Partnering with National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRFs)

Action on Human Rights Recommendations to Advance Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

UNFPA

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements 4
Acronyms and abbreviations 5
Executive summary 6

Introduction 10
1.1. UNFPA's engagement with UN human rights mechanisms 11
1.1.1. The ICPD Programme of Action 13
1.1.2. UNFPA's role in linking the ICPD Programme of Action to UN human rights mechanisms 14
1.2. International normative basis for NMIRFs 17
1.2.1. The Human Rights Council and NMIRFs 18
1.2.2. Enhanced political commitment towards the strengthening of NMIRFs 19

Engagement of UNFPA with NMIRFs 21
2.1. UNFPA and NMIRFs 22
2.2. How UNFPA offices engage with NMIRFs: the current state of affairs 24

Main areas of UNFPA engagement with NMIRFs 25
3.1. Engagement with NMIRFs within the UN Resident Coordinator System 29
3.2. Strengthening interministerial knowledge and capacity on ICPD and SRHR 32
3.3. Strengthening multi-stakeholder policy dialogue 36
3.4. Developing technical capacities of NMRIFs in planning and monitoring 41
3.4.1. Supporting the systematization of SRHR-related recommendations 41
3.4.2. Developing human rights plans and aligning planning results with other plans and policies 41
3.4.3. Building M&E systems and databases 42

Conclusions 47
Key takeaways (checklist) 48
Bibliography 52
Annex I: Additional illustrative examples of country offices/resident coordinator offices engaging with NMRIFs 54
Annex II: Scope and methodology of the assessment of UNFPA's engagement with NMIRFs and list of respondents to the global survey 56
Annex III: List of contributors 58

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Map disclaimer

The designations employed and the presentation of material in maps in this report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNFPA concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CPD	Country programme document
CSOs	Civil society organizations
DIHR	Danish Institute for Human Rights
HRC	Human Rights Council
GRO	UNFPA Geneva Representation Office
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and more
LNOB	Leaving no one behind
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NHRI	National human rights institution
NMIRF	National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up
NSO	National Statistics Office
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PoA	Programme of Action
RC	Resident Coordinator
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPs	Special procedures
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
TBs	Treaty bodies
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCT	United Nations country team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNRC	United Nations Resident Coordinator
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UPR	Universal periodic review
URG	Universal Rights Group

Executive summary

This report aims to enhance UNFPA's partnership with National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting, and Follow-up of human rights obligations and recommendations (NMIRFs) with a view to strengthening the normative linkages between human rights and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) agenda. It also seeks to accelerate the implementation of human rights recommendations related to gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and the specific rights of traditionally left behind population groups.

This report also provides lessons and illustrative examples from this emerging form of collaboration with NMIRFs. The goal is to support the leadership role of UNFPA country representatives and the heads of NMIRFs in strengthening the capacity of States, as primary duty bearers, to effectively own and implement human rights recommendations through national laws, policies and programmes.

This report presents the findings from an assessment conducted by UNFPA in 2024. It illustrates how, by engaging with NMIRFs, UNFPA provides technical expertise on the ICPD agenda, SRHR, and gender equality. It also supports the mobilization of relevant government entities and non-governmental stakeholders to champion this agenda and enhance the government's action and accountability. In particular, the assessment illustrates UNFPA's contributions to NMIRFs' work in coordinating the national implementation and tracking of human rights recommendations related to the three transformative results pursued by UNFPA on a global scale: (1) ending the unmet need for family planning; (2) ending preventable maternal deaths; and (3) ending gender-based violence and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.[1]

NMIRFs are government-led structures originally conceived to tackle reporting backlogs to international human rights mechanisms and coordinate the implementation of recommendations received from the same mechanisms. However, they encompass a wider variety of activities, including the promotion of enhanced and streamlined interministerial and intergovernmental coordination and of broader civil society participation in supporting States in their reporting and implementation efforts, with the ultimate goal of building national and local ownership of human rights recommendations.

NMIRFs are currently experiencing significant political momentum at the global level, with approximately 70 established mechanisms[2] and the recent establishment of the International Network of NMIRFs in May 2024 in Asunción, Paraguay, with the aim of institutionalizing cooperation, partnership, dialogue and the exchange of expertise and experiences among NMIRFs.

UNFPA has a long tradition of engaging with international human rights mechanisms: universal periodic review, special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council and United Nations treaty bodies. The goal has been to advance the development of international standards on human rights norms and States' obligations related to the ICPD agenda, including SRHR. This has created a two-way synergy: UNFPA is a valuable source of data and evidence to inform the review work of international human rights mechanisms in formulating country-specific human rights recommendations. In turn, UNFPA uses those same recommendations to shape its own country programmes.

Along the same lines, UNFPA's engagement with NMIRFs finds its rationale in the potential of these mechanisms to bridge the

1 UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

2 Source: OHCHR, 2 September 2024. This approximate number does not include countries that have coordination bodies carrying out, at least partially, similar functions to NMIRFs but which do not identify as NMIRFs per se.

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'implementation gap' and translate human rights recommendations into impactful and tangible action, especially where SRHR and gender equality and women's empowerment may be more challenged and marginalized groups left behind. At the same time, UNFPA's involvement with NMIRFs can enhance States' accountability concerning their ICPD-related human rights commitments.

The assessment adopted a mixed-methods approach, starting from a global survey shared with UNFPA offices, for which 48 submissions were received (see annex II). The assessment was completed with a visit to Morocco and a final workshop in Geneva.

Among the respondents to the survey, 37 per cent of UNFPA offices reported doing dedicated work with NMIRFs through various modalities of engagement, while 36 per cent indicated a 'mixed engagement' showing some level of confusion between the role of NMIRFs and other institutional arrangements with a human rights promotion and protection mandate, including national human rights institutions (NHRIs).

At a minimum, UNFPA offices support NMIRFs, line ministries and relevant stakeholders, including civil society organizations (CSOs), in preparing reports to human rights mechanisms. However, additional modalities of engagement emerged from the assessment:

1. Engagement with NMIRFs within the UN Resident Coordinator System

The engagement of the United Nations system at country level with NMIRFs is a system-wide endeavour led by UN Resident Coordinators (RCs), with a twofold impact. On the one hand, a collective engagement allows UNFPA to leverage the advocacy role of the RC and the UN country team (UNCT) to position the ICPD agenda in the work of NMIRFs as human rights priorities in their own right and building blocks for the realization of the whole range of human rights recommendations and the achievement of sustainable development. On the other hand, as part of a United Nations system-wide engagement, UNFPA provides

its comparative thematic advantage in gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender-based violence and harmful practices, population dynamics, and population data generation and disaggregation, through technical assistance to NMIRFs' reporting, planning and monitoring work.

Case study: Tanzania[3]

2. Strengthening interministerial knowledge and capacity on ICPD and SRHR

NMIRFs strategically coordinate the governmental response to human rights recommendations and complex human rights issues, including those pertaining to the ICPD agenda, such as maternal health, family planning, gender-based violence and harmful practices. UNFPA can (1) strengthen interministerial knowledge and capacity with regard to the ICPD Programme of Action and (2) consolidate awareness of the strong convergence of human rights recommendations with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the ICPD agenda. In this sense, UNFPA can favour better coordination between NMIRFs and ministries with social portfolios – and between human rights and development interventions – especially whenever multisectoral responses are needed, as well as expediting the reporting burden from multiple human rights and development review processes and consequent implementation processes.

Case studies: Mongolia, Turkmenistzan

3. Strengthening multi-stakeholder policy dialogue

NMIRFs provide platforms for collaborative action and dialogue across ministries and State institutions (parliamentarians, NHRIs, national statistics offices (NSOs) and the judiciary, among others), down to the local and community level (CSOs, women's groups, youth-led organizations, faith-based organizations, traditional and religious leaders, among others). UNFPA supports NMIRFs and national stakeholders with the data and evidence needed for informed dialogue on critical yet sensitive human rights issues. Moreover, UNFPA promotes the mobilization of actors at the subnational level, including marginalized and leaving no one behind (LNOB) groups. This allows for the perspectives and needs of those directly affected by human rights recommendations to be duly taken into account and for complex human rights issues pertaining to SRHR and gender equality to be addressed. In this regard, UNFPA can support NMIRFs' efforts to localize the implementation of human rights recommendations by building on its partnership with community actors to change negative gender and social norms.

Case studies: Mozambique, Morocco, Pakistan

4. Developing technical capacities of NMRIFs in planning and monitoring

Given the increasing volume of recommendations related to the rights of women and girls, gender equality, gender-based violence and harmful practices, and SRHR, UNFPA can assist NMIRFs in their systematization for streamlined implementation of relevant recommendations from the human rights mechanisms that relate to the work of UNFPA. UNFPA can assist with (1) clustering of human rights recommendations related to key thematic areas together with related SDG and ICPD-related commitments; (2) the integration of thematic clusters of recommendations and commitments in development plans and sectoral policies at the national, provincial and local level; and (3) the development of planning and

[3] Additional case studies for each of the areas of engagement can be consulted in annex I.

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tracking tools and databases. At the same time, stronger data systems and tools enhance the accountability of NMIRFs and other government entities responsible for the implementation of human rights recommendations.

Case studies: Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Paraguay

Relevantly, the four engagement areas described above are not mutually exclusive. The examples provided, together with the checklist, aim to guide UNFPA country offices in engaging with NMIRFs to position UNFPA's mandate and thematic ICPD and SRHR-related priorities in national reporting, implementation and monitoring processes.

In conclusion, UNFPA's ultimate goal is to strengthen the national ownership and implementation capacity of human rights recommendations, obligations and commitments, including those pertaining to SRHR and ICPD, across governments and societies. Through their multisectoral and inclusive composition, NMIRFs have the potential to facilitate comprehensive legal, policy and budgetary responses to complex human rights issues. By clarifying who does what, multisectoral coordination helps strengthen the transparency and accountability of government actions towards the full realization of SRHR and the achievement of gender equality.

1. Introduction

1.1. UNFPA's engagement with UN human rights mechanisms

What is the universal periodic review?

The universal periodic review (UPR) is a mechanism of the Human Rights Council (HRC) that calls for each UN Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights record every 4.5 years. The UPR is designed to prompt, support and expand the promotion and protection of human rights, with States committing to the implementation of received human rights recommendations at the national level. The review is informed by a national report prepared by the State under review outlining the progress on implementation of UPR recommendations supported at the previous review, as well as identifying emerging human rights issues. The review is also supplemented by a 'Compilation of UN Information' prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) with inputs from international human rights mechanisms, UN agencies, funds and programmes, and a 'Stakeholders Summary Report' with information from NHRIs and CSOs. This diversity of inputs allows for a triangulation of information and perspectives on critical human rights issues and implementation measures. The outcome of the review is later adopted by the HRC and indicates the recommendations supported or noted (not supported) by the State under review.

What are the human rights treaty bodies?

The human rights treaty bodies (TBs) are committees of independent experts that monitor the implementation of international human rights treaties. These TBs ensure international human rights accountability by monitoring and reviewing the progress achieved by State Parties in meeting their legally binding human rights obligations under each treaty. The outcome of State Parties' reviews consists of a set of concluding observations containing specific recommendations to guide States in fulfilling their obligations. All core international human rights treaties[4] enshrine standards and obligations of relevance to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and some TBs have issued concrete guidance in this regard, such as the General comment No. 22 (2016) on the right to sexual and reproductive health produced by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

What are the special procedure mandate holders?

The special procedures (SPs) are independent human rights experts appointed by the Human Rights Council with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. SPs regularly make recommendations to countries and other stakeholders in their reports to the HRC. The Special Rapporteurs on the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, violence against women and girls, and the right to education, as well as the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls, inter alia, have contributed to policy advocacy and reform on SRHR and other ICPD-related human rights issues.

[4] For more information on the core international human rights treaties and monitoring bodies, see: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx.

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What are the national human rights institutions?

Often confused with NMIRFs, the national human rights institutions (NHRIs), when in full compliance with the Paris Principles,[5] are independent State institutions and the cornerstone of national human rights protection systems.[6] Their main role is to promote and protect human rights, including by investigating individual complaints on human rights abuses and monitoring governments' compliance with their human rights obligations. In this sense, they also promote the ICPD agenda through the advancement of gender equality and SRHR. Compelling policy results have been achieved through the roll-out of national inquiries and country assessments on SRHR with the assistance of UNFPA in countries such as Indonesia, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, the Philippines, Uganda and Zambia. Through these partnerships with NHRIs, the voices of marginalized groups including women with disabilities, indigenous women, older persons, adolescents and youth, and LGBTQIA+ persons can be amplified. Although different in nature and mandate, NHRIs may play a complementary role to NMIRFs, particularly by ensuring independent monitoring of human rights implementation. In addition, they can contribute to improved coordination in the areas of implementation, monitoring and reporting by participating in the work of NMIRFs, usually in an observer role.

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5 For more information on the Paris Principles guiding NHRIs' activities and mandates, refer to: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/principles-relating-status-national-institutions-paris.

6 OHCHR, *National Human Rights Institutions: History, Principles, Roles and Responsibilities* (2010, p. 13).

1.1.1. The ICPD Programme of Action

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (PoA) adopted by 179 States in Cairo in 1994 represents the core of UNFPA's vision and mandate as the leading UN agency for population issues and sexual and reproductive health.

The ICPD PoA is a landmark international consensus document and a change of paradigm in shifting the discussion on population from one about population size and growth to one about human rights by putting reproductive rights at the heart of development.[7] This includes the rights of couples and individuals to make decisions about the size of their families and to have the information and resources to make such decisions free of discrimination, coercion and violence.[8] The PoA called for a comprehensive approach to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, recognizing that sexual and reproductive health services and programmes must be guided by the needs of, and must protect the human rights of, individuals, especially women and girls.

The ICPD PoA affirmed that inclusive sustainable development is not possible without prioritizing human rights, including reproductive rights; empowering women and girls; and addressing inequalities. It set the standard for people-centred development, guiding national policies and programmes for the implementation of the Programme of Action by governments, in collaboration with parliaments, civil society, including women- and youth-led organizations, community groups and individuals at the grass-roots level, and the private sector.

While the ICPD PoA was initially considered to have a 20-year time-horizon, guided by five-year review cycles, in 2010 the UN General Assembly extended this promise beyond 2014 in order to "fully meet its goals and objectives".[9]

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ICPD PoA in 2019, governments, parliamentarians, civil society, private sector representatives and other stakeholders met at the Nairobi Summit in Kenya on 18 November 2019. They were invited to submit voluntary national commitments towards accelerating the unfinished business of the ICPD PoA. Since then, many of those voluntary commitments have been translated into at least 74 UPR recommendations.[10] Consequently, States under review will need to report back on actions taken to advance those commitments at subsequent UPR reviews.

7 https://www.unfpa.org/press/human-rights-day-2018.

8 ICPD PoA, para. 7.3 on reproductive rights.

9 General Assembly Resolution A/65/234 (2010).

10 Information gathered through the Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI) based on adopted UPR outcome reports by the HRC 56th regular session. A search of the UHRI database on 22/11/2024 yielded a result of 65 recommendations explicitly referring to the "Nairobi Summit", 14 recommendations referring to the "International Conference on Population and Development + 25", and 5 recommendations referring to "ICPD + 25". This search did not include several other recommendations drawn from Nairobi Summit commitments that do not make explicit references to the Nairobi Summit or the ICPD + 25.

As the international community celebrates and reaffirms the objectives and actions of the ICPD at the 30-year mark, people-centred development has enabled numerous gains. However, progress is threatened by multifaceted crises, backsliding on the rights and choices of women and girls, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the polarization of the sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda. The world is at a critical inflection point in preserving the hard-won gains and deliver on the vision of the ICPD agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1.1.2. UNFPA's role in linking the ICPD Programme of Action to UN human rights mechanisms

As a human rights-based development agency, UNFPA is deeply engaged with international human rights mechanisms, ensuring that gender equality and SRHR are comprehensively and effectively addressed. UNFPA operates at the global level to strengthen the normative foundation of SRHR and gender equality. Whereas, at the operational level, this engagement with human rights mechanisms spans through their review-implementation-reporting cycles to clarify the legal, policy and programme implications and linkages to national efforts aimed at achieving the ICPD agenda and other international development commitments, including the SDGs.[11]

The high degree of overlap between human rights obligations and SDG targets and ICPD commitments has long been recognized.[12] Therefore, the recommendations issued to States by international human rights mechanisms have the potential to advance the achievement of the SDGs and the ICPD agenda, including SRHR. For instance, analyses conducted by UNFPA show that at least 44 per cent[13] of all UPR recommendations are strongly related to the ICPD agenda.

Additional studies reveal that in the first three UPR cycles, almost 24 per cent of recommendations covered women's rights and gender equality, of which 8 per cent addressed SRHR, including calls to decriminalize same-sex relations (33 per cent), HIV/AIDS (17 per cent) and maternal health (16 per cent). This advocacy work and collaboration with Member States contributing to the reviews has greatly contributed to raising the attention given to sensitive or neglected components of SRHR and gender equality, as has been the case with comprehensive sexuality education, which moved from 15 recommendations during the first UPR cycle in 2008 to 169 recommendations in its third cycle (2017–2021).[14]

An analysis of 21 State Parties' reviews by TBs showed that 12 per cent of the recommendations received explicitly addressed SRHR. Unsurprisingly, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) issued as many recommendations on SRHR as all other TBs together. Similarly, an analysis of 450 State Parties' country reports showed that 33 per cent of recommendations covered women's rights and gender equality, of which 11 per cent specifically addressed SRHR, in particular access to sexual and reproductive health

11 UNFPA, URG, *Advancing Rights, Transforming Lives* (2023).

12 UNDP, *Human Rights and SDG systems integration: Beyond linkages, data and efficiency to leave no one behind* (2024).

13 Analysis carried out by the UNFPA Geneva Representation Office. The number of UPR recommendations related to the ICPD commitments reached peaks of 47% (36th session, 2020), 52% (38th session, 2021) and 45% (41st session, 2022).

14 As of February 2024 and updated to the 43th UPR session celebrated in May 2023.

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services (34 per cent), maternal health (18 per cent), HIV/AIDS (11 per cent) and comprehensive sexuality education (10 per cent).[15]

Nevertheless, there is still some way to go to ensure that certain dimensions of SRHR are not neglected, as evidenced by the very low number of recommendations focusing on access to contraception, SRHR in emergencies, and adolescents' sexual and reproductive health.

Moreover, effective national implementation of ICPD-related human rights obligations and recommendations continues to be a persistent challenge due to an array of factors. These include incoherent, vertical or insufficient policy responses, underfunding, and the persistence of discriminatory social and gender norms.

UNFPA has a critical role in supporting governments to address human rights deficits and inequalities by ensuring that the implementation of human rights recommendations and national ICPD and related SDG implementation efforts are mutually reinforcing. This includes ensuring that recommendations reflecting human rights concerns and inequalities affecting marginalized groups are prioritized by NMIRFs and translated into early and concrete legal, policy, budgetary and other measures aiming at leaving no one behind (LNOB).

[15] UNFPA, URG, *Advancing Rights, Transforming Lives* (2023).

Available UNFPA human rights tools

The human rights tools presented below, although initially intended for other audiences – both internal and external to UNFPA – can also be valuable resources for NMIRFs interested in (1) developing a better understanding of the applicable human rights standards, obligations and related legal and policy implications in the context of SRHR and gender equality; (2) applying a human rights-based approach to the formulation of national human rights implementation plans; and (3) guiding ministries of planning and line ministries to mainstream human rights recommendations in national development plans and sectoral policies and programmes.

Toolkit for advancing human rights-based universal sexual and reproductive health (2024)	The toolkit aims to guide efforts to assess and strengthen the integration of international human rights obligations to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) within universal health coverage (UHC) policies and programmes. Organized into seven modules – maternal health, contraceptive services, sexuality education, abortion care, HIV/STIs, gender-based violence, and harmful practices – the toolkit helps users evaluate their countries' health systems for human rights compliance. It includes resources, case studies and examples of effective rights-based approaches to UHC.
Human Rights-based Approach to Family Planning: Support Tool (2024)	This tool offers a comprehensive guide to developing rights-based family planning programmes. It explains the principles of a human rights-based approach to family planning and provides a conceptual framework for translating these principles into practical actions.
Elevating Rights and Choices for All: Guidance Note for Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to Programming (2020)	This publication provides clear and comprehensive direction for integrating human rights into every level of UNFPA's work. The Guidance Note focuses on three pillars of action – equality and non-discrimination, quality, and accountability – to ensure that policies and programmes align with international human rights standards; address root causes of discrimination in sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence; promote transformative change for marginalized groups; and strengthen accountability for delivering the ICPD Programme of Action.
UNFPA Guidance for National Human Rights Institutions (2019)	This tool's primary intent is to guide national human rights institutions (NHRIs) when conducting national inquiries on human rights issues relating to sexual and reproductive health. It aims to help develop more comprehensive information systems, standardize approaches to assessing violations, and offer step-by-step guidance for country analyses and inquiries. It also assists UNFPA country offices in collaborating with NHRIs to strengthen accountability on SRHR.

Available UNFPA human rights tools	
Lessons From the Second Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review: From Commitment to Action on SRHR (2018)	This report evaluates the successes, challenges and opportunities for advancing SRHR in the context of the UPR's second cycle, and offers lessons to guide governments, the United Nations system, civil society and other stakeholders in the third cycle. The report provides a global analysis of trends in relation to SRHR-related recommendations and the level of national implementation.
Lessons From the First Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review: From Commitment to Action on SRHR (2014)	This report highlights the UPR's potential to advance SRHR at global, regional and national levels. It examines the attention given to SRHR during the first UPR cycle and identifies ways to strengthen its focus in future cycles.

1.2. International normative basis for NMIRFs

NMIRFs are government-led structures mandated, often by law or decree, to coordinate the preparation of reports to and engage with international and regional human rights mechanisms and implement the recommendations emanating from these same mechanisms. NMIRFs coordinate these functions with ministries, specialized State bodies (such as the NSO), parliamentarians and the judiciary. Even though NMIRFs are government-led mechanisms, NHRIs and CSOs are also invited to participate in a consultative and collaborative approach to support the State in its reporting and implementation efforts.[16]

The different typologies of NMIRFs encompass a variety of structures tailored to fulfil governmental human rights obligations through reporting and implementation.

NMIRFs can be mainly categorized as ministerial and interministerial, based on the prominent role assigned to a single government ministry (often the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Justice or Human Rights) or the coordinated implementation, reporting and follow-up activity of multiple ministries and departments. The composition and level of representation of line ministries in NMIRFs' discussions can vary, as can the configuration of stakeholder consultations.

A comprehensive governmental representation, along with a broad range of stakeholders, fosters greater national ownership of human rights recommendations. Finding ways to localize implementation processes and involve marginalized groups thus further contributes to the effectiveness of NMIRFs.

[16] The definition was adapted from OHCHR, *National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up: A Practical Guide to Effective State Engagement with International Human Rights Mechanisms* (2016). The same definition was also taken up by DIHR, *Report on Country Experiences with HR-SDG Integrated National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-Up* (July 2021).

1.2.1. The Human Rights Council and NMIRFs

Driven by the need to help States with reducing their reporting backlogs, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights report of 2012[17] made a recommendation to establish "Standing national reporting and coordination mechanisms", which subsequently led to the adoption of General Assembly Resolution 68/268 on strengthening the treaty body system. This Resolution highlights the importance of supporting States in building institutional capacity for reporting and provides avenues for direct assistance at the national level. It mandates UN agencies, funds and programmes and UNCTs to partner with OHCHR in assisting States in the fulfilment of their obligations through advisory services, technical assistance and capacity-building for the preparation of periodic reports.[18]

Since then, the Human Rights Council has played an instrumental role in guiding Member States in establishing and strengthening NMIRFs. It also helped expand their role beyond a mere reporting function towards a more comprehensive coordination of government action in implementing human rights recommendations through national human rights action plans and development policies.

- Starting from Resolution 36/29 (2017), the Council acknowledged the potential of NMIRFs in contributing to the implementation of the SDGs. With the support of United Nations Resident Coordinators (UNRCs) and UNCTs, NMIRFs can assess needs, set priorities, build synergies and coordinate the implementation of measures that promote and protect human rights, especially of those living in vulnerable situations.
- Resolution 42/30 (2019) encouraged States to establish and strengthen NMIRFs for enhanced and comprehensive compliance with human rights commitments and recommendations, also promoting the facilitation of regional consultations for the sharing of good practices and experiences.[19]
- Resolutions 40/32 (2019) and 46/10 (2021) welcomed the capacity-building work of UN development agencies, funds and programmes and acknowledged that the national follow-up to human rights obligations and recommendations enforces the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and commitments from other UN conferences and summits, implicitly including the ICPD.
- Resolution 51/33 (2022) encouraged States to establish or strengthen NMIRFs for further compliance with human rights obligations and commitments. It also gave a mandate to OHCHR to facilitate the sharing of good practices and the creation of a virtual knowledge hub and an online community of practice to strengthen NMIRFs' exchange and consolidation of information.

[17] OHCHR report A/66/860, on the strengthening of the human rights treaty bodies, pursuant to Assembly resolution 66/254.
[18] General Assembly Resolution 68/268. Strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system (2014).
[19] UNFPA participated in the consultations, in particular UNFPA GRO moderated some sessions of the Regional Consultation of NMIRFs in Africa.

1.2.2. Enhanced political commitment towards the strengthening of NMIRFs

The political momentum surrounding NMIRFs suggests a collective acknowledgement of the need for streamlined interministerial mechanisms to effectively address human rights challenges and ensure the fulfilment of international obligations with the full, active and meaningful participation of civil society and other relevant stakeholders.

At the same time, the global rise of NMIRFs as primary coordination mechanisms for aligning international norms and implementing human rights at the national level underscores the need for Member States to enhance international cooperation and mutual investment in each other's successes. Ensuring this collaborative endeavour requires that NMIRFs worldwide adopt a human rights-based approach and operate in accordance with relevant human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, and accountability.

In this sense, the potential of NMIRFs for effective coordination and implementation at the national level has garnered attention in the realm of human rights diplomacy. A Group of Friends of NMIRFs was established in Geneva in 2017 to promote the NMIRF agenda at the HRC and facilitate peer cooperation and the sharing of good practices among Member States.[20]

Additionally, more and more recommendations stemming from international mechanisms have targeted the establishment and strengthening of NMIRFs. Through the UPR alone, approximately 234 recommendations targeting NMIRFs have been supported by more than 130 States.[21] At the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights celebrated in December 2023, several States pledged to establish and/or strengthen NMIRFs.[22] At the same time, UNFPA has also pledged to strategically engage with national and international human rights mechanisms and reinforce efforts to support national implementation, follow-up and reporting on SRHR and gender-based violence-related recommendations.

This significant political momentum and growing political traction culminated in the recent establishment of an International Network of NMIRFs in Asunción on 9 May 2024.[23]

The International Network commits to fostering partnerships and cooperative efforts, inter alia, with international human rights bodies, UN agencies, funds and programmes. Moreover, the Declaration notes that such collaboration is "crucial for ensuring effective implementation, reporting and follow-up of human rights obligations, commitments and recommendations, as well as to strengthening the global human rights framework, in conjunction with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and commitments from other United Nations conferences and summits", of which the ICPD is part.

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20 The Group of Friends was established in Geneva in 2017 by Portugal with the support of the Universal Rights Group (URG). As of April 2024, it includes around 40 States, OHCHR and other interested UN agencies, including UNFPA, and international NGOs.

21 Information drawn from searching the Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI) on 22/8/2024. The search yielded a result of 263 NMIRF-related recommendations, of which 29 were discarded following a manual quality check.

22 The States that made pledges on NMIRFs are Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Bahamas, Barbados, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Cambodia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Finland, Ghana, Guyana, Paraguay, Republic of the Congo, Sao Tome and Principe, Uruguay and Zambia.

23 The Declaration of Asunción was adopted by 20 Member States at the Second International Seminar to exchange experiences on NMIRFs, held in Asunción, Paraguay, on 8–9 May 2024. See: https://www.mre.gov.py/application/files/6717/1922/1382/6._EN_Asuncion_Declaration.pdf. This seminar culminated a process initiated at the First International Seminar, held in Marrakech, Morocco, on 7–8 December 2022, in which States committed to establishing the International Network.

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At a subsequent conference held by the Government of Morocco in Marrakech in October 2024, NMIRF representatives from several countries, international human rights experts, UN agencies and civil society organizations adopted the *Marrakech Guidance Framework* for the establishment and development of effective NMIRFs.

Building on good practices and lessons learned, the Guidance Framework elaborates on integrated approaches to human rights and sustainable development and the role of national and international actors, including UN agencies, in supporting the work of NMIRFs.[24]

[24] 10th Glion Human Rights Dialogue on the theme *'Transforming universal norms into local reality – national mechanisms for implementation, reporting, and follow-up (NMIRFs), and the strengthening of the UN human rights system's effectiveness and on-the-ground impact,'* held on 16 and 17 October 2024 in Marrakech, Kingdom of Morocco. The Guidance Framework is available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/15iIG8LsMa3M5xI7q5163Bmundleyig8t/view.

2. Engagement of UNFPA with NMIRFs

2.1. UNFPA and NMIRFs

Originally conceived to coordinate national reporting requirements and reduce multiple reporting burdens, NMIRFs have evolved to encompass a broader range of functions. These include following up the national implementation of human rights recommendations through enhanced coordination and policy dialogue and the development of planning tools and tracking/monitoring systems.

The international human rights system has emphasized the imperative of bridging universal norms, standards and principles with local realities. In this regard, NMIRFs become optimal institutions to link the implementation of recommendations with national policies and programmes and broader governmental efforts to achieve the SDGs and other international commitments. While NMIRFs are critical State coordination mechanisms aimed at fulfilling international obligations and commitments, their ability to bridge the implementation gap and translate human rights recommendations into impactful and tangible action is still developing.

UNFPA recognizes the critical role of NMIRFs, beyond their mere technical advantages, in advancing human rights, including SRHR and gender equality and women's and girls' human rights, where they are most challenged.

The strong convergence between human rights recommendations and the ICPD agenda, as outlined in the 2019 Nairobi Summit commitments and the SDGs, reinforces the key role of NMIRFs in strengthening linkages between human rights recommendations and national development commitments and ensuring greater attention to SRHR and gender equality. At the same time, enhancing NMIRFs can promote inclusive governance structures and meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders, particularly marginalized groups, in decision-making processes related to implementing recommendations affecting them. This makes NMIRFs instrumental to the realization of the principle of leaving no one behind (LNOB), by ensuring that recommendations related to equality and non-discrimination are translated into concrete actions on the ground, including in remote areas. For this purpose, the participation of women's and youth groups and marginalized/LNOB groups – LGBTQIA+ persons, people of African descent, Indigenous Peoples, rural women, persons with disabilities, persons living with HIV, and older persons – is pivotal. At community level, NMIRFs can engage faith-based organizations, traditional and religious leaders, and other cultural actors to get their support in the implementation of human rights recommendations and to foster changes in the negative social and gender norms that hamper it.

By engaging with NMIRFs, UNFPA assists government-led efforts in preparing State reports to international human rights mechanisms and in the implementation of recommendations at national level. In all aspects of NMIRFs work, UNFPA provides technical assistance, analytical insights and advocacy, particularly in human rights areas and issues related to SRHR, gender equality, gender-based violence and harmful practices, and population dynamics.

UNFPA's engagement with international human rights mechanisms has emerged as a twofold articulation. UNFPA represents a valuable source of information and evidence-based programming to help shape the content of reports and recommendations. In its turn, UNFPA uses those same recommendations to inform its programmes and advocacy strategies for legal, policy and institutional change and national capacity development. NMIRFs can play a vital role in this articulation by providing UNFPA offices with a channel of communication and partnership with government agencies

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and other stakeholders in the process of preparing reports to international human rights mechanisms and when developing national plans for the implementation of human rights recommendations and associated monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.

Central to a human rights-based approach to development, UNFPA's involvement with NMIRFs can enhance Member States' accountability concerning their ICPD-related human rights commitments.[25] Therefore, it is important to understand how NMRIFs could strategically support these efforts, and how support to these mechanisms can be fortified to strengthen implementation of human rights obligations and recommendations. To guide its offices in following up on recommendations at the national level, UNFPA has incorporated a specific indicator into its Strategic Plan.[26]

[25] UNFPA, "Elevating Rights and Choices for All: Guidance Note for Applying a Human Rights Based Approach to Programming", 2020, available at https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2020_HRBA_guidance.pdf.

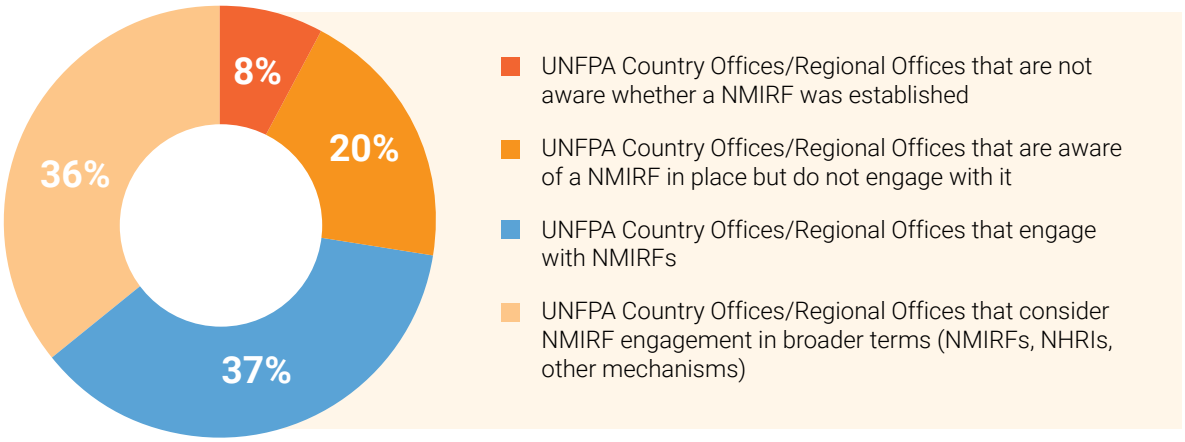
[26] UNFPA's Strategic Plan for 2022–2025 has introduced the Indicator OP 3.6 focusing on the proportion of countries following up on supported recommendations related to discriminatory social/gender norms, stereotypes, practices and power relations related to SRHR, gender-based violence and harmful practices.

2.2. How UNFPA offices engage with NMIRFs: the current state of affairs

Given the relative novelty of NMIRFs, it is important for UNFPA to assess the level of its current engagement in supporting NMIRFs.

Among UNFPA offices surveyed in an assessment conducted by UNFPA in 2023:

- Thirty-seven per cent expressed a dedicated engagement under various modalities of engagement with NMIRFs, while 36 per cent highlighted a mixed engagement, indicating also some level of confusion between NMIRFs and other national mechanisms relevant in advancing human rights (e.g. NHRIs, women's commissions, youth councils). In particular, submissions from seven country offices focused specifically on UNFPA's engagement with NHRIs. Follow-up with four of these country offices revealed that they also conducted engagement-related activities directly relevant to NMIRF-led processes.
- Twenty per cent of UNFPA offices responding to the survey were aware of the existence of NMIRFs in their respective countries without engaging with such mechanisms. This lack of engagement may be due to various factors, including resource constraints (capacity gaps at country office level, limited budget or staff), competing priorities or perceived barriers to effective collaboration. The limited functionality of NMIRFs in certain countries may also contribute to this lack of engagement. Although the assessment does not delve deeper into the reasons behind this lack of engagement, understanding its underlying factors is key to further strategic and systematic engagement with NMIRFs.
- Finally, 8 per cent of respondents reported being unaware of whether a NMIRF was established in their country, with a consequent lack of engagement. This lack of awareness may be attributed to factors such as limited communication channels between UNFPA offices and national authorities responsible for NMIRFs, insufficient information-sharing within the UNCT, or a lack of capacity at the country, regional or sub-regional level.



3. Main areas of UNFPA engagement with NMIRFs

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The report assesses the level of engagement with NMIRFs based on the experiences and cases reported by UNFPA offices in the global survey and those presented in the workshop held in Geneva on 20 May 2024.

At a minimum and in a more traditional and recurring way of engagement, UNFPA offices support NMIRFs, line ministries and relevant stakeholders, including CSOs, in preparing reports to human rights mechanisms.

The assistance provided to governments is key to supporting ministerial roles and capacities within NMIRFs and effectively meeting reporting obligations and deadlines. In this regard, the Costa Rica country office has assisted national stakeholders in adopting intersectional, gender and intercultural approaches to formulating reports. Meanwhile, UNFPA in Namibia has advised the Government on the alignment of the national reports prepared for the UPR, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and Human Rights Committee reviews.

Additionally, supporting CSOs with evidence-based information and financial assistance in preparing and submitting shadow reports and individual and joint submissions strengthens participatory approaches and policy dialogues, providing healthy stimuli for NMIRF-led implementation.

Overall, country and regional offices that responded to the survey reported having contributed to the preparation of reports for the following mechanisms and review processes:[27] UPR,[28] CEDAW,[29] Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,[30] Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,[31] Maputo Protocol,[32] and the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development.[33]

27 There is no claim to exhaustiveness in the list of human rights mechanisms and country offices/regional offices that follows, as it is an excerpt from the replies to the survey.

28 Colombia, Costa Rica, Guinea, Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Niger, Paraguay, Rwanda, Tanzania, Viet Nam, Uganda, Uzbekistan.

29 Belize, Cambodia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guinea, Indonesia, Malawi, Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zambia.

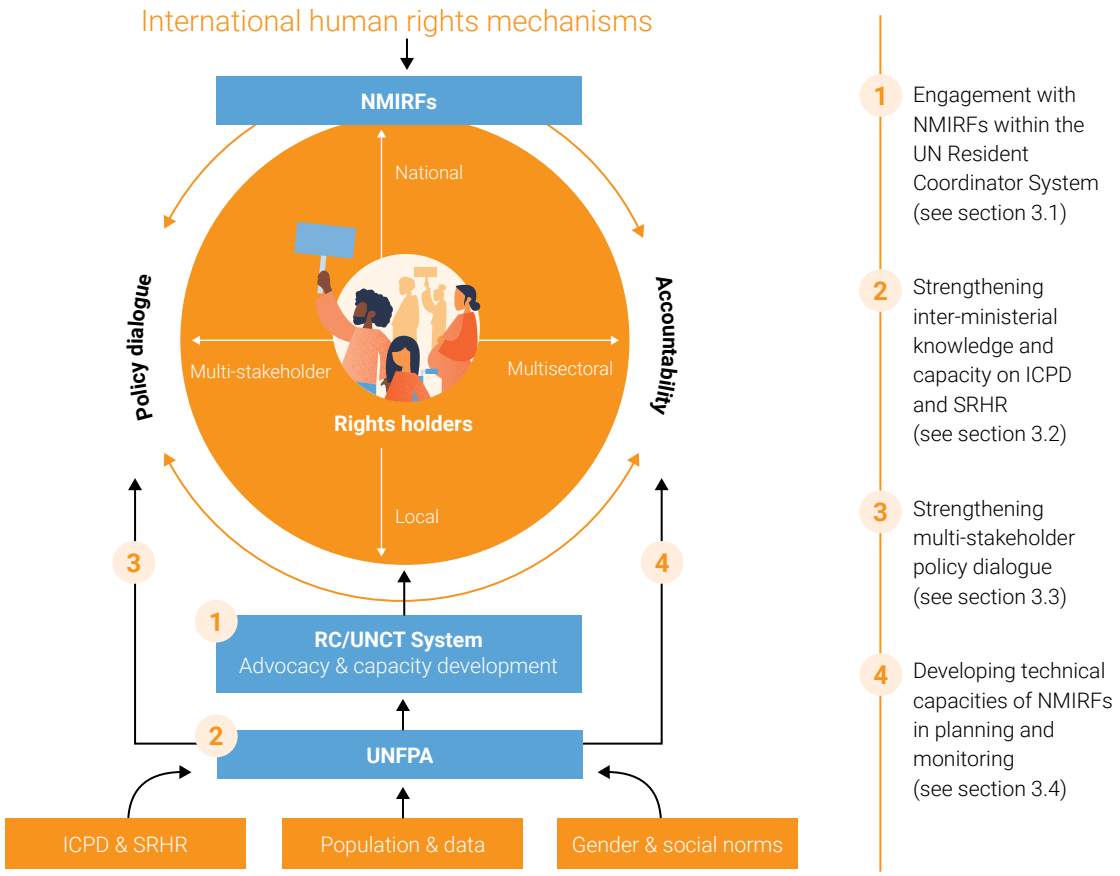
30 Namibia, Tanzania, Uzbekistan.

31 Cambodia, Rwanda.

32 Guinea, Uganda.

33 Belize, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay.

UNFPA engagement with NMIRFs

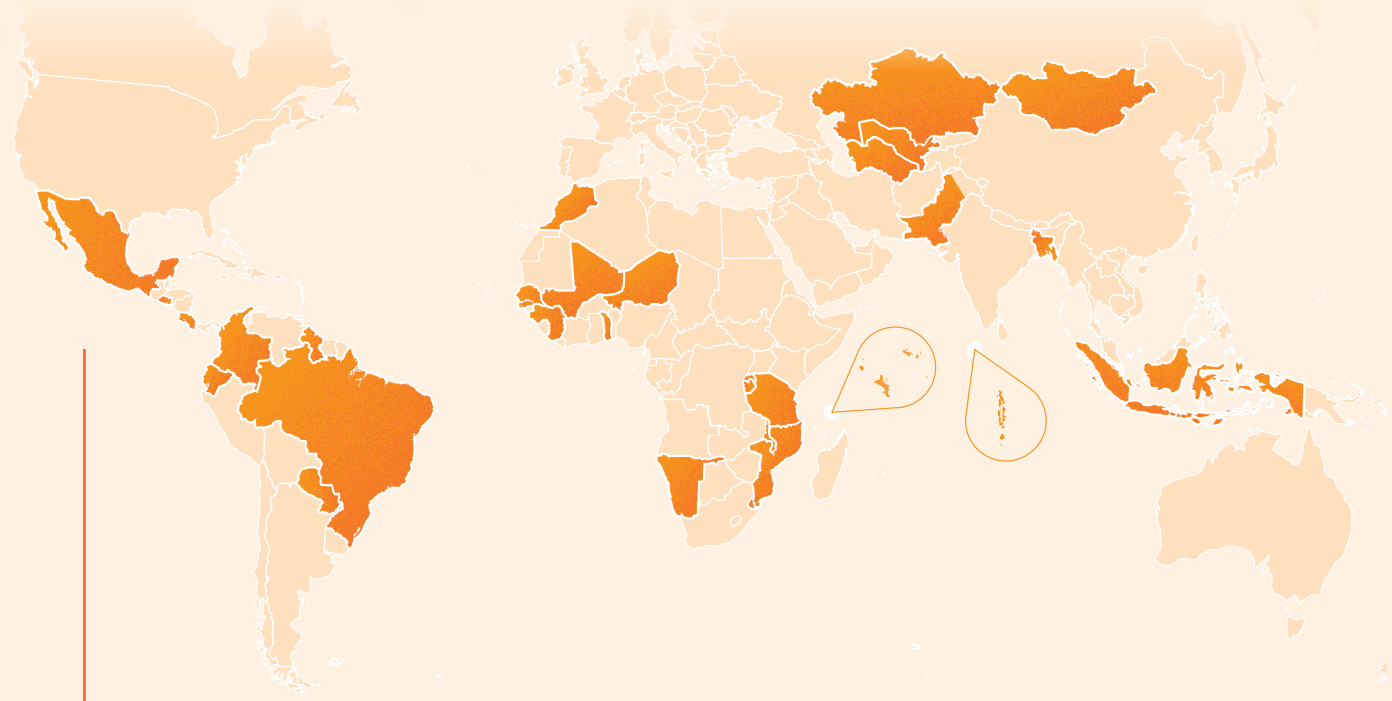


Additionally, the report identifies another four areas of engagement with NMIRFs, as illustrated in the diagram above and explained in detail in section three of the report:

1. Engagement with NMIRFs within the UN Resident Coordinator System;
2. Strengthening interministerial knowledge and capacity on ICPD and SRHR;
3. Strengthening multi-stakeholder policy dialogue;
4. Developing technical capacities of NMRIFs in planning and monitoring.

While NMIRFs play a necessary technocratic role in ensuring proper reporting, implementation, monitoring and follow-up of human rights recommendations, their role has a potential beyond that. The proposed conceptual framework used to assess the different forms of UNFPA's engagement underlines the potentially transformative role NMIRFs can play in building more genuine national ownership of human rights recommendations. This can be achieved through the articulation of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, encompassing dialogue and accountability on human rights recommendations both horizontally and vertically. The horizontal multisectoral approach promotes the engagement of a wide array of government and non-governmental national stakeholders. In contrast, the vertical approach promotes the localization of human rights recommendations through the involvement of local governments and a wide spectrum of community actors and rights holders. The United Nations system, including UNFPA, is uniquely placed to equip NMIRFs with the knowledge, capacities and skills to make this transformative change possible.

Survey responses to UNFPA's engagement with NMIRFs



Engaging with NMIRFs is a United Nations system-wide endeavour. UNFPA country offices leverage the leadership of the RC and UNCT (e.g. Guinea, Guyana, Morocco, Pakistan, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Tanzania) to promote the understanding of gender equality and SRHR as necessary components for the full implementation of the whole range of human rights recommendations. This modality of engagement is presented under section 3.1. Engagement with NMIRFs within the UN Resident Coordinator System.

UNFPA also fosters a multisectoral approach by supporting line ministries to participate in the work of NMIRFs and providing orientation for coherence and action on gender equality and SRHR (e.g. Bangladesh, Eswatini, Mali, Mongolia, Turkmenistan). This area of engagement is presented under section 3.2. Strengthening interministerial knowledge and capacity on ICPD and SRHR.

Through the inclusion of diverse stakeholders, NMIRFs play a critical role in translating human rights recommendations into tangible actions on the ground, in particular at subnational and local levels. UNFPA offices advocate for and facilitate multi-stakeholders' dialogues (e.g. Bangladesh, Colombia, El Salvador, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, Pakistan, Paraguay, Tanzania) and the active participation of CSOs (e.g. Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Colombia, Indonesia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Uzbekistan), parliamentarians (e.g. Brazil, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and NHRIs (e.g. Costa Rica, Malawi, Mali). UNFPA's efforts in this area are addressed under section 3.3. Strengthening multi-stakeholder policy dialogue.

The supportive role of the United Nations development system is crucial for the implementation of human rights recommendations through their integration in relevant development processes. UNFPA assists with the clustering of human rights recommendations and their alignment to SDGs and ICPD-related commitments (e.g. Paraguay, Rwanda). Additionally, UNFPA provides key assistance in the areas of planning and M&E (e.g. Bangladesh, Burundi, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Mexico, Namibia, Togo, Uzbekistan), while also supporting NSOs (e.g. Colombia, Ecuador, Morocco). This modality of engagement is assessed in section 3.4. Developing technical capacities of NMRIFs in planning and monitoring.

3.1. Engagement with NMIRFs within the UN Resident Coordinator System

The United Nations system's engagement with NMIRFs is driven by the purpose of infusing human rights-based and gender-transformative approaches in all aspects of NMIRFs' work. In this regard, the Resident Coordinator System, including UNFPA, engages with such mechanisms by championing partnerships, inclusion and mobilization of relevant government entities and non-governmental stakeholders while also providing advocacy strategies, analytical insights, data and technical assistance.

UNFPA operates in the framework of the efforts led by the RC, and it does so by responding to requests from governments and NMIRFs for technical assistance and advice in those areas where it has a comparative advantage, as follows:

1. Operating within the parameters of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and the UNFPA country programme document (CPD), UNFPA supplies NMIRFs with relevant information and complements implementation and monitoring/tracking efforts, particularly in human rights areas related to SRHR, gender equality, and prevention and elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices. UNFPA also leads analysis of population dynamics, which is critical for understanding the specific rights and needs of different population groups and identifying human rights solutions that consider demographic changes and other megatrends.
2. Relatedly, UNFPA supports line ministries championing the ICPD agenda to participate actively in NMIRFs' reporting, planning, monitoring and policy dialogue for accelerated and efficient implementation. UNFPA can offer information, evidence, technical assistance and analytical insights in relation to relevant ICPD commitments and human rights recommendations. This helps equip its government allies with the arguments and key messages to advocate successfully for action on SRHR and gender equality.
3. UNFPA's social mobilization capacity and experience promoting social and gender norms change at the community level help NMIRFs incorporate the perspectives of community actors and localize the implementation of human rights recommendations where change is most needed, particularly for LNOB groups.
4. As a data agency, UNFPA's key contributions to NMIRFs include its expertise in data generation and disaggregation and M&E systems through its long-standing partnership with NSOs and other government entities working on data. Additionally, UNFPA is the global co-custodian of key SDGs indicators, including targets 3.1 on maternal mortality, 3.7 on sexual and reproductive health services, 5.2 on gender-based violence, 5.3 on harmful practices, including child,

early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, 5.6 on reproductive rights and 17.18 on data and data disaggregation.

5. UNFPA often (co-)leads or participates actively in UNCT Theme Groups on Gender, Human Rights and Youth. In these roles, UNFPA is actively preparing UNCT submissions to the UPR on its thematic priorities and formulating SMART[34] recommendations. In this context, UNFPA is strongly positioned to advocate for the creation of clusters of recommendations on SRHR, gender equality and the rights of women, girls and youth. These clusters can help NMIRFs manage a high volume of recommendations on these topics and elucidate the linkages to related SDGs and ICPD commitments.

Considering the politically sensitive nature of some components of the ICPD agenda, UNFPA seeks the support of the RC and UNCT colleagues towards joint advocacy efforts. Running the engagement with NMIRFs under United Nations system-wide initiatives adds traction to gender equality and SRHR. It presents these issues as building blocks of the broader Sustainable Development Agenda and as enablers of the full implementation of the whole range of human rights recommendations. For instance, advocating for action on recommendations to eliminate child, early and forced marriage or adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health services, apart from being human rights and development priorities in their own right, will contribute to poverty reduction and the school retention of girls through primary and secondary education.

Similarly, operating within the UNCT and RC system presents the added value of addressing broader governance challenges faced by NMIRFs, beyond those pertaining to individual agency mandates, through a United Nations system-wide response. As highlighted by UNFPA respondents to the survey, these broader challenges include poor coordination across the ministries, departments and agencies composing NMIRFs. Of particular concern is the limited participation or influence of line ministries, including those traditionally championing the ICPD agenda, and the limited representation of senior delegates with decision-making authority and of local and regional governments. This is also combined with insufficient funding allocated to NMIRFs, hampering the implementation of human rights plans, as well as the frequent turnover and changes of personnel or limited capacity, possibly also due to a lack of genuine interest or political support.

Further challenges highlighted are the lack of a coherent and consistent approach between reporting, implementation and follow-up phases across different government agencies. UNFPA offices also underscored a lack of instruments and tools to ensure streamlined and efficient implementation and monitoring of human rights recommendations and the plans put into place. Finally, they also highlighted that human rights implementation still operates in silos, without sufficiently mainstreaming human rights recommendations into broader development and ICPD implementation processes.

It is clear that these broader governance shortcomings can have detrimental impacts on the ability to report on and implement recommendations related to SRHR and gender equality at the national level. This can be heightened in contexts where there is strong resistance and political sensitivity to SRHR and gender equality. Hence, the active involvement of UNFPA within United Nations system-wide capacity-development efforts is fundamental in keeping SRHR, gender equality and the specific rights of marginalized population groups at the forefront of the human rights and development agendas.

[34] SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound recommendations.

Tanzania

In Tanzania, the UNFPA country office has identified several pathways for engagement and interaction with the NMIRF, which takes the form of an Interministerial Secretary Committee led and coordinated by the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs (MoCLA).

UNFPA's strategic engagement with MoCLA is done through the RC system and in its active role as member of the United Nations gender and human rights coordination mechanism and the lead of its subgroups on youth, disability and gender. This engagement aims to advocate for the integration of sensitive ICPD-related issues, including child early and and forced marriage, adolescents' sexual and reproductive health, informed consent to family planning, and the rights of women and girls, in MoCLA's reporting, implementation and follow-up functions.

UNFPA is collaborating with OHCHR and other sister UN agencies to strengthen MoCLA's capacity and its ability to promote a more systematic interministerial approach in reporting on UN conventions and African Union treaties, conventions, protocols and charters. UNFPA also supported MoCLA to strengthen the role of the NMIRF in coordinating the implementation and follow-up of the third UPR cycle with the involvement of various stakeholders.

Furthermore, UNFPA engages with the Parliament to raise awareness about the central role of the NMIRF in advancing ICPD-related UPR recommendations with a view to creating stronger national support for adequate resourcing of the mechanism in the future.

Key takeaways

UNFPA's engagement with NMIRFs through the RC system and UNCT is vital, especially in contexts where human rights or ICPD-related issues are considered sensitive. By leveraging the RC's leadership role and harnessing the UNCT's collective advocacy and capacity-development support to NMIRFs, these critical topics are made more acceptable, fostering national ownership and sustainable change in the long-term.

3.2. Strengthening interministerial knowledge and capacity on ICPD and SRHR

To ensure the effective implementation and follow-up of human rights recommendations, NMIRFs coordinate collaboration among government entities and other relevant stakeholders. Primary responsible ministries are identified, and strategic alliances are established among the NMIRF's components, facilitating information- and data-sharing from the onset of planning and implementation. In this regard, some UNFPA offices have pointed to the key role of NMIRFs in facilitating coordination among line ministries to develop comprehensive strategies, which include issues central to UNFPA's mandate requiring a multisectoral response, such as maternal health, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.

However, UNFPA has occasionally observed the difficulties faced by line ministries with social portfolios dealing with SRHR, gender equality, youth and disability rights among others, in positioning themselves within NMIRFs, whenever these mechanisms are not sufficiently consolidated or have limited coordination capacity. Excessive centralization, compartmentalization of decisions, limited opportunities for strategic consultations and lack of capacity can hinder internal coordination with the risk of leaving out key human rights priorities from reports and implementation plans.

At the same time, NMIRFs may have little knowledge and understanding of the ICPD PoA and its particular relevance as a human rights agenda.

The strong convergence of international human rights recommendations with SDG targets and ICPD commitments creates an opportunity to leverage NMIRFs for enhanced accountability and accelerated implementation of the ICPD agenda and related SDGs. UNFPA can play a critical role in consolidating awareness of these converging agendas and in building bridges between NMIRFs (often led by ministries of foreign affairs and/or justice and human rights) and those government entities responsible for reviewing the ICPD agenda (ministries of planning, line ministries and NSOs).

A guiding purpose for the creation of NMIRFs was to assist governments in managing a high volume of human rights recommendations and expedite the reporting burden from multiple review processes and implementations. In this regard, NMIRFs' participation in voluntary national reviews of SDGs and national ICPD and Beijing reviews can be supported and linked to UPR reporting, including voluntary midterm reports, and other human rights mechanism review processes. Additionally, by engaging with SDGs, ICPD and Beijing national reviews, NMIRFs can benefit from the highly participatory nature of these processes to promote multi-stakeholder dialogues around human rights recommendations and their policy implications.

Concurrently, UNFPA can help strengthen interministerial capacity within the NMIRFs through technical assistance

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and evidence-based information on SRHR and ICPD-related issues and facilitate the mainstreaming of human rights recommendations in social portfolios.

The ultimate purpose of UNFPA is to help build national ownership of ICPD-related human rights recommendations, down from ministries of foreign affairs – who negotiate and accept recommendations at the international level – to line ministries – who integrate recommendations in their sectoral policies – as well as parliaments, local governments and target population groups at the national and community level.

Mongolia

The Government of Mongolia has established an Ex Officio Council, consisting of various government entities and NGOs, to oversee the implementation and follow-up of recommendations. UNFPA has partnered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which, in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs, serves as the secretariat for the Council and coordinates reporting duties with various line ministries.

Through this collaborative mechanism, the UNFPA country office has disseminated key information on the ICPD, including infographics prepared by UNFPA Geneva Representation Office on linkages between UPR recommendations and the ICPD agenda.[35] It has also advocated for the follow-up of SRHR recommendations, including a few taken verbatim from ICPD25 voluntary commitments made by the country, though dedicated briefings to newly appointed government officials to the Ex Officio Council. As a result, the NMIRF has been able to follow up UPR recommendations in conjunction with related ICPD25 commitments during the national implementation process.

Key takeaways

Disseminating knowledge and capacity on ICPD, SRHR and human rights mechanisms, including the intersection with the UPR process and recommendations, allows for these issues not to be sidelined within the NMIRF work, also with a view to facilitating future revision processes.

[35] The infographic can be consulted here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1flkRBYz-8pO7bEN1nUQeF7QtgaE-wh0T1/view?usp=sharing.

Turkmenistan

In preparation for Turkmenistan's participation at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD57), UNFPA provided an orientation briefing to the NMIRF in the country – the Interministerial Commission on international human rights obligations – and its members including parliamentarians of the Mejlis (the national Parliament of Turkmenistan). The orientation briefing focused on advancing the implementation of recommendations, specifically emanating from CEDAW, related to gender equality, gender-based violence, and addressing the needs of vulnerable women and girls.

The initiative has influenced the formulation of Turkmenistan's statement at the CPD57, which expresses a strong political commitment to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and zero gender-based violence. This commitment was also central to the Government's engagement at the Summit of the Future in September 2024. At a domestic level, the briefing has contributed to fostering strategic multisectoral partnerships within the NMIRF components and parliamentarians in advancing the implementation of recommendations and in linking those efforts to the ICPD PoA and SDGs.

Key takeaways

By strengthening the knowledge and capacity of line ministries and other constituents of NMIRFs on the ICPD and its linkages with broader human rights and development agendas, including the SDGs, NMIRFs can become ICPD champions both at the international level and in building multisectoral platforms for national implementation.

3.3. Strengthening multi-stakeholder policy dialogue

The ICPD PoA and several other internationally agreed commitments recognize the importance of human rights-based and gender-responsive approaches in preventing and responding to complex human rights and development challenges such as preventable maternal mortality, child marriage and female genital mutilation. A human rights-based approach addresses deeply rooted discriminatory patterns and negative social and gender norms through comprehensive and integrated legal, policy, programme and budgetary measures focusing on removing the barriers faced by those left behind.

Due to the nature of their mandate and composition, NMIRFs are critically placed to promote transformative change in implementing human rights recommendations through the promotion of multi-stakeholder dialogues. These dialogues can range from horizontal, across ministries and other State institutions (including parliamentarians, NHRIs and the judiciary), to vertical, from the central Government down to the local and community level. In particular, informed civil society participation is paramount to ensure that the perspectives and needs of those directly affected by human rights recommendations are duly taken into account. This includes topics pertaining to teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence or disability-inclusive health services. For instance, the NMIRF can bring together experts and practitioners from the health sector, social services, law enforcement and legal protection, women's organizations, men's engagement groups, youth-led organizations, gender-based violence survivors and others to discuss human rights recommendations related to the prevention of and response to gender-based violence. This interaction can help strengthen the continuum of gender-based violence prevention, protection and response services while addressing underlying and social determinants.

The recommendations stemming from UN human rights mechanisms and the political traction of the UPR process provide a strong basis for policy dialogue and accountability. Taking the opportunity of UPR reviews (during both pre- and post-adoption processes), UNFPA supports NMIRFs and national stakeholders with the data and evidence needed for an informed dialogue on critical yet sensitive human rights issues that may otherwise be challenging to raise in other spaces.

Ultimately, promoting cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder dialogues allows NMIRFs to garner political support and build national ownership of human rights recommendations to drive bottom-up change. UNFPA facilitates participatory processes in support of NMIRFs by mobilizing local government officials and other key stakeholders at the subnational level. It also fosters the participation of marginalized and LNOB groups in consultations and debates, ensuring a broader public engagement in the localization and implementation of human rights recommendations. This bridging role is critical in overcoming

Opportunities for multi-stakeholder dialogue within the UPR process

Taking the UPR as example, the NMIRF can identify some critical stages for broad-based participatory dialogue, as follows:

- ✓ In the context of formulating State Party reports to human rights mechanisms;
- ✓ Facilitating consultations between the review and the adoption phase of the UPR for the government to decide which ICPD-related human rights recommendations will be finally supported;
- ✓ Organizing dissemination events after the adoption of human rights recommendations;
- ✓ Formulating National Action Plans and M&E tools and clustering of ICPD-related recommendations;
- ✓ Formulating voluntary UPR midterm reports and organizing public forums to discuss progress on implementation of ICPD-related recommendations.

social resistance that may act as a barrier to effective implementation of ICPD-related recommendations at the local level.

NMIRFs' specific members championing the ICPD agenda (line ministries, State agencies, NHRIs and parliaments) are, in this sense, well positioned to leverage their contacts with local governments, civil society and marginalized groups. This helps enhance the understanding of expectations and needs on the ground, thus making implementation more valuable and impactful. UNFPA's mobilization and convening role is critical in facilitating the informed participation and capacity of these ICPD champions within the NMIRF structure, as seen in the previous section.

In particular, parliamentarians, who can be fully fledged NMIRF members or observers depending on the country's context, play a critical role in building political will and making budgetary decisions for the implementation of recommendations. Moreover, parliamentarians can be instrumental in connecting their respective constituencies with national debates. UNFPA can mobilize parliamentary caucuses and committees on population and development, health, human rights and gender equality to be actively involved in the work of NMIRFs. Their engagement can push NMIRFs to invest more in policy dialogue initiatives at critical stages of the UPR process or in the context of the State's review by a UN treaty body or a country visit by a special rapporteur.

Reporting is a key tool for reviewing progress and advocating for further change, including correcting systemic policy failures. By engaging in reporting (e.g. national reports, midterm reports and shadow reports), government entities, parliaments, NHRIs and CSOs contribute to and benefit from the monitoring systems established by NMIRFs to track the implementation of human rights recommendations and related policies and plans. By facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement in the reporting process, NMIRFs can gather broader perspectives on shortcomings while raising further awareness at national and grass-roots levels.

Morocco

The Délégation Interministérielle aux Droits de l'Homme (DIDH) was created in 2011 to absorb Morocco's reporting shortfall and integrate human rights commitments, obligations and recommendations into public policies through interministerial coordination. Currently, the DIDH presents a more advanced stance with its efforts towards creating a national model of implementation of recommendations that unfolds in a twofold manner: strong political participation in the implementation of the National Human Rights Plan and strong involvement at the regional and local level, including of CSOs. This approach promotes the involvement of both institutional and local actors, and the ownership of recommendations and their implementation at local level.

The participation at the central level is mainly institutional and technocratic, focused on the analysis and clustering of recommendations and the elaboration of implementation plans with relevant M&E systems being put into place. In this regard, UNFPA is working closely with UNDP's multi-year programme of support to the DIDH to strengthen its operational and coordination capacity. This includes the support to line ministries in integrating human rights recommendations in their sectoral policies and M&E systems and the development and operationalization of national strategies and programmes (e.g. the National Strategy on Sexual and Reproductive Health, National Strategy for the Health of Adolescents and Young People, National Strategy/ Plan on Gender-Based Violence, Policy on People with Disabilities).

At the request of the DIDH, UNFPA is currently engaged in strengthening the integration of ICPD-related human rights recommendations in the plans and strategies at the departmental level, and the adoption of a 'territorial approach' for implementing recommendations. This is in line with the strong configuration of the DIDH as a space of coordination favouring the mobilization and participation of different actors. In this sense, not only do CSOs participate in dialogues prior to review processes, but they are also involved in the dissemination of recommendations. UNFPA has supported the organization of sensitization workshops for civil society, including women's and youth-led organizations, with a view to bringing international human rights commitments and recommendations down to the regional/provincial level.

Key takeaways

UNFPA can assist NMIRFs in the local implementation of human rights recommendations and commitments, inter alia, by involving subnational and local government and civil society actors, including community-based organizations, in supporting implementation while holding central Governments to account.

Mozambique

In Mozambique, the National Directorate for Human Rights and Citizenship, a division of the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs (MJCR), is responsible for providing the secretariat and coordinates the activities of the Interministerial Commission for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CIDHDIH).

The UNFPA Mozambique country office has been collaborating closely with CIDHDIH's government members, focusing on supporting youth rights, including SRHR. Through concerted efforts involving MJCR, UNFPA and other stakeholders, workshops have been conducted across Nampula, Zambezia, Gaza and Tete Provinces to train decision makers, including provincial governors, and members of the Intersectoral Committee for the Development of Youth and Adolescents. These workshops focused on strengthening participants' knowledge about the UPR, with specific attention to the recommendations of the third cycle relating to adolescent and youth SRHR. These initiatives are expected to be integrated into the National Action Plan coordinated by MJCR.

At the same time, UNFPA promoted the participation of young people and youth organizations in implementing and monitoring UPR recommendations, including those related to Mozambique's ICPD25 voluntary commitments. In particular, UNFPA supported the mentorship programme created by the Coalition of Youth. This allowed mentors and mentees to participate in the discussion around SRHR issues and promote the use of sexual and reproductive health services at the community level. This support is oriented at building the capacity of youth and youth organizations to advocate for their priorities with line ministries and other national actors involved in the CIDHDIH. As a result, youth-led organizations are influencing the inclusion of SRHR issues, such as HIV prevention and child marriage in the National Development Strategy.

Key takeaways

The case illustrates the importance of empowering civil society actors, including youth groups and other LNOB groups, with knowledge and capacity to influence NMIRFs and multi-stakeholder policy processes. At the same time, it demonstrates the importance of building the government's knowledge and capacity for inclusive governance for effective decision-making and policy implementation.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, the Federal Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) coordinates the implementation and follow-up of supported recommendations from international mechanisms. Following the enactment of the Eighteenth Constitution (Amendment) Act (2010), many responsibilities have been entrusted to provincial governments, including the implementation of human rights recommendations. The MoHR disseminates the recommendations and follows up on implementation progress through Treaty Implementation Cells (TICs) established at federal and provincial Government level.

UNFPA, as co-leader of the UN Gender Theme Group, has been engaging closely with the Government, including the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Women's Development, the National Commission on the Status of Women as well as the Social Welfare and Women's Development Departments at the subnational level, to advocate for a multi-stakeholder engagement on SRHR issues, gender equality and the elimination of harmful practices, including child marriage. This engagement and advocacy work has also involved women's groups and other CSOs at the subnational level.

An important first step has included the promulgation of the 2021 Anti-Rape (Trial and Investigation) Act and the 2021 Criminal Law (Amendment). These laws redefine rape in the legal framework and ensure victim-centred investigation, evidence and trial guidelines to protect victims of sexual violence and improve rape conviction rates. The Commission on the Status of Women has reported progressive results related to the 'two-finger' test administered to rape survivors, which was banned by the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Key takeaways

With UNCT's support, multi-stakeholder engagement with government ministries, women's groups and CSOs has been pivotal in advancing legal reforms on SRHR and harmful practices. This form of engagement has contributed to building national and community ownership of laws and policies, which is critical for changing the social norms that perpetuate harmful practices and the denial of SRHR.

3.4. Developing technical capacities of NMRIFs in planning and monitoring

3.4.1. Supporting the systematization of SRHR-related recommendations

Issues related to women's rights, gender equality, gender-based violence and SRHR are among the most frequently addressed within human rights mechanisms, as exemplified by the high number and volume of related recommendations. Thus it is imperative to systematically organize them to ensure streamlined and efficient implementation.

The thematic clustering of recommendations within comprehensive national implementation plans avoids fragmentation of key human rights priorities and ensures a clear perspective for the follow-up of multiple commitments.

UNFPA is well positioned to support NMIRFs and relevant ministries to subdivide recommendations into more manageable subclusters, considering factors like feasibility, impact, budget allocation and capacity-development needs. UNFPA does this clustering work, for example, in the context of UN Theme Working Groups in collaboration with related agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). This coordinated effort additionally allows for the identification of gaps and synergies.

UNFPA can leverage the cluster approach employed by several NMIRFs to promote the alignment of human rights recommendations to national commitments stemming from the 2030 Agenda and major UN conferences and summits, including the ICPD PoA and the Nairobi Summit.

Being a data-driven organization, UNFPA can provide relevant evidence and data for tailoring and framing the clusters. At the same time, consultations with diverse stakeholders, including government ministries, parliamentarians, NHRIs, CSOs, statistical agencies, service providers, affected communities and development partners, are essential to validate these clustering efforts.

3.4.2. Developing human rights plans and aligning planning results with other plans and policies

Traditionally, NMIRFs, particularly those led by ministries of justice and human rights, have been involved in developing human rights plans. While these plans have the potential to enhance the visibility of human rights recommendations at the national level, their impact has been mixed. In some cases, human rights plans may contribute to siloing action on these recommendations within a single planning tool without facilitating their integration into other implementation plans

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or policies. At the same time, they may face challenges such as limited funding or insufficient political support.

Given the strong convergence between human rights and development agendas, including the ICPD, in recent years some NMIRFs have been ensuring coordination across ministries of planning and line ministries to mainstream human rights recommendations in development plans and sectoral policies. When done systematically, human rights mainstreaming can ensure that specific interventions and policy results are effectively budgeted for and implemented. NMIRFs can also be instrumental in helping provincial and local governments to mainstream human rights recommendations in their territorial plans of action. This approach also brings recommendations closer to local communities and ensures that the perspectives and specific needs of marginalized/LNOB groups are taken into account in defining actions and results in response to recommendations.

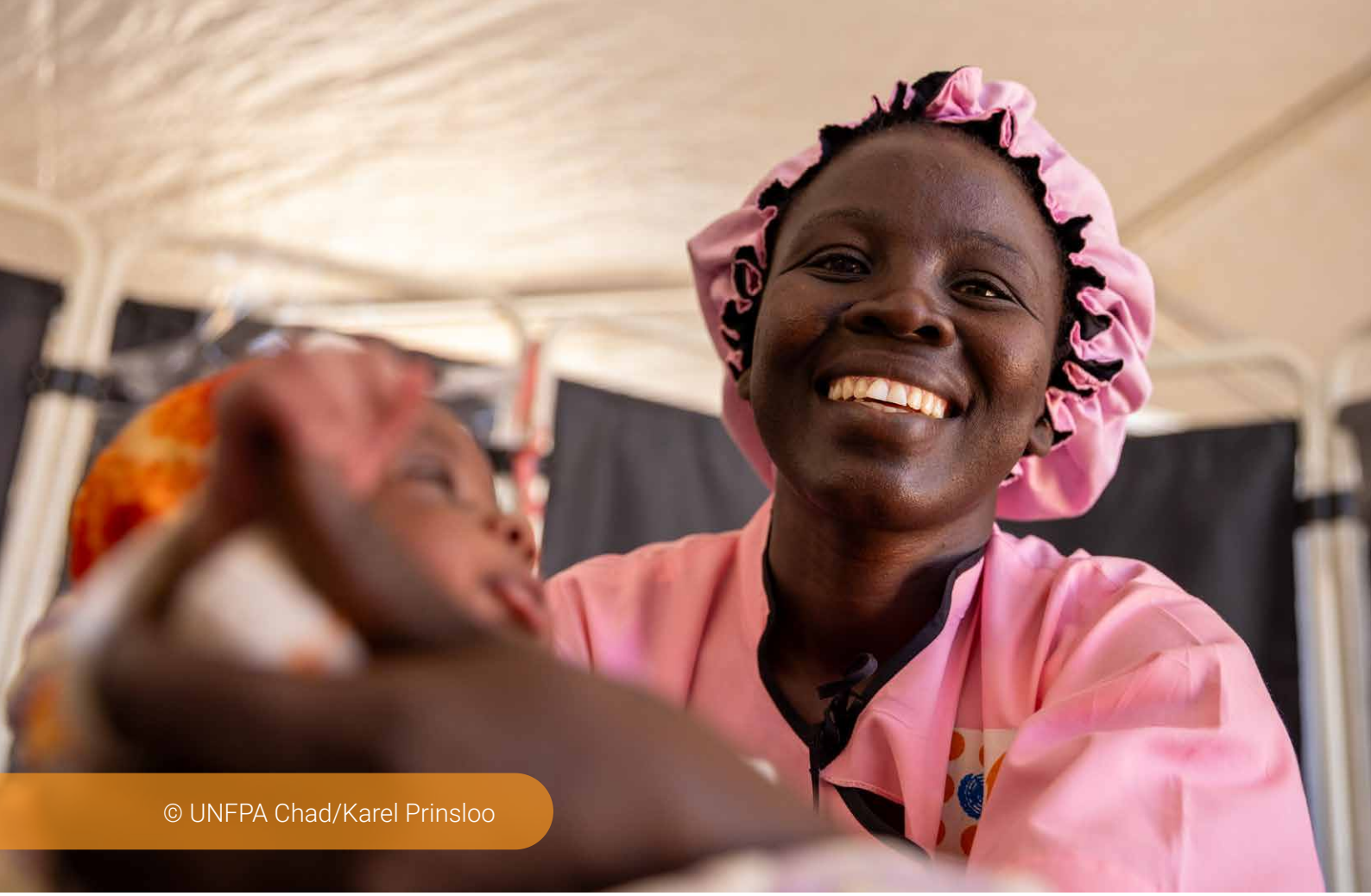
Human rights mainstreaming can yield mutually reinforcing synergies between NMIRFs and other government entities responsible for development and sectoral policies. Through support in aligning human rights recommendations with related SDGs and ICPD commitments within their implementation/action plans and tracking mechanisms, NMIRFs can benefit from the broader planning and monitoring experience of other government entities. In turn, ministries of planning can benefit from the stronger accountability architecture associated with human rights processes. This can put more pressure on line ministries or divisions to take effective action on the implementation of national development results.

3.4.3. Building M&E systems and databases

Several governments, NMIRFs, NHRIs, and regional and international organizations have established digital human rights tracking tools and databases to streamline the implementation of human rights recommendations.[36] Often operating as repositories of information, these tracking tools and databases inform on actions, indicators, responsible agencies, time frames and resources. An effective use of these tools enhances the overall accountability of NMIRFs and other entities responsible for implementation.

Among these tools, the National Recommendations Tracking Database is an application offered by OHCHR to assist State officials in recording, tracking and reporting on the implementation of human rights recommendations. Recommendations emanating from international human rights mechanisms and States' voluntary commitments are directly uploaded from the Universal Human Rights Index and aligned with SDGs targets.

[36] The Geneva Human Rights Platform, "Digital human rights tracking tools and databases".



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The UNFPA Geneva Representation Office has developed a database and a dashboard to facilitate the clustering of UPR recommendations. This is done in accordance with key components of the ICPD PoA, including on issues pertaining to SRHR, gender-based violence and equality and non-discrimination of specific population groups, and in humanitarian situations.

UNFPA also supports NSOs to roll out censuses and household surveys, including demographic and health surveys, and strengthen administrative data systems on civil registration and vital statistics. These systems play a significant role by ensuring the permanent, universal and continuous registration of births, deaths and other vital events, and recording causes of death. These systems are also essential as they monitor 12 of the 17 SDGs, providing information for 67 of the 232 SDG indicators.[37] As the current host of the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, UNFPA can harness global financial and technical resources to support national statistical efforts across different countries. Moreover, UNFPA is the global co-custodian of key SDGs indicators, including targets 3.1 on maternal mortality, 3.7 on sexual and reproductive health services, 5.2 on gender-based violence, 5.3 on harmful practices, 5.6 on reproductive rights and 17.18 on data and data disaggregation.

Data tools and information collected through national censuses and surveys are critical to directing NMIRFs' planning priorities and tracking progress on implementation. In particular, consistent and disaggregated data allow for the sustained use of clustering approaches and the creation of appropriate indicators to track the implementation of human rights recommendations with an LNOB approach.

[37] Samuel Mills and others, *Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals* (Washington, D.C., World Bank Group, 2017).

Bangladesh

UNFPA in Bangladesh developed an advocacy strategy in support of Bangladesh's review during the fourth UPR cycle in November 2023. The strategy includes a road map and identifies various levels and stakeholders for engagement, such as the NMIRF, the NHRI, CSOs and development partners. This strategy spans the entire UPR process, from the preparation for the review and the review to the adoption of the recommendations received and the implementation phase.

In particular, after the adoption of UPR recommendations, the country office engaged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in charge of coordinating the NMIRF and other relevant ministries to support systematic follow-up. This included activities to disseminate the recommendations, cluster them and develop a comprehensive implementation plan detailing resources, time frames and indicators. The UPR recommendations were also clustered with those derived from other human rights mechanisms and Nairobi Summit voluntary commitments made by Bangladesh to reduce maternal mortality, unmet need for family planning, gender-based violence, child, early and forced marriages, harassment, and discrimination of women and girls. By aligning these clusters with its programmatic priorities, UNFPA has played a leading role in facilitating collaboration among UN entities and partners for a more strategic and targeted implementation.

The UNFPA country office, in coordination with MOFA, has additionally conducted orientation sessions for NMIRF members, emphasizing the intersections between ICPD commitments and international human rights recommendations and contributing to awareness-raising.

Key takeaways

By assisting NMIRFs over the entire UPR process and, in particular, by advocating for greater attention and support to key recommendations related to the ICPD and pertaining issues such as SRHR, gender-based violence and harmful practices, these recommendations and commitments can be translated into implementation plans and progress can be more easily monitored.

Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, the Minister of Justice is tasked with leading and coordinating the reporting, implementation and follow-up of recommendations emanating from the UPR and other human rights mechanisms. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs leads an Inter-agency Commission on International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Treaties responsible for guiding the implementation of international humanitarian and human rights obligations. Different consultative and advisory bodies under the President of Kazakhstan, such as the National Commission of Women's Affairs and Family and Demographic Policy (National Commission), provide thematic guidance on implementation and policy dialogue.

UNFPA has been engaging and supporting line ministries on the implementation of human rights commitments through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The country office has supported the National Commission in strengthening its plan of action. This support included advice on actions, targets and budget lines related to recommendations on gender equality, gender-based violence prevention and response, and SRHR. The National Commission has been instrumental in guiding progress on the SRHR of persons with disabilities, access to youth-friendly health services, integration of comprehensive sexuality education into vocational education and Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools' curricula, and a pilot multisectoral response to gender-based violence.

Key takeaways

UNFPA engagement in the development of the NMIRF Plan of Action and related M&E tools has been crucial in ensuring that recommendations related to ICPD priorities are prominently featured and followed up. This dedicated attention will also ensure more robust reporting on these issues in the context of future review processes.

Paraguay

Paraguay's NMIRF has emerged as a leader thanks to its monitoring system SIMORE Plus. Developed with the support of the United Nations, this web-based inter-institutional monitoring system facilitates the systematization of the recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms (UPR, TBs and SPs), as well as those from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. SIMORE Plus' clustering approach is designed to align human rights recommendations with SDG targets. This facilitates the integration of human rights recommendations into national SDG plans and allows the use of the information generated by SIMORE Plus to prepare voluntary national review reports on sustainable development. A similar model could be employed to align human rights recommendations with ICPD commitments since the ICPD agenda is strongly aligned with the SDGs.

SIMORE Plus is not just a repository of recommendations and related actions. It is also an interactive tool allowing responsible entities and other stakeholders to report back regularly on progress in the implementation of recommendations. Additionally, an open access section also makes progress-related information available to the larger public. This includes information on the actions undertaken by the ministries and institutions responsible for implementing human rights recommendations. This form of transparency promotes the informed participation of CSOs, contributing to policy dialogue and partnership building.

The UNFPA country office has promoted the use of SIMORE Plus to follow up on progress in the implementation of SRHR and other relevant recommendations. In line with the Ministry of Planning's National Plan of Action on Population and Development (2023–2028), progress in human rights, including SRHR and population and development commitments, can now be monitored in an integrated manner through SIMORE Plus and the Ministry of Planning's Planning System for Results. Currently, SIMORE Plus monitors progress on ICPD issues related to adolescent and youth rights, SRHR and gender equality, among others.

Key takeaways

SIMORE Plus has become a successful model that is being replicated in at least 13 other countries. It has positioned Paraguay as a leader in terms of South-South cooperation spearheaded by the SIMORE-Paraguay Technical Cooperation Programme. Building on our presence in over 130 countries, UNFPA is well placed to support south-south and triangular cooperation for integrated approaches to human rights and sustainable development, as called for in the Marrakech Guidance Framework on NMIRFs.

Conclusions

Closely intertwined with its strong tradition of engagement with human rights mechanisms, UNFPA's work with NMIRFs is guided by the conviction that States, as primary duty bearers, have the responsibility to own and implement human rights recommendations.

In that regard, NMIRFs are strategically and uniquely placed to articulate the governmental response. They also coordinate the development of tools to better plan and follow up on human rights recommendations and commitments. NMIRFs do so by providing a platform for cross-sectoral collaboration across different government entities and technical professionals, thus facilitating comprehensive responses to complex human rights issues requiring integrated legal, policy, programme and budgetary measures.

At the same time, NMIRFs engage in dialogue and collaborate with various stakeholders both among State institutions (NHRIs, parliaments, NSOs, the judiciary) and at the community and local level (CSOs, traditional and religious leaders, marginalized/LNOB groups). Multi-stakeholders' dialogue and advocacy helps NMIRFs build ownership of human rights recommendations, thereby strengthening accountability at all levels.

By engaging with NMIRFs, UNFPA offers technical expertise on the ICPD agenda, SRHR and gender equality and the mobilization of relevant government entities and non-governmental stakeholders to champion this agenda and enhance the government's accountability.

In more operational terms, UNFPA's expertise can critically support NMIRFs' role in coordinating the mainstreaming of human rights recommendations in national development plans and sectoral policies. Moreover, subnational and community level implementation allows for greater impact where the achievement of SRHR and gender equality may be more challenging, and marginalized groups may be left behind.

UNFPA's support of NMIRFs is increasingly relevant, as evidenced by the growing political momentum globally and resolutions from the Human Rights Council stressing the pivotal role of cooperation in strengthening NMIRFs. The interest generated by the UPR process as a driver for implementation, along with the strong convergence between human rights recommendations and the ICPD's agenda and Nairobi Summit commitments, underscore the importance of NMIRFs for advancing the unfinished business on SRHR and gender equality.

In this regard, NMIRFs are to be sustained in navigating the shift from a more classic technocratic stance in terms of report writing, coordination and information management towards mechanisms fostering transformative policy and social change. Examples of engagement from the field show that UNFPA can contribute in an impactful manner by supporting NMIRFs and partners in driving that ambitious shift.

This involves applying human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, and transparency and accountability in all aspects of NMIRFs' work. Through applying a human rights-based and gender-transformative approach, NMIRFs, with the support of UNFPA, can articulate whole-of-government and whole-of-society responses in the identification of technical solutions and streamlined implementation.

Engagement with NMIRFs is a United Nations system-wide endeavour led by the Resident Coordinator. It offers the opportunity to advocate for sensitive components of the ICPD agenda, including SRHR, within the broader context of sustainable development. At the same time, it contributes to addressing NMIRFs' governance challenges and capacity-development needs, which go beyond the specific mandate and thematic priorities of an individual UN agency.

Due to their relative novelty (79 NMIRFs worldwide), UNFPA's level of engagement with NMIRFs is still uneven. In countries where such engagement occurs, UNFPA's collaboration has contributed to strengthening these mechanisms as transformative institutions fostering policy and social change.

Ultimately, UNFPA's goal is to strengthen national capacities and ownership of the implementation and monitoring of human rights recommendations, obligations and commitments, including those on SRHR, gender equality and the ICPD, by leveraging the mandate and multisectoral composition of NMIRFs.

This work is done from the conviction that NMIRFs are uniquely placed to build multilayered political support to the ICPD agenda and promote sustainable changes on the ground aiming to realize rights and transform lives.

Key takeaways (checklist)

To facilitate UNFPA involvement with NMIRFs, the main takeaways are structured in a checklist format in accordance with the four main areas of engagement identified in the assessment report.

These takeaways aim to highlight UNFPA's added value, indicating its unique expertise and adaptive approaches to maximizing partnerships and results.

Engagement with NMIRFs within the UN Resident Coordinator System

UNFPA's engagement with NMIRFs is conducted under the leadership of the RC and in collaboration with the whole UNCT. As part of this United Nations system-wide engagement, UNFPA can position SRHR and gender equality as building blocks of the broader Sustainable Development Agenda and increase their acceptance at national and local level.

- ✓ Join the RC and UNCT efforts to advocate for the establishment and strengthening of effective NMIRFs, guided by HRC resolutions on NMIRFs and the *Marrakech Guidance Framework* (2024);
- ✓ Ensure a unified UN voice in addressing sensitive SRHR and gender equality issues by providing advice and evidence-based information;
- ✓ Leverage the leadership and advocacy role of the UNRC to advocate with the Government and the NMIRF towards the acceptance of UPR recommendations related to the ICPD agenda;
- ✓ Collaborate with UN Theme Working Groups, OHCHR and the RC to advocate for the integration of ICPD-related human rights recommendations from the UPR, TBs and SPs in NMIRFs' planning, monitoring and reporting tools;
- ✓ Invite NMIRFs to participate in formulating common country analyses, UNSDCFs and CPDs.

Strengthening interministerial knowledge and capacity on ICPD and SRHR

NMIRFs are strategically positioned to facilitate coordination and concerted efforts and strategies among different line ministries and other stakeholders championing the ICPD agenda. This creates an opportunity to leverage reporting, planning and monitoring processes for accelerated implementation and enhanced accountability.

UNFPA can play a role in making NMIRFs more aware of the strong convergences between human rights recommendations, the SDGs and the ICPD agenda, and build bridges between NMIRFs and those government entities responsible for reviewing and following up the ICPD agenda. UNFPA can also help strengthen interministerial capacity within the NMIRF through technical assistance and evidence-based information, including on ICPD and SRHR.

- ✓ Conduct briefing and orientation sessions for NMIRF members focusing on the convergence between human rights recommendations and ICPD commitments and provide specific tools to clarify the practical implications of this convergence in the areas of reporting, planning, monitoring and partnership building;
- ✓ Mobilize line ministries responsible for the implementation of the ICPD-related recommendations and championing the ICPD agenda to participate actively in all aspects of NMIRFs' work, in particular in the formulation of human rights plans, monitoring systems and reports, including voluntary UPR midterm reports;
- ✓ Conduct workshops for NMIRF members and observers on human rights-based, gender-transformative and multisectoral approaches to SRHR and gender equality and the practical implications in the reporting, implementation and monitoring/tracking of related human rights recommendations;
- ✓ Support the participation of NMIRFs in national SDGs, ICPD and Beijing reviews to feed human rights information into the outcomes of those review processes and related policies.

Strengthening multi-stakeholder policy dialogue

By adopting a human rights-based, gender-responsive and multi-stakeholder approach, NMIRFs are critically placed to promote transformational change through policy dialogue. A cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach allows NMIRFs to build national ownership of human rights recommendations, challenging social resistance to effective implementation and driving bottom-up change.

- ✓ Support NMIRFs to convene and facilitate dialogues across government ministries and agencies (at both the political and technical level) and with non-government actors (parliamentarians, NHRIs, CSOs and community-based organizations) at critical stages of the human rights review-action-reporting continuum and equip them with evidence-based information and analysis on critical gender equality and SRHR issues for a meaningful engagement with NMIRFs;
- ✓ Map out relevant stakeholders to be engaged and consulted by the NMIRF on the basis of the human recommendations received by the State and the population groups directly affected by those recommendations, including LNOB groups;
- ✓ Support NMIRFs' participation in parliamentary commissions, NHRI inquiries, local health service inspections, maternal death reviews, community hearings and other spaces where gender equality and SRHR-related policies and services are discussed and reviewed;
- ✓ Promote and facilitate the dissemination of human rights recommendations at national and subnational level, including among local governments, community-based organizations, traditional leaders and affected LNOB population groups;
- ✓ Support awareness of implementation processes related to specific recommendations and strengthen alliances with CSOs, LNOB groups, local authorities and traditional leaders at the subnational level to address recommendations, including those requiring change in social norms.

Developing technical capacities of NMRIFs in planning and monitoring

UNFPA supports countries and NMIRFs with technical capacity and tools for more effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation through the thematic clustering of human rights recommendations, data and evidence.

- ✓ Support NMIRFs in identifying thematic clusters of human rights recommendations and ICPD commitments related to SRHR with a view to promoting more comprehensive and multisectoral action and minimizing SRHR fragmentation across different thematic clusters;
- ✓ Provide NMIRFs with technical assistance in promoting the integration of ICPD-related human rights recommendations in national development plans and sectoral policies, including in the formulation of results, activities and indicators;
- ✓ Leverage UNFPA's expertise on programming and data and its partnership with ministries of planning, line ministries and NSOs to strengthen the planning tools, M&E systems and tracking tools developed by NMIRFs to assess the status of implementation of human rights recommendations;
- ✓ Advocate to ensure that the information contained in NMIRFs' tracking tools, including on the status of implementation of human rights recommendations, is accessible to the public (preferably in an open access website) in order to enhance government accountability and informed and meaningful participation by civil society actors in policy formulation and human rights reporting processes.

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Annex I: Additional illustrative examples of country offices/resident coordinator offices engaging with NMRIFs

Engagement with NMIRFs within the UN Resident Coordinator System

Guyana

In Guyana, UNFPA, as part of a UNCT-led initiative facilitated by the Human Rights Adviser to the RC, played a key role in supporting the National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRF), which is chaired by the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance. This UNCT-led initiative helped the NMIRF develop the results and indicators of the country's human rights action plan. UNFPA specifically identified capacity-development needs for implementing ICPD-related recommendations, and supported the engagement of line ministries and civil society championing the ICPD agenda. As a result, ICPD-related recommendations and concrete implementation modalities were more firmly anchored in the human rights action plan.

Rwanda

Following the 2021 UPR review, as part of a joint effort of the Human Rights Task Team coordinated by OHCHR and the UNDP, UNFPA was the responsible agency for a cluster of recommendations. It assisted the Ministry of Justice, which leads the NMIRF cross-institutional national Treaty Body Reporting Task Force (TBRTF), in developing a road map for implementing the 160 supported recommendations, a few of which were taken verbatim from the voluntary commitments made by the Government at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25. The TBRTF/NMIRF comprises government institutions, CSOs, the private sector, development partners and UN agencies.

Strengthening interministerial knowledge and capacity on ICPD and SRHR

Mali

From January 2022 to December 2023, UNFPA in Mali, as Co-Chair of the Women's Empowerment Dialogue Group, made use of the UPR-supported recommendations to facilitate a series of policy dialogue sessions. These sessions were led by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family (MPFEF) and focused on gender equality, empowerment of women and girls, and harmful practices. The capacity-building and advocacy efforts generated by the policy dialogues helped MPFEF in strengthening its partnership vis-à-vis the Ministry of Justice (leading the Comité Interministériel d'appui à l'élaboration des Rapports initiaux et périodiques de mise en œuvre des Conventions ratifiées par le Mali/CIMERAP) and improve the Ministry's strategic positioning within the NMIRF. Positive results were also registered in terms of improving institutional communication and information exchange on those issues and strengthening MPFEF's partnership with CSOs, the United Nations system and other technical and financial partners.

Strengthening multi-stakeholder policy dialogues

Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, the national Parliament (Oliy Majlis) plays a key role in implementing human rights recommendations and development commitments by maintaining an institutionalized collaboration with the National Centre for Human Rights (the NMIRF).

The adoption of the resolution 'Enhancing the Role of Parliaments in Accelerating the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals' by the United Nations General Assembly on 14 December 2022, proposed by the President of Uzbekistan, paved the way for a national road map (National Action Plan) for achieving the SDGs and targets. This road map involves responsible ministries, State agencies, local authorities and various population groups in consultations, including women and youth. The Parliament approves draft reports to be submitted to human rights mechanisms and conducts public discussions on human rights issues. Special parliamentary commissions have been established under the Parliament to ensure compliance with international human rights obligations and to monitor the implementation of the SDGs.

UNFPA, in collaboration with the national Parliament, participates in consultations and provides expert support regarding changes in national legislation. It also provided inputs to National Action Plans for the effective implementation of human rights obligations with UNFPA's support. For instance, UNFPA in Uzbekistan has provided technical assistance for developing and implementing the CEDAW National Action Plan. It has contributed to gender-related legislation and policies aligned with CEDAW concluding observations and other recommendations from international mechanisms. Among these legal and policy reforms are the 'Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in Uzbekistan until 2030' (2021) and the 'Law on Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence' (2023), covering respectively equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the social, economic and political spheres, and domestic violence and sexual abuse of minors.

These reform processes have enabled UNFPA to enhance collaboration with government agencies, development partners and civil society, promoting advocacy and fostering a cohesive and coordinated multisectoral approach. To bolster national efforts to prevent and eradicate gender-based violence, UNFPA introduced a survivor-centred and disability-inclusive response mechanism, bringing together, for the first time, national law enforcement, health and psychosocial sector practitioners, women's rights activists and community leaders.

Developing technical capacities of NMRIFs in planning and monitoring

Maldives

In the Maldives, the Government has established a UPR National Standing Committee. In order to accelerate and scale up progress in the achievement of ICPD commitments and the SDGs, the Government initiated discussions with UNFPA to explore opportunities related to the integration of the ICPD and Nairobi Summit commitments in the National Recommendations Tracking Database. The Maldives' ICPD25 commitments include environmental protection and climate change adaptation, suggesting a crucial nexus between climate change, gender and SRHR.

Mexico

In Mexico, three digital platforms have been established to assist the Government and stakeholders in systematizing recommendations and monitoring their implementation. These platforms include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MOFA) System for Implementing and Monitoring International Human Rights Recommendations; the National System for Assessing Degrees of Compliance with Human Rights-related Recommendations, developed in a collaboration between the MOFA, the Ministry of the Interior, the Office of the President and the Human Rights Programme of the National Autonomous University of Mexico; and the Traffic Light System for Assessing Compliance with International Human Rights-related Recommendations, introduced by the Mexican National Human Rights Commission. Line ministries, State agencies and statutory institutions responsible for implementation efforts are required to provide updates to the platforms on the progress of recommendations through the coordination of the MOFA.

Given that the platforms mainly serve as sources of information and monitoring for international recommendations, UNFPA in Mexico's engagement primarily revolves around dialogue and follow-up with the MOFA and partner line ministries.

In the absence of a more structured consultative mechanism, UNFPA provides direct technical assistance to partner line ministries in analysing and complying with specific recommendations. Support, including training, workshops and formulation of tools to strengthen the implementation of public policies and to systematize recommendations, has also been directed to institutions such as the National Women's Institute, the National Population Council, the Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women, and the judiciary. To strengthen dialogue among ministries and promote UNFPA's mandate, the country office maintains strategic partnerships with State institutions, civil society and other international agencies.

Annex II: Scope and methodology of the assessment of UNFPA's engagement with NMIRFs and list of respondents to the global survey

The findings presented in this report are based on an assessment of the level of engagement of UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, particularly at country level, with National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up of human rights obligations and recommendations (NMIRFs). It identifies challenges, good practices and lessons learned in providing technical support to such government-led mechanisms, as well as recommendations for strengthening of partnership and collaboration between UNFPA and NMIRFs.

To comprehensively understand the extent of UNFPA's engagement with NMIRFs, and its added value, the assessment employed

a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Firstly, a global survey was distributed to UNFPA regional and country offices and a total of 48 submissions were received. Based on the survey's findings, follow-up interviews were conducted with UNFPA personnel, NMIRFs' coordinating ministries, civil society organizations (CSOs), permanent missions of Member States to the United Nations (UN), and other stakeholders. Additionally, a desk review was conducted to gather information and examples from relevant reports and documents.

A visit to Morocco was undertaken to further explore and document practices, challenges and opportunities for UNFPA to support national implementation of human rights recommendations. During the visit, meetings were held with the Délégation Interministérielle aux Droits de l'Homme (DIDH), the established NMIRF in the country, relevant line ministries, the National Statistics Office (NSO), the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), CSOs, the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office, development partners and UNFPA staff.

The assessment was concluded with a workshop held in Geneva on 20 May 2024 under the auspices of the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations in Geneva, featuring the participation of UNFPA staff, representatives of a cross-regional group of UN Member States and NMIRF officials, and CSOs. The workshop represented opportunities for exchange on the transformative role of NMIRFs and served to establish or strengthen partnerships between UNFPA focal points and their counterparts at the national level within governments and/or NMIRFs. Additionally, the workshop participants provided reflections and feedback on the findings and recommendations presented in a draft assessment report.

Surveys submitted by region

Region	Country/Regional/Sub-Regional Offices
Arab States	Jordan, Morocco, Yemen
Asia & the Pacific	Bangladesh, Cambodia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines, Viet Nam, Asia & the Pacific Regional Office (Thailand), Pacific Island Countries Sub-Regional Office (Fiji)
East & Southern Africa	Burundi, Eritrea, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan
Latin America & the Caribbean	Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Caribbean Sub-Regional Office Liaison Office in Belize, Caribbean Sub-Regional Office Liaison Office in Guyana, Latin America & the Caribbean Regional Office (Panama)
West & Central Africa	Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, Togo

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