested in being involved in VNRs can see more information [here](#).
- The UN Security Council called on Member States to continue to implement resolution 1325, including through the development of **National Action Plans** (NAPs) or other national level strategies.¹¹ The creation of a WPS action plan provides an opportunity to initiate strategic actions, identify priorities and resources, and determine the responsibilities and timeframes. These discussions have previously coincided with the [Youth Peace and Security](#) (YPS) reviews. The whole process of developing a plan entails awareness-raising and capacity-building to overcome gaps and challenges to the full

¹⁰ See more at <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/mandate/basics/introduction-basic-documents.pdf>.

¹¹ See more at <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/fiveyearsonreport.pdf>.

implementation of UNSCR 1325. Civil society actors working on WPS are encouraged to reach out to influence the development and implementation of NAPs. More information on WPS NAPs can be found [here](#).

- Civil society actors may also want to take part in the country-focused mechanisms led by the UN human rights bodies such as the **Universal Periodic Reviews** (UPRs) and shadow reports produced for the **Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (CEDAW). The UPR and CEDAW processes are linked to key human rights bodies that are central to advocacy efforts linking the global to the local. They are, for instance, important in ensuring a Forum-centred approach to ACT's advocacy work at all levels. The [UPR](#) is a unique process aimed at **improving the human rights situation in the communities** of each of the 193 United Nations (UN) Member States.¹² Under this mechanism, the human rights situation of all UN Member States is reviewed every 5 years. 42 States are reviewed each year during three Working Group sessions dedicated to 14 States each. These three sessions are usually held in January/February, May/June, and October/November. Similarly, the [State-led CEDAW reports](#) indicate factors and difficulties in the specific implementation of CEDAW (see more in the SGBV section below). Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have a very important role in making the CEDAW an instrument of women's empowerment, through advocacy and monitoring their government's implementation of the treaty. CSOs can, for instance, present a [shadow report](#) to complement the periodic report submitted by Member States every four years. CEDAW shadow reports are officially recognised whereas civil society shadow reports are not, and only done when the process is closed. For this reason, it is important to do advocacy around the national processes – both generally in support of the wider civil society inclusion in the process of developing progress reports, and specifically the inclusive government bodies doing the reports and specific gender sensitivity and disaggregated data in the reports. ACT Alliance, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Act Church of Sweden (CoS), Finn Church Aid (FCA), Mission 21, Swiss Peace and the World Council of Churches host every year a [CEDAW training](#) for those interested to delve further into the issue.¹³
- There is a myriad of opportunities to engage at the national level. For example, there are other thematic areas which also operate through NAPs such as economic justice. More on information on Business and Human Rights NAPs can be found [here](#).

Key Coalitions:

- There are many coalitions, [major groups](#) and stakeholders ACT Alliance coordinates with. These are spaces where ACT operates in partnership with other influential actors to maximise impact and to connect global action to real life stories at local level. The main advocacy coalitions the ACT alliance is working with at the global level on gender justice currently are:
- The **Multi-Faith Advisory Council** (MFAC) was created in September 2018 by the UN Inter-Agency Task Force (ATF) with an aim to provide strategic advice and support to the IATF on thematic priority areas. The idea is to assist the UN system through human rights-based policy advocacy, interaction, and engagement with faith-based and faith-inspired entities, and by strengthening the UN's religious literacy. The MFAC encourages greater partnership and joint actions between UN entities and faith-based/inspired actors and serves the greater faith-based community by increasing its understanding of the UN mandate and engagement. It is an informal and voluntary entity which consists of 45 religious leaders and heads of faith-based organisations (FBOs). The composition reflects the diversity of religions, regional and national presence, and covers different thematic areas that mirror the UN's mandate. ACT Alliance acts as [co-chair of the MFAC](#). MFAC's Working Group on Gender developed, among other things, a set of guiding questions which are supposed to serve as a tool to enhance gender-

¹² See more at https://www.upr-info.org/en/upr-process/what-is-it?device=c&gclid=CjwKCAiAKJCBhAyEiwAKQBCKtvXD4eXzyWA4pikPQM6Qzhwy3k38fpVCEakbkYj02_qeK_nJrh1xoCw0YQAvD_BwE.

¹³ World Council of Churches, 2017, Strengthening advocacy for women's human rights, available at <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/strengthening-advocacy-for-womens-human-rights>.

responsive dialogue, programming and activities, and management/leadership on gender inclusiveness.¹⁴

- The **Steering Committee of the UN Office on Genocide Prevention** (UNOGP) carried out a global and regional consultation process to the now global plan on peacebuilding and gender. ACT Alliance is on the steering committee and is actively involved in the implementation of the [Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes](#). Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is also a focus.
- The **Generation Equality Forum** (GEF) —a global gathering for gender equality, convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France in partnership with civil society— set up [Action Coalitions](#) (ACs) with an aim to implement the Beijing PfA and achieve gender equality and all women’s and girls’ human rights. The action coalitions focus on six themes: (i) gender-based violence; (ii) economic justice and rights; (iii) bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights; (iv) feminist action for climate justice; (v) technology and innovation for gender equality; and (vi) feminist movements and leadership. The Action Coalitions provide monthly on how to shape the Generation Equality process. These conversations are usually guided by “curated discussions”.¹⁵
- In 2020, a [High Level Commission](#) was created to track the progress of the commitments made at the ICPD25 Summit (the one celebrating the 25th anniversary of CPD) which took place in Nairobi in November 2019. The **Nairobi High Level Commission** (NHLC) is composed of advocates, experts, and activists, including ACT Alliance.¹⁶

¹⁴ See more at <https://actalliance.org/act-news/un-multi-faith-advisory-councils-role-and-ambitions-an-interview-with-rudelmar-bueno-de-faria/>.

¹⁵ See more at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/announcer-global-leaders-of-the-generation-equality-action-coalitions-to-accelerate-gender-equality#:~:text=The%20Generation%20Equality%20Forum%2C%20accelerated,and%20girls%20human%20rights%20globally.>

¹⁶ See more at [https://www.unfpa.org/press/new-high-level-commission-will-ensure-promises-made-nairobi-summit-are-kept-covid-19-pandemic.](https://www.unfpa.org/press/new-high-level-commission-will-ensure-promises-made-nairobi-summit-are-kept-covid-19-pandemic)

FOUNDATIONAL MESSAGES

Why does ACT have a justice and human rights-based approach to its work?

The ACT Alliance Advocacy Strategy for 2020-2027 states that *“the global community can and should do more to save lives, improve the well-being of all human beings, promote peace and ensure the realisation of all human rights, as well as to preserve the integrity of God’s creation.”* It establishes that, indeed, ACT respects and defends the **rights and dignity of all**.

The Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1998, in connection with the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated: *“As Christians, we are called to share in God’s mission of justice, peace and respect for all Creation and to seek for all humanity the abundant life which God intends. Within scripture, through tradition, and from the many ways in which the spirit illumines our hearts today, we discern God’s gift of dignity for each person and their inherent right to acceptance and participation with the community. From this flows the responsibility of the churches, as the Body of Christ, to work for universal respect and implementation of human rights”*.

As Christian, faith-based, and church-related organisations, we must be clear to ourselves and our partners about the grounds on which we pursue development work and rights based-strategies in our work. Central is the way the Bible bears witness from beginning to end of God’s creating, redeeming, and sustaining activities. God creates out of nothing, delivers from bondage, defends the vulnerable, strengthens the weak, and yearns for abundant life, peace, and the integrity of creation.

Human rights have developed through complex, interacting historical processes, informed by experiences of oppression and totalitarianism, injustice, and violations of human rights. However, human rights can be seen as both rooted in ancient religious beliefs and practices and as modern political fruits of those beliefs. Throughout Christian history, there have been significant traditions of thought about what claims we make of each other. The idea that there are some freedoms that we all should have can be seen in Christian thinking in the Middle Ages and there is discussion of what ‘rights’ might be considered ‘natural’.

Our commitment to human rights is not an arbitrary cultural or ideological preference; it is rooted in religious convictions. There can be no justice where God-given human rights are violated or where duty bearers fail to discharge their responsibilities. In this vision, we value the work of caring and nurturing within our communities. Let us seek to truly learn from those who already hold the knowledge and wisdom of alternative systems. Let us understand that one knowledge alone will never be complete. Only by truly engaging with one another from a place of humility and vulnerability, with a willingness to defamiliarise ourselves with current norms that we might see the radical shift towards a justice-centred world. This is necessary for true gender equality, as well as human and planetary flourishing.

A paper published by ACT EU (former APRODEV) in 2013, affirms that, to overcome discrimination and the lack of entitlement facing poor women and men, and girls and boys, a rights-based approach to development is an important tool for organisations to address some of the root-causes of poverty and exclusion. A rights-based approach strengthens and complements other strategies in North-South development cooperation, such as strengthening capacities of local partners and enhancing their capabilities to use productive resources or other income earning opportunities. It stimulates analysis and reflection on the causes of entitlement failure and allows for a more precise description of roles, obligations, and responsibilities of the different actors in the development process. It is a way of reducing the accountability gap that in many countries works against the poor. Indeed, a paper produced by UNFPA and Act Church of Sweden (CoS) in 2016 states that to violate the dignity of a human being is thus equivalent to violating the Divine. Since human rights are part of the gift of being human, they are an indivisible part of the essence of humanness.

TOP LINE MESSAGES

- As religious actors and networks of faith-based organisations, we are called to work together in the midst of global changes, rising nationalism, and political, cultural, and religious conflict for gender equality and justice. Throughout history, many faith actors have been working for global gender equality and empowerment, human rights-based development, and in times of emergency, humanitarian response (CSW 64 Statement).
- As faith actors, our scriptures inspire us to stand up for justice and defend human rights. We work to address the needs not only of the body but also the mind and spirit, honouring the fullness of humanity. We acknowledge that religious institutions, customs, and practices have created, reinforced, and been shaped by unjust patriarchal structures and recognise the disservice that has been to humankind throughout history. The role of religious leaders in combating systems of oppression has never been more important (CSW 64 Statement).
- ACT Alliance has a ‘rights-based approach’ to our work and we believe that work to strengthen human rights is work to overcome poverty. We want to see human rights of all people upheld, and we recognise that there is still much work to do in achieving this. Indeed, we respect and defend the rights and dignity of all (Putting God to Rights).
- We believe in the transformative power of justice-oriented approaches and call on the implementation of all binding and non-binding agreements on gender equality, which is critical in ensuring that “No One is Left Behind” (CSW 65 joint statement E/CN.6/2021/NGO/117).
- Stigma and discrimination against fellow human beings goes against the basic tenets of our faith. As people of faith, we affirm the worth, value and dignity of all human beings. We refuse to associate with those who attack, demean, and ostracise others in the name of our faith. We uphold the conviction that all human beings must be respected and that their dignity should not be compromised.
- All religious traditions and spiritualities are inherently contextual and hold tensions within them. All cultures and traditions are diverse, inclusive, and evolving. But the core message is that human beings have inherent dignity (2021 Intersessional Briefing).
- All our religious traditions thus call on us to oppose the marginalisation of any human being. ‘Do no harm’ is a core life-affirming principle of all religious traditions (2021 Intersessional Briefing).
- The principles of equality and non-discrimination mandate particular attention to the groups most affected by rights violations and breaches, including indigenous people, women, youth, and minority groups. Development strategies must address the interests and needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable men and women in societies. In our support we need to strengthen their access to their rights, in particular their claims for an equal voice in the distribution of resources, to real access and control of these resources, and to non-discrimination within institutions, legislation, policy, and administrative practice (Rights-Based Development from a Faith-Based Perspective).
- Process is as important as outcome. The political as well as the economic participation of impoverished and marginalised men and women is at the heart of rights-based strategies. No change in unequal, unjust power structures is possible without their active engagement and participation. It is local communities themselves who need to set the agenda, including influencing the choice of which rights should be prioritised when different rights come into conflict and priorities need to be

set. Development work must therefore work to ensure the participation of impoverished and discriminated women and men themselves in the design, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives that impact their lives (Rights-Based Development from a Faith-Based Perspective).

- No use of political power is legitimate unless exercised in conformity with international human rights standards for protecting human dignity. Strengthening the accountability of duty-bearers to targeted rights-holders, through for example advocacy or capacity-building, becomes therefore a major focus in our endeavours (Rights-Based Development from a Faith-Based Perspective).

Recommendations that are Common to all themes

We call on all members of the ACT Alliance, civil society actors, governments, and multilateral stakeholders to:

1. Take urgent and accelerated action to fully implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and all other existing agreements and commitments for gender equality and the protection of women's rights, with no regression or exception.
2. To fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action and all commitments, including non-binding agreements for gender equality.
3. Work to transform unequal gender power relations, and the structures, norms and values that underpin them, to achieve equal representation and full participation in programmes, structures, and decision-making, achieving the 2030 Agenda.
4. Support robust adherence to the international human rights law system to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to tackle the challenges faced by women and girls, in all their diversity, with an acknowledgement of the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women can experience.
5. Promote gender equality, justice and human rights in religious institutions and faith communities. Champion evidence-based policies to counteract myths, stigma, and gender stereotypes.
6. Make strategic alliances with religious actors and challenge the validity of religious arguments against gender equality put forward at the global arena.
7. Resource intersectional approaches to development that recognise the diversity of life and protects and advances women's and girls' equal rights to safety; a healthy environment; economic advancement; freedom from exploitation, violence, and discrimination; education and health; and includes the voices and traditional knowledge of indigenous women.

STRATEGIC THEMES

The primary objective of the ACT Alliance Gender Justice Programme is to enable the coalition to become a leading faith-based alliance speaking out for gender justice. Through the programme, ACT is seeking to develop structures and processes that will deliver a strong record of results and effective programming that respond to intersecting inequalities.

ACT Alliance and its members' strategic aim is to contribute to changed policy, practice, narratives, and attitudes on gender justice in faith communities, by positively affecting the commitment of churches and other faith-based organisations within the Alliance, as well as their programming, and their advocacy to promote and realise gender justice, through focus on four programmatic outcomes.

With the support of the Government of Sweden, through Sida, ACT's Gender Justice Programme has identified priority thematic areas where we can work jointly as an alliance to deliver the impact that is foreseen in the ACT Alliance Global Strategy for 2019-2026 and the ACT Alliance Advocacy Strategy for 2020-2027.

This Gender Justice Advocacy Framework aims to contribute to the above-mentioned goal by providing strategic advocacy positions and messaging on the thematic areas prioritised by the Gender Justice Programme: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV); Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR); Family Law; Migration & Displacement; Economic Justice; Transformative Masculinities.

There was a need to add at least a focus to thematic reflections on other issues that have been prioritised by the Alliance or issues that are particularly challenging for faith-based actors. As the Alliance has a programme on Climate Justice, we have decided to add this theme to this framework. There will be a task group working on the faith perspectives for all these thematic areas. The idea is to build a diaconal theology which will provide the basis for a discussion of advocacy strategies that depart from a faith perspective.

The framework is content-focused, i.e. it helps to harmonise common messages and identifies the supporting theology. It provides a few examples of influencing tactics that members could use to promote the messages present in this framework. However, these examples are only indicative of the possibilities available to members. We sign post some useful process-oriented that members could use to either organise a training of trainers or as a consultation tool to craft specific policy outputs and/or advocacy activities.¹⁷ In this sense, one could say that this is a consultation tool that sets out the basic ACT messaging on gender justice and points out additional resources to those interested in delving deeper into each specific theme and/or advocacy strategy.

¹⁷ See, for instance, YUWA, 2020, Young Advocates Guide on Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights: Advocacy and Intersectionality, available at www.yuwa.org.np. See also: Oxfam, 2020, Influencing for Impact Guide: How to Deliver Effective Influencing Strategies available at <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/>.

1. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Sexual and Gender based Violence (SGBV) is an **overall term for any harmful act (including threats of violence and coercion) that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed gender differences, like power inequalities.**¹⁸ SGBV can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual in nature, and can take the form of a denial of resources or access to services.¹⁹ Acts of SGBV violate a number of universal human rights and [undermine efforts towards the achievement of all SDGs](#), in particular SDG Target 5.2 on the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.



Sexual and Gender-based violence

SGBV includes but is not limited to: physical, sexual, psychological, verbal and emotional violence occurring in the family, within the general community or in institutions, including domestic abuse, rape, incest and child sexual abuse; sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in the public sphere; commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, pornography and trafficking; dowry-related violence; female genital mutilation; forced and child marriages; 'honour crimes'.²⁰ Other acts of violence against women include violation of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict, in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy.²¹ SGBV is often a sign of wider crisis. This is because it is the result of unequal power dynamics and deeply entrenched intersecting inequalities. For example, women with disabilities are at a higher risk of SGBV due to the different levels of discrimination they are exposed to.²²

The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, during the launch of the [policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on Women](#), highlighted that sexual and gender-based violence is an invisible pandemic that has been worsened by COVID-19.²³ As Guterres noted, **"for many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest – in their own homes"** (2020). This is because, in many countries, there is a culture of impunity for those who carry out this kind of violence.²⁴ 'It is often seen as normal, acceptable, and even Christian churches can often hide, tolerate, perpetuate and even practise violence against women.'²⁵

ACT Alliance recognised that SGBV is the result of structural injustices and unequal power dynamics. ACT acknowledges that religious institutions, customs, and practices at times have contributed to creating and reinforcing unjust and patriarchal systems and structures. We encourage all faith-based actors (FBAs) to 'challenge socially constructed norms and tackle the root causes of gender inequality and its results, such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)'.²⁶ The ACT Alliance Gender Policy affirms that the "alliance holds a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of all people it works with. GBV including SGBV, often occurs in acute emergencies and affects women, boys and girls particularly including women, boys and girls with disabilities."²⁷

¹⁸ ACT Alliance, 2017. Gender Justice Policy, p. 4, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ACT-Alliance-Gender-Justice-Policy-2017-EN.pdf>.

¹⁹ Lutheran World Federation, 2002, Churches say "No" to Violence against Women: Action Plan for the Churches, available at <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-churches-say-no-violence-against-women-action-plan-churches>.

²⁰ Loving One Another, p. 7.

²¹ Lifted from the Strategic Objective D of the Beijing Platform for Action. See more at <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm>.

²² See, for instance, Disability and Gender-Based Violence: ADD International's Approach, available at [https://add.org.uk/sites/default/files/Gender Based Violence Learning Paper.pdf](https://add.org.uk/sites/default/files/Gender%20Based%20Violence%20Learning%20Paper.pdf).

²³ See more at <https://news.un.org/>.

²⁴ Christian Aid, Loving one another: A biblical discussion toolkit on gender-based violence, available at <https://www.christianaid.org.uk>.

²⁵ Ibid. p.13.

²⁶ Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Statement Submitted by ACT Alliance et al., E/CN.6/2021/NGO/117, available at <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2021/NGO/117>.

²⁷ ACT Alliance, 2017. Gender Justice Policy, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ACT-Alliance-Gender-Justice-Policy-2017-EN.pdf>.

(i) Human rights agreements and instruments

The right to live free from violence is key to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goal 5 which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030. SDG target 5.2 sets its horizon on eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation. This commitment is also enshrined in some human rights instruments and agreements such as the following:

- The right to life, gender equality, prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex, protection of physical integrity, the right to health - to mention a few of the human rights impacted by gender-based violence - are safeguarded in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**²⁸ (UDHR - art. 1 right to equality and art. 3 right to life and security of person) and the **International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights**²⁹ (ICCPR - art. 6 right to life) and the **International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights**³⁰ (ICESCR - preamble on inherent dignity and art. 12 highest attainable standard of physical and mental health).
- Art. 1 of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women** (CEDAW) determines that 'the term "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.'³¹
- **General recommendation No. 19** on violence against women, adopted by the CEDAW Committee (the UN committee that oversees the implementation of the convention), states that discrimination against women –as defined in article 1 of the Convention - includes gender-based violence, that is, 'violence which is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately', and, as such, is a violation of their human rights.³² It is however important to point out that, normally, even though recommendations issued by human rights bodies have authoritative character, they are not legally-binding like covenants, conventions and treaties.
- **General recommendation No. 35** on gender-based violence, adopted by the CEDAW Committee, affirms that 'the opinio juris and State practice suggest that *the prohibition of gender-based violence against women has evolved into a principle of customary international law.*' This is important because it means that General recommendation 19 is now legally-binding over all States, including those that have not ratified the CEDAW.³³
- The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** identified violence against women as one of the critical areas of concern.
- The landmark **UN Security Council Resolution 1325** (UNSCR 1325) recognises the differential impact of conflict and war on women and girls' lives. It calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.
- The International Labour Organisation (**ILO**) **Convention 190**³⁴ creates binding protecting workers against violence and harassment in the world of work.
- The **Istanbul Convention** is a Council of Europe instrument preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It aims at zero tolerance for such violence in Europe.³⁵

²⁸ See at <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

²⁹ See at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>.

³⁰ See at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>.

³¹ 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), available at <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

³² CEDAW Committee, 1992, General recommendation No. 19: Violence against women, available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/INT_CEDAW_GEC_3731_E.pdf.

³³ CEDAW Committee, 2017, General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, CEDAW/C/GC/25, available at

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CEDAW_C_GC_35_8267_E.pdf.

³⁴ See more at https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190.

³⁵ See more at <https://rm.coe.int/168059aa28>.

- The **Maputo Protocol**³⁶ is an intricate part of the African Charter to Human and People’s Rights. It particularly focuses on the rights of women in Africa. Art. III. 4 establishes that ‘State Parties shall adopt and implement appropriate measures to ensure the protection of every woman’s right to respect for her dignity and protection of women from all forms of violence, particularly sexual and verbal violence.’
- The **Convention of Belém do Pará**³⁷ is an Inter-American Instrument on the prevention, punishment, and eradication of violence against women. Art 1 determines that ‘violence against women shall be understood as any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere’.

(ii) Key messages

Helpful data & statistics:

According to [UN Women](#), globally, 35 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, or sexual violence by a non-partner.³⁸ This figure does not include sexual harassment. In fact, some national studies show that the number can be as high as 70 percent of women. Less than 40 per cent of the women who experience violence seek help of any sort. As a result, many women never find a way out of violence or see justice being done. For example, 137 women are killed by a member of their family every day.

These figures have worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cases of SGBV have risen dramatically as people have been quarantined, often with their abusers.³⁹ This is not a new trend. For example, an [interfaith brief](#) prepared by ACT Ubumbano and others on gender-based violence, acknowledged the high incidence of gender-based violence in Southern Africa where 1 in 3 women has reportedly been affected by some form of violence in her lifetime.⁴⁰ The lifetime experience of gender-based violence among women ranges from 24% in Mauritius to 86% in Lesotho.

Conflicts and situations of instability exacerbate pre-existing patterns of discrimination against women and girls, exposing them to heightened risks of violations of their human rights.⁴¹ Conflict can result in higher levels of violence against women and girls, including arbitrary killings, torture, sexual violence and forced marriage. Women and girls are primarily and increasingly targeted using sexual violence, including as a tactic of war. While women and girls are in general more predominantly subject of sexual violence, men and boys have also been victims of sexual violence, especially in contexts of detention.

Faith actors are fundamental to fostering a survivor led approach to SGBV. For example, the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence (ICGBV), which is composed by secular and faith-based actors, implemented a GBV lifecycle programming in Lebanon that had better results than usual GBV programmes.⁴² At the beginning of the programme cycle, frontline aid workers and outreach volunteers promote awareness within the community of GBV prevention and response. The aim is to build trust with community leaders while also striving to access hard to reach groups. Faith-based actors can, of course, be good allies when reaching out to community leaders as, oftentimes, they are leaders themselves. Non-focused psychosocial support, which may include recreational activities, peer support groups, livelihoods and income skills building and other activities, provide a broad space

³⁶ See more at https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter_on_rights_of_women_in_africa.pdf.

³⁷ 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, ‘Convention of Belem do Para’, available at <https://www.oas.org/en/CIM/docs/Belem-do-Para%5BEN%5D.pdf>.

³⁸ See more at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

³⁹ ACT Alliance, 2020, Briefing Paper: Gender and Faith Perspectives on COVID-19, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/briefingpaper-gender.pdf>.

⁴⁰ ACT Alliance et al., Interfaith Brief on Gender-Based Violence, available <https://www.actubumbano.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Interfaith-Brief-on-Gender-Based-Violence.pdf>.

⁴¹ See more at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/PeaceAndSecurity.aspx>.

⁴² The Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence (ICGBV), 2019. Responding and Empowering: GBV Services in Lebanon in response to the Syrian Crisis, at 6, available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ICGBV-Report-CSW-63-In-violence-we-forget-who-we-were-Final.pdf>.

for engagement with most women and girls in the community. The ICGBV has found that more than 30% of survivors seek more specific help after more than one month of ongoing participation in psychosocial activities.⁴³

Faith communities can be a safe space for women in situations of domestic violence. Pastors and faith leaders can break the silence and speak out using their spaces, in sermons, bible studies, or organising special moments and liturgies engaging in campaigns, etc. It implies a careful and pastoral listening attitude, enabling the survivors of violence express in their words their pain and suffering. Biblical interpretations must provide accompaniment and support to women in their decisions and in their process of being agents of their own life. **The Bible cannot be used as a tool for judgement and guilt, but it is a resource in promoting life, dignity, and justice.**

TOP LINE MESSAGES

- SGBV is a violation of human rights, and therefore a sin against all humanity (Loving One Another).
- We can no longer be silent as we are called to uphold human dignity for all creation (Inter-Faith Brief on Gender-Based Violence).
- Faith communities can be safe havens for those who have suffered violence, but if these communities do nothing, they may be part of the problem themselves (Loving One Another).
- We, as faith leaders and people of hope, commit to addressing gender-based violence effectively. We believe in the sanctity of life and that the human body is sacred. Therefore, it should be protected and not harmed. Our voice as the faith community is critical to effective and holistic responses to gender-based violence. Silence and 'cautious' responses to issues of gender-based violence are no longer an option. It is our duty to invest in our vision of a transformed, productive, and vibrant life, free of gender-based violence, by using all platforms at our disposal to speak and encourage action against this scourge. As the custodians of our sacred texts, we commit to deepening our examination of religious texts and teachings and to explore new, liberative interpretations that will promote the health and well-being of all, including those affected by gender-based violence (Interfaith Brief on GBV).

Possible recommendations:

During a global level advocacy meeting, ACT members might want to recommend the following to Member States:⁴⁴

1. To ratify and fully implement international and regional conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Maputo Protocol, and the Istanbul Convention, to ensure that women and girls have equal rights and protection.
2. To enact and implement domestic laws and robust mechanisms that ensure women's agency and power to decide over their own lives, and their full participation in public life and leadership.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Recommendations present in the statement submitted to CSW 65 on behalf of the Faith in Beijing Collective which encompasses many faith-based actors including ACT Alliance. Find it at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw65-2021/official-documents>.

3. To work with religious actors as strategic partners, in both preventative and responsive measures, to address gender inequalities and harmful social norms.
4. To provide long-term sustainable funding for the provision of services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and for initiatives that address violence against women and girls. This includes, but is not limited to, health services, legal advice, counselling, and support.
5. To provide long-term sustainable funding to women-led and women's rights organisations, including in emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. To work towards achieving gender parity in public decision-making spaces especially in political leadership.

(iii) Faith Perspectives

The Lutheran World Federation document, [Churches say "No" to Violence against Women](#), has a powerful statement for faith actors and communities, calling their responsibility to address and to name violence against women as sin:

"As a faith community, the church begins this task with affirmation of the image of God in women and men and their co-responsibility and co-privilege as stewards of all creation. It looks at Jesus and his solidarity with women as a model for all to emulate. It sees the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on women, men and children as a sign and gift from God for mutuality and equality. This is received with faith in and through baptism. Our justification by grace through faith proclaims that no one is to be excluded or downgraded because of patriarchy and hierarchy. Therefore, the church looks at violence against women as a sin against life, which should be named and condemned, as it disregards the image of God in the person affected, be it woman, man, girl or boy."⁴⁵

As an action plan for churches this is a very useful resource to address violence against women from a theological perspective, rooting it in biblical interpretations as well as for positive action to be taken by churches and communities. Efforts and accompaniment with the abusers often bring them back into their own humanity and links to structural issues that also affect them such as toxic masculinities and the need to promote transformative approaches.

Carefully communicated theology can be a means of promoting real change. Bible stories portraying violence against women need to be interpreted carefully to avoid reading these stories as if condoning such actions today.⁴⁶ Moreover, when SGBV cases have been identified, it is possible to restore dignity to the lives of these survivors 'through very simple and humanising acts of welcoming and care, following the example of the Samaritan, who was the neighbour to the one who was injured and was in danger of death by showing him mercy'.⁴⁷

May we be capable of noticing those in situations of violence, who are close to us, and may we be close enough to them that we feel sadness in our hearts (which is the meaning of the word 'mercy' – from the Latin word 'misericord' which means miserable heart) by the situation of violence faced by so many women, who even in silence, ask for help.

The deep work of justice and reconciliation in which we are invited to participate is God's work. We are called to yield ourselves to whole-hearted, intelligent, and costly participation in this work, but without anxiety or frenzy. We are to be prophetic but not reactive, our fierce love growing in the soil of prayer, listening, and discernment. Our faith teaches us that we become agents of authentic new life insofar as we entrust our own lives and work to God's larger truth, confident even in the midst of suffering and chaos that love is indeed stronger than death and that in Christ all things are already being made new.⁴⁸ **Through collaboration, the**

⁴⁵ LWF, 2002. Churches say "No" to Violence against women. Action plan for churches, available at <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Churches%20Say%20No%20to%20Violence%20against%20Women.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Loving One Another, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Loving One Another, p.16.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 26.

sharing of resources and having courageous conversations, we can begin to dare to imagine a new world where there is no space for gender-based violence and every human being is able to flourish.⁴⁹

Some say that Jesus was one of the first human rights defenders ever to set feet on this planet.⁵⁰ The Sermon on the Mount serves as one of the best blueprints. For instance, it calls us to be the light of the world and to stand against darkness. It says:

'You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven' (Matthew 5:14).

(iv) Influencing tactics

There is a myriad of tactics that may be adopted to influence the reduction of SGBV. Many have been systematised by process-oriented advocacy resources such as those available in [Oxfam's campaign library](#) with guidelines and toolkits. Below you will find some useful examples based on ACT's work:



Organise an Event

If you would like to reach out to a particular audience, it might be useful to organise an event. Advocacy events can be online or in-person. They can be timed according to a particular influencing opportunity (such as CSW parallel events), or they can be held to gather experts to discuss opportunities, challenges, and strategies (such as the ACT Alliance 'Conversatorio' on GBV prevention).

To host a successful advocacy event you must:

- Invite engaging speakers and set up a pre-event briefing with them
- Design a flyer or some sort of summary to easily explain that the event is about
- Open the registration for participants well in advance
- Promote it on social media and through your own networks

⁴⁹ ACT Alliance et al., Interfaith Brief on Gender-Based Violence, available <https://www.actubumbano.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Interfaith-Brief-on-Gender-Based-Violence.pdf>.

⁵⁰ For example, this issued was present during a panel discussion related to a film screening organised by Al Liqa Centre, Christ at The Checkpoint, Kairos Palestine, The Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF), Sabeel, and East- Jerusalem YMCA and the YWCA of Palestine and promoted by the World Council of Churches on 6 February 2021. The full session is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64 ihtzLbFE>.

Develop a 16 Days Campaign⁵¹

Simple and straightforward campaigns may be very effective in raising awareness to the need to act against SGBV. They normally mobilise regular people to keep the momentum up.

THURSDAYS IN BLACK: RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

The campaign is simple but profound. Wear Black on Thursdays. Wear a pin to declare you are part of the global movement resisting attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence. Show your respect for women who are resilient in the face of injustice and violence. Encourage others to join you. Often black has been used with negative racial connotations. In this campaign Black is used as a colour of resistance and resilience.¹⁰



Engage with the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women

The [UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences](#) reports to the Human Rights Council and has a mandate⁵² to seek and receive information on violence against women, its causes and consequences from Governments, treaty bodies, specialised agencies, other special rapporteurs responsible for various human rights questions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, including women's organisations. The Special Rapporteur may:

- Recommend measures, ways and means at the local, national, regional, and international levels to eliminate all forms of violence against women and its causes, and to remedy its consequences.
- Work closely with all special procedures and other human rights mechanisms of the Human Rights Council and with the treaty bodies, considering the request of the Council that they regularly and systematically integrate the human rights of women and a gender perspective into their work, and cooperate closely with the Commission on the Status of Women in the discharge of its functions.
- Continue to adopt a comprehensive and universal approach to the elimination of violence against women, its causes, and consequences, including causes of violence against women relating to the civil, cultural, economic, political, and social spheres.

Interaction usually takes place through calls for input, which are posted on the [OHCHR website](#).

Things to Consider

Political barriers impact the delivery and success of gender justice projects and advocacy activities. The most successful projects and strategies are based on robust [intersectional gender analysis](#). Gender analysis is a tool for identifying and documenting differences in power, roles, resources, norms, needs and interests of women,

⁵¹ 16 Days of Activism is an international initiative led by UN Women and UNFPA. It starts every year on the 25th of November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and ends on the 10th of December, Human Rights Day. See more at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism>.

⁵² See more at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/Mandate.aspx>.

men, girls and boys in a community or group. It helps us to understand the societies we live in and to design strategies to tackle blockages. Diakonia developed a [resource on the development of gender sensitive power analysis](#). Some other ACT members and partners use other approaches such as an intersectional [political economy analysis](#) or the [Gender, Inclusion, Power and Politics analysis \(GIPP\)](#). All these approaches can be useful to those interested in developing a robust understanding of a particular context and crafting localised strategies that promote gender equality.

Please note that political advocacy is deeply connected to the work on social norms. This means that faith-based actors are just as much legitimate targets as stakeholders operating in UN spaces or national level policy makers. In fact, oftentimes this is where ACT Alliance can be most effective. For example, ACT Alliance can be fundamental in creating safe spaces at community-level that foster respectful discussions and explore interfaith nuances and teachings based on concrete examples that enable the shift in social norms and attitudes. Dialogical and diaconal approaches can be key to unlocking difficult and controversial issues. For instance, the discussions enriched through '[conversatorios](#)'⁵³ are important as they create safe spaces while also challenging patriarchal social norms.

⁵³ See, for instance, ACT Alliance, 2020. The Other Pandemic: ACT Alliance 16 days of activism social media toolkit, at p. 3, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-media-toolkit.pdf>. See also 'Qué es un conversatorio', available at https://www.academia.edu/21956099/Qu%C3%A9_es_un_conversatorio?email_work_card=reading-history.

2. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

SDG 3 urges all Member States to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. For example, SDG target 3.1 aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030. SDG target 3.7 aims to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes by 2030.



Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

SDG 5 on gender equality is also intrinsically related to SDG 3 (in particular 5.6), which relates to health and gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as well as international human rights instruments (listed below) that determined these rights are inalienable. Despite these commitments, progress on SRHR is still slow.

[ACT Alliance's 2018 public General Assembly statement on gender justice](#) affirmed that we must all 'engage in a continuous dialogue, based on love, trust transparency [...] to strive towards a change in societal norms, harmful attitudes about gender roles, including masculinities, reproductive choices, human sexuality, child marriage, and stigmatisation of HIV and AIDS [...] for mutual learning and a better realisation of gender justice and sexual reproductive health rights.'⁵⁴

Moreover, the ACT Global Strategy emphasises ACT as a faith motivated and rights-based alliance, which lives its faith and engages in global political processes, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the agenda of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. The ACT Gender Policy approved by the Governing Board in 2017, states as one of its principle to "ensure access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for all individuals, so that they can make their own informed decisions concerning their sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence."⁵⁵ The ACT Alliance Advocacy Strategy for 2020-2027 establishes that we respect and defend the **rights and dignity of all**.

Similarly, ACT Ubumbano produced a briefing paper, representing reflections by theologians from diverse communities of faith, which highlights that we, 'as members of the faith community, believe that we cannot stand by and watch when our people are without information on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)'.⁵⁶ That '[w]e have a collective duty as the faith community to use our leadership influence to educate and advocate for greater access to age- and context-appropriate SRHR information and services.'⁵⁷ We must provide space for internal analysis and self-empowering learning processes that are fundamental for local ownership and for the ability to devise and implement effective rights-based strategies at the local and national levels.⁵⁸

(i) Human rights agreements and instruments

Lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, maternal health and access

⁵⁴ ACT Alliance, 2018. ACT Alliance public statement on gender justice, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ACT-Alliance-public-statement-on-Gender-Justice-EN.pdf>.

⁵⁵ <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ACT-Alliance-Gender-Justice-Policy-2017-EN.pdf>

⁵⁶ ACT Ubumbano, Interfaith Brief on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights - "Created in Gods Image": Southern Africa Faith Leaders Support Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights for All, at 1, available at <https://www.actubumbano.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Interfaith-Brief-on-Sexual-and-Reproductive-Health-and-Rights.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

to services for youth, means that women and girls are dying.⁵⁹ Everyone should have the ability to decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence.⁶⁰ Churches and faith communities deliver family planning, youth services and other sexual and reproductive health services. They also help to challenge patriarchal attitudes and practices by promoting gender equality at all levels of society, engaging men and boys in their activities and promoting transformative masculinities.

Those who are working on SRHR, either from a programming or an advocacy perspective, should be guided by the following instruments:

- Art 12 of ICESCR recognises “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the **highest attainable standard of physical and mental health**”
- In 2000, the Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) issued the General Comment 14 to article 12 ICESCR. It explains and expands in detail the scope and content of the right to the highest attainable standard of health. General Comment 14 emphasises that ensuring reproductive health care is a core obligation of the human right to health and reproductive health services therefore must be provided through primary health care systems.
- In 2002, The Human Rights Council appointed a Special Rapporteur on the right to health, as an independent expert to examine, report and make recommendations on specific issues or on the health situation in specific countries. Special Rapporteurs normally serve for a set period and produce outputs that help to further develop the UN system’s understanding of a particular human right.
- The **International Conference on Population and Development** (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 is a watershed moment for SRHR. It led to the creation of a Programme of Action (Cairo PoA or ICPD PoA) which moved away from a prior focus on population control towards a comprehensive approach that prioritised a rights-based approach to protect sexual and reproductive health. Although the Cairo PoA is not a legally-binding instrument, it has great authoritative value.
- The ICPD PoA makes a strong link between the ‘rights’ and ‘development’ paradigms including health, education, gender equality, population dynamics, urbanisation, migration and technology research and development agendas. The ICPD agenda also underscores governments’ responsibilities in ensuring strong infrastructure and resourcing to support the administration of censuses, data collection and analyses, which are essential for development planning and will play a key role in monitoring the achievement of the SDGs.⁶¹
- The Cairo PoA, para. 7.2, affirms that: “**reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being** and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people can have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant.”
- The 4th World Conference on Women that took place in Beijing in 1995 reinforced the Cairo PoA. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing PfA) reaffirmed that the human rights of women throughout the life cycle are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.
- There are several courses, guidelines and toolkits that provide in-depth information on SRHR standards and instruments.

(ii) Key messages

⁵⁹ Commission on Population and Development, 2019. Statement submitted by ACT Alliance, E/CN.9/2020/NGO/14, available at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/445/08/PDF/N1944508.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ See International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition (ISRR): Comments on the Methods of Work of the Commission on Population and Development.

Helpful data & statistics:

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO),⁶² every day in 2017, approximately 810 women died from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Between 2000 and 2017, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR, number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births) dropped by about 38% worldwide. 94% of all maternal deaths occur in low and lower middle-income countries. Young adolescents (ages 10-14) face a higher risk of complications and death because of pregnancy than other women. Most of these complications develop during pregnancy and most are preventable or treatable. Other complications may exist before pregnancy but are worsened during pregnancy, especially if not managed as part of woman's healthcare.

The Southern Africa region accounts for 10% to 13% of maternal mortality, 95% of teenage pregnancies worldwide and an HIV burden that estimates one in five adults aged between 15 and 49 to be HIV positive.⁶³ It is estimated that 15 of the 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriages in the world are in Africa.⁶⁴ In sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that 39% of girls are married before their 18th birthday, while 13% are married by their 15th birthday.⁶⁵ Child brides are most likely to be found in rural areas, among the poorest and most illiterate segments of the population.⁶⁶

Faith actors can be instrumental in changing these statistics. For example, the national prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Ethiopia among women age 15-49 is 65% and 16% among girls 0-14.1 FGM is mainly practiced due to religious and cultural justifications such as keeping the girl's virginity, a rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood, showing that a girl belongs to a certain tribe (identity), marriage ability etc.⁶⁷ Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) Ethiopia provided technical support for institutionalisation of the work to end FGM within the FBOs existing structures to ensure sustainability and ownership. Accordingly, 68 theology colleges and Bible schools have integrated FGM in their curriculums. Anti-FGM messages are disseminated through regular sermons, women groups, Sunday school and youth teachings, faith media, faith owned health facilities and schools. This, we believe, is key in changing social norms and progressing SRHR.⁶⁸

⁶² See more at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ United Nations Children's Fund, Ending Child Marriage: Progress and prospects, UNICEF, New York, 2014, available at https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child_Marriage_Report_7_17_LR..pdf.

⁶⁵ UNICEF 'The state of the world's children 2015: Reimagine the future', available at data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/sowc_2015_Summary_and_Tables_210.pdf.

⁶⁶ UNICEF, Child Marriage Brochure, available at https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/UNICEF-Child-Marriage-Brochure-High-Single_246.pdf.

⁶⁷ Norwegian Church Aid, 2019. Engaging Faith Actors on Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Best Practices from the NCA Global GBV Programme 2016-2019, available at <https://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/globalassets/lanserte-rapporter/2018/2018-engaging-faith-actors-on-gender-based-violence.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

TOP LINE MESSAGES

- Strategic alliances with religious actors and networks of faith-based organisations are vital to successfully counter resistance against a comprehensive and people-centred approach to SRHR. Religious actors based within their communities have a strong understanding of the local challenges and are well-positioned to develop holistic solutions to the barriers faced. Faith-based organisations and religious actors also have vast reach, with 84 per cent of the world's population identifying as a member of a religious group, and often existing in communities where even governments have difficulty in ensuring an institutional presence. For example, Side by Side is a faith movement for gender justice that brings together religious and traditional leaders to strengthen strategic partnerships for gender justice in national, regional, and international spaces (adapted from the CSW 64 Statement).
- We believe that in order to guarantee comprehensively and effectively the enjoyment of human rights, we must accelerate the promises enshrined in the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and ensure the full implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA). We will work to encourage all stakeholders: multilateral agencies, civil society, academia, the faith-based sector and above all, governments to commit to the commitments of the Summit to accelerate the promise of the ICPD PoA (ACT Alliance Commitments to ICPD 25).
- We recognise that the ICPD Programme of Action and regional reviews, including the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, are key frameworks that promote a dignified life for all people. They are in full congruence with our Christian values and our rights-based approach. We also support the Statement and Commitments for the Nairobi Summit as crucial in ensuring: (i) zero unmet need for family planning; (ii) zero preventable maternal deaths; (iii) zero gender-based violence and harmful practices against women, girls and youth; (iv) zero sexual and gender-based violence, including zero child, early and forced marriage, as well as; (v) zero female genital mutilation, in order to realise all individuals' potential as agents of change in their society – both socially and economically (ACT Alliance Commitments to ICPD 25).
- As networks of churches and Christian faith-based organisations working for human rights, sustainable development, and humanitarian purposes around the world, we are engaged in all pillars of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ACT Alliance Commitments to ICPD 25).

Possible recommendations:

We recognise that low conditions of access and quality of sexual and reproductive health services affect indigenous women, afro-descendants, and other historically marginalised groups in a disproportionate way leading to high rates of maternal mortality and teenage pregnancy amongst individuals that are part of these same groups. Similarly, we highlight those migrant women are also at risk of not having their sexual and reproductive rights met.

For this reason, ACT Alliance call on all members, and invite them to mobilise their partners, to:

- Work on comprehensive information and ensure access to sexual and reproductive health care and provide education on rights, so that women and girls can take informed and responsible decisions related to their sexuality and bodily integrity.
- Engage in a continuous dialogue, based on love, trust and transparency, within ACT Alliance, with partner organisations and churches to strive towards a change in societal norms, harmful attitudes about gender roles, including masculinities, reproductive choices, human sexuality, child marriage, and stigmatisation of HIV and AIDS, among other issues, for mutual learning and a better realisation of gender justice and sexual and reproductive health rights.
- To scale up efforts to implement the ACT Alliance Gender Justice policy which will support the implementation of ICPD PoA, ensuring access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and protection from Gender-Based Violence. This includes adoption of protocols for the prevention, detection, and attention to sexual and gender-based violence inside churches and faith-based organisations.
- To promote and strengthen strategies for pastoral and community actions in coordination with different stakeholders, in the prevention, reduction and eradication of preventable maternal/child deaths through increased access to quality SRHR-services and information. The Alliance members are committed to engage in dialogue based on love, trust, and transparency to strive towards a change in societal norms, and harmful attitudes related to gender roles.
- To promote awareness and information strategies for overcoming existing taboos and resistance in addressing comprehensive sexuality education in churches.
- Convene inter-church dialogues, to make communities more aware of factors that generate high rates of teenage and child pregnancy as well as mortality and morbidity due to a failure to protect sexual and reproductive rights.
- As network of churches and faith-based organisations with presence, experience, and existing engagement across the globe and with the capacity to accelerate the achievement of the goals of the ICPD Programme of Action and its subsequent regional and global reviews, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals - in particular SDG 3, 5, 10 and 16 - we encourage all governments and other stakeholders to commit to:
- Supporting the Nairobi Summit's commitment to *'integrate sexual and reproductive health into Universal Health Coverage [UHC] at primary health care level, equalising access, improving quality, and enhancing accountability'*. A particular focus on ensuring access for adolescents due to the vulnerabilities, needs and rights of adolescents and to harness the demographic dividend.
- Recognising and addressing the interconnection, interrelatedness and interdependence between sexual and reproductive health, human rights and Sustainable Development Goals and supporting a holistic development agenda that puts human rights and human dignity front and centre.
- Engaging religious actors to ensure accountability, functioning private-public partnerships, mutual transparency, and inclusion in decision-making. While recognising the primary role of the State, there is also the pivotal role faith-based actors play in provision of UHC, as providers of education and health care services -- in some national contexts comprising up to 50% of health-care provision. Faith-based actors and institutions have networks and access to marginalised communities where governments have difficulty ensuring an institutional presence and have the potential to reach those furthest left behind.
- Recognising that domestic resource mobilisation is a vital method to secure sustainable financing for UHC, governments have a duty to use a combination of domestic resource mobilisation primarily through progressive taxation and to ensure public investment in key areas, such as education and social protection, that contribute to the realisation of women's rights and achievement of UHC. In financing health services, there needs to be equity in the use of existing resources and a reduced reliance on out-of-pocket payments by those living in poverty. Faith actors often are the ones providing those services to the most marginalised. National governments should increase their investment in health and meet commitments such as the Africa Union's Abuja 15% allocation of annual budget to health.
- Protecting and fulfilling access to UHC for all persons, regardless of nationality, migration status, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, ethnicity, or any other intersecting identity.

- Engaging churches and faith-based organisations as transformative actors in this agenda, recognising, and holding faith accountable as holding important ethical values that promote abundant life and dignity of all human beings which encompass justice, compassion and love at its core and the implementation of the ICPD PoA as part of ensuring that which is all our moral imperative, that “no-one is left behind”.

(iii) Faith Perspectives

We are aware that the issue of SRHR is a sensitive topic for many of our member churches, but we also know that our members care deeply about the poverty, powerlessness and inequalities that are faced by women and men across the globe, often with fatal consequences. We also understand that there are different entry points that might help demystify this area of work and/or clarify how it connects to our faith values. For example, the reduction of maternal mortality rates through the health measures that tackle preventable maternal deaths is connected to SRHR and has been in the past highlighted by [Millennium Development Goal 5](#) (MDG5) on maternal health. Similarly, work that tackles the global HIV/AIDS pandemic and ensures equal access to affordable drugs is work that contributed towards the achievement of SRHR.

Christian Aid's Policy on Family Planning states that 'that efforts directed at increasing demand for family planning must involve not only women and men but also the wider community and, in particular, traditional and faith leaders, so that everyone is included in supporting women to make positive, well-informed and healthier reproductive choices for themselves and their families'.⁶⁹ 'The teachings of faith communities, love, faithfulness and respect for others, echoes in an approach to reproductive health that helps women have more power over the shape of their family.'⁷⁰ The health programme of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania provides sexual and reproductive health services focusing on youth friendly needs, family planning services and men engagement as part of their diaconal work. With this comprehensive approach the church is working proactively in preventing and protecting people from HIV infections, as well as teenager's pregnancy or maternal death.⁷¹

Moreover, ACT Ubumbano states that as communities of faith, we are called upon to attend to the "total person," that is, address the person holistically.⁷² We are enjoined by our different religious traditions to address the physical, social, spiritual, emotional, occupational, intellectual, political, security, economic and environmental dimensions of wellness.⁷³ Consequently, issues relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights are integral to our identity as communities of faith.

We consider human beings as being, "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) and "all created by God" (Quran 39: 6).⁷⁴ Our communities of faith invest in SRHR because it enables human beings to develop and enjoy full and fulfilling lives. Every human being is valuable and must be respected as he or she reflects the image of God. Human beings possess inherent dignity. Therefore, our approach to SRHR is inclusive, as we seek to ensure that all human beings access quality information and services, as guided by our faith traditions.

Human dignity is central to our approach to SRHR in our families, communities, nations, and the region. Genesis 1: 27 in Christianity communicates the view that the human being was created in the image of God. Human dignity (karamah) in Islam is grounded in the Quranic verse: "We have bestowed dignity on the children of Adam... and conferred upon them special favours above the greater part of Our creation." (17:70).

In the Bahai faith, equality and human dignity are seen as being the same for women and men: "Women have equal rights with men upon earth; in religion and society they are a very important element. If women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs." (Abdu'l-Baha: "The Promulgation of Universal Peace").

In the Southern African region, the concept of Ubuntu, "I am because you are, and because we are, therefore I am," promotes solidarity.⁷⁵ As such, from our faith standpoints, we stand in solidarity with adolescents and youth as well as adults, as they negotiate SRHR issues in life. Our different religions are united in the belief that God gifted humans with conscience. This is the "inner voice" that enables people of different faiths to separate right from wrong. Conscience is a powerful resource that facilitates people of faith to respond to contested SRHR issues, alongside sacred writings and teachings found in our respective traditions.

(iv) Influencing tactics

Many ACT members such as the World Young Women’s Christian Association (World YWCA) have created manuals that provide a [step-by-step guide](#) on how to address the issue of SRHR within faith communities.⁷⁶ There are also secular toolkits such as the [toolkit produced by Rutgers University on CEDAW advocacy focusing on SRHR](#). Here we detail some examples of global level advocacy:

Build High-Level Relationships

As mentioned by ACT’s General Secretary, “there are two unique things about ACT, we are the world’s largest Protestant/Orthodox alliance for humanitarian, development and advocacy work. And we have engagement at all levels- from the community to the national, regional, and global. Our forums bring together national and international members to work together in a way that no other organisation does.”⁷⁷

Another factor that is helping to begin conversations is the ongoing dialogue throughout the sector on faith and development, and the role of religious leaders in issues ranging from disaster risk reduction to gender equality.



Develop Partnership Agreements

To build on its added value, and to strengthen high-level relationships with UN agencies, ACT has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women.

The aim of these MoUs is foster collaboration, and synergy between both groups as well as enhance our ability to advance key development, humanitarian, and advocacy topics by bringing local people together to talk and learn at the national level, and by feeding into international discussions. This type of partnership has led, for instance, to ACT’s participation in the 2019 [Nairobi Summit](#) and the development of [ACT Alliance’s commitments towards ICPD +25](#).



⁶⁹ Christian Aid, 2015. Christian Aid’s Policy on Family Planning, p. 2, available [christian-aid-policy-on-family-planning-jun-2015.pdf](#).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See video of Dr Paul Mmbano: <https://actalliance.org/gender-srhr/>

⁷² ACT Ubumbano, Interfaith Brief on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights - “Created in Gods Image”: Southern Africa Faith Leaders Support Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights for All, available at <https://www.actubumbano.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Interfaith-Brief-on-Sexual-and-Reproductive-Health-and-Rights.pdf>.

⁷³ Ibid. at 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid. at 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ World YWCA, 2020. Guide for Young Women’s Transformative Leadership, at 64, available at https://www.worldywca.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rise-UP-PDF_yellow.pdf. See also Church of Sweden, 2013. Theology and HIV/AIDS in Latin America, available at [https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/Sve/Bin%3a4rfiler/File/Theology%20and%20HIV-e-book%20\(pdf,%20146%20sidor\).pdf](https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/Sve/Bin%3a4rfiler/File/Theology%20and%20HIV-e-book%20(pdf,%20146%20sidor).pdf).

⁷⁷ See more at <https://actalliance.org/act-news/building-relationships-with-global-agencies/>.

Things to Consider

Political barriers impact the delivery and success of gender justice projects and advocacy activities. The most successful projects and strategies are based on robust [intersectional gender analysis](#). Gender analysis is a tool for identifying and documenting differences in power, roles, resources, norms, needs and interests of women, men, girls and boys in a community or group. It helps us to understand the societies we live in and to design strategies to tackle blockages. Diakonia developed a [resource on the development of gender sensitive power analysis](#). Some other ACT members and partners use other approaches such as an intersectional [political economy analysis](#) or the [Gender, Inclusion, Power and Politics analysis \(GIPP\)](#). All these approaches can be useful to those interested in developing a robust understanding of a particular context and crafting localised strategies that promote gender equality.

Please note that political advocacy is deeply connected to the work on social norms. This means that faith-based actors are just as much legitimate targets as stakeholders operating in UN spaces or national level policy makers. In fact, oftentimes this is where ACT Alliance can be most helpful and effective. For example, ACT Alliance can be fundamental in creating safe spaces at community-level that foster respectful discussions and explore inter-faith nuances and teachings based on concrete examples that enable the shift in social norms and attitudes. Dialogical and diaconal approaches can be key to unlocking difficult and controversial issues. For instance, the discussions enriched through '[conversatorios](#)'⁷⁸ are important as they create safe spaces while also challenging patriarchal social norms.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, ACT Alliance, 2020. The Other Pandemic: ACT Alliance 16 days of activism social media toolkit, at p. 3, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-media-toolkit.pdf>. See also 'Qué es un conversatorio', available at https://www.academia.edu/21956099/Qu%C3%A9_es_un_conversatorio?email_work_card=reading-history.

3. Family Law

Although 143 out of 195 countries have guaranteed gender equality in their constitutions, discrimination against women persists in laws and policies, gender-based stereotypes, and social norms and practices.¹ SDG 5 on gender equality identifies discriminatory legislation as one of the main challenges to advance gender equality with SDG Indicator 5.1.1 specifically focusing on family law as one of the four overarching legal frameworks that must be reformed to accelerate progress to achieve gender equality. SDG 16 on peace, justice and inclusive institutions includes equal access to justice for all and the promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies



Family law

Family law has a significant impact on women's rights. It regulates matters such as legal age of marriage, domestic violence, child custody, inheritance as well as land and property ownership. Family law might also regulate women's legal capacity - if women and men are equal as citizens, and equal before the law. This may include women's right to work, open a bank account or apply for a passport without a husband's or male guardian's permission.

Family legislation is a special case where "religion" meets "law", either through direct legislative power or strong influence on family legislation by religious norms and actors. In many countries in Asia and the Middle East/North Africa, family law is an area of legislation that is regulated by parallel religious legalisation and handled by religious courts, exempted from non-discrimination provisions in national constitutions.⁷⁹ A patchwork of laws and norms regulate family matters that apply to men and women depending on where they live and what religion or denomination they profess. There are different legal frameworks on Family Law (also known as personal status laws) according to the different denominations.⁸⁰ For example, in Palestine, personal status laws (marriage, divorce, inheritance, dowries, alimony, and custody of children, among others) are drafted and governed by religious courts (Sharia Courts and Ecclesiastic courts).⁸¹ Muslims in Palestine are governed by a Muslim personal status based on Islamic principles. For Palestinian Christians, the ecclesiastical courts of each of the specific religious denomination draft and govern personal status laws for Catholic, Episcopal Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical Lutherans and Coptic Orthodox.⁸²

The complex nature of pluralistic legal systems makes it more difficult to hold governments accountable for discriminatory legislation, as the discrimination remains hidden, ignored, or justified with reference to religion or tradition. Thus, discriminatory family laws can remain unscrutinised or unchallenged. In other countries, secular and customary family law is heavily influenced by religious norms and actors. This may for instance occur through consultation in legislative processes, strong public opinion, or political pressure. The laws may also be based on old religious legislation.

Unfortunately, these laws draw on very conservative interpretations of faith sources and this has contributed to the institutionalisation of women's inequality within current legislations on family matters. The application of these laws often results in disadvantages to women and therefore contradicts international human rights law including CEDAW.⁸³ With that in mind, ACT affirms our responsibility as churches and faith-based organisations to promote each person's inherent dignity and right as part of the divine creation, as well as to promote rigorous analysis of the impact of religious and customary systems on issues like child, early and forced marriage, as in many parts of the world religious family law trumps statutory legislation.⁸⁴

(i) Human rights agreements and instruments

Family law is a distinctive area of law because it is multi-layered (national, regional, and international), interdisciplinary (transcending private and public law, both domestically and internationally)⁸⁵ and pluralistic

(with competing formal and informal systems regulating relationships and family life). The key human rights references on family law are:

- **UDHR Art. 16** establishes the right to equality within marriage. It states in art. 16.1 that ‘men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family’ and that ‘they are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.’ This includes free and full consent (art. 16.2).
- **CEDAW Art. 1** foresees the right to live free from any form of discrimination irrespective of marital status. Under **Art. 2** State parties must address all aspects of their legal obligations under the Convention to respect, protect and fulfil women’s right to non-discrimination and to the enjoyment of equality. **Art. 16** reinforces State’s obligation to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations. **Art. 16** is key for work to reform discriminatory family laws.
- The CEDAW committee has, for instance, elaborated on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 regarding family law in its *General recommendation No. 28*⁸⁶, and specifically on article 16 in its *General Recommendation No. 29*⁸⁷.
- **CRC** also sets out some key principles that are important to family law such as non-discrimination.
- As with most international human rights standards, there are regional instruments that aim to implement these rules in particular contexts. For example, **articles 8 and 12** of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) explicitly addresses national family law by reaffirming the right to respect for private and family life.
- The Council of Europe developed a useful [course on family law and human rights](#) that might be of interest to those versing in this area.

(ii) Key messages

Helpful data & statistics:

Examples of inequalities within family law are clearly illustrated by global statistics shown below:

- In more than one in five countries, daughters and sons are treated unequally in laws governing inheritance,⁸⁸ and in 37 out of 183 countries, women and men do not have equal rights to inherit assets from their spouse.⁸⁹
- In terms of women’s equal rights and voice in marriage and the family, in 19 countries and territories (out of 189), the law explicitly requires women to obey their husbands; in 17 countries and territories, married women are not allowed to travel outside of the home in the same way as married men; and in 37 countries and territories, married women are not allowed to apply for a passport in the same way as married men.⁹⁰

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Lilja, J. 2019. Opinion: Families in focus of UN Women’s new report, available at <https://blogg.svenskakyrkan.se/opinion/families-in-focus-of-un-womens-new-report/>.

⁸⁰ Faith Actors Mapping Gender Justice for Palestine Coalition Compiled by Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL’s) Women Desk.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Commission on Population and Development, 2019. Statement submitted by ACT Alliance, E/CN.9/2020/NGO/14, available at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/445/08/PDF/N1944508.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁸⁵ See more at Council of Europe, 2019, HELP online course on Family Law and Human Rights, available at <http://help.elearning.ext.coe.int/pluginfile.php/112266/course/section/17480/HELP%20Course%20Brief%20Family%20Law%20and%20Human%20Rights.pdf>.

⁸⁶ CEDAW Committee, *General recommendation No. 28*, para. 15, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/28.

⁸⁷ CEDAW Committee, *General Recommendation No. 29*, U.N. doc. CEDAW/C/ GC/29 (2013).

⁸⁸ UN Women calculations using data from the World Bank 2018e. A subset of 185 countries was used, instead of the full sample of 189

⁸⁹ UN Women calculations using data from the World Bank 2018e.

⁹⁰ World Bank 2019c.

- In 13 per cent of countries (based on a sample of 185 out of 189 countries), a married woman cannot confer citizenship on her children in the same way as a married man.⁹¹
- Globally, the legal age of marriage for girls is 18 in all but four countries and territories; thirds of countries and territories allow girls to be married earlier with parental or judicial consent.⁹²

World Bank data shows that many countries ranked at the bottom of the index for legal equality have family laws that explicitly discriminate against women and girls.⁹³ Further, a recent comprehensive cross-country study drew the conclusion that “egalitarian reform of family law may be the most crucial precondition for empowering women economically”.⁹⁴ UN Women’s Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030: a multistakeholder strategy for accelerated action identified promoting equality in family relations as one of the six areas of focus to accelerate action towards gender equality.⁹⁵ In its 2019-2020 flagship report on Progress of the World’s Women, which focusses on Families in a Changing World, the top recommendation made is the need to establish family laws that recognise diversity and promote equality and non-discrimination.⁹⁶

Family law is often based on religious interpretations, tradition and culture and intertwined with religious and cultural identity. Efforts to reform is often portrayed or seen as a threat against a group’s identity, religious freedom, and self-determination. Over 60 percent of the 440 reservations entered against the CEDAW globally are based on religion⁹⁷, and the most reserved article of all UN human rights treaties is article 16 of CEDAW, which recognises equality between women and men in marriage and family relations.

Religious family law is one area where Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and gender equality intersects, and FoRB is often used as an argument against reform efforts. In the annual report to the Human rights council 43rd session 2020, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) draws particular attention to personal status and family laws informed by religion or delegated to religious entities and its impact on gender discrimination. The report clearly affirms that FoRB never can serve or be invoked as a justification for violation of human rights of women and girls and that FoRB and gender equality are mutually reinforcing each other.

Despite the difficulties in addressing and reforming discriminatory family laws, there has been positive developments in several countries, as the example below will illustrate:

Some countries such as Pakistan have demonstrated crucial leadership in family law. For instance, 21% of girls in Pakistan are married before the age of 18.⁹⁸ Child marriage in Pakistan is a result of tradition, culture, and customary practices, at times involving the transfer of money, settlement of debts or exchange of daughters (Vani/ Swara or Watta Satta) sanctioned by a Jirga or Panchayat (council of elders from the community). The minimum age for marriage is 18 in Sindh Province and 16 in the rest of Pakistan. In 2017, the Parliament amended the Penal Code to curb child marriage by increasing the punishment from five to ten years in prison and a fine of up to 1 million rupees. In addition, Pakistan was among the first States to propose a target to end child marriage by 2030 during discussions of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals.⁹⁹

A lot of progress is still to be made in the area for family law. This is evident for example in the unequal grounds for divorce that make it easier (albeit not easy) for husbands to petition for divorce than women; custody and guardianship laws that favour the father (and sometimes other male relatives) over the mother;

⁹¹ UN Women calculations using data from the World Bank 2018e. A subset of 185 countries was used, instead of the full sample of 189

⁹² Sakhonchik et al. 2015.

⁹³ See World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2018), and World Bank, *Women, Business, and the Law* (2019).

⁹⁴ Mala Htun, Francesca R Jensenius and Jami Nelson-Nuñez, “Gender-Discriminatory Laws and Women’s Economic Agency”, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, Volume 26, Issue 2, Summer 2019, Pages 193–222.

⁹⁵ UN Women’s *Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030: a multistakeholder strategy for accelerated action*

⁹⁶ *Families in a Changing World*

⁹⁷ Basak Cali and Mariana Montoya, *The March of Universality: Religion-based reservations to the Core UN Human Rights Treaties*, (2017), Universal Rights Group. p.3.

⁹⁸ Norwegian Church Aid, 2019. Engaging Faith Actors on Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Best Practices from the NCA Global GBV Programme 2016-2019, available at <https://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/globalassets/lanserte-rapporter/2018/2018-engaging-faith-actors-on-gender-based-violence.pdf>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

and the unequal marriage age between men and women that exist in many countries with religious family laws.¹⁰⁰ As an example, for Muslims, the personal status laws set the minimum legal age of marriage as 15 years for girls and 16 years for boys in the West Bank (Jordanian Law of Personal Status, 1976), and 17 years for girls and 18 for boys in the Gaza Strip (Administrative decision no. 78/1995 of the Qadi al-Quda). However, a girl can marry at the age of 14 years if a judge approves the marriage as being in the child's interests which goes against the Palestinian Child Law No. 7 of 2004, as it sets the upper age of childhood at 18 years. As mentioned above, every Christian denomination has their own family law. For instance, in the Catholic PSL (which applies to Maronite, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Syriac, Latin, Chaldean) the age marriage for boys is 16 and for girls 14. In the Byzantine family law (which applies to Orthodox) the age for boys 14 and the age for girls 12. In the Syrian Orthodox the age for men is 18 and age for girls 16. In the Episcopate, the marriage age for men is 18 and the age for girls is 16. The only PSL that sets the age for men and women at 18 is Lutheran personal status law modified in 2015. Understanding the highly unjust effects of these laws on the lives of women and girls is crucial.

TOP LINE MESSAGES

- Family law is absolutely crucial for the fulfilment of women's and girls' rights and gender equality.
- Family law regulates issues, such as legal age of marriage, the right to freely enter into marriage and choose a spouse, marital rape, divorce, custody of children, inheritance laws – which all are crucial for the fulfilment of women's and girls' rights. In more than one out of five countries in the world, daughters and sons are not equal before the law when it comes to inheritance rights.
- Research shows that family law reform may be the most important prerequisite for women's economic empowerment.
- Religion plays an important role in the lives of the vast majority of world's population. In many countries, issues of marriage and family relations are regulated by religious family law and handled by religious courts. This gives religious leaders and institutions power over the rights and responsibilities of husband and wife in marriage, if a victim of domestic violence can file for divorce, and if men and women have equal rights to own and inherit property. In other countries, secular family law is heavily influenced by religious norms and actors. This may for instance occur through consultation in legislative processes, strong public opinion, or political pressure.
- Religious actors and institutions can be changemakers. By including them in our work, we have new opportunities to change discriminatory family law and harmful norms that obstruct the fulfilment of women's and girls' rights. Religious actors can play a crucial role both through advocacy in their religious communities to promote legislative change and through shadow reports to CEDAW regarding discriminatory religious legislation and share examples of how reform can take place.

Possible recommendations:

Recommendations to the UN, governments, and multilateral stakeholders

We call on governments and multilateral stakeholders to:

1. Hold states accountable for commitments to human rights relating to gender equality and non-discrimination. This includes for instance bringing up and referring to family law in bilateral dialogue with

¹⁰⁰ Aziz, Z and Moussa, J (2021). Personal Status Laws Applicable to Christians in Asia and the Middle East [Unpublished report, commissioned by Act Church of Sweden]

other states. It should also be brought up in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of countries that repeatedly refuse to reform discriminatory family legislation. Discriminatory legislation must not pass unnoticed.

2. Draw global attention and build global support for the urgent necessity for equality in family law, including religious family law/personal status law when engaging at different arenas.
3. Keep insisting on inclusive language and wording that emphasises that multiple legal systems must comply with international human rights obligations in final documents, resolutions, and policies of the UN.
4. Support initiatives seeking to address discriminatory family legislation and promote progressive law reform in all forms of family law, including secular, traditional, customary, and religious family law.
5. Make strategic alliances with religious actors and challenge the validity of religious arguments against gender equality put forward at the global arena.
6. Build and share knowledge of the urgency to reform family laws that discriminate against women, including religious family law/personal status law.
7. Remove reservations on human rights treaties such as CEDAW, particularly article 16 on family and marriage.

Recommendations to members of the ACT Alliance and other Faith-Based Actors

1. For religious leaders to use their considerable influence over legislation, in many parts of the world, to promote gender just laws that regulate women's rights. Use their significant influence or direct power over family law, to tackle gender discrimination.
2. For faith actors to play a crucial role through advocacy in their own religious communities to promote gender just legislative changes.
3. For religious institutions who have legislative responsibility and power, to review and reform laws to ensure gender justice.
4. For faith actors to track commitments and hold governments accountable, including reporting to the CEDAW committee and shadow reporting to the Universal Periodical Review of UN Human Rights Council.
5. For faith actors to share learnings and learn from other faith actors who are taking the lead in the pursuit for women's rights. For example, the work done by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land to adopt a gender equal family law and to promote a unified family law for all churches in Palestine, based on the same principles.

(iii) Faith Perspectives

An estimated 84 percent of our world's population identifies as members of a faith or religion.¹⁰¹ Faith plays a major role in the formation of people's values and norms of acceptable behaviour. Faith leaders often hold trusted positions and have considerable influence to change attitudes and behaviours in many communities, sometimes where governments fail to reach.¹⁰² In responding to patriarchal practices, many faith leaders and faith communities are positive and powerful forces: sharing accurate health information, modelling healthy behaviour, advocating for measures to address gender-based violence and supporting the most vulnerable in society. However, without support and strategic engagement, faith actors can also amplify misinformation and spread myths, which can result in increasing stigma, fear, and gender inequalities.¹⁰³

It is key to involve religious leaders and faith actors in the work for family law reform, given that they play a key role in shaping people's values, norms of acceptable behaviour and life roles, and hold significant power and influence of legislation. Faith actors can play a decisive role through working for legislative change within in their own religious communities as well as sharing examples of how to change it. They can also be changemakers through engaging with the UN bodies and mechanisms, such as the CEDAW committee and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

¹⁰¹ Commission on the Status of Women, 2021. Statement Submitted by ACT Alliance et al., E/CN.6/2021/NGO/117, available at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/359/89/PDF/N2035989.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

The notions of “family values” and “traditional family” are frequently and strategically used to push back advancement of women’s rights and inclusive policies.¹⁰⁴ The term family is often interpreted as the nuclear family when discussed both in religious contexts and at the UN level. For instance, the 2019 Commission on the Status of Women, there were multiple efforts to instate the word “the family” as an exclusive concept, ignoring the fact that there is no such thing as the “standard family”.¹⁰⁵ The UN Women 2019 ‘[Families in a Changing World](#)’ report shows that there is “significant diversity in family structures and relationships that exists across regions, within countries, and over time”.¹⁰⁶

Religion is often used in arguments opposing a more inclusive understanding of family and several religious actors have put substantial efforts into arguing that the only valid understanding of family is the nuclear family. However, as Act Church of Sweden recently pointed out,¹⁰⁷ it is important for us to underline that there are various forms of families described in the Bible and the Bible does not dictate a certain form of a family. Instead, it allows for different forms of families, with relationship and community at the centre. Progressive faith actors must strategise and collaborate to make their voices heard at the international arena.

(iv) Influencing tactics

As mentioned above, there are several advocacy toolkits and guides that have step-by-step advice on how to develop strategic influencing activities. For example, the Lifeline Fund for Embattled CSOs published a [toolkit](#) that is useful to those developing advocacy in restricted spaces.¹⁰⁸ Here we describe an additional example:

Record a video

Testimonials can be a powerful way of driving your message and ensuring technical discussions reach the wider public. For example, Diakonia Sweden recorded a [story of hope](#) for ACT Alliance focusing on their efforts fighting violence against women in Lebanon and the links to family law and practice. Videos are useful in demonstrating how a particular approach can change the lives of people on the ground and address patriarchal dynamics. There are many [tips](#) and [guides](#) online on how to record an advocacy video. Advocacy Assembly also has some interesting [media-related courses](#) such as how to reach out to journalists.



Challenge Unequal Laws

ACT members such as the Lutheran World Federation and Act Church of Sweden are actively challenging unequal laws. Despite the difficulties in addressing and reforming discriminatory family laws, there has been opportunities and positive developments that can inspire to action and engagement:

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, Lilja, J. 2019. Opinion: Families in focus of UN Women’s new report, available at <https://blogg.svenskakyrkan.se/opinion/families-in-focus-of-un-womens-new-report/>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ UN Women, 2019. Progress of the World’s Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World, at 16, available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/progress-of-the-worlds-women>.

¹⁰⁷ Lilja, J. 2019. Opinion: Families in focus of UN Women’s new report, available at <https://blogg.svenskakyrkan.se/opinion/families-in-focus-of-un-womens-new-report/>.

¹⁰⁸ Lifeline Fund for Embattled CSOs, Advocacy in Restricted Spaces: A Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations, available at https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/FINAL_COMPLETE_Lifeline_Toolkit_for_CS0_Advocacy_in_Restrictive%20Spaces_June_2020.pdf.

- Faith actors can be changemakers through scrutinising legislation and working with state accountability, for instance through engaging with the UN bodies and mechanisms, such as the CEDAW committee and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This is one way of holding states accountable for their human rights commitments and ensuring that discriminatory family legislation is detected, criticised, and get international attention.
- Faith actors can play a decisive role through working for legislative change within in their own religious communities as well as sharing examples of how to change it. In 2015 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) adopted a gender equal family law. Taking a gender equal family law was no easy process. The process was initiated by the women’s group, inspired by the Lutheran World Federation 2013 Gender Justice policy. The ELCJHL has previously followed the personal status law of the Anglican Church. Under that law equal recognition was not given to the spouses and children in the event of marriage and inheritance, separation or divorce, Women received only 1/8 (one eighth) of the inheritance that men got, and male children were entitled to twice as much as their female siblings.¹⁰⁹ After reviewing how this legal code adhered to the Lutheran understanding of gender justice, the ELCJHL decided to draft its own law, that would reflect the Church’s position on gender justice matters. The process to adopt the new law took several years of commitment from the women’s group, dialogue and theological reflection involving all levels of the church. This was key for the success. ELCJHL is the only church in Middle East with a gender equal family law. One of the three judges of its court is a woman. Under the personal status law of ELCJHL, each spouse has equal responsibility in family life and children are treated equally. In cases of separation or divorce, responsibility for the family and its affairs will be shared equally by the spouses. When it comes to inheritance, each spouse will be entitled to an equal share of the family’s inheritance, and the male and female children would receive an equal proportion.
- Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law. The overarching goal of the Campaign is equality for women and men under the law in all matters relating to the family, regardless of religion and culture. This Campaign addresses family law as a body of statutes, rules and regulations, court procedures and customary and uncodified laws and practices that govern relationships within family units. It includes, but is not limited to, areas of marriage and family relations which fall under Article 16 of the CEDAW Convention such as rights of women and men entering into marriage, divorce, custody and guardianship of children, property rights, as well as equal rights to inheritance.

The objectives of this Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law are:

1. To mobilise international action to achieve progressive family law reform around the world and to draw global attention and build global support for the urgent necessity for equality in family law.
2. To bring together civil society actors spearheading campaigns for family law reform at the national level, academics, UN agencies and government allies to create and implement a global campaign to end discrimination against women in family laws.
3. To strengthen advocacy for reform at the national level through developing knowledge resources and providing technical assistance to share good practices and lessons learnt.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

4. Migration & Displacement

Migration is usually connected to other phenomena caused by wider structural issues. For example, climate change projections indicate extremely high numbers of climate change migrants.¹¹⁰ The Central American region is the most striking example of this phenomenon; this region is severely affected by extreme climate phenomena, and the women among the migrants travelling through the Dry Corridor towards the United States are exposed to violence.¹¹¹ In addition to that, women in that region are also more vulnerable to increased food insecurity, job losses, social conflicts caused by disputes over water sources as well as deaths and decline in quality of life.



Migration and Displacement

Many policies, laws, and recommendations exist around migration, but are often not put into practice. This affects many issues connected to migration, in particular internal displacement. An [analysis undertaken by ACT Alliance and partners](#) shows that States and others have taken insufficient measures to ensure the protection and assistance of specific groups subjected to internal displacement, such as women, girls, youth, and children more generally – with each group having individuals with particular diversities.¹¹² While there has been progress on an approach to internal displacement, it is not yet an approach that receives adequate attention in global or national policy spaces or responses. Where these policies or approaches exist, they often do not receive adequate resources.

Migration is a cross-cutting issue of Agenda 2030. It is relevant to all 17 SDGs and most of the 169 targets of the agenda. The central reference to migration is present in Target 10.7 which states that member states will facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

(i) Human rights agreements and instruments

Migration policies and practices can only be viable and effective when they are based on a firm foundation of legal norms, and thus operate under the rule of law.¹¹³ A key step in establishing the governance – and governability – of migration is the establishment of national law based on and in compliance with international law. This is usually accomplished through ratification by states of relevant international human rights instruments and international labour standards, followed by their effective implementation.

There are several [resources](#) and organisations focusing on migration issues such as the [International Organisation for Migration](#) (IOM), the [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (UNHCR) and [International Labour Organisation](#) (ILO).¹¹⁴ The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) produced a [handbook](#) on

¹¹⁰ See more at

https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/events/coordination/15/documents/papers/2_UNEP.pdf.

¹¹¹ Christian Aid and Inspiration, 2019. Climate migration in the Dry Corridor of Central America: integrating a gender perspective, available at https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/2019_migration_gender_climate_change_Central_America.pdf.

¹¹² ACT Alliance et al, Leaving No One Behind: Ensuring an Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) Inclusive Approach to Internal Displacement Joint Submission to the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/age-gender-diversity-high-level-panel-internal-displacement-submission-052020.pdf>.

¹¹³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015. Migration, Human Rights and Governance, Handbook for Parliamentarians n. 24, p.40, available at https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/migrationhr_and_governance_hr_pub_15_3_en.pdf.

¹¹⁴ See, for instance, available at . See also the page of the UN Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/SRMigrants/Pages/SRMigrantsIndex.aspx>.

migration, human rights and governance which might be useful to those working at national level or with Member States' delegations.¹¹⁵

The key international law focusing on migration are:

- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), Article 14 (1) recognises the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution
- International refugee law, namely the [1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol](#) and related regional instruments. These are covered in [Refugee protection: A guide to international refugee law](#), handbook for parliamentarians No. 2, jointly produced in 2001 by IPU and UNHCR.
- The main instruments of international humanitarian law most relevant to migrants are the [four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977](#), which are presented, among others, in the first handbook for parliamentarians [Respect for International Humanitarian Law](#), jointly produced in 1999 by IPU and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).
- The 1965 [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) defines "racial discrimination" as 'any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.'
- The [1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) establishes, among other things, that no State Party shall expel, return or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.
- The 1990 [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families](#) created specific rules that relate to the entire migration process of migrant workers and members of their families, which comprises preparation for migration, departure, transit and the entire period of stay and remunerated activity in the State of employment as well as return to the State of origin or the State of habitual residence.
- [International Labour Standards on Migrant Workers](#) provide tools for both countries of origin and of destination to manage migration flows and ensure adequate protection for this vulnerable category of workers
- The 2018 [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) (GCM) promotes respect for human rights, including non-refoulement, self-determination, non-discrimination, and the full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.¹¹⁶ The Global Compact is the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. It is a non-binding document that respects states' sovereign right to determine who enters and stays in their territory and demonstrates commitment to international cooperation on migration.
- The [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) is a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognising that a sustainable solution to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation. It provides a blueprint for governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities get the support they need and that refugees can lead productive lives.

¹¹⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015. Migration, Human Rights and Governance, Handbook for Parliamentarians n. 24, available at https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/migrationhr_and_governance_hr_pub_15_3_en.pdf.

¹¹⁶ See more at <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>.

(ii) Key messages

Helpful data & statistics:

According to ILO estimates, there are at present approximately 244 million migrants around the world, representing 3.3 per cent of the global population.¹¹⁷ Women make up almost half of migrants.

As mentioned above, migration is often connected to other context-related factors such as climate change. Every second, one person leaves their home due to climate change-related causes, according to the 2017 United Nations Frontiers 2017 report, which analyses the environmental issues affecting the planet; one of these issues is migration. The IOM's 2016 Atlas of Environmental Migration states that, in 2015, 19 million people were displaced by climate disasters across the world. This figure does not include displacements caused by drought or slow-onset environmental degradation.¹¹⁸

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in 2016, 98% of new displacements associated with disasters were caused by risks related to climate 6 or to meteorology, such as storms, floods, forest fires and severe winter weather conditions. It also states that the ten largest displacement events in absolute terms were weather-related.¹¹⁹ According to this organisation, in 2016 there were 24.2 million new internal displacements associated with disasters, while in 2017 the total was 18.8 million.¹²⁰ These figures, which do not include international migration or migration associated with slow-onset disasters (such as rising sea levels), indicate the scale of the phenomenon.

Faith actors can be crucial in promoting a people-centred approach to migration. For example, Finn Church Aid (FCA) implemented a project for quality non-formal education and enhanced psychosocial well-being for refugee children aged 6–17 in Greece between 2016–2017.¹²¹ Through this project, unaccompanied minors living in the shelters were offered language courses (English and Greek), science training (physics, mathematics, and chemistry through short laboratory experiments) and life-skills education. Life-skills education triggered a positive change in the behaviour of minors through individualised sessions evaluating and discussing separately any problems or concerns, focus group discussions practicing techniques of conflict management, decision making and argumentation, discussing issues of social interest such as stereotypes or diversity and describing their ambitions and dreams for the future.¹²² There were also discussions about personal responsibility and their role as active citizens in a society, role playing consisting of scenarios and stories on the rights, obligations and needs and functional communication skills cultivating interpersonal relationships among the boys emphasising respect and tolerance and improved confidence.¹²³

¹¹⁷ See more at <https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/migrant-workers/lang--en/index.htm>.

¹¹⁸ See more at https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/2019_migration_gender_climate_change_Central_America.pdf.

¹¹⁹ See more at Alexandra Bilak et al, 2017. Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID 2017). Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Finn Church Aid, 2018. Improving Well-Being through Education: Integrating Community Based Psychosocial Support into Education in Emergencies, at 11, available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ImprovingWellbeingThroughEducation_web.pdf.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

TOP LINE MESSAGES

- Each person has agency and different attributes, capacities, and possibly disabilities. Age, education, ethnicity, language, religion, citizenship status, income, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or other diversity factors make each person unique, can shape an individual's views and experiences, and can influence individual displacement experiences. These various elements together can contribute to multiple forms of discrimination and specific protection risks. They can also impact an individual's ability to participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives, particularly during displacement (Joint Submission to the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement).
- Protecting and assisting Internally Displaced People (IDPs) is fundamentally about respecting and upholding human rights and ensuring non-discrimination. IDPs face extremely difficult conditions and loss of safety and protection when they are forced to flee their homes and communities because of conflict, violence, disasters, or development and when they remain displaced for years. The response to any situation of internal displacement – whether resulting from conflicts, disasters, climate change, or development – requires a rights-based approach that puts people first (Joint Submission to the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement).
- An Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach enables responses to be adapted to different needs through meaningful participation. Understanding and addressing needs – particularly of groups at increased risk during displacement – can result in more inclusive and accountable responses to internal displacement (Joint Submission to the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement).

Possible recommendations:

Here are some recommendations that might be used or adapted to other contexts:

1. States should adopt or strengthen national laws, policies, and other frameworks to ensure protection and assistance for IDPs without discrimination, in accordance with international law, which considers the needs and challenges faced by IDPs due to age, gender, and diversity (AGD). More specifically, States should facilitate opportunities to bring together diverse parties to work together to engage IDPs safely and meaningfully and host communities to understand how they are affected based on AGD and ensure appropriate responses.
2. Ensure State accountability for obligations to uphold international human rights and humanitarian law when responding to internal displacement, particularly their obligations to protect groups vulnerable to discrimination and violations, including women, children, older persons, and those with disabilities during displacement and in the search for solutions to their displacement.
3. States and all those responding to internal displacement situations should incorporate an AGD inclusive approach in their responses so that all IDPs are protected, have their human rights respected, and to ensure that no one who is internally displaced is left behind. For example:
 - Decision-makers should set up systems to collect, analyse, and use AGD disaggregated data to develop/adapt inclusive laws, policies, and responses to internal displacement.
 - Governments should partner with other stakeholders to bring together different actors (including ministries) to identify and tackle any discrimination faced by IDPs based on AGD.
4. Women, girls, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities, and minority groups in all their diversity must be represented and safely and meaningfully consulted in decision-making processes to ensure that their needs and views are included in all responses to internal displacement. Actors working with IDPs should make available spaces for participation that are gender-sensitive, as well as child-

and disability-friendly; provide accessible materials in relevant languages and formats; and reach out within communities for equal representation across AGD groups.

5. All actors should offer special welcome and attention to women of migrant communities and their families, not only through humanitarian aid but also in terms of spiritual and psycho-social support.

(iii) Faith Perspectives

People on the move, wandering from one place to the other, and the experiences of migration, refugees and the conflicts that stem due to geographical and border disputes are at the heart of the Bible. The biblical stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs, like Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Rebecca and Lea, or the story of group of people fleeing from Egypt, narrated in the book of Exodus, are some paradigmatic narratives in relation to migration movements and their impact in the history of salvation. Even with Jesus, at his birth, the experience of fleeing due to insecurity to another country (Egypt) came again to the scenery. Throughout the biblical narrative exile, movement of people or groups, leaving homeland, risks of death and hunger and hospitality are recurrent issues, thematics and situations.

Why is it important to discuss issues of migration and displacement from a faith perspective, interrelating it with theological groundings? As Father Groody affirms, "Theology offers not just more information but a new imagination. It supplies a way of thinking about migration that keeps the human issues at the centre of the debate and reminds us that our own existence as a pilgrim people is migratory in nature. Christian discipleship leads us to overcome all that divides us to reconcile our relationships, reminding us that the more difficult walls to cross are the ones that exist in the hearts of each of us."¹²⁴

Human rights violations and suffering indignities are daily experiences in the reality of migration. Seeing these realities through the lenses of faith and theology, can help in seeing people on the move, beyond migrants, mere work force, or lawbreakers, illegal or undocumented people, but, women and men, created in the image of God, in full dignified life. Knowing that Jesus himself experienced persecution and had to fled, has an important theological concept embedded: God and Jesus incarnated in human life, crossing divine and human frontiers, transgressing barriers, and coming to encounter human life in all fragile conditions.

God incarnating in human life offers a vision for a faith which is committed with an ethical movement of solidarity and hospitality. These are diaconal responsibilities of churches and faith communities - to open doors, to welcome at a shared table, to journey together in deep solidarity, which is beyond charity, but justice.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Daniel G. Groody. A theology of migration.

<https://www3.nd.edu/~dgroody/Published%20Works/Other%20Articles/files/Theology%20of%20Migration-%20Groody%202.pdf>

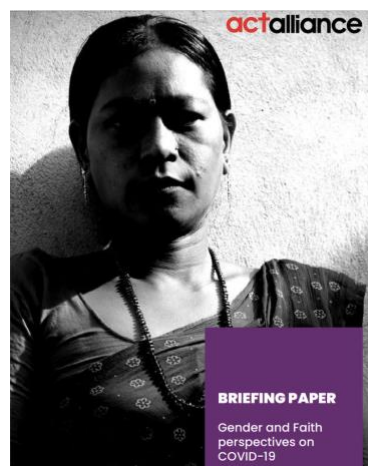
¹²⁵ Christian Aid, 2018, Becoming human together. A theological reflection on migration, available at https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-05/Becoming_Human_web_version.pdf.

(iv) Influencing tactics

Caritas produced a [youth advocacy toolkit on global migration and development](#) which can be useful to those interested in developing an advocacy strategy focused on the topic. Below you will find an example of some outputs you can produce based on ACT's experience:

Write a Briefing Paper

It is often useful to write a joint briefing paper or position paper to highlight how particular issues are disproportionately affecting people on the ground. Briefing papers often open discussions without setting new policy. They set out useful ideas that might lead to new policy or practice. On the other hand, position papers are supposed to systematise existing policy or create new policy with an aim of communicating it externally. Open Society published [a guide on how to write effective policy papers](#) which can be useful for this purpose.



29 Oct 2018 | News

"Migration is not a crime; it's a right."

Forced displacement around the world has reached an alarming 68.5 million. The United Nations Refugee Commission reported that in 2017 alone one Commission reported every two seconds.

Related Blog Posts

"We want to walk with you"
1 Nov 2018
Member Conversations

Write a blog

If you would like to react to an ongoing debate or if you would like to generate a new debate, you might want to write a blog. A good blog post takes up considerably less time to develop than other policy outputs, while managing to convey complex messages in a simple and direct way. You can promote the blog on your website or use it to influence specific language or the outcome of a particular process.

Oxfam has a [set of suggestions](#) on how to create a blog post.

Things to Consider

Political barriers impact the delivery and success of gender justice projects and advocacy activities. The most successful projects and strategies are based on robust [intersectional gender analysis](#). Gender analysis is a tool for identifying and documenting differences in power, roles, resources, norms, needs and interests of women, men, girls and boys in a community or group. It helps us to understand the societies we live in and to design strategies to tackle blockages. Diakonia developed a [resource on the development of gender sensitive power analysis](#). Some other ACT members and partners use other approaches such as an intersectional [political economy analysis](#) or the [Gender, Inclusion, Power and Politics analysis \(GIPP\)](#). All these approaches can be useful to those interested in developing a robust understanding of a particular context and crafting localised strategies that promote gender equality.

Please note that political advocacy is deeply connected to the work on social norms. This means that faith-based actors are just as much legitimate targets as stakeholders operating in UN spaces or national level policy makers. In fact, oftentimes this is where ACT Alliance can be most helpful and effective. For example, ACT Alliance can

be fundamental in creating safe spaces at community-level that foster respectful discussions and explore inter-faith nuances and teachings based on concrete examples that enable the shift in social norms and attitudes. Dialogical and diaconal approaches can be key to unlocking difficult and controversial issues. For instance, the discussions enriched through '[conversatorios](#)'¹²⁶ are important as they create safe spaces while also challenging patriarchal social norms.

¹²⁶ See, for instance, ACT Alliance, 2020. The Other Pandemic: ACT Alliance 16 days of activism social media toolkit, at p. 3, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-media-toolkit.pdf>. See also 'Qué es un conversatorio', available at https://www.academia.edu/21956099/Qu%C3%A9_es_un_conversatorio?email_work_card=reading-history.

5. Economic Justice

SDG 8 - on sustainable and inclusive growth, SDG 9 - on inclusive industrialisation and SDG 12 - on sustainable consumption - aim to promote economic justice. This entails recognising that business principles do not always converge with human rights principles. In various dimensions, from violence against women, to women's economic participation, to tax, trade and investment, the gendered disparities are not resolved uniquely by market participation and growth dynamics.¹²⁷ In fact, the growth-based model often puts women and other individuals who are marginalised in disadvantageous positions, i.e., trapped in poverty, in unequal power relations and subject to abuse and violence.¹²⁸



Economic Justice

Activities by corporate actors have differentiated and gendered impacts on the populations local to where corporates operate.¹²⁹ Whether this is the disparity of pay in terms of the female labour force, the concern over gender-based violence, or indeed the impact of irresponsible corporate practices that pose serious human rights risks. Often, the gendered impacts of such practices or impacts that exacerbate other pre-existing inequalities are not adequately recognised. For example, environmental destruction often has a greater impact on women, who have less opportunities for alternative livelihoods compared to men who can travel more easily in search of paid labour.¹³⁰ Similarly, exploitative labour practices affect women and marginalised individuals and groups disproportionately due to their over representation in low-paid sectors.

Activities by public actors also have differentiated and gendered impacts. For instance, the Interfaith Standing Committee on Economic Justice and Integrity of Creation affirms that essential issues such as the allocation of public budgets are key in delivering fundamental services such as universal health coverage.¹³¹ For example, if taxation does not align with inclusive health financing policies, then we will continue to fail to deliver to those most in need. This is because unjust taxation leads to the mismatch between budget allocations, health system needs and the discrepancy between allocated budget and disbursed/executed budgets.¹³² In short, without money we cannot provide the means to the basic human rights that are essential to the dignity of every person.

Our goal as ACT Alliance is to promote an economy in the service of life - people and planet.¹³³ We are empowered to live out an ethic of responsibility for our neighbours globally and to work together for greater accountability in the governance of globalisation today.¹³⁴

Economic justice is, of course, not only limited to structural issues, but it is also connected to women's economic empowerment and legal constraints such as those present in family law. This means that economic justice also reverberates into the private sphere. We addressed these issues in the family law section.

(i) Human rights agreements and instruments

A major human rights instrument to regulate the economy, namely the [UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights](#) (Binding Treaty), has started to change this conversation by proposing that human rights have a priori value before economic imperatives. This entails the regulation of all corporate relationships by human rights principles, therefore recognising the primacy of human rights over divisive business instruments such as bilateral treaties on trade and investment. The negotiations on the binding treaty build on a myriad of non-binding rules such as:

- The [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGPs) endorsed in 2011 have been an important step in establishing the norm that human rights frameworks and principles also apply to business entities. But they have their limitations as they are only voluntary in their application and adherence and are largely gender blind.
- The 2019 [UN Gender Guidance on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGPs Gender Guidance) tries to fill the gender gap, but does not establish binding rules, despite its explicit focus on access to remedy.
- [UN Global Compact on Business and Human Rights](#) is a voluntary initiative based on CEO commitments to implement universal sustainability principles and to take steps to support the UN goals.
- [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#) are recommendations addressed by governments to multinational enterprises operating in or from adhering countries. They provide non-binding principles and standards for responsible business conduct in a global context consistent with applicable laws and internationally recognised standards.
- Additional resources can be found at the [Business and Human Rights Resource Centre](#) or on the [Danish Institute for Human Rights handbook](#).

(ii) Key messages

Helpful data & statistics:

The number of killings of human rights defenders in the context of corporate activities is shocking, with an average of over four land and environmental defenders being killed every week in 2019.¹³⁵ Since 2015, more than 2,000 attacks on activists working on human rights issues related to business have been documented by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.¹³⁶ Women human rights defenders are also being targeted through threats of sexual violence and smear campaigns.¹³⁷ There were 572 attacks in 2019 alone, up from 492 in 2018. Most of these attacks took place in Latin America, followed by Asia and the Pacific region.¹³⁸

¹²⁷ ACT Alliance, 2019, Briefing Paper: Gender Lens to the UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights, available at <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-10/Gender-lens-UN-Treaty-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-gender-briefing-oct2019.pdf>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Interfaith Standing Committee on Economic Justice and Integrity of Creation, 2018. Make It Possible: How Tax Commitments Can Move Tanzania Towards Universal Health Coverage, available at <https://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/globalassets/lanserte-rapporter/2018/make-it-possible.pdf>.

¹³² Ibid. at 6.

¹³³ See, for instance, Lutheran World Federation, 2004. Communion, Responsibility, Accountability: Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalisation, available at https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWF-Doc-50-Economic_Globalization-EN.pdf.

¹³⁴ Ibid. at 9.

¹³⁵ See, for instance, <https://www.trocaire.org/news/why-we-need-a-business-human-rights-treaty/>.

¹³⁶ See more at <https://dispatches.business-humanrights.org/hrd-january-2020/index.html>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

TOP LINE MESSAGES

- At the root of poverty and rights violations lie complex social, cultural, political, and economic structures that exclude certain groups of women, men and children. Development efforts must not only meet their immediate needs but must also analyse and address the rules, institutions, power relations and mechanisms that exclude and discriminate against certain groups in society (Rights-Based Development from a Faith-Based Perspective).
- Rights-based strategies require solid analyses for identifying those excluded and discriminated against, the particular rights issues involved, the causes for this exclusion and discrimination, and the corresponding obligations and responsibilities of different actors in any given context. The specific obligations of the nation state at different levels, the responsibilities of third-party states (e.g. extraterritorial obligations), and the responsibilities of other actors need to be analysed and identified (Rights-Based Development from a Faith-Based Perspective).
- Business principles do not always converge with human rights principles. In various dimensions, from violence against women, to women's economic participation, to tax, trade and investment, the gendered disparities are not resolved uniquely by market participation and growth dynamics. In fact, the growth-based model often puts women and other individuals who are marginalised in disadvantageous positions, ie, trapped in poverty, in unequal power relations and subject to abuse and violence (Briefing Paper on Gender Lens to the UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights).
- Activities by corporate actors have differentiated and gendered impacts on the populations local to where corporates operate. Whether this is the disparity of pay in terms of the female labour force, the concern over gender-based violence, or indeed the impact of irresponsible corporate practices that pose serious human rights risks. Often, the gendered impacts of such practices or impacts that exacerbate other pre-existing inequalities are not adequately recognised. For example, environmental destruction often has a greater impact on women, who have less opportunities for alternative livelihoods compared to men who can travel more easily in search of paid labour (Briefing Paper on Gender Lens to the UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights).
- Exploitative labour practices affect women and marginalised individuals and groups disproportionately due to their over representation in low-paid sectors. For example, aggressive tax avoidance or evasion is a drain on revenues that could provide public services most needed by women and people living in poverty, while higher direct taxes like value added tax (VAT), are borne by women in a disproportionate fashion (Briefing Paper on Gender Lens to the UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights).

Possible recommendations:

Those working with Member States, donors and/or international organisations, may want to use or adapt the following recommendations to their work:

1. Human rights should be the cornerstone of all business practices. This means that they should be integrated in a mandatory basis to all contractual relationships. We, like many civil society organisations, networks and coalitions, the establishment of direct obligations on companies and the strengthening of the provisions on the criminal liability for companies and individuals.
2. Mobilise the necessary resources, financial and other, for the implementation of programmes and projects that promote a justice-oriented approach to development.
3. Recognise in government policies and implementation that faith actors are key stakeholders in this work, which requires adequate resourcing to ensure that we leave no one behind.
4. Implement the UNGPs Gender Guidance and create legally binding rules that enable its translation and implementation in national and local contexts.
5. Make sure all State actors and all other non-State stakeholders, including faith actors, accountable for commitments to all human rights.
6. Hold transnational corporations to account and demand them to conduct mandatory human rights-based gender impact assessments (ex ante and periodically ex poste) of all their operations.
7. Advocate for a holistic development agenda that addresses intersectional injustices and are centred on the role of the State, including universal health coverage and gender just health systems, equality in education, economic empowerment and freedom from exploitation, violence, and discrimination.
8. Governments must integrate gender impact assessments to understand the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, including economic impacts, and find ways to address it effectively. Governments must plan and resource its response for the long term as the impacts will continue long after we have tackled the virus which include holding private sector actors into account and ensuring a people's vaccine available to all and in respect to human rights principles.

(iii) Faith Perspectives

Development implies a structural uplifting of people's well-being: efforts to this end will only have positive results when the structural determinants of oppression and discrimination are overcome. In the New Testament, a clear distinction is made between 'charity' and 'diakonia' in which Jesus Christ is seen as the Diakonos and diakonia as the very being of the church.¹³⁹ This implies that next to alleviating immediate needs, the church must address injustice, taking up more fundamental issues such as power structures underlying poverty and oppression. Views on development with justice derived from the teaching of the church inspire us today in efforts to address the downside of globalisation, marginalisation, and the exclusion of an ever-increasing number of those living in daily hardship. It is, indeed, in biblical understanding of ways in which God's liberating action demands a continuous human response that we find inspiration for faith-based involvement in development.¹⁴⁰

Economic powers 'continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ APRODEV et al, 2013, Development and Religion: A Discussion Paper, available at https://actalliance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/APRODEV_DevelopReligion_Final_WEB.pdf.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Laudato Sí, para 56, available at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.htm.

'The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin.'¹⁴² We, as faith-actors, must acknowledge it and act before it is too late.

(iv) Influencing tactics

Many ACT members and partners are actively promoting a faith and values-oriented approach to the economy. For instance, WCC is dedicated to measuring social results, ensuring investments support initiatives for sustainable livelihoods, women's empowerment and environment as well as promoting an '[economy of life](#)'. Those interested in further exploring this area of work can either partner up with expert organisations¹⁴³ or delve deeper into economic toolkits such as the [toolkit developed by the Centre for Economic and Social Rights](#). Members might also want to develop activities of their own such as:



Host a Side Event

If you would like to raise policy makers attention, you might want to host a side event during an official UN session. For example, to launch the [Engendering Business and Human Rights report](#), Christian Aid hosted an event during the [41st Human Rights Council session](#). To do so, it had to map out what key messages it wanted to convey, who to target and how to get them to listen (ex. by invitation to current UNRISD and former CEDAW member as well as chair of UNWG BHR). The ISHR Academy provides [tricks and tips](#) on how to organise a side event.

Network with Experts

Please do remember that, after the event is over your advocacy is not done. You must seize this opportunity to talk informally to participants and panel members, get their contact information and follow up afterwards. This means preparing questions in advance for the panellists, handing out useful publications you have produced, inquiring about additional resources and case studies, or simply sharing your business card or professional information with them.



¹⁴² Ibid. at 66.

¹⁴³ See also the work developed by Diakonia on settlement business at <https://www.diakonia.se/globalassets/documents/ihl/ihl-in-opt/briefs/the-unsettling-business-of-settlement-business.pdf> or the work development by Dan Church Aid on private sector partnerships at <https://www.danchurchaid.org/how-we-work/partnerships/private-sector-partnerships>.

Additional Advocacy Platforms

In addition to coordinating activities during the CSW and the HRC sessions, those working on economic justice might also want to consider additional advocacy platforms and processes such as the [World Bank's Spring and Annual Meetings](#), the [World Economic Forum](#) held in Davos, the [Financing for Development \(FfD\)](#), the [Civil Society Policy Forum](#) coordinated by the World Bank and the IMF and the [Ecumenical Panel on a New International Financial and Economic Architecture](#) (NIFEA).

Things to Consider

Political barriers impact the delivery and success of gender justice projects and advocacy activities. The most successful projects and strategies are based on robust [intersectional gender analysis](#). Gender analysis is a tool for identifying and documenting differences in power, roles, resources, norms, needs and interests of women, men, girls and boys in a community or group. It helps us to understand the societies we live in and to design strategies to tackle blockages. Diakonia developed a [resource on the development of gender sensitive power analysis](#). Some other ACT members and partners use other approaches such as an intersectional [political economy analysis](#) or the [Gender, Inclusion, Power and Politics analysis \(GIPP\)](#). All these approaches can be useful to those interested in developing a robust understanding of a particular context and crafting localised strategies that promote gender equality.

Please note that political advocacy is deeply connected to the work on social norms. This means that faith-based actors are just as much legitimate targets as stakeholders operating in UN spaces or national level policy makers. In fact, oftentimes this is where ACT Alliance can be most helpful and effective. For example, ACT Alliance can be fundamental in creating safe spaces at community-level that foster respectful discussions and explore inter-faith nuances and teachings based on concrete examples that enable the shift in social norms and attitudes. Dialogical and diaconal approaches can be key to unlocking difficult and controversial issues. For instance, the discussions enriched through ['conversatorios'](#)¹⁴⁴ are important as they create safe spaces while also challenging patriarchal social norms.

¹⁴⁴ See, for instance, ACT Alliance, 2020. The Other Pandemic: ACT Alliance 16 days of activism social media toolkit, at p. 3, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-media-toolkit.pdf>. See also 'Qué es un conversatorio', available at https://www.academia.edu/21956099/Qu%C3%A9_es_un_conversatorio?email_work_card=reading-history.

6. Transformative Masculinities

In many places we can see that there are roles, behaviours and attributes that are considered appropriate for men and associated with maleness which emphasise relations of equality and respect between women and men and which regard femininities as different but equally valued. Focused on gender equality, these transformative masculinities challenge the legitimacy of patriarchal ideas and practices. Transformative masculinities should be positive for everyone, because they emphasise the values of equality, respect, and dignity for people of all gender identities.¹⁴⁵



Transformative Masculinities

SDG 5 target 5.3 demands the elimination of all harmful practices whereas target 5.c urges Member States to adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality. Although SDG 5 is mostly focused on tackling the historical injustices suffered by women and girls, it also encapsulates a dimension that affects men and boys, in all their diversity. That is, men and boys also have a role to play in advancing gender equality. But not only. They are actively constrained and harmed by toxic masculinity which is responsible for impeding progress on this area.

This means that the work for transformative masculinities needs to be situated as subservient to the work for women's emancipation. This is because tackling toxic masculinities is crucial in dismantling patriarchy as a structure. In many places, from North America to Africa theology and politics are intertwined to promote toxic masculinities.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, ACT Alliance has a crucial role to play in challenging discourse that subvert Christ's teachings and promote discrimination, inequality and injustice to women and men, girls, and boys, in all their diversity.

(i) Human rights agreements and instruments

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, gender mainstreaming has become a widespread strategy for changing unequal social and institutional structures which discriminate against women and girls, with the goal of achieving gender equality.¹⁴⁷ Much has changed for women since 1995: they have become more visible as actors in society, economy, and politics. Public awareness regarding their discrimination has increased. However, most societies remain based on patriarchy and male hegemony. Patriarchal structures and institutions cannot easily be changed and the struggle for gender equality is still far from being won. The following agreements may be useful to those working on transformative masculinities:

- The right to life, gender equality, prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex, protection of physical integrity, the right to health - to mention a few of the human rights impacted by gender-based violence - are safeguarded in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**¹⁴⁸ (UDHR - art. 1 right to equality and art. 3 right to life and security of person) and the **International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights**¹⁴⁹ (ICCPR - art. 6 right to life) and the **International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights**¹⁵⁰ (ICESCR - preamble on inherent dignity and art. 12 highest attainable standard of physical and mental health).

¹⁴⁵ ACT Alliance et al., Interfaith Brief on Gender-Based Violence, available <https://www.actubumbano.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Interfaith-Brief-on-Gender-Based-Violence.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ See, for instance, <https://www.counterview.net/2021/03/of-men-and-beasts-of-political.html?m=1>.

¹⁴⁷ Bread for the World, 2016. The Burden of Breadwinning: Transformative Masculinities in the Context of HIV, Violence against Women and Gender Equality, available at <https://actalliance.org/gender-masculinities/>.

¹⁴⁸ See at <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

¹⁴⁹ See at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>.

¹⁵⁰ See at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>.

- Art. 1 of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women** (CEDAW) determines that ‘the term "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.’¹⁵¹
- The **Beijing PFA**, para. 82.k (p. 252), urges Member States to strengthen gender-awareness campaigns and gender equality training among women and men, girls, and boys to eliminate the persistence of gender stereotypes.
- Those wanting to push for the implementation of global instruments such as CEDAW through their work are encouraged to identify champion countries and work with them on national level policies that might serve as a blueprint at the regional and global level. For example, those working on masculinities may [map which countries have signed and ratified UN instruments such as CEDAW](#) and track what they have done to adequately implement their human rights responsibilities. This information may, for instance, feed into regional-specific data and regional review.
- There are regional and continental protocols that are quite useful to those working on masculinities such as the [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#) (Maputo Protocol) and [AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women’s Empowerment for 2018-2028](#).

(ii) Key messages

Helpful data & statistics:

Globally, boys are more often killed or maimed, abducted, or recruited by armed groups.¹⁵² Similarly, boys are more likely to be killed in direct warfare, if girls are killed or badly injured it is more likely to be a result of indiscriminate explosive weapons. Of all verified cases of killing and maiming, 44 percent were boys, 17 percent were girls.¹⁵³ In the Middle East, adolescent boys are reported being targeted by the police, as well as by gangs and armed groups, which then leads to a sense of powerlessness and resignation for not being able to change the situation.¹⁵⁴

The global average of intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence against women, which is a result of toxic masculinity, is high at 35 per cent.¹⁵⁵ In certain regions like the Pacific, intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence, non-partner sexual assault, sexual exploitation and trafficking, and harmful practices such as bride price and accusations of sorcery are pervasive. Prevalence of these types of violence is high in the region; in most countries, it is much higher than the global average of 35 percent. National research shows rate of lifetime experience is incredibly high in Tonga (79 per cent), Samoa (76 per cent), Kiribati (73 per cent), Fiji (72 per cent), Vanuatu (72 per cent) and Solomon Islands (64 per cent).¹⁵⁶ Women with intellectual disabilities and psychosocial impairment are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual violence. Studies show that women and girls with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse than women without disabilities.¹⁵⁷

Toxic masculinities do not only contribute to violence and conflict. It affects all spheres of life such as health-seeking behaviours and the psychological effect of economic losses and to climate change. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, men’s access to HIV/AIDS treatment is 11 percent lower than that of women. In 2013, there were

¹⁵¹ 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), available at <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

¹⁵² Save the Children, 2020. Stop the War on Children, available at <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/children-conflict-highest-risk-violence-records-began>.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Save the Children, 2019, I Wish Tomorrow Will Not Come, available at https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15384/pdf/i_wish_tomorrow_will_not_come.pdf.

¹⁵⁵ See, for instance, <https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/focus-areas/ending-violence-against-women/>.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ UNFPA, 2013. A Deeper Silence – The Unheard Experiences of Women with Disabilities – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Violence against Women in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

an estimated 730,000 AIDS-related deaths among men, and 600,000 AIDS-related deaths among women, which clearly show that there are obvious problems with men accessing or staying on treatment.

Although there are more boys than girls born in the world (105/100), this proportion is inverted in the 30-to-40-year-old population and increases from the age of 80 onwards (with 190 women for every 100 men).¹⁵⁸ Women constitute the majority of older adults in all countries. In the Americas, statistics show that men's life is 5.8 years lower than women.¹⁵⁹ Mortality indicators confirm that the mortality rate for men is higher than for women (718.8 deaths per year per 100,000 population among men versus 615.1/100,000 for women). Furthermore, due to premature death, there are 18% more years of life lost (YLLs) among men than among women. Because they tend to die earlier, men have 8% fewer disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) than do women.¹⁶⁰

Patriarchal masculinities also affect men's ability to handle hardship and to deal with psychological duress. For example, in India, it is estimated that around 16,000 farmers die by suicide each year, and at rates far above those of the general population.¹⁶¹ Socioeconomic factors, rather than mental health problems, are associated with farmer suicides, with increased indebtedness related to the agrarian crisis created by climate change and aggressive market policies playing the predominant role.¹⁶² This means that often women are left behind to deal with the consequences. Similar trends are observed in marginalised groups, Roma people, scavengers and people with alcohol addictions which shows the intersecting and interconnected inequalities resulting out of toxic masculinity practices and narratives.¹⁶³

TOP LINE MESSAGES

- Dominant forms of masculinity are often associated with gender-based violence, oppression of women and girls and dangerous sexual and reproductive practices. Transformative masculinities are essential for the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. (ACT's website). "*Transformative masculinities*" speaks about the endeavour to generate masculinities that transform the world into a gender-equitable community (Redemptive Masculinities).
- Faith-based groups around the world are contributing to tackling endemic gender-based violence and toxic masculinity. Faith actors are fundamental in taking a theological approach to deconstructing patriarchal theology that condones human rights violation such as SGBV. This approach resonates with communities of faith and can have a wider and more impactful reach as such (Gender Justice Reference Group Masculinities Task Force).
- Men continue to hold a greater percentage of positions of leadership. As such, men are in a crucial position to address gender justice and bring forward respectful masculinities to workplaces and communities. Action by men and boys is crucial to achieve gender justice (ACT's website).
- For men, negative stereotypes of masculinity can result in harmful emotional impact. Beyond the self, this can perpetuate generational cycles of violence and harm on families and communities (ACT's website). The socialisation of boys is crucial in tackling negative stereotypes and influencing their understanding of masculinities and responsibilities (Gender Justice Reference Group Masculinities Task Force).

¹⁵⁸ PAHO, 2019. Masculinities and Health in the Americas, available at <https://iris.paho.org/handle/10665.2/51666>.

¹⁵⁹ PAHO, 2019. Masculinities and Health in the Americas, available at <https://iris.paho.org/handle/10665.2/51666>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Marriott, D. Factors Associated with the Farmer Suicide Crisis in India, *Journal of Epidemiology and Global Health* 6(4): 217-227, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210600615300277>.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ See, for instance, <https://www.bloombergquint.com/opinion/student-suicides-why-do-numbers-disproportionately-tilt-towards-dalits>.

- Discourses on empowerment have focused on the vulnerability of women and children, an approach that must be appreciated as these groups have been more vulnerable to different social factors. However, this has had the undesired effect of leaving men (totally) out of the picture. Only holistic approaches will bring about gender justice (ACT's website).
- Patriarchal system which dominates most societies is not only disadvantageous for women and girls but also for men and boys. Men and boys must be encouraged to critically analyse gender-based power relations, identities, and roles and how they determine their lives (The Burden of Breadwinning).
- We must equip and scale up the engagement of faith communities with an intergenerational tool on conversations about sex, sexuality, and sexual and gender-based violence and to develop adolescents' and young adults' competence in positive masculinities and femininities in their communities (Positive Masculinities and Femininities).

Possible recommendations:

Those working on masculinities might want to adjust the following recommendations to their own contexts:

1. Enable resources to ensure more men become involved in the search for transformative masculinities and the realisation of gender equality. Men who are interested in these issues often consider themselves to be advocates of gender issues.
2. Include transformative masculinities in gender policies and appropriately resource the delivery of transformative masculinities activities.
3. Develop work with inter-faith groups and secular entities to promote a multi-disciplinary approach to transformative masculinities within communities.
4. Map existing projects/initiatives focusing on masculinities and explore ways of collaborating within the existing structures/systems.
5. Create incentives to improve men's health seeking behaviour without harming women's full access to health services.
6. Promote research to fully understand and analyse the situation of discriminated and marginalised groups, the intersecting categories have to be considered. Gender is just one category of social differentiation. Gender overlaps or intersects with other categories such as age, economic class, sexual orientation, HIV/health status and religion, resulting in many different manifestations of inequality and discrimination. Men's health, for example, is determined by gender but also by social categories such as class, race, or sexual orientation.
7. Donors must recognise that work with men for transformative masculinities needs funding of its own. Work with men must not result in reduced funding for women's empowerment. Fund communications strategies that promote positive social change in the long run, transforming social attitudes and mentalities.
8. Promote women's leadership and participation in the community and in church environments as a way to counteract gender stereotypes and promote equal practices.
9. Promote the exercise of masculinities that counteract the practices and behaviours that generate violence and inequality in society, especially, at the core of our congregations and communities of faith.

(iii) Faith Perspectives

Concepts of masculinity have become problematised and are contested. Dominant versions of masculinity in many cultures and societies are often associated with the rise of conflict and violence such as SGBV, the spread of diseases such as HIV and low health-seeking behaviours, the rise of health problems such as alcoholism and

suicide.¹⁶⁴ Masculinities are amenable to transformation through multiple strategies. Men have the agency and the capacity to act in specific ways that enable them to contribute to a better world.¹⁶⁵ Men are not hapless victims of socialisation but can begin to do things differently and faith actors are crucial in promoting this change within their own communities and through interfaith action. However, it is important to note that the intersections of religion and masculinities are complex: on the one hand, religion is often considered a factor that sustains or reinforces problematic notions of masculinity, while on the other hand religion is considered a resource and instrument to change men and to transform masculinities.

In most African societies, families are smaller unities of faith communities.¹⁶⁶ but the roles they abide by are usually those promoted by the larger faith community. In Nigeria, most family units are either Islamic or Christian, with many others incorporating African Traditional Religions as well. Therefore, the roles expected of men and women are seen as ordained by God and Bible texts and Hadith and Quran texts. These are used mainly to justify why men and women must carry out the chores assigned to them by the faith community. While faith communities often promote gender imbalances in the context of enforcing gender roles for women and men, some religious texts also promote gender equality.¹⁶⁷ For example, the story of the two sisters - Mary and Martha (Luke 10: 38-42) - shows that while women were expected to do the house chores, while men learned from Jesus, Jesus supported Mary's choice to learn like men.¹⁶⁸

Although religious passages have at times been used to suppress and oppress, they can have a deeply transformative role. For example, many theologies connect with Christian images of Jesus as subversive, Jesus as vulnerable, and Christian values like surrender, sacrifice, love.¹⁶⁹ Jesus certainly was not afraid to show vulnerable emotions¹⁷⁰. He wept openly in public (Luke 19:41; John 11:33-36). He was comfortable in the company of women, allowing them to follow him in his travels. In fact, he even received financial support from women (Luke 8:1-3). Some of his parables—about baking with yeast (Matthew 13:33), looking for a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), and virgins at a wedding (Matthew 25:1-13)—indicate a familiarity with women's everyday life. Jesus even praised Mary for bucking the traditionally women's role of preparing and serving food when she chose instead to sit and learn at the feet of Jesus among the male disciples (Luke 10:38-42). He welcomed little children when most men didn't have time for them (Mark 10:13-16). Since the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) is what God wants and expects all Christ followers, men, and women, to exhibit in their lives, it must be how God intends "real" men to be, as well. The problem lies not with the Spirit, but with our cultures' stereotypes of masculinities and femininities.¹⁷¹

Promoting transformative readings of religious texts is fundamental in advancing theologies of gender justice. For example, the relationship between David and Jonathan (Samuel 18:1) as loving and non-competitive is a profound teaching of transformative masculinity. Another example is when Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4: 1-40) showing his loving acceptance and the rejection of stereotypes. The [Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians](#) is yet another good faith-based example of a concrete response to the patriarchal exclusion of women.¹⁷² It empowers women theologians to raise their voice in the theological discourse. Since 2007, the Circle is also open to 'gender equitable men' (GEM) who support the cause of gender equity. Some areas theologians have focused on in critiquing patriarchal masculinities are Biblical hermeneutics (e.g. use of Contextual Bible Study for raising gender awareness) and cultural resources for challenging patriarchy (e.g. matrilineal and traditional women religious/societal leadership).

¹⁶⁴ See, for instance, Side by Side, 2011. Changing Men and Transforming Masculinities: Practices, Perspectives and Resources, available at <http://sidebysidegender.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Changing-Men-and-Transforming-Masculinities-seminar-report-2011.pdf>.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ WCC, Positive Masculinities and Femininities: Handbook for Adolescents and Young People in Faith Communities in Nigeria, available at https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/File/2019-EHAI-MascFem-handbook_web-EN.pdf.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. at 27.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. at 28.

¹⁶⁹ Side by Side, 2011, at 5.

¹⁷⁰ Banner, 2019, Christlike Masculinity, available at <https://www.thebanner.org/features/2019/10/christlike-masculinity>.

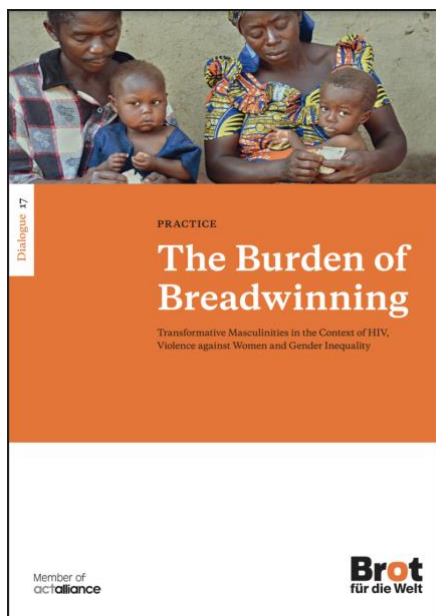
¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Side by Side, 2011, at 3.

In many contexts like the Pacific, the Christian church is deeply embedded across and influential in every facet of life across the majority of communities. Church denominations have a unique network that places them in an influential position in the policy space. They can and therefore must promote transformative masculinities while also condemning faith actors who misinterpret Biblical passages and cause harm to women and girls, men, and boys, by supporting harmful beliefs about femininity and masculinity.

(iv) Influencing tactics

Sonke Gender Justice produced a [set of resources](#) that support men and boys to take action to end domestic and sexual violence and to promote healthy, equitable relationships that men and women can enjoy – passionately, respectfully and fully. The Sonke toolkit gives a more comprehensive picture as to what tactics are more appropriate for this theme. Here we highlight some that have been used by our members:



Publish a report

If, like Bread for the World, you have programming that addresses the negative effects of toxic masculinities, you might want to document your findings in the format of a report. In order to publish a report you must: (i) develop a terms of reference (ToR) detailing the aim, the timeline and the methodology; (ii) put together a task force to either oversee the development of the report by a consultant or to divide the writing responsibilities amongst the members of the task force; (iii) organise a work plan based on ToR timeline; (iv) sort out the editing and publishing support; and (v) create a dissemination strategy that helps you time the release according to a particular advocacy opportunity.

Here is an example of a [report](#) that documents Norwegian Church Aid's (NCA) best practices from global GBV programmes. And here are some [tips on how to produce policy briefs](#) which can be used if you want to produce a shorter and snappier output. Please remember that your work is not done once the report is published. You must ensure it is read and shared by others working in this area.

Additional examples can be found at WCC's website on [positive masculinities and femininities](#) as well as on [redemptive masculinities](#).

Create a training

Those working on transformative masculinities might want to create a training to promote positive religious teachings on gender justice. The Pacific Theologians for Pacific Communities developed an excellent [gender equality theology training](#) that might serve as a blueprint.

Things to Consider

Political barriers impact the delivery and success of gender justice projects and advocacy activities. The most successful projects and strategies are based on robust [intersectional gender analysis](#). Gender analysis is a tool for identifying and documenting differences in power, roles, resources, norms, needs and interests of women, men, girls and boys in a community or group. It helps us to understand the societies we live in and to design

strategies to tackle blockages. Diakonia developed a [resource on the development of gender sensitive power analysis](#). Some other ACT members and partners use other approaches such as an intersectional [political economy analysis](#) or the [Gender, Inclusion, Power and Politics analysis \(GIPP\)](#). All of these approaches can be useful to those interested in developing a robust understanding of a particular context and crafting localised strategies that promote gender equality.

Please note that political advocacy is deeply connected to the work on social norms. This means that faith-based actors are just as much legitimate targets as stakeholders operating in UN spaces or national level policy makers. In fact, oftentimes this is where ACT Alliance can be most helpful and effective. For example, ACT Alliance can be fundamental in creating safe spaces at community-level that foster respectful discussions and explore inter-faith nuances and teachings based on concrete examples that enable the shift in social norms and attitudes. Dialogical and diaconal approaches can be key to unlocking difficult and controversial issues. For instance, the discussions enriched through '[Conversatorios](#)'¹⁷³ are important as they create safe spaces while also challenging patriarchal social norms.

¹⁷³ See, for instance, ACT Alliance, 2020. The Other Pandemic: ACT Alliance 16 days of activism social media toolkit, at p. 3, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-media-toolkit.pdf>. See also 'Qué es un conversatorio', available at https://www.academia.edu/21956099/Qu%C3%A9_es_un_conversatorio?email_work_card=reading-history.

7. Climate Justice

Climate change is a threat which affects the planet's most vulnerable people in multidimensional ways and is manifested unequally depending on the population's natural geographical and social dimensions. There is increasing evidence of the disproportionately negative impact of climate change on women and girls and of the erosion of gains already made in closing gender gaps.¹⁷⁴ Climate change is an issue of justice between groups of people as well as between countries.



Existing inequalities between women and men, in all their diversity, are relevant to climate change policy making in a number of ways, since they will interplay with the impacts of climate change and influence what kind of solutions that are presented as solutions to the climate challenge.¹⁷⁵ At the same time, how climate disruption affects men and boys also needs to be understood using gender analysis tools.

[SDG13](#) urges Member States to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. SDG Target 13.b promotes mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth, and local and marginalised communities. The preface to the Paris Agreement (see more below) states that all climate action shall, *inter alia*, respect and promote human rights, the right to health, gender equality and women's empowerment, indigenous peoples' rights, and the right to development. The Paris Agreement also provides for some accountability on gender equality and empowerment, stating that adaptation action and capacity building efforts should be gender-responsive (articles 7.5 and 11.2).

(i) Human rights agreements and instruments

Many human rights are affected by climate change such as the right to life, to self-determination, to development, to health and to a healthy environment. Here we highlight the main agreements and instruments that can be used for climate action:

- The 1992 [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development](#) (Rio Declaration), [the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action](#), and ['The Future We Want'](#) (the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference) all call for the right to development, which is articulated in the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, to be fulfilled so as to meet equitably the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.
- The 1994 [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC) calls for States to protect future generations and to take action on climate change "on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities". The UNFCCC is a "Rio Convention", one of two opened for signature at the "Rio Earth Summit" in 1992. Its sister Rio Conventions are the [UN Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and the [Convention to Combat Desertification](#).
- UNFCCC has a [Gender Action Plan](#) (GAP) which was adopted in 2017 and sets out objectives and activities under five priority areas that aim to advance knowledge and understanding of gender-responsive climate action and its coherent mainstreaming in the implementation of the UNFCCC and the work of Parties, the

¹⁷⁴ Christian Aid and Inspiration, 2019. Climate migration in the Dry Corridor of Central America: integrating a gender perspective, available at https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/2019_migration_gender_climate_change_Central_America.pdf.

¹⁷⁵ Position paper on Gender and Human rights for the advocacy work on climate change in ACT Alliance 2019-2020.

secretariat, United Nations entities and all stakeholders at all levels, as well as women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the UNFCCC process.

- In 2019, at Conference of Parties (COP) 25 that took place in Madrid, a new Gender Action Plan was adopted. Parties agreed a 5-year enhanced [Lima work programme](#) on gender and its gender action plan. **The Enhanced LWPG (Lima Work Programme on Gender) & Its GAP operate over five years: 2020-2024.** The GAP includes specific activities for each year. The GAP has five priority areas, all of which provide opportunities for civil society engagement and advocacy at local level: (i) capacity building, knowledge management and communication; (ii) gender balance, participation, and women's leadership; (iii) coherence (orienting new members of UNFCCC to the importance of gender); (iv) gender responsive implementation and means of implementation; and (v) monitoring and reporting.
- The 1997 [Kyoto Protocol](#) operationalises the UNFCCC by committing industrialised countries and economies in transition to limit and reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets. The Convention itself only asks those countries to adopt policies and measures on mitigation and to report periodically.
- The [Paris Agreement](#) is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at Conference of Parties (COP) 21 in Paris, on 12 December 2015, and entered into force on 4 November 2016. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels. The Paris Agreement works on a 5- year cycle of increasingly ambitious climate action carried out by countries. By 2020, countries submitted their plans for climate action known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs). The implementation of the Paris Agreement is also reviewed annually during the COP.
- There is **gender specific language in the Paris Agreement** which must be highlighted through all climate advocacy. For example, the preamble of the Paris Agreement states that '*Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.*'
- The [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) runs from 2015 until 2030 and aims to achieve the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.
- OHCHR produced a [useful guide on human rights and climate change](#) which could be interesting to those looking at delving further into this issue.¹⁷⁶

(ii) Key messages

Helpful data & statistics:

Climate change effects are so pervasive that they impact issues such as health, security, migration, and gender equality. In spite of that, a recent [report](#) published by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) states that only 5 out of 75 Member states recognised gender considerations for climate related security risks in a 2019 security council open debate on the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security.¹⁷⁷

Addressing the root causes of gender inequality is also important to addressing the climate/gender intersection. Church World Service states:

"With predefined responsibilities for cooking, cleaning and childcare, women and girls already bear the brunt of the additional workload caused by slow onset disasters such as drought. When sudden onset disasters occur such as extreme rainfall or floods, commonly held assets can be further eroded, forcing many families to use to harmful traditional practices in their search for emergency income. Even in communities where the practices are questioned, overwhelmed and resource poor

¹⁷⁶ See more at <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/COP21.pdf>.

¹⁷⁷ UNEP et al, Gender, Climate Change & Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change, available <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/32638/GCS.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

*families can resort to FGM, early marriage, and bride price negotiation for pre-pubescent girls, even if these are prohibited by national law.*¹⁷⁸

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), climate change will affect the cultivation of crops which will impact local economies and compromise food security. This phenomenon will especially affect women who, according to FAO, produce 60 to 80 percent of the food in countries in the Global South and half of the food in all countries.

The lack of recognition and support provided to the intersections pertaining to gender and climate change has real impact on people's lives. In 2018, 77 percent of human rights defenders who were murdered (and whose deaths were recorded) were defending land, indigenous peoples' and/or environmental rights.¹⁷⁹ Global Witness documented 168 killings of land and environmental defenders in 2018 and an additional 201 in 2017, about ten percent of whom were women. The true scale of the problem is difficult to estimate but the number of those who have lost their lives is likely far greater than has been recorded; many more have been silenced with intimidation, arrests, violent attacks, or lawsuits.¹⁸⁰

This reality will be aggravated by the persecution of leading defenders of the environment and human rights that live in the vulnerable regions. 116 people died in Latin American countries for defending their lands and confronting practices that affected the environment in 2017.¹⁸¹ Brazil heads the list in Latin America with 46 murders, followed by Colombia with 32, Mexico with 15 and Peru with 8.¹⁸²

According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), women are fourteen times more likely than men to die in a natural disaster.¹⁸³ If women and girls continued to be left out of planning for disaster response or risk reduction measures, the special talents, skills, and knowledge of 50 percent of the population will not be capitalised upon and the needs of the most affected are unlikely to be met.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Church World Service, 2021, Summary on Gender and Climate Change.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. at 16.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ See more at At What Cost? Irresponsible Businesses and the Murder of Environmental Activists in 2017, available at <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/a-qu%C3%A9-precio/>.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ UNDP, 2010. Gender and Disasters. Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, available

<https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/disaster/7Disaster%20Risk%20Reduction%20-%20Gender.pdf>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. at 1.

TOP LEVEL MESSAGES

- We are facing great challenges: nationalist populism, increased securitisation, climate emergency, and forced migration and displacement. Women and girls, and those most marginalised in society, stand at the crossroads of all these trends, which perpetuate gender inequalities (CSW 64 Statement).
- As faith actors working in communities, we see how forms of repression are interrelated and recognise gender injustice as an intersectional issue; therefore, we are pivotal partners in addressing them. If we are to successfully implement gender just policies and programmes, intersectional approaches to development and struggles for gender justice around the world must be sufficiently resourced. Capacity is important to the sustainability of projects. Increased resources to better enable religious actors and faith-based organisations to develop their own capacity and to work effectively with the growing global partnership for Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is critical for achieving gender equality.
- Gender inequality and climate change are both expressions of structural injustices that cater for over-exploitation of natural resources and human rights abuses. Climate change is tightly linked to economic injustice since the current economic system feeds on inequality and injustice, while contributing to climate change since it is largely dependent on fossil sources of energy. Depletion of resources and destruction of ecosystems also reduce the resilience to climate change of human societies (Position paper on Gender and Human rights for the advocacy work on climate change in ACT Alliance 2019-2020).
- The gender-specific division of work, the unequal access of men and women to resources and decision-making power make women more vulnerable to climate change and its effects, and their ability to respond is limited (Climate Migration in the Dry Corridor of Central America).
- Since women and men traditionally play different roles in the formal and informal economy of a country as well as at the household level, they experience the impacts of climate change in different ways and have unequal opportunities to influence decisions related to climate action. Despite recent gains, women continue to be underrepresented in climate policymaking and finance activities (Position paper on Gender and Human rights for the advocacy work on climate change in ACT Alliance 2019-2020).
- While women are traditionally responsible for daily care work like cooking, health and hygiene within the household, men are more frequently involved in the formal economy. Women tend to own less productive resources such as land than men and in many countries they are not allowed to inherit land and other resources from their father or husband. This division of labour and unequal access to resources has implications in terms of vulnerability to climate change impacts as well as the opportunity to participate in decision making on climate change policy and action. As the current globalised economy and the politics that support it measures progress primarily in terms of GDP, women's work and the needs, interests, and the knowledge that they have, get less recognition than that of men and their voices and perspectives are consequently often over-looked (Position paper on Gender and Human rights for the advocacy work on climate change in ACT Alliance 2019-2020).
- Historically marginalised and vulnerable groups - such as ethnic cultural, or racial minorities - tend to be excluded from formal consultative processes and are often relegated to the informal economy. This institutionalised discrimination exacerbates existing gender inequalities, making it very difficult for minority men and women to be equally consulted in the management and control of financial and/or energy supplies and natural resources. Entrenched gender norms also can trap minority women in their

productive, and reproductive roles, preventing them from building their potential as influencing agents or political actors at community level and beyond (Position paper on Gender and Human rights for the advocacy work on climate change in ACT Alliance 2019-2020).

Possible recommendations:

Here are some possible recommendations based on the work developed by ACT's Climate Change Reference Group, through its Gender, Human Rights and Climate Change sub-group, that can be adapted to different contexts:

1. We call on all Parties to take action to implement the activities under the Gender Action Plan in order to strengthen consideration of gender aspects in climate related activities all over the world
2. We call for a continuation of the Lima work programme, which secures that the capacity to integrate gender considerations in processes under the Paris Agreement continues to increase.
3. We call on Parties to follow the recommendations in the Paris Agreement Implementation Guidelines to make the NDC revision in 2020 an inclusive and participative process, which engages with local communities and indigenous peoples, in a gender-responsive manner, and report this accordingly.
4. We call on Parties to follow the recommendations in the Paris Agreement Implementation Guidelines to include gender-responsive adaptation action and traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems related to adaptation in their adaptation communications, and report on this accordingly.
5. We call on Parties to allocate adequate financial and human resources to build the needed capacity on gender dimensions of climate policy and action at national level and to comply with the requirements on gender under the Paris Agreement Implementation Guidelines.
6. We call on Parties to include information on gender responsiveness in their biannual communication on public financial resources provided to developing country Parties, in line with the recommendations in the Paris Agreement Implementation Guidelines.
7. We call on Parties to recognise and address the interconnections, interrelatedness, and interdependence among climate and human rights, gender equality, and the Sustainable Development Goals, and support a holistic development agenda that puts human rights front and centre.
8. We call on Parties to develop projects within the framework of the Adaptation Fund or the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to capitalise on the GCF gender equality mandate, for example, by developing statistics and/or implementing pilot projects on mitigation, resilience and adaptation which prevent displacement and help women to adapt. To this end, governments need more training and support so that they can gain access to finance for these types of projects. Progress is also required towards greater transparency in the operation of all the climate finance mechanisms, which would have an impact on access to funding for civil society and projects led by women.
9. We call on Parties to, at a regional level, ensure that a gender focus is included in action plans. In addition, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migrations endorsed by the United Nations notes the importance of developing migration policies with a gender perspective in order to address women's specific needs and vulnerabilities.
10. We call on Parties to, at national level, increase mandatory training on gender and climate change for staff involved in decision-making processes relating to national climate change policy and migration policy.
11. Develop databases, historical and specific series which include disaggregated data to determine the actual scale of climate change and related internal, cross-border and international migration. Evaluate the economic, migration, climate and gender policies which are currently in operation at a national and regional level to:
 - Understand their impact on local communities, focusing on human and women's rights.
 - Ensure that their implementation is not worsening women's living conditions and that they meet the national commitments made under international frameworks (the United Nations Framework

- Convention on Climate Change, the 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the New Urban Agenda, etc.); and
- Identify, share, and replicate strategies which achieve national targets, especially relating to climate change and the SDGs.

We also call faith actors to:

1. Accompany community leaders in exercising their human and environmental rights and being firmly committed to raising awareness about the risks that those who report the destruction of the environment face.
2. Strengthen the undertakings and initiatives of women and for the sustainable development of their families and communities.

(iii) Faith Perspectives

As rightly pointed out in [Song of the Prophets](#), theology and modern climate science have had an uneasy relationship. Theology, at its best, will help us to see clearly and face up to our experiences, clearing away the mechanisms we all use to hide from the truths about ourselves and the world.¹⁸⁵ We all need those who will help us to see the truth from which we might be tempted to turn, to face things we can hardly bear, and to find a source of hope that is real. We have often called the people who can do this for us ‘prophets. They help us to discern the truth and to act upon it.

Prophets are sometimes unpopular, especially with those who have much to lose if things change. But they consistently, and without fear, speak out.¹⁸⁶ Sometimes people think them mad. Sometimes they are indulged as though they are naïve. All this happened to the prophets in the Bible, and it happens still to truth-tellers in the world today. But prophets are much more complex than their popular caricature. Their most dominant note is not actually doom-saying, for they bring most a joyful and hopeful vision of a new world.

The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann has taught us to celebrate the ‘prophetic imagination’, and to look for those who offer us a vision of a renewed world, holding on fast to hope.¹⁸⁷ Prophets call people to behave differently, to keep the good laws they have been given, to do what is right. They help us all face up to the future we are walking towards and that we are creating for future generations. It is precisely these voices that we need to hear in the churches and in the wider world, and a theological approach to climate change must make this possible.

¹⁸⁵ Christian Aid, 2014. *Song of the Prophets: A Global Theology of Climate Change*, available <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-08/song-of-prophets-global-theology-climate-change-november-2014.pdf>.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* at 6.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

(iv) Influencing tactics



Create a Campaign

The [ACT Now for Climate Justice](#) campaign aims to highlight the urgency of this issue while contributing to sector-wide discussions on resilience; financing; gender and human rights; mitigation; and movement building/strengthening. So far, the alliance has been able to influence key global negotiations and instruments such as the negotiation of the Paris Agreement in 2015.¹⁸⁸

The ACT Climate Justice Global Community of Practice (CoP) group on Gender, Climate and Human Rights focuses on producing joint outputs and coordinating a shared strategy such as those connected to the Conference of Parties (COP).

This is extremely important as we will not be able to avert the climate crisis alone. We will only be able to do it if we do collaborate with other faith-based as well as secular actors. This is because, and as clearly explained by the ACT Advocacy Strategy, multi stakeholder action is needed to transform the status quo and to bring the healing the mother earth and society need.

WECF produced a [media training toolkit](#) that might be useful to those developing a campaign. The Green Peace Mob Lab created a course on [how to create 'people powered' campaigns](#).

Collaborate Joint Messaging and Strategies

Civil society often struggles to influence policy change, particularly in spaces that are crowded and occupied by powerful actors. When attending an advocacy event or treaty negotiation (such as a UNECE [Aarhus Convention](#) negotiation), CSOs must try to collaborate with each other in order to find joint-messaging and strategies. For instance, you might want to get together beforehand to line up messages and determine who would intervene in each thematic discussion. You might also want to meet during the event to come up with reactive strategies. Similarly, within the context of faith communities, you might want to stimulate conversations as a way to find common points and strategies. See, for instance the meetings held by the [Hope Cathedral on Interfaith Cooperation on Environment, Creation and Sustainability](#).¹⁸⁹



Things to Consider

Political barriers impact the delivery and success of gender justice projects and advocacy activities. The most successful projects and strategies are based on robust [intersectional gender analysis](#). Gender analysis is a tool for identifying and documenting differences in power, roles, resources, norms, needs and interests of women, men, girls and boys in a community or group. It helps us to understand the societies we live in and to design strategies to tackle blockages. Diakonia developed a [resource on the development of gender sensitive power analysis](#). Some other ACT members and partners use other approaches such as an intersectional [political economy analysis](#) or the [Gender, Inclusion, Power and Politics analysis \(GIPP\)](#). All of these approaches can be useful to those interested in developing a robust understanding of a particular context and crafting localised strategies that promote gender equality.

Please note that political advocacy is deeply connected to the work on social norms. This means that faith-based actors are just as much legitimate targets as stakeholders operating in UN spaces or national level policy makers. In fact, oftentimes this is where ACT Alliance can be most helpful and effective. For example, ACT Alliance can be fundamental in creating safe spaces at community-level that foster respectful discussions and explore inter-faith nuances and teachings based on concrete examples that enable the shift in social norms and attitudes. Dialogical and diaconal approaches can be key to unlocking difficult and controversial issues. For instance, the discussions enriched through '[conversatorios](#)'¹⁹⁰ are important as they create safe spaces while also challenging patriarchal social norms.

¹⁸⁸ See, for instance, the ACT Alliance Position Paper for COP 19, available at https://actalliance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/act_alliance_position_paper_for_cop19_final.pdf.

¹⁸⁹ See more at <https://www.norwegianamerican.com/hope-cathedral/>.

¹⁹⁰ See, for instance, ACT Alliance, 2020. The Other Pandemic: ACT Alliance 16 days of activism social media toolkit, at p. 3, available at <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-media-toolkit.pdf>. See also 'Qué es un conversatorio', available at https://www.academia.edu/21956099/Qu%C3%A9_es_un_conversatorio?email_work_card=reading-history.

CONCLUSION

This framework aims to contribute to the implementation of the ACT Alliance Global Strategy 2019-2026. The ACT Global Strategy *Hope in Action – Putting People First* is a response to the changing global social, economic and political environment, which poses challenges and opportunities for civil society (CSOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) to play a meaningful role in fostering a just and inclusive world. Comprised of national, regional, and global members, ACT has much to contribute as a Christian, church-based alliance with its roots firmly planted in strong faith-based communities at local level.

The ACT global strategy provides a strong focus on gender justice, localisation, and the role of youth. Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and as such the global strategy focuses on a world where everybody is valued equally, enjoys equal human rights, and equitably shares responsibility in the distribution of power, knowledge, and resources. We want to see all people free from cultural and interpersonal systems of patronage and oppression, and from violence and repression based on gender.

The global community can and should do more to save lives, improve the well-being of all human beings, promote peace, and ensure the realisation of all human rights, as well as to preserve the integrity of God's creation. **Equally, faith actors and FBOs can do more to live their faith by engaging in all processes that have an impact on the life of people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised.** The prophetic and moral voice of faith communities and organisations, associated with their care and concern to save lives, bring transformational development, denounce injustices, and uphold dignity are paramount to putting people first and a clear demonstration of *Hope in Action*.

The ACT Advocacy Strategy which accompanies the global strategy, considers the sequence of the necessary governance endorsement, covering the period 2020 -2027. ACT Alliance has defined advocacy as a strategic set of activities designed to influence decision-makers, laws and regulations, structures, and practices to address the root causes of injustice. Advocacy may be done publicly or more privately, and can include policy research, campaigning, and public events, lobbying and policy dialogue, media work and production of materials to support the different types of activities. Awareness raising is part of advocacy when it is seeking to educate and increase understanding on issues of injustice. ACT will use different advocacy methods as appropriate to ACT Forums, members, and their contexts, and which are most effective to achieve the desired policy and practice change.

This framework provides suggestions and guidelines for key common messages and faith perspectives that may contribute to positive and sustainable change in the lives of people affected by poverty and injustice through effective rights-based, evidence-based, and rooted advocacy at national, regional, and global levels according to the ACT Global Strategy. We hope that members may be able to use this framework to enhance their individual impact as well as the joint impact of the Alliance on gender justice.

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