

LEADING THE REALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS TO HEALTH AND THROUGH HEALTH



Report of the High-Level Working Group
on the Health and Human Rights
of Women, Children and Adolescents



Leading the realization of human rights to health and through health: report of the High-Level Working Group on the Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents

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Foreword

Healthy women, children and adolescents whose rights are protected are the very heart of sustainable development. Their inherent right to the highest attainable standard of health is enshrined in the constitution of the World Health Organization and international human rights law. When their right to health is upheld, their access to all other human rights is also enhanced, triggering a cascade of transformative change. Survive, thrive AND transform: that is the clarion call of the *Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030)*. If rights to health and through health are upheld, delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will indeed leave no one behind.

Recognizing this, one year ago, the World Health Organization and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights announced the formation of a High-Level Working Group on the Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents. The Group was tasked with securing political support for the implementation of the human rights-related measures contained in the SDGs and the *Global Strategy*.

The High-Level Working Group, which we are honoured to co-Chair, brings together a diverse group of people from different regions, backgrounds and experiences. We come from civil society, academia, the health community, parliaments and executive government. While we come together via different paths, we are united by two fundamental convictions.

First, you cannot improve health if you fail to uphold rights. Second, you cannot uphold rights without bold, unapologetic leadership at the highest levels.

Our work is inspired by the human rights principles of equality, inclusiveness, non-discrimination, participation and accountability, and stands on a firm foundation of international human rights law. It owes much to the efforts of activists, health professionals, lawyers, politicians, academics and others whose tireless, and at times courageous efforts, have elaborated this mutually dependent field of health and human rights over the past decades. And it includes numerous examples of the evidence of the efficacy of a human rights-based approach to improving health, and how better health can enable women, children and adolescents specifically to realize their other rights.

Still merely a concept for millions of women, children and adolescents, this report calls urgently on leaders to take up the challenge of translating human rights to health and through health into a reality for all. By acting decisively to uphold human rights, leaders—especially at national and local levels—can put an end to preventable and unacceptable suffering, and in so doing, unlock enormous human potential. Only when health and human rights walk hand in hand will women, children and adolescents be able to realize the vision of the *Global Strategy* and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to survive, thrive, and truly transform our planet.

We have the knowledge, means and the motivation to act. Let's not wait a moment longer.



H.E. Tarja Halonen
Former President, Finland
Working Group Co-Chair



Hina Jilani
The Elders
Working Group Co-Chair

Acronyms, abbreviations and definitions

The “**right to health**” is used throughout this report to refer to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health as defined by Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The phrase “**rights to health and through health**” is used throughout this report to express the fact that the right to health does not stand alone but is indivisible from other human rights. Good health not only depends on but is also a prerequisite for pursuing other rights. Human rights cannot be fully enjoyed without health; likewise, health cannot be fully enjoyed without the dignity that is upheld by all other human rights.

Agenda 2030

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

CEHURD

Centre for Health, Human Rights and Development

CRC

Convention on the Rights of the Child

GDP

gross domestic product

Global Strategy

Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health (2016-2030)

High-Level Working Group

High-Level Working Group on Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents

HRBA

human rights-based approaches

IAP

Independent Accountability Panel

OECD

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OHCHR

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

SDGs

Sustainable Development Goals

UAF

Unified Accountability Framework

UHC

universal health coverage

UN

United Nations

WHO

World Health Organization

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Executive Summary

We all have the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, without discrimination, wherever we are, and whatever our circumstances. We all have the right to receive good quality health services, with dignity and respect. We all have the right to the essentials for healthy life, including food, water, sanitation, housing, clean air and a safe environment.

States are legally obliged by international law to enable us to realize our right to health, which is

That is why whole-of-government leadership is needed to realize the whole nexus of intersecting, interdependent rights. This term presents no changes to the States' human rights obligations nor does this report have legally binding status.

The High-Level Working Group on Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents was established in May 2016 by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner

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