

United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms

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INTRODUCTION

International human rights law obliges States to respect, implement, and enforce the treaty bodies they have ratified at a national level. **Mechanisms and bodies have been established within the United Nations' System to monitor the States' overall compliance with human rights law.** These UN bodies adopt findings, recommendations, and decisions aimed at closing human rights gaps and indicate how States, supported by other stakeholders, can move toward the full enjoyment of human rights.

Human rights can and should be enforced domestically through national human rights mechanisms or court systems, when these rights are incorporated into domestic law. However, in some cases, where domestic legal proceedings fail to address human rights violations, mechanisms and procedures for individual complaints or communications are available at regional and international levels.

The UN human rights **monitoring mechanisms** can be classified into **two main categories**:

1. **UN Charter-based bodies and procedures** and
2. **Treaty-based bodies and procedures.**

The former derive from provisions in the Charter of the United Nations (UN); the latter are bodies created under international human rights treaties. **These two mechanisms complement each other.**

In general terms, human rights mechanisms work through **monitoring** and **accountability cycles** that can be summarized in the following **phases: Information gathering; reporting** to the human rights mechanism (UN Charter-based or Treaty-based), **dialogue** with the State involved, **recommendations** by the human rights body to the State, and the **implementation** of recommendations **and follow-up** by the State involved.¹

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has published various resources and practical guides on these mechanisms, including, among others: a guide on human rights monitoring and follow-up,¹ a fact sheet on the UN human rights treaty system,² a handbook for civil society engagement with human rights mechanisms,³ and a practical guide on the universal periodic review (UPR).⁴

These resources, all **available online at the OHCHR webpage,** can help to build or strengthen the rights-based advocacy capacities of FIGO's Member Societies.

UNITED NATIONS CHARTER-BASED BODIES: THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL'S UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW AND SPECIAL PROCEDURES

The UN Charter-based bodies are the Human Rights Council (HRC) and its subsidiaries, and the special procedures.

The **Human Rights Council (the Council)**, which replaced the Commission on Human Rights in 2006, is a **Charter-based body**, as it was established by General Assembly resolution, under the UN Charter.

The Council is an intergovernmental body, **made up of 47 elected UN Member States** who serve for an initial period of 3 years, and cannot be elected for more than two consecutive terms. The Council is **responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide and for addressing human rights violations and making recommendations on them**. It **meets in Geneva in regular sessions** three times per year, and in **special sessions** when the need arises. **It reports to the UN General Assembly.**

Universal Periodic Review

The **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** is a unique process that involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States. The UPR **is a state-driven process, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfill their human rights obligations.**

The main principles inspiring the UPR are the need to promote universality, interdependence, and indivisibility of all human rights, as well as constructive, transparent, nonconfrontational accountability mechanisms. It also intends to ensure universal coverage and equal treatment of all States, as well as the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies, and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). Therefore, **it creates a unique platform for policy dialogue** between Governments, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders.

The **outcomes of the review are a document with recommendations** made to the State under Review (SuR) by the reviewing States; the **response** of the SuR to the recommendations, as well as **any other voluntary commitment** by the State.

Currently, the UPR **operates on a 5-year review cycle**. Forty-two States are reviewed each year during three 2-week sessions of the HRC's UPR working group (14 States each session). The **UPR working group is made up of the 47 members of the Council. Each State review is assisted by a group of three States**, known as "*troika*," who serve as **rapporteurs**.

Figure 2.1 shows the three stages of the UPR process: reporting, review, and implementation.⁵

Stage 1: Reporting

The process starts with the preparation of the **presession documents** by the SuR and other stakeholders.

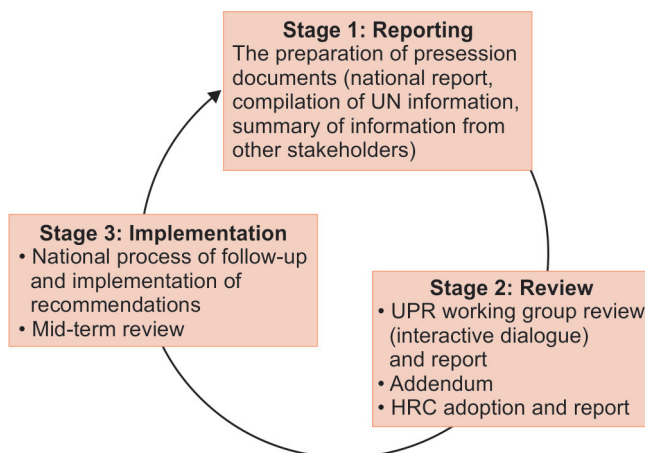


Fig. 2.1: The three stages of the universal periodic review (UPR) process. The UPR is a circular human rights monitoring process that promotes continuous accountability by member States.

(HRC: Human Rights Council)

- The **national report** prepared by the SuR
- The **compilation of UN information** prepared by OHCHR, which includes information from special procedures, human rights treaty body reports, and other relevant UN documentation
- The **summary of information** received from other stakeholders (including NHRIs, NGOs, and other civil society actors), also prepared by the OHCHR.

Stage 2: Review

The review **takes place during a meeting of the UPR Working Group**, chaired by the HRC President. It **starts with the SuR presenting the situation** of human rights in the country and is then **followed by an interactive discussion** (also called “*interactive dialogue*”) between the SuR and other UN Member States, which lasts 140 minutes. During the interactive dialogue, any UN member State can ask questions and make recommendations to the SuR.

After the interactive dialogue, the outcome report is prepared by the **troika**, with the participation of the SuR and assistance from the OHCHR. The outcome report includes **a summary of the review, recommendations by States, and voluntary commitments presented by the SuR**. Thirty minutes are allocated to adopt each outcome report by the working group session, during which time the SuR has the opportunity to indicate whether it supports the recommendations made by the member States or note them. It can also make voluntary pledges. Both accepted and noted recommendations are included in the report (the so-called “*addendum*” to the working group report).

The report and addendum then have to be adopted at a plenary session of the HRC. In the period between the working group session and the HRC plenary session, the SuR is expected to confirm which recommendations it accepts and which it does not. During the plenary session, an hour is allocated to the adoption of each document. The SuR can present replies to questions or issues not sufficiently addressed during the interactive dialogue, while

member states, NHRI and NGOs with Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) status and other stakeholders can express their opinion and make general comments. **This is the only opportunity for civil society to take the floor during the review stage.**

Stage 3: Implementation

The implementation phase starts once the final outcome report has been adopted by the HRC. **States have the primary responsibility to implement the recommendations contained in the outcome document over the following 4 and a half years** and are encouraged to provide the council with a mid-term update on how they followed-up in order to meet the recommendations and voluntary commitments they accepted. This is feasible only if monitoring systems are in place at a national level.

Nongovernmental organizations can contribute to each of the three stages of the UPR process.

Universal periodic reviews **are a unique opportunity for FIGO and its member societies to advance girls' and women's health at intergovernmental and national levels.**

Table 2.1 identifies concrete opportunities for participation and provides advice and recommendations to FIGO Member Societies so that they can effectively engage with this monitoring mechanism.^{6,7}

Special Procedures

Special Procedures of the HRC are independent mechanisms established and mandated by the HRC to address issues of concern worldwide. An important characteristic of these monitoring mechanisms is that **they can address human rights situations** at a worldwide level, **even if a country has not ratified a particular human rights instrument.**

Persons appointed to the special procedures (**mandate-holders**) **are independent human rights experts and are known as special rapporteurs, independent experts, or members of working groups.**

Usually, thematic mandates are renewed every 3 years, while country mandates are renewed every year. Mandate-holders can serve in their capacity for a maximum of 6 years.

Although the mandates are defined in the resolution that creates them and may vary a little, mandate-holders usually monitor, examine, report, and advice either on human rights situations in specific countries (**country mandates**) or on major human rights issues (**thematic mandates**).

More specifically, they **can**:

- Monitor the situation of human rights issues in countries, through official visits and the elaboration of visit reports with recommendations;
- Contribute to the development and strengthening of international human rights standards, through the elaboration of thematic studies or the organization of expert consultations;
- Raise public awareness on specific human rights issues;
- Act on complaints of alleged human rights violations by sending communications.⁸

As to the latter, the mandate-holders can receive information on allegations of human rights violations from individuals or NGOs, the so-called "*complaints procedure*," irrespective

Table 2.1: Opportunities for FIGO and its member societies to participate in the UPR cycle.

Stages	Opportunities for NGO participation and engagement	Advice for FIGO and its member societies
Stage 1: Reporting	<p>1.1: NGOs can contribute to the elaboration of the national report prepared by the SuR</p> <p>1.2: NGOs can submit information to the OHCHR, to be incorporated into the summary of stakeholders document</p>	<p>1.1.1: Check the calendar of the UPR third cycle (2017–2021) and the tentative deadline for the submission of the national report by the SuR. This information is available at: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_3rd_cycle.pdf</p> <p>1.1.2: Check if national consultations will take place in your country, to gather information for the elaboration of the national report. If so, make sure you participate in those consultations. Focus on how the State has implemented the recommendations in the outcome report of the previous UPR cycle, on key issues related to girls' and women's health and human rights, especially those related to sexual, reproductive, maternal and neonatal health, and rights.⁷ The outcome reports of the previous cycle are available at: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/Documentation.aspx</p> <p>1.2.1: Prepare your submission of information to OHCHR. Bear in mind that the summary of information is a 10-page document. Therefore, try to be as concise as possible (between 5 and 10 pages). Focus on the situation of national legal frameworks, policies, and allocation of resources to issues of sexual and reproductive, maternal, and newborn health. Look at the national and subnational levels. Check if your State has made reservations to international human rights instruments. If so, recommend that the reservations are lifted. Make robust recommendations, based on evidence. Remember that NGOs have to send their submissions before the State submits its national report. Although NGOs cannot respond to State's views, they can highlight issues to be discussed during the interactive dialogue.</p> <p>1.2.2: Consider preparing a joint submission of information in partnership with other civil society groups concerned with the enjoyment of SRHR and maternal & newborn rights. Although there is no formal template for NGO submissions to the UPR, it is advisable to use the template that OHCHR has developed for its summary (use the same headings). Make precise, specific, action-oriented, and easy-to-monitor recommendations to the SuR. Look at the OHCHR guidelines for submission for more detailed information on how to prepare the document.</p>

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<i>Stages</i>	<i>Opportunities for NGO participation and engagement</i>	<i>Advice for FIGO and its member societies</i>
<i>Stage 2: Review</i>	<p>2.1: NGOs can attend the review of the State at the Working Group on UPR, although they cannot take part in the interactive dialogue</p> <p>2.2: NGOs can attend the plenary HRC session.</p> <p>2.3: NGOs with ECOSOC-status can make "general comments" before the adoption of the final outcome report and can submit written statements under HRC agenda item 6</p>	<p>2.1.1: If possible, attend the review of the State at the working group in Geneva. Organize side-events in partnership with other civil society organizations focusing on girls' and women's health and rights.</p> <p>2.2.1: Look at the list of recommendations of the outcome report. Approach your government to lobby for voluntary commitments on matters not covered by recommendations.</p> <p>2.2.2: As soon as possible (before the interactive dialogue) contact the delegations of Member States who will participate in the interactive dialogue and encourage them to propose recommendations on the issues you have prioritized in the area of SRHR and maternal and newborn rights.</p> <p>2.3.1: Approach NGOs with ECOSOC-status focusing on SRHR and maternal and newborn rights and ask them to include in their intervention during the plenary session of the Human Rights Council comments on matters that concern you the most.</p>
<i>Stage 3: Implementation</i>	<p>3.1: NGOs can follow-up the implementation of the UPR recommendations</p>	<p>3.1.1: Disseminate broadly the UPR outcome report in your country.</p> <p>3.1.2: Analyze the report and identify the recommendations on sexual, reproductive, maternal, and neonatal health.</p> <p>3.1.3: Support the government in developing its national implementation plan, with a clear timeframe and strong indicators.</p> <p>3.1.4: Assess progress on a regular basis. Consider using the media, including social media, to increase your reach and draw attention to recommendations of FIGO's interest. Consider monitoring progress in partnership with other civil society organizations. Coalitions have proven to be more effective in monitoring human rights commitments.</p> <p>3.1.5: Lobby with your Government for the submission of a mid-term report and ensure that it informs on actions taken to implement the recommendations on sexual, reproductive, maternal and neonatal health, and other linked human rights.</p>

(ECOSOC: Economic and Social Council; FIGO: International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics; HRC: Human Rights Council; NGO: Nongovernmental Organization; OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; SuR: State under Review; SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights; UPR: Universal Periodic Review)

of whether an alleged victim has exhausted domestic remedies or whether the State has ratified an international human rights instrument.

If the information is considered credible and reliable by the mandate-holder, it can be brought to the Government's attention through a written communication in the form of a "letter of allegation" or "urgent appeal" if the human rights violation is ongoing, or even in the form of a "concern" relating to pieces of legislation, policies, or practices that do not comply with international human rights standards.

Although the procedure is not a quasi-judicial proceeding, that is, the mandate-holders do not have the authority and power to enforce their communications through the justice system, the mechanism can put significant political pressure on States to prevent or end the alleged violation of human rights. Indeed, every year, mandate-holders have to report to the Human Rights Council and most of them also to the UN General Assembly.⁹

Table 2.2 illustrates the **special procedures that FIGO and its member societies may consider engaging in**, as they cover issues relating to girls' and women's health.¹⁰

There are **various ways non-state actors**, including NGOs, **can engage in special procedures** and contribute to their mandate.

Table 2.3 describes some of these **opportunities and provides advice and recommendations for FIGO and its member societies**. Additional resources with more information are available online at the OHCHR webpage.¹¹

Table 2.2: List of the special procedures that FIGO and its member societies may consider engaging in, as they cover issues relating to girls' and women's health.

<i>Special procedure</i>	<i>Date of establishment of mandate and resolution</i>	<i>Human rights expert that currently holds the mandate¹⁰</i>
Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established in 2002 Extended in 2016 through HRC resolution A/HRC/RES/33/9 	Dainius Puras from Lithuania srhealth@ohchr.org
Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes, and consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established in 1994 Extended in 2016 through HRC resolution A/HRC/RES/32/19 	Dubravka Simonovic from Croatia vaw@ohchr.org
Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography, and other sexual abuse material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established in 1990 Extended in 2017 through HRC resolution A/HRC/RES/34/16 	Maud De Boer-Buquicchio from Netherlands srsaleofchildren@ohchr.org
Independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established in 2016 by HRC resolution A/HRC/RES/32/2 	Víctor Madrigal-Borloz from Costa Rica ie-sogi@ohchr.org

(FIGO: International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics; HRC: Human Rights Council)

Table 2.3: Opportunities for FIGO and its member societies to engage in special procedures.

<i>Opportunities for NGO participation and engagement with special procedures</i>	<i>Advice and recommendations for FIGO and its member societies</i>
<i>NGOs can submit to Special Procedures cases of alleged human rights violations or provide information on specific human rights concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FIGO and its member societies could consider submitting information on alleged violations of human rights relating to girls' and women's health, in particular sexual and reproductive health and rights, maternal health, and neonatal health. • Information has to be submitted either via email to urgent-action@ohchr.org or by completing an online form available at https://spsubmission.ohchr.org/ • Please bear in mind that only complete, reliable, and credible information will be taken into consideration. Submissions should always include. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Who is the alleged victim(s) individual(s), community group; – Who is the alleged perpetrator(s) of the violation; – Information of the person(s) or organization(s) submitting the information; – Date, place and detailed description of the circumstances of the incident(s) or the violation; – Informed consent of the alleged victim(s). • Clearly mention if the name of the alleged victim(s) should not be included in the communication to the alleged perpetrator or in the public report to the HRC. Otherwise, the name(s) will be included (except in the case of children).
<i>NGOs can provide support for official country visits or invite mandate-holders to participate in their own initiatives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check if your State has issued standing invitations to the aforementioned—Special Procedures. Information on standing invitations is available online at: http://spinternet.ohchr.org/_Layouts/SpecialProceduresInternet/StandingInvitations.aspx • Propose to mandate-holders that they request a visit to your country and provide substantive information to justify a visit or lobby your Government to extend an invitation for a country visit by one of the aforementioned experts. • Once a visit has been scheduled, send written information on girls' and women's right to health to the mandate-holder, with an emphasis on sexual and reproductive health, maternal, and neonatal health. As detailed in Chapter 3, information on the availability, acceptability, and quality of health services, goods, and facilities should be included, as well as the underlying determinants for girls' and women's health in the country in question (including gender-based violence, discrimination, harmful practices, among others). Bring the mandate-holders attention to specific groups of population in situations of exclusion and vulnerability, including girls and adolescents, persons with disabilities, LGBTI, women with HIV/AIDS, and migrant or refugee women. • Mandate-holders always include meetings with a variety of stakeholders in their official visits, including members of civil society organizations and academic institutions. Ensure that members of the FIGO's National Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists are invited to those meetings. • Once the visit has been completed, the mandate-holder releases a report with major concerns and specific recommendations for action. After the report has been released, disseminate it widely in your country and follow-up the implementation of the recommendations. You can also propose, participate, or even organize follow-up events.

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Opportunities for NGO participation and engagement with special procedures	Advice and recommendations for FIGO and its member societies
Nominate candidates as special procedures mandate-holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check online when nominations for mandate-holders of the above-mentioned special procedures are open. • Identify human rights experts in your country in the field of girls' and women's health and rights that could hold one of the four mandates in an outstanding way, and nominate them. Most likely these experts can be identified within FIGO's Professional Societies of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

(FIGO: International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics; NGO: Nongovernmental Organization; LGBTI: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex; HIV: Human immunodeficiency virus; AIDS: Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome)

THE HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES

The human rights treaty bodies are committees of independent human rights experts, nominated and elected by State parties for a period of 4 years, renewable to another term of 4 years.

Treaty bodies perform a number of functions in accordance with the provisions of the treaties that established them.

Consideration of State Parties' Periodic Reports

The primary mandate, common to all treaty bodies, is to monitor the implementation of the relevant treaty by reviewing the reports submitted periodically by State parties. Indeed, as aforementioned in this Handbook, when a State ratifies a treaty, it accepts to submit periodic reports to the relevant treaty body on how the rights defined by the treaty are being implemented in the country and provide information on any challenge they have encountered, as well as on the measures the State has put in place to overcome them.

Each State party submits an initial report after the treaty has entered into force in the country (usually 1–2 years after the ratification). After the initial report, State parties are required to submit periodical reports, focusing on the progress and challenges during the reporting period. The periodicity of the reports varies from treaty to treaty (4–5 years).

Figure 2.2 outlines the four stages of the reporting cycle that are common to all treaty bodies: submission of report; preessional working groups and a list of issues; constructive dialogue and adoption of concluding observations; implementation of recommendations and follow-up.

Although the reporting process differs from treaty to treaty, it should always be perceived as an ongoing process and cycle, exactly as in the case of other UN human rights mechanisms.

Briefly, the cycle starts with the State party submitting its report to the treaty body through the OHCHR. State reports are made up of two parts: a common core document with general information on the promotion and protection of human rights in the country and the treaty-specific documents.¹²

On the basis of the State report, the Committee usually prepares a "list of issues," identifying matters of concern and questions to be answered in writing by the State party. This usually

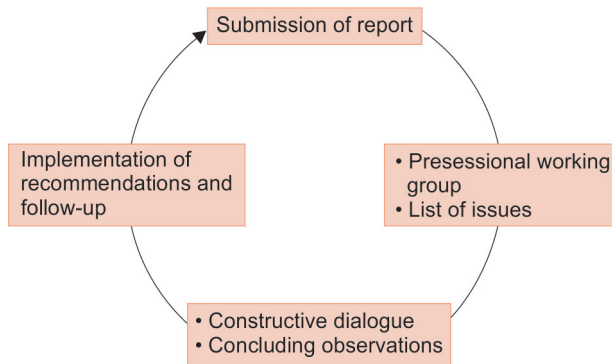


Fig. 2.2: Stages of treaty bodies reporting cycle.

happens during a **pre-session of the Committee's working group** that is tasked with the preparation of the list of issues.

Once the answer to the list of issues has been received, a public face-to-face “*constructive dialogue*” takes place between the committee members and the State party's delegation. The dialogue between the committee and States parties is held in public and is usually webcasted live.¹³

On the basis of that dialogue, the committee adopts and publishes the “*concluding observations*” as to the status of the treaty in that State, with concrete recommendations to the State party. The review stage ends with the adoption of the concluding observations and the **implementation and follow-up** phase starts. Indeed, in the following cycle, the State is to report on how it has implemented the recommendations made by the committee.

Some treaty bodies have established procedures to ensure that State parties take immediate action on the recommendations made in the concluding observations. Indeed, the concluding observations made by CAT, CERD, CCPR, CEDAW, and CED request that the State reports back within 1 year (or two, in the case of CEDAW) on the measures taken to implement priority recommendations or concerns, without waiting for the next cycle to start.

There are opportunities for civil society actors to engage with human rights treaty bodies in all stages of the reporting cycle. **Civil society actors have the power to influence the elaboration process of the concluding observations and recommendations.** Indeed, they can submit additional information to the committee through written reports also called “*alternative*” or “*complementary*” **reports**. Although the modalities for submitting information vary from one treaty to another, civil society actors should submit their additional information after the State party has submitted its own report and before the constructive dialogue takes place. In some cases, Committees welcome written information by civil society actors also at the pre-sessional working groups, to inform the process of identification and elaboration of the list of issues [as in the case of Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)].

Civil society actors can register as **observers** at sessions or pre-sessional working groups of any of the Committees. However, most Committees set aside time for **oral submissions** by civil society actors during their reporting session, either in the plenary meetings (CESCR

and CEDAW) or in separate closed meetings Committee for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW). **Informal meetings** and lunch-time meetings with Committee members can also be organized by civil society organizations.

The reports of the States parties, as well as other relevant documentation, including the lists of issues adopted by the presessional working group, the States parties’ replies, the alternative reports by non-state actors, and the concluding observations, are all posted on the webpage of each treaty-body.

Table 2.4 describes the role civil society actors play in each one of the stages and **provides advice and recommendations for an effective engagement of FIGO member societies.**^{14,15}

As aforementioned, specific modalities for civil society engagement may vary from one treaty-body to another. Detailed information is available on the OHCHR website.¹⁶ Therefore, before engaging in any reporting cycle, FIGO member societies must be aware of the specific guidelines of each treaty body.

Table 2.4: Opportunities for FIGO and its member societies to engage with treaty bodies in the treaty-body reporting cycle.

<i>Stages</i>	<i>Opportunities for civil society's participation and engagement</i>	<i>Advice and recommendations for FIGO and its member societies</i>
<i>Stage 1: Submission of report</i>	Although it is the State's responsibility to write its own report, the process should be as participatory as possible. This means that States should consult with all nonstate actors in the country so as to obtain their views on the human rights situation in the country in question.	<p>Check the OHCHR website the information on upcoming human rights treaty body sessions on the OHCHR website (calendar of country reviews by treaty bodies)¹⁵</p> <p>Once you have identified the upcoming human rights treaty body sessions for your country, you should familiarize with the reporting guidelines of each treaty body.</p> <p>Encourage your Government to meet reporting deadlines.</p> <p>Check if your Government is organizing consultations with nonstate actors. If so, make sure you participate in them, as it is a good opportunity to highlight issues regarding girls' and women's health and human rights.</p> <p>You should be familiar with previous concluding observations and previous lists of issues, especially those relating to SRHR, maternal, and newborn health. It should be remembered that all documents produced by the State party or the Committees as part of the review are public documents and are available on the website of the Committee that can be accessed through the OHCHR website.</p>

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<i>Stages</i>	<i>Opportunities for civil society's participation and engagement</i>	<i>Advice and recommendations for FIGO and its Member Societies</i>
	<p>Civil society actors may submit “complementary” reports for the consideration of State-party reports and list of issues.</p> <p>These reports should be sent once the report has been submitted by the State party and before the constructive dialogue.</p>	<p>Start preparing your complementary report. To do so, read the State report carefully and focus on areas relating to girls' and women's health and human rights that you think are incomplete, incorrect, or not covered at all in the report. Highlight good practices and underline gaps and challenges for the enjoyment of SRHR, maternal, and neonatal rights.</p> <p>Consider writing joint complementary reports with other NGOs involved in girls' and women's health and human rights.</p> <p>Always check the Committee's webpage for the format requirements, including length and languages.</p>
<p><i>Stage 2:</i> <i>Presessional working group:</i> <i>List of issues</i></p>	<p>CESCR, CEDAW, and CRC welcome written information by civil society actors at the presessional working groups, to help the committees identify the main questions to be discussed with the State party during the plenary session.</p> <p>CESCR, CEDAW, CRC also allocate a specific time to the civil society actors that have prepared a written submission, to contribute to presessional working groups.</p> <p>NGOs may also contribute to the preparation of the Written Replies by State parties if such assistance is requested by the Government.</p> <p>As to other Committees, nonstate actors can arrange informal meetings with committee members.</p>	<p>If you are taking part in the reporting cycle of CESCR, CEDAW, or CRC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare your written information for the presessional working group. Remember that your contributions may be incorporated into the lists of issues to be sent to the State party. Therefore, it is a unique opportunity to highlight matters of concern in FIGO's priority areas (in particular SRHR, maternal and neonatal health). • Ensure you translate your report into English, as reports submitted by civil society actors are not usually edited or translated by the Secretariat. • If possible, travel to Geneva for the pre-sessional working group, as you will have the opportunity to make a short introductory statement, to highlight a limited number of key areas of concern. • Please remember to register through the unique online platform for accreditation to attend presessional working groups of any of the Committees. <p>If you are taking part in the reporting cycle of other treaty bodies, you may still wish to arrange informal meetings with committee members.</p>

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Stages	Opportunities for civil society's participation and engagement	Advice and recommendations for FIGO and its member societies
<p data-bbox="128 306 257 389"><i>Stage 3: Constructive dialogue</i></p>	<p data-bbox="306 306 744 389">The constructive dialogue takes place through a public meeting; therefore, civil society actors can attend as observers.</p> <p data-bbox="306 436 744 550">Some Committees set aside time for civil society actors to make oral submissions either in open sessions (CESCR, CEDAW) or closed meetings (CCPR, CAT, CMW).</p>	<p data-bbox="758 306 1179 421">Confirm the dates for the plenary session with relevant Ministries and emphasize the importance of sending a high-level delegation.</p> <p data-bbox="758 436 1179 765">If possible, attend the plenary sessions, even if the Committee you have engaged with only allows civil society actors to participate as observers. It is still a very good opportunity to informally meet with government representatives and Committee members, before or during the plenary session. Please remember to register through the unique online platform for accreditation to attend pre-session working groups of any of the Committees.</p> <p data-bbox="758 787 1179 975">Remember that you can also organize informal meetings (lunchtime briefings) usually on the day before or on the day of the constructive dialogue, with Committee members. Informal meetings are sometimes even more important (and effective) than formal ones.</p> <p data-bbox="758 997 1179 1134">Meet with members of the government delegation before the plenary session to reinforce important issues that may not have received sufficient recognition in the State report.</p> <p data-bbox="758 1156 1179 1289">Consider organizing a press conference in your country to raise public awareness about the upcoming State review makes issues relating to girls' and women's health and human rights visible.</p>
<p data-bbox="128 1304 293 1437"><i>Stage 4: Implementation of recommendations and follow-up</i></p>	<p data-bbox="306 1304 744 1498">CAT, CERD, CCPR, CEDAW, and CED have established follow-up procedures that require States to report back within 1 year (or 2, in the case of CEDAW) from the adoption of the concluding observations on the measures taken to implement priority recommendations or concerns.</p> <p data-bbox="306 1530 744 1613">Civil society actors may submit information in the framework of these follow-up procedures.</p>	<p data-bbox="758 1304 1179 1350">Integrate the follow-up to concluding Observations into your advocacy strategy.</p> <p data-bbox="758 1373 1179 1622">Disseminate the concluding observations at a national level, highlighting recommendations in the areas of SRHR, maternal and neonatal health and rights. Consider developing advocacy material, including "friendly-versions" of the concluding observations in local languages and make them available in accessible formats.</p> <p data-bbox="758 1644 1179 1690">Encourage and help the Government to report back on progress.</p>

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Stages	Opportunities for civil society's participation and engagement	Advice and recommendations for FIGO and its Member Societies
		<p>Consider inviting Committee members to your country to carry out a field visit and meet with Government officials, civil society organizations, and especially with girls and women most affected by human rights violations.</p> <p>Set-up and implement research activities to fill gaps in data and/or information on specific issues of sexual, reproductive, maternal, and neonatal health.</p>

(CAT: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; CCPR: Committee for Civil and Political Rights; CED: Committee on Enforced Disappearances; CEDAW: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; CERD: Committee for the Elimination Racial Discrimination; CMW: Committee on Migrant Workers; CESCR: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; CRC: Committee on the Rights of the Child; FIGO: International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics; OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights)

Other Functions

Other functions **performed by treaty bodies** include:¹⁷

- **Interpretation of treaty provisions**, through the adoption of general comments (or general recommendations). These documents contribute to the definition of human rights standards by clarifying certain provisions and suggesting approaches on how to implement them.
- **Consideration of individual complaints**. CCPR, Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), CAT, CEDAW, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) can receive petitions from individuals. CMW, CRC, and CESCR also contain provisions for individual communications. Please note that domestic remedies must have been exhausted before an individual or third party can bring a communication before the relevant committee. The decisions cannot be enforced directly by the Committees.
- **Initiation and implementation of country inquiries**. This confidential procedure may be started by CESCR, CAT, CEDAW, CRPD, CED, or CRC, upon receipt of reliable information with indications of serious or systematic violations of human rights in a State party. Country inquiries can be started only if the State party has recognized and accepted that the Committee has this competence when ratifying the treaty.

SUMMARY NOTES

This chapter described the main UN human rights mechanisms that can be used by FIGO and its member societies as part of its rights-based advocacy strategy to contribute to the improvement of the health and wellbeing of girls, women, and newborn children worldwide,

and to strengthen governments' accountability for delivering the SDG commitments. Indeed, engaging with the UN human rights mechanisms can contribute significantly to the SDG implementation and follow-up processes.

Which Human Rights Mechanism should FIGO and its Member Societies Prioritize and Engage with? Which One has the Greatest Impact?

This may vary from country to country, as it depends on a variety of factors, including partnership opportunities, human and financial capacity, and even the human rights mechanisms.

Nonetheless, what is most important is that FIGO member societies take a cyclical approach to engaging in the reporting process, whatever mechanisms they choose.

Efforts should focus on achieving strong, realistic, and easy-to-monitor recommendations by UN human rights bodies, as this opens more advocacy opportunities for FIGO and its member societies to ensure implementation and follow-up at a national level. It is important to prioritize those UNs' findings and recommendations that can really enhance girls' and women's health and wellbeing. Chapter 3 provides guidance on this.

Follow-up is more effective if undertaken in a holistic manner whereby recommendations of different human rights mechanisms reinforce one another and maximize their potential implementation.

FIGO member societies can use Annexure 1 as a tool to select which UN human mechanisms to engage with. By selecting key issues related to girls' and women's health in their country, they can identify the related SDG targets and use the tool to find the corresponding human rights obligations, that is, specific provisions contained in international treaties and conventions that are legally binding for the countries that have ratified them.

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