THE STATE OF GIRLS' RIGHTS IN THE UK

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Zeynah 10, with baby brother Zayn, 10 months old, London

"I like going to the park and there are loads of people who live next to me and I like to play with them outside and I like to go to different places… I like going to, maybe like, uhm the hills. I like going there because there is a big park there and there is a café and hills that you can climb. And I love the leisure centre. I go swimming there…
[On diversity and integration in her area] ***"My best friend from school is from Pakistan, but I had a best friend before she left, she's from Serbia and I had another best friend… and she's from Romania… and they're going to come on my birthday!"***

Thank you

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Foreword by Tanya Barron Chief Executive, Plan International UK

The publication of this report comes at a time of significant change and uncertainty. Concerns about security – problems that at times can feel abstract and distant – have rarely felt more pressing. Climate change and environmental pressures have joined with conflict to drive mass movements of people across our planet. And in the United Kingdom we have still to draw the road map of how to work closely with our neighbours and partners in Europe.

Yet, despite the very welcome milestone of a newly elected second female Prime Minister, it remains the case that the debate on these critical questions is principally conducted by men, and, all too often, men of a certain age.

For us to chart a successful course for the UK in the long term, this has to change. It is therefore timely that through this report, we aim to give a voice to a group who are amongst the least heard, and to bring attention to huge challenges that are amongst the least understood. As an organisation with approaching eight decades of experience in supporting children to enjoy their rights, we've identified that adolescent girls are very often the group that gets left behind. This is a critical life stage where futures are forged, and which requires concerted and particular attention from policy makers.

Getting it right for adolescent girls today is a pre-requisite for the future prosperity and happiness of this country. But it is a challenge which we believe is not being properly acknowledged, let alone comprehensively tackled. Some of the problems outlined in the pages that follow may appear grimly familiar to some readers: the point we make here is that, be it poverty and social mobility, violence or online harassment, how it affects adolescent girls needs to be specifically understood.

Led by the new Sustainable Development Goals with their commitment to universality, as Plan International UK we believe this truth holds at home as well as it does globally. The specific challenges girls face in Lagos, Lima, London or Loughborough may look different (though at times they in fact look surprisingly similar) but fundamentally the problem of gender inequality is the same.

As, indeed, are many of the solutions. Not least starting, as we do in this report, by listening to girls themselves. And – never forget – involving men and boys too. While this publication's focus is, unapologetically, girls, we as Plan International UK believe gender inequality affects everyone. As such, and as is reflected in our global programming, challenging stereotypes must involve males.

It is with these convictions that Plan International UK has taken a major step in our history, to bring our expertise and experience to our own domestic setting. My sincere thanks to those who have worked so very hard to make this happen. And my invitation to those who have the power to take this report's recommendations forward – let's work together to ensure girls in the UK can fully enjoy their rights.

Foreword by Plan International UK's Youth Advisory Panel

The statistics and information in this report about harassment and sexual violence against girls do not shock us. We are not surprised, because these experiences are part of our day-to-day lives. Many girls do not tell anyone about the violence, because of stigma, because it is normalised, or because they may be pressurised by boys to keep quiet. We feel that girls are sometimes seen as objects rather than humans. Girls' rights are definitely overlooked in the UK – people don't understand that we have rights, or they just ignore them. Although we live in an economically developed country that is seen to hold modern views, we still have gender stereotyping and harassment.

Groping and rating girls have become ingrained in 'lad' culture, and girls our age feel they have to conform. A lot of girls in our classes have been pressured by boys to send them nude photos on their phones. When 'sexting' happens, the parents and teachers decide it's the girl who has to leave school so she won't get bullied. As for the boy, not much happens.

Some staff teach girls not to get harassed, rather than teaching boys not to harass. Teachers have told us not to wear short skirts in case we 'distract' the male teachers. Many of us change the way we travel to school because we get harassed on the streets; teachers often tell us there is nothing they can do about it, or say that it's our fault. Many girls are scared to ask for help and have given up talking about these issues – or even thinking about them.

If we are taught at a young age that harassment and sexual violence are wrong, we can prevent it. Schools and parents should talk more openly about it and not be self-conscious, so that when it happens, we know what it is. Then it will be less frightening. Young people are the ones who have to deal with violence against girls, so we should also have a voice and a say in how it should be tackled.

By comparing girls' rights in the UK at local authority level, this report also shows that we have different experiences depending on where we live, so we need to hear lots of different girls' voices to understand what is happening – and how to change it.

Everyone – women and men, boys and girls – should work to solve girls' rights issues in the UK. If we start small, in our own homes, then one day we will be able to make a bigger change together. People should be judged by their heart and their spirit, not by their gender.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY THE STATE OF GIRLS' RIGHTS IN THE UK

For 79 years, Plan International UK has fought to deliver and protect the rights of millions of children – especially girls – across Latin America, Africa and Asia. In this report, marking an exciting new phase in our history, we turn our attention for the first time to the UK. Our analysis poses the question, 'What is the current state of girls' rights in the UK?' Sadly, the answer is clear. We may be the fifth-richest country in the world, but we are failing our girls, and failing to meet international standards set out in human rights frameworks and the United Nation's new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By exploring the real experiences of girls in the UK, our intent is for policy makers and decision makers to recognise this reality – and act.

Plan International UK is the expert on girls' rights. Decades of global experience tell us that due to their gender and age, adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to having their rights denied. This is now a widely accepted premise in the sphere of international development, yet little understood in the UK domestic space. Taking its lead from Plan International's flagship 'State of the World's Girls' report series, this report shows that, as in other parts of the world, being young and female in the UK comes with specific challenges – challenges that today seem greater than ever. For instance, research we conducted into sexual harassment in schools has shown:

- One in five women (22 per cent) in the UK reported some experience of sexual touching, groping, flashing, sexual assault or rape while they were in or around school.[1]
- Reports of sexual offences in UK schools have more than doubled in recent years to an average of 10 each school day.[2]
- Two thirds of victims of reported sex offences on school premises are girls or women (66 per cent).[3]

We also discover that a girl's location is critical: Middlesbrough is named the worst place in England and Wales to be a girl, while Waverley, Surrey – ranked as the best – is somewhere that girls are likelier to fully enjoy their rights based on life expectancy, child poverty, reproductive health and educational outcomes.

Despite this, we don't talk enough about adolescent girls as a particular demographic group; we talk about 'children', 'teenagers' and then 'women'. Nor do we understand with sufficient depth their complex identities: as girls, but also as being a particular race, class, sexual orientation or religion, or living with a disability. Very seldom do we talk about girls' rights. Yet human rights, most recently expressed through the SDGs, can help us to better understand – and tackle – the problems that girls face. At a global level, Plan International argues that to achieve the SDGs, girls must be able to learn, lead, thrive and decide. And critically, the SDGs are universal: a girl's rights are the same wherever she lives, and so too must be our commitment to securing them, including in the UK.

We argue that in the UK, often discussed problems need to be understood from girls' particular perspectives, and in terms of human rights. What's more, digital technology is throwing up new problems for girls that we haven't begun to conceptualise. So, through two methodologies, qualitative and quantitative, and supported by existing evidence, we bring new depth and breadth to our understanding of what it means to be a girl in the UK.

- First, through focus group interviews with 103 girls and young women from across the UK, we listen to what girls say about their own lives, with clear themes emerging. This is supported by interviews with relevant professionals.
- Second, an unprecedented analysis of available data paints a quantitative picture of some of the critical challenges girls face, highlighting stark regional variations.

The conclusions we draw are clear, and worrying. Across a range of themes and indicators, girls are being denied their rights. Readers will be familiar with particularly shocking rights violations such as sexual exploitation. This report seeks to shine a light too on the everyday barriers to girls' rights and quality of life that have become an accepted part of their lives. By bringing our experience to bear in the UK, we hope to see a step change in how girls' lives are understood, and an urgent commitment to tackling the challenges they face. We're one of most developed countries on the planet: we can do better.

Elinor,
Year 10,
South Wales

What are girls telling us?

Girls are the experts in their own lives. This report draws on the accounts given by 103 girls from diverse backgrounds and areas through focus group interviews. While this sample size is insufficient for statistical analysis, the girls' voices give us a valuable depth of understanding. Their testimony is supported by 36 expert witness interviews as well as existing literature. The evidence presents several thematic areas in which it is clear girls' rights are not being met, or at least not in full.

Education, future careers and stereotypes

"People stereotype girls and expect them to not be as strong and determined as men."

Louise, 16

The report finds that the assumption that girls outperform boys at school is misleading, as it doesn't paint the full picture. While girls perform well in exams, the testimony here strongly suggests that their experience in the school environment can adversely impact the opportunities and experiences they will enjoy in the future. Whether we are delivering on girls' right to a quality education is therefore debateable.

We find that the school environment tends to reinforce stereotypes about girls' capabilities, whether that's through the sports they play or the subjects they choose. School can also be a location for abuse and harassment for girls. Lastly, we see that when girls leave education, many feel confined by expectations of what jobs they should do, with a tendency towards traditionally female-dominated careers.

Apprenticeship options for girls, meanwhile, are narrow.

Health and quality of life

"I really do not understand how you can put policy towards something that you cannot understand unless you have been through it. You cannot stop someone's right to choose."

Jane, 24

Inconsistencies in reproductive health laws across the UK, and the impact this has on girls and young women, were a focus of discussion in the interviews. The analysis also emphasised the need for mandatory sex and relationships education for all girls in school. There are significant gaps in girls' access to healthcare, especially when it comes to child and adolescent mental-health services and self-harm support for girls.

Violence and safety

"In my school, there's loads of boys who sexually harass girls. Teachers are completely oblivious, and we don't say anything because, honestly, we're scared..."

Megan, 14

Violence and the right to safety were clear themes. Concerns around these issues are having real impacts on girls' behaviour, driving decisions about what to do, or not do, in their daily lives. Offline as online, girls are held back due to concerns about their safety. The school and the street were identified as key locations for violence and harassment for girls.

Citizenship and voice

"I do feel like politics generally, as an abstract concept, is a boys' club. I felt it had nothing to do with me, that I shouldn't voice my opinion; it's a bunch of white men in a conference room."

Niamh, 22

Interviewees eagerly debated issues around politics and citizenship, such as the lack of female and young role models and the voting age. What emerged was that girls feel that stereotyping, discrimination and harassment against them bars them from meaningful contributions to securing change in these areas. Existing laws and policies, social norms and media dynamics perpetuate these problems: this must be recognised and challenged.

Moreover, with digital communication channels increasingly the primary mode of access to public and political spheres for young people, the risk, thanks to harassment and abuse in the digital space, is that girls find themselves squeezed out. This compounds the impression that politics is separate from girls' lives, and is a 'boys' game'.

Digital health

"There is no other life than technology. Remove the technology and there is no life."

Jackie, 17

The testimony in this report highlights that digital communication is a fundamental part of girls' lives – not an 'optional extra'. While this can be a source of pleasure, girls are clear about the immense pressures to meet certain standards and the prevalence and impact of cyber-bullying. Worse, the research suggests that too frequently, measures designed to protect girls are ineffective or even have negative consequences for girls. Barring girls from digital spaces in the name of protection is a counter-productive solution that reinforces a sense of voicelessness. Measures to prevent harm from activities such as sexting also too frequently place undue or uneven responsibility on a girl's actions over those of a boy.

Body image

"I feel pressured by the people I see around me every day, and I think about how they look compared to me. But I also feel pressured by the girls I see in the media, both on TV and social media."

Anna, 16

It comes as little surprise that pressures around body image were raised time and again by interviewees. Girls tell us that their choices are constrained by expectations about their bodies that are reproduced and reinforced across society – and strongly amplified in the digital world. Concern about body image, and its link to sexuality, comes through as a significant barrier to girls' freedom of expression. It inhibits girls' participation in the world around them, and wider evidence suggests can lead to poor mental-health outcomes too.

Identity discrimination

"As a young girl in primary school I knew I wasn't attracted to boys. But I still dated boys because I thought that's what I was meant to do. That's what everyone else was doing. It was never said it's okay not to be a certain thing."

Jackie, 17

Gender is just one factor contributing to identity. Throughout the girls' evidence, it is clear that the interrelationship between being a girl and also being a particular race, class, sexual orientation, or religion, or living with a disability, have particular impacts on girls' experiences growing up. Formative experiences such as experiencing poverty or being in care or the criminal justice system should also be considered. While the cross-cutting themes outlined here clearly emerge, it is important to acknowledge that girls are not a homogenous group and policy responses must always take into account an individual's circumstances.

Girls' experiences: analysing the data

Geography and place are confirmed in this report as having a major impact on girls' life experiences. To ensure that girls are able to realise their rights, policies must be reflective of different realities in different parts of the country.

For the first time, we present a detailed examination of available data about girls' lives that paints a picture of experiences in different regions, mapping where the critical challenges lie and setting out the priorities for policy makers. Using five indicators, we have been able to map the delivery of girls' rights across England and Wales in terms of the key themes raised by girls, and answer the question: where are the best and worst places to be a girl?

The five indicators, drawn from local and unitary authority data, are:

- Child Poverty
- Life Expectancy
- Teenage Conception Rates
- GCSE Attainment
- Those not in education, employment or training (NEETs)

The missing data

The data is not as complete as we would have liked: lack of uniformity means our local or unitary authority analysis has had to exclude Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as a number of indicators which would be useful additions. These include hospital admission rates for substance/drug misuse, self-harming and child obesity. We know gender has a bearing in these areas – but the data isn't available to analyse this in full.

The indicators span key quality of life and rights measurements and, through a ranking system, are used to identify the best and worst places to be a girl in England, Wales and London. Across England and Wales, the best place to be a girl was identified as Waverley, Surrey, and the worst place was Middlesbrough. The majority of the highest-ranking areas were in the south east of England, while towns such as Blackpool and Manchester ranked poorly in comparison. In Wales, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff and Caerphilly ranked behind their neighbours in Monmouthshire and Powys, while in London, Richmond upon Thames ranked best, with Barking and Dagenham worst.

Violence against girls

Critically, data on violence, collected at police force level, is not comparable to the other indicators (which are based on local or unitary authority data). Given the need for local authority action as well as police force action to tackle violence against girls, this is disappointing. Furthermore, what data there is rarely breaks down by age, gender and local area to provide an adequate picture of the problem.

Girls have told us for years that violence and harassment in schools pose a significant barrier in their lives. Our research shows that reports of sexual offences on school premises have doubled in recent years, to an average of 10 each school day. Nearly two-thirds of alleged victims are girls, with 94 per cent of alleged perpetrators men or boys.

Best 10 Local Authorities in England and Wales by Individual Indicators Ranking

Local/Unitary Authorities	Child Poverty Ranking	Life Expectancy Ranking	Teenage Conceptions Ranking	GCSE Ranking	NEET Ranking	Total	Rank
Waverley	5	26	7	23	1	62	1
Rushcliffe	5	26	25	1	25	82	2
Chiltern	16	1	14	3	53	87	3
Mole Valley	5	33	2	47	1	88	4
Epsom and Ewell	28	10	24	28	1	91	5
Rutland	16	9	6	59	1	91	5
Elmbridge	5	21	33	43	1	103	7
Wokingham	1	52	21	8	25	107	8
St Albans	16	26	1	2	76	121	9
East Hertfordshire	16	33	22	6	76	153	10

Worst 10 Local Authorities in England and Wales by Individual Indicators Ranking

Local/Unitary Authorities	Child Poverty Ranking	Life Expectancy Ranking	Teenage Conceptions Ranking	GCSE Ranking	NEET Ranking	Total	Rank
Sandwell	323	320	329	283	283	1538	337
Salford	294	334	280	300	338	1546	338
Kingston upon Hull, City of	323	337	323	341	248	1572	339
Hastings	294	304	327	325	332	1582	340
Knowsley	294	337	298	342	323	1594	341
Liverpool	312	337	313	311	340	1613	342
Nottingham	334	309	333	339	303	1618	343
Manchester	342	344	328	315	303	1632	344
Blackpool	323	344	343	332	319	1661	345
Middlesbrough	331	346	340	316	345	1678	346

Conclusions

It is clear that the UK is failing girls. Girls are not consistently able to enjoy the rights that they are entitled to as set out in international agreements to which the UK is a signatory. And while much time has been spent seeking to understand social problems through certain lenses – such as income deprivation – we have failed to understand them from the perspective of adolescent girls. For girls, blatant rights violations such as sexual violence are underpinned by a reality too often defined by gendered expectations and everyday harassment. The digital sphere, while at times presenting a positive environment, all too often amplifies this reality, while school, ideally a critical location for tackling these problems, can be found to reinforce them. We also conclude that a girl's ability to enjoy her rights is bound to where she lives. Effective solutions must be tailored to local needs; this will involve devolved authorities in particular.

We recognise that some positive steps have been taken, notably the UK Government's strategy to end violence against women and girls, which highlights prevention as well as response, including with younger age groups, and includes two national campaigns on abuse in relationships. A recent inquiry by the Women and Equalities Committee into sexual harassment and sexual violence in school represents a significant step. However, much more needs to be done.

Drawing together these findings, Plan International UK wants to see the UK Government treat girls as a priority group to highlight and address their needs in a way that hasn't been done before. Girls' Rights Champions should be appointed at national, devolved and local levels, to work with existing structures and bodies and bring within them a new focus on girls.

Recommendations

We must listen to girls

Policy makers must start from the position that girls understand best what is happening in their own lives. Combining their first-hand testimony and ideas with relevant expert opinion can create powerful solutions to the problems girls are facing. Investments should be made to enable meaningful participation of girls at the local level. We should expand on outreach strategies already implemented in some areas, creating Girls' Committees, where girls and policy makers can pool ideas about how services can better meet girls' needs.

We must involve men and boys

This report in unapologetic in its focus on girls and their lives. However, to tackle gender inequality men and boys must be part of the process. Given that much of the sexism, harassment and violence experienced by girls and young women comes from their peers, it is critical to work with and engage boys and young men. Their lives too are affected by negative gender stereotypes and expectations and they too must be part of the solutions.

We must tackle root causes of gender inequality – and this starts in schools

Our research shines a light on persistent, harmful stereotypes that limit girls' opportunities and wellbeing. A whole school approach, including engaging boys and parents, is required to tackle gender inequality. Mandatory status for sex and relationships education should be the cornerstone of this effort.

We need a more joined-up approach to end violence

If we are serious about ending violence against girls, a holistic approach is necessary, one that joins up different thematic areas as well as geographical areas. A good starting point would be to ensure greater breadth in the cross-departmental engagement in the delivery and development of the government's existing strategy to end violence against women and girls.

We need better data

In order to respond to the needs of girls, policy makers need data at local authority level to invest in the right thematic and geographic responses. This data should be publicly available so that civil society, including girls, can hold those in power to account.

We need a UK SDG delivery strategy

There is an urgent need for a cross-departmental UK Government SDG delivery strategy that includes a focus on how the SDGs are being met in the UK and for girls.

Tasnia, 13, Tasmia, 21 and their mother, in their favourite park, London

Tasmia: ***"The Brexit situation does worry me a lot… It feels really worrying that, when you hear about things like Islamophobia, things like racist attacks on people. Because ultimately as people of colour, as a first generation immigrant, when you hear people saying things like 'all the immigrants should go home'… When you're saying [that], you're talking about people like myself. For me this is home. This is where I've spent so much time actually being involved in the community and actually doing things… There is no 'home'. 'All immigrants should go home', but this is my home. Where do I go?"***

Tasnia: ***"When I grow up I want to be a scientist… I like chemistry because of the experiments, because it's fun and interesting at the same time… You don't need to be a boy or a girl to like science, you can be either.***

"In 2011, during the London summer riots, I was really worried and distressed for the safety of everyone. So I decided to write a letter to the Queen. I didn't really expect a response, but a couple months later she wrote back and she reassured me about my family's safety. It was really nice because it's good to have that reassuring sense there."

GIRLS' RIGHTS IN THE UK: THE INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

Alex, 12, and her father, on their boat, east Northern Ireland
"I once got a crab stuck to my finger! And I didn't know what to do, 'cause it was one of my first times on the boat.

"[In my fishing village] there are mainly fishermen, there aren't that many women who do it. [This village is a good area to be a girl, but sometimes there isn't enough to do] I wish there were like… In my opinion I think there should be places where you can get hot chocolate. The only café we have closed here. And we should get more cafés and all. There's, like, three chippies here, there's a Chinese, there's a chemist, there's a doctor's, there's a school, there's a church, there's a Post Office... What else is there? There's a butcher's. That's all there is."

Introduction

Why Plan? Why girls?

For nearly 80 years Plan International UK has been striving for a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International's *Because I am a Girl* is the world's largest global girls' rights campaign, highlighting the inequality faced by girls every day. The campaign calls for girls to be free from violence, and to have voice, choice and control in their lives, as well as for them to get a quality education and the skills and support they need. We focus particularly on helping girls aged 10-19, as adolescence often brings an increased threat of abuse or violence and a denial of rights and choices.

Across the globe, girls' rights are compromised by poverty, gender inequality, violence, poor education, unfair policies, ingrained discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes, conflict and disasters. Plan International UK believes that girls' rights are universal. Regardless of where in the world a girl is born or lives, she should be safe, free from abuse and have equal rights.

Plan International's 'State of the World's Girls' reports[1] have covered a wide range of topics, including education,[2] violence against girls, and governance and participation.[3] All have emphasised the importance of global girls' rights and the vital role that accurate data plays in assessing the situation for adolescent girls aged 10-19, and in understanding how best to respond to the specific needs and rights of girls. In 2006 Plan International UK initiated a longitudinal research study, 'Real Choices, Real Lives', tracking 142 girls in nine countries across the world from birth. The study examines the formation of gender inequality including the gender roles and identities of the girls from the perspective of their lived realities. In late 2016 Plan International UK will publish a report on the study reflecting on the previous 10 years of data and how beliefs have shifted or stayed the same.

This is an exciting moment in Plan International UK's work: by turning a spotlight on girls' rights in the UK, we are highlighting the need for governments and international bodies to commit to investing in the realisation of girls' rights in *all* countries, including our own. In this report, we combine the international rights frameworks and the SDGs framework with our analysis of the real life experiences of girls to ask and respond to the question: 'What is the current state of girls' rights in the UK?'

Aims of the Report

In this report we set out to achieve four things:

- Using the international rights frameworks and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relevant to girls' rights, we ask: 'What is the current state of girls' rights in the UK?'
- Set out what matters to girls in the UK and how girls' rights in the UK relate to the international rights and SDGs framework.
- Scrutinise what is happening to girls at the local level, highlighting that geography and place matter to girls' rights.
- Provide a foundation for developing policy responses to ensure that girls' rights in the UK are realised.

Report Overview

We begin this report in Section One by examining the international rights frameworks and asking how they impact on girls. Section Two brings together the findings of our research with girls and key professionals across the UK with the latest literature on the subject. In Section Three we move to the question of place and examine the situation for girls at a local level, followed in Section Four by our conclusions and recommendations.

2015 saw the biggest change in global human development in a decade: 193 heads of state and government committed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A core part of the commitment, officially known as 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', was to 'Leave No One Behind'. That is: to make sure that even the most vulnerable and marginalised, no matter their circumstance, should benefit from the SDGs. In addition, the SDGs are universal – they are for everyone, everywhere. We use the SDGs as part of the core framework of this report.

In order to take this new focus forward, we wanted to establish a picture of girls' rights across the UK and at a local level and consider the context and social environment in which girls are living. In this report we have therefore used existing quantitative data, existing qualitative data, the voices and perspectives of 103 girls interviewed in focus groups from across the UK and some additional case studies to create a picture of girls' lives and their rights in the UK.

The situation of girls has frequently been overlooked: when young they tend to be gender neutralised, not in real life, but in statistics and research, as 'children'. Then they are subsumed into the category of 'women' without consideration for the challenges girls face, especially during adolescence.

This report aims to start the process of filling this gap. It recognises and builds upon the important analysis of child rights organisations, girl-focused organisations, and those in the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector, such as Child Rights Alliance England (CRAE), the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC), NSPCC, Women's Aid, Rape Crisis, End Violence Against Women coalition (EVAW), Imkaan and Girlguiding UK, to name but a few. Our report takes this work further by focusing squarely on girls' rights and gender equality across the UK at a local, devolved and national level.

With devolution in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales has come increasingly devolved local governance, including the establishment of local mayors and police and crime commissioners. These local leaders and decision makers have significant budgets and influence over girls' lives at a local level. Our study is the first attempt to map girls' rights at local authority level in the UK using comparable datasets. This report does not seek to argue for attention only for girls, but rather to show with as much accuracy as possible what is happening to girls in the UK and urge improvements in policy and services to accurately meet the needs of girls as a specific, although not homogenous, group.

Despite living in a relatively wealthy country, girls in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are missing out on their rights. Violence and sexual harassment remain stubborn, persistent problems. Gender stereotypes and expectations of girls are holding back this new generation, whether in their education, career choices, demonstrable leadership, or personal safety. At the same time, the role of digital technology in girls' lives sets their experiences apart from previous generations. At Plan International UK[4] we recognise that technology brings opportunity for communities and the girls who live within them, but also threats and danger, many of which are still poorly understood by older generations.

It is clear that girls are not accessing their full rights. Some are having their rights violated in the most egregious ways. It has been recently and fully demonstrated by the child sexual exploitation cases in Rochdale,[5] Rotherham[6] and Oxfordshire,[7] that girls' rights in the UK are not secure, and much more needs to be done as a matter of urgency. This report seeks to help drive that endeavour in the right direction by creating an understanding of girls' rights that can be built upon and to highlight for whom, what and where gaps exist.

Methodology

The data for this study was collected drawing on mixed methods and the researchers are all gender analysts working within a feminist, anthropological and sociological methodological framework. In terms of quantitative data, the research team examined a range of statistical indicators at local authority, unitary authority,[8] police force area and devolved level which speak to girls' rights and the quality of life for girls and young women in England and Wales. A selection of indicators was chosen to measure the situation for girls in the UK. However, it became clear that much of the desired data could not be found with a gender, age and local breakdown. This immediately meant that the available and usable data was very limited. It was not possible to compare data sets for Scotland and Northern Ireland alongside this information, and we discuss this in greater detail in Section Three. The usable data then formed the basis of a comparative analysis of girls' rights in different parts of the UK. We use it to answer the question: what impact does 'place' have on girls' access to and realisation of their rights? An analysis of the indicators chosen and how they relate to girls' rights can be found in Section Three.

We also conducted empirical qualitative research with girls, young women and key professionals working within relevant sectors from southern and northern England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In total, we spoke to 103 girls and young women, through a series of 15 focus group discussions and qualitative surveys across the UK. The research met the ethical guidelines set by the University of Hull and was approved by the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. As some of the interviews were conducted with children aged 18 years and younger, these were led by a researcher with designated DBS approval. All names of participants have been anonymised and any other identifying material has been removed.

While making no claims for representativeness of particular identity groups or sectors of the girl population, we nevertheless were able to gather the voices of a wide range of participants with differing religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The 103 girls and young women ranged from age 10 to 21 and were contacted through statutory educational institutions, non-statutory youth groups, girls' organisations and clubs, and support services for more vulnerable young people. The research paid particular attention to girls' geographical location and sought to interview girls from diverse areas, including rural areas (villages and small towns), urban areas (capital cities and smaller regional cities) and coastal areas across the UK.

More specifically, focus groups were held with girls and young women in primary and secondary schools and sixth-form colleges in England, Wales and Scotland, and with university students in Northern Ireland. The research team spoke to groups of pre-teen and early teenage friends in a rural village setting in England and held a range of different focus groups with girls and young women who were part of local and national girls' and young women's social groups. We also conducted several focus groups at two national charitable events organised for girls and young women in London and Cardiff, and a focus group with girls who had experienced child sexual exploitation (CSE) or who had been identified as being vulnerable to CSE and who were being supported by a local charity in England.

The girls were from differing white and ethnic minority British (English, Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish) backgrounds, across a variety of socio-economic and regional contexts.

The research team also interviewed 36 key professionals through a combination of semi-structured interviews, telephone interviews and focus groups. All of these professionals work with girls and young women at a national or regional level in southern and northern England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. They were selected in liaison with Plan International UK and on the basis of their professional roles working directly with and for girls and young women in both the statutory and non-statutory sectors. Statutory roles ranged from city council managers within children's and young people's services, to those in educational and social work or in a safeguarding context concerning child sexual exploitation. Those in non-statutory roles were from recognised charitable organisations working directly with girls and young women within regional women's services, networks working with vulnerable young women in the context of CSE, and with managers of national girls' organisations.

The photographs and associated personal stories in the report were developed separately from this research. Photographer Joyce Nicholls met with girls and their friends and families across the UK to photograph them and interview them about the emerging themes from the report. Girls were contacted through schools, youth groups, families, events and via street photography for girls over the age of 18. We targeted a mixture of urban, rural and coastal areas and spent time in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England.

Tasha, 20, and Anna, 27, London

What do we mean by girls' rights?

The International Framework

As internationally agreed through the United Nations,[9] human rights are inherent to all human beings, and are independent of an individual's nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. All human beings are entitled to have their human rights respected, protected and fulfilled without discrimination.[10] Girls' rights are protected by this international framework, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the specific conventions that protect the rights of refugees, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and migrant workers, among others. While there are no treaties that focus solely on girls' rights, there are some key international treaties that are particularly relevant to girls – both as children and as young women.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the key convention when considering the protection of the rights of children. Critically, it "applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It doesn't matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor."[11] In addition to the principle of non-discrimination, a key principle that CRC promotes in protecting the rights of children (including girls) is the best interest of the child.[12] This means that children's interests are, or should be, the primary concern in any decisions made that may affect them, and should be taken into account when setting budgets, policy and laws.

Girls are also protected by the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which calls on the international community to undertake measures to end gender discrimination in all forms. The Convention shows that stereotypes, customs and norms can constrain the advancement of women and girls. Importantly, the Convention states that "a change in the traditional role of men as well as the role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality of men and women".[13] These changes to social and cultural patterns of behaviour are necessary to eliminate "prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women".[14] The Convention also challenges cultural patterns and the sexual division of labour that constrain men to the public sphere and women to the domestic sphere. It highlights that efforts need to be made to ensure the equal responsibilities of both sexes in family life and their equal opportunities in the public realm.

"Girls everywhere should be able to learn, lead, decide and thrive."

In addition, the outcome documents of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) (1995) are also relevant. In particular, Section L of the BPfA on the 'Girl Child' sets strategic objectives to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls, eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls, promote and protect the rights of the girl, and increase awareness of her needs and potential. Section L prompts governments to eliminate discrimination against girls in education and training and in health and nutrition, and to protect young girls at work. It also calls for the eradication of violence against girls; the promotion of girls' awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life; and the strengthening of the family's role in improving the status of girls.[15]

It is important to note that one of the main areas of concern for the international community regarding the rights of women and girls is their vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence. CEDAW, the CRC and other documents such as the BPfA have highlighted the need to eradicate this "pandemic violation of human rights".[16] Furthermore, there is a UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women who most recently reported on the UK in May 2015.[17] Moreover, several UN commitments[18,19] have expanded our understanding of violence against women and girls as violence that is rooted in historical and structural unequal power relations between women and men and is a pervasive violation of the enjoyment of human rights. "Violence against women and girls is characterised by the use and abuse of power and control […] linked with gender stereotypes that underlie and perpetuate such violence, as well as other factors that can increase women's and girls' vulnerability to such violence."[20]

Transforming Our World: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals are an intergovernmental set of 17 aspirational goals with 169 targets. The Goals were adopted in a United Nations Resolution on 25 September 2015. In adopting the SDGs, 193 heads of state and government have made specific and historical commitments to end the discrimination and rights violations facing girls. They also committed to invest in girls' futures, covering issues from nutrition and ending harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) to education and economic empowerment. Plan International's analysis has concluded that the SDGs carry four significant promises to girls: Girls everywhere should be able to learn, lead, decide and thrive.

Key Moments in the Girls' Rights Movement: Institutional Milestones

1979
The UN General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

1989
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted.

1995
The 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing results in a global Platform for Action for women's equality, empowerment and justice.

2000
Millennium Development Goals include the "ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education" as a Goal 3 indicator.[21]

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security adopted, recognising the impact of conflict on women and girls.

2011
UN Women established as "a global champion for women and girls".[22]

International Day of the Girl UN resolution adopted.

2012
UN General Assembly adopts a resolution "intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations", demonstrating the political will of the international community to eliminate FGM/C.[23]

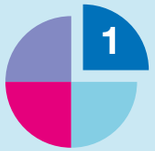
2014
#HeForShe solidarity campaign launched by the United Nations.

UN General Assembly adopts a landmark resolution calling for a ban on child marriage.

2015
2030 Sustainable Development Agenda adopted by 193 UN members. Goal 5 requires governments worldwide to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" by 2030.[24]

The SDGs' promise to girls

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in September 2015 by 193 heads of state and governments. They are a set of 17 aspirational goals with 169 targets which are in the UK and contain an overarching agenda to 'Leave No One Behind'. The SDGs apply in the UK. They also make historical and specific commitments to end the discrimination and violence facing girls. Plan International's analysis shows that the SDGs carry four significant promises to girls: that girls everywhere should be able to learn, lead, decide and thrive.



LEARN

DEFINING GLOBAL THEMES: LIFELONG LEARNING, SKILLS BUILDING and EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

Key Goals: SDG 4: Quality Education

LEAD

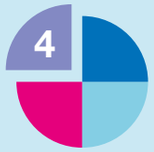
DEFINING GLOBAL THEMES: PARTICIPATION, LEADERSHIP and CITIZENSHIP

Key Goals: SDG 5: Gender Equality; SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities and SDG 16: Peace and Justice

DECIDE

DEFINING GLOBAL THEMES: BODILY AUTONOMY, ACCESS TO SERVICES, and SEXUAL RIGHTS & SEXUAL HEALTH

Key Goals: SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing; SDG 5: Gender Equality



THRIVE

DEFINING GLOBAL THEMES: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, and POVERTY

Key Goals: SDG 5: Gender Equality; SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 10: Reducing Inequalities; and SDG 16: Peace and Justice

Definitions

Who is a girl?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as anyone under the age of 18. But the definition of 'girl' varies across research. For the purposes of this report, a girl has been defined as anyone identifying as female up to the age of 18, and a young woman aged up to 25.

Gender

The concept of gender refers to the norms, expectations and beliefs about the roles, relations and values attributed to girls and boys, women and men. These norms are socially constructed; they are neither invariable nor are they biologically determined. They change over time. They are learned from families and friends, in schools and communities, and from the media, government and religious organisations.[25]

Plan International UK believes that we cannot realise our vision for gender equality without working towards the realisation of the rights of all children. We believe that gender inequality is a key obstacle to the achievement of children's rights, and that it is therefore central to achieving Plan International UK's mission and vision.[26]

Gender Identity

We acknowledge that the majority of data available uses binary gender categories and does not take into account the needs and circumstances of transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming children.

The SDGs' overarching agenda is to 'Leave No One Behind'; that is, to make sure that even the most vulnerable and marginalised, no matter their circumstance, should benefit from the SDGs. In addition, the SDGs contain three integrated and indivisible dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – brought together in the SDGs, marking an important shift away from previous distinctions made between social and economic development and environment and climate issues. The goals therefore represent more accurately the complex and interconnected challenges and realities of girls' lives globally.

Critically, the SDGs are universal, which means they apply equally in London, Lima and Lagos. We therefore believe it is helpful to examine the situation for girls in the UK using this additional international framework into which girls' rights are woven. The commitments to gender equality and to girls across the SDGs provide the global community with a solid foundation from which to address the unfinished business of realising girls' rights, and to bring transformative and lasting change to their lives.

As the goals come into play, Plan International will be using 'learn, lead, decide and thrive' as four important themes that cover the girls' agenda contained within the SDG framework. Globally, Plan International intends to be very clear that measuring criteria should address progress for girls' rights and gender equality at all levels (individual, household, community and institutional). We must always look at the experiences of the individual girl and what happens in her life, health and choices, but we must never lose sight of community attitudes and the laws and policies that govern the opportunities and choices made available to her.

Learn, lead, decide and thrive also reflects the priorities that girls themselves have identified as key during consultative processes run by Plan International around the world. The outcomes of this process can be found in Plan International's report 'Hear Our Voices: Do Adolescent Girls' Issues Really Matter?' released in September 2014, in which over 7,000 adolescent girls and boys were spoken with in 11 countries across four regions.[27]

These themes also provide a useful framework in the analysis of the research Plan International UK has undertaken in the UK. In Section Two we use the SDGs

Identifying gaps in children's rights

Gaps in child rights identified by CRAE in their 'State of Children's Rights in England 2014' report include:

- There is no domestic law requiring all public bodies, such as schools, hospitals and the police, to comply with children's human rights or allowing children to challenge laws and decisions which breach their rights.
- Nor is there any duty on public bodies requiring them to have regard for children's human rights when making decisions. The evidence suggests that they do not systematically do so.
- There is currently no cross-government children's rights strategy with actions and targets to implement children's human rights.
- Government budgets do not identify how much money is spent on children.
- There is currently a lack of data showing whether children enjoy their rights in certain areas.
- Professionals working with children are not systematically trained on children's human rights.
- Access to justice for children, and those working with and for them, has been significantly undermined by changes to legal aid and judicial review.[28]

to present a framework for girls' rights in the UK and as a means of categorising both girls' opinions and the current literature on the matter. The interviews we conducted with girls and young women across the UK raised issues of education and future careers; digital health and voice; body image and stereotypes; safety; and violence against women and girls. Such matters are presented in this report under the SDG categories (see box).

How are girls' rights applied in the UK?

The application of age and gender to rights brings various levels of complexity. CEDAW was ratified in 1986 and the CRC was ratified by the UK State (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) in 1991.

The ratification of the CRC means that all areas of government and state, including local government, statutory criminal justice, educational and health bodies, should do all they can to fulfil children's rights. It is important to note that there have been several positive developments in bringing children's rights and young people's voices into the public policy framework over the past two decades. Perhaps most notable in the governmental context has been the introduction of separate Children's Commissioners for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland between 2001 and 2004. Each Commissioner works independently but has a rights-based mandate, certain powers and independence from government, and there are now duties, albeit relatively limited, on local authority leaders to have regard for children's views.[29]

Despite this progress, critical gaps in the implementation of child rights persist.

The committees of the CRC and CEDAW have made a series of recommendations to the UK government about where it is lagging behind or where progress has not been sufficient,[30] as has the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, in her recent mission to the UK. The following challenges to the realisation of girls' rights in the UK have been identified by these bodies and listed under the key themes identified in the SDGs Framework:

1 LEARN: Lifelong Learning, Skills Building and Early Years Education, including quality education

Challenges identified:

- Many children continue to experience discrimination and social stigmatisation.[31,32]
- Failure to make sure that the provision of personal, social and health education and education on sexual relationships is compulsory in all schools.[33]
- Reports of bullying, racism and harassment of girls in schools.[34]
- Persistence of traditional attitudes and stereotypes, including in the choice of studies, affecting educational paths and careers of girls and women.[35]

2 LEAD: Participation, Leadership and Citizenship

Challenges identified:

- The UK has not sufficiently addressed negative public attitudes towards children, especially adolescents or the stereotypical imaging and objectification of women by the media and in advertising.[36]
- Under-representation of women in public life (including parliament, the judiciary and public-sector boards), particularly the lack of representation in political life of women from black and ethnic minorities and women with disabilities.[37]
- Bullying, including cyber-bullying, is identified as a serious and ongoing problem, particularly against LGBTI children, children with disabilities and children belonging to minority groups.[38] The increasing interest in the extension of the right to vote to 16 and 17-year-olds is also noted.[39]

3 DECIDE: Bodily Autonomy, Access to Services, and Sexual Rights & Sexual Health

Challenges identified:

- There is a high rate of teenage pregnancies, especially among girls from a lower socio-economic background.[40]
- The inequality of access to health services for children from ethnic minorities, migrant children, children living in poverty and deprived areas, children in care and custody, children living with HIV/AIDS and LGBTI children is also raised,[41] as is the increase in the number of children with mental-health needs, and lack of child-specific care.[42]
- Abortion continues to be illegal in Northern Ireland in all cases except where continuance of the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, and carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.[43]

4 THRIVE: Gender-based Violence, Economic Empowerment and Poverty

Challenges identified:

- Poverty is still a serious problem. Women and children from ethnic minorities continue to have poor outcomes in education, health and employment.[44]
- There is a widening gap in infant mortality between the best and worst-off groups.[45]
- Cuts in funding due to austerity measures have affected social services for women, including women-only services.[46]
- The high prevalence of domestic and gender-based violence against women and girls and its negative impact on children as victims or witnesses is key.[47]
- The three-year limitation period for filing civil claims of sexual abuse in Scotland, including where a child is a victim, limits their access to justice.[48]
- Negative attitudes from the police towards women who are victims of domestic violence are still experienced.[49]
- Female genital mutilation (FGM) persists in some communities.[50]
- There have not been any convictions to date against those involved in the trafficking of girls and women. Nor is there a comprehensive national framework on trafficking.[51]

Siam, 19, South East England

"Five seconds away from here, on my way in, I get wolf whistled like a dog… But I would have brushed that off, as a part of daily life…

"One problem with [our local town] is that people are just so polite that it's seen as out of the ordinary if you, as a woman, stick up for yourself or say something when someone hits on you, because there is this air of politeness and quietness…

"Sometimes you can put yourself in more danger if you do retaliate against some guy. You want to; every part of you wants to say something, or fight back or something, but you know that you're safer if you just do the polite smile and walk on…

"I think the interesting thing about [our town] is that it's actually, in some ways, more dodgy because of its size. So people [think] that because it's a smaller city it's safer, because there are less people…

"[I think] because there's a much smaller population, a lot of girls I know feel more unsafe here; they feel more targeted because there's less people to pull on a night out…"

In addition to the above, there are several key areas which are not explored further in this report but which are important to mention. They include the concerns over the treatment of asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children in terms of age assessment, detention, restrictions on family reunification, and their access to legal advice, basic services and entitlements. Placing these children in temporary accommodation infringes their basic rights, such as access to health or education. In general, the UK government's ongoing reform of the asylum and immigration system fails to address the particular needs and rights of asylum-seeking children. In 2013 it changed the rules so that unaccompanied migrant children can no longer get legal aid in relation to their immigration status. This has substantially reduced their chances of finding a safe solution to their predicament.[52]

Important matters also not examined in this report include the impacts to changes to Legal Aid; and a greater in-depth examination of mental health and substance misuse.

This report uses the gaps in girls' rights, as highlighted by CEDAW, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, and the CRC, to shape our indicators for how girls are doing in the UK, as laid out in Section Three.

Amelia, 11, Blackpool

"I feel safe in the places that I know, and I don't feel safe anywhere else that I don't know."

Holly, 11, South Wales

WHAT MATTERS TO GIRLS: ARE WE FAILING THEM?

Introduction

"Girls are the experts in their experience; if we don't ask them what the solutions are to the problems they are facing, we won't create sustainable solutions to those problems."
Key Professional interview, southern England, 2015

What girls are telling us about their rights and how we conceptualise girls' rights can often seem very far apart. Much of the narrative, and literature, on children's rights is not specific to girls but rather talks about the child as a largely ungendered being. There is often a gap between the theory of a child's rights framework and the real ability of girls to take up an equal place in the world.

What a lot of girls tell us is that they still face a huge amount of gender discrimination in their everyday lives. They experience day-to-day obstacles to freedom of expression, choice, safety, equal opportunity and economic empowerment through persistent and harmful gender stereotyping, sexism and discrimination. The challenge for all of us is to deliver equality of opportunity and rights for girls in a way that reflects what matters to them in the UK today.

In this section, we focus on girls' voices, led by the 103 girls who told us about what matters to them as they grow up in the UK. We also include the voices of girls from literature, our interviews with key professionals and analysis of the current literature on girls' rights in the UK. From our focus groups, four key themes emerged:

- stereotyped experiences of education and future careers;
- body image;
- digital health;
- and safety.

Within each of these themes, links also emerged between girls' experiences based on their age and gender and their experiences based on their race, class or sexuality. We will examine each theme in turn, but also together since each theme crosses over with others.

As outlined in Section One of this report, our commitment is to work towards a universal concept of girls' rights. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a unique opportunity to bring together the various rights frameworks under a universal umbrella that helps us shine a spotlight on the UK.

It is important to acknowledge that this list of gaps in and challenges to girls' rights is not comprehensive but limited to the capacity and breadth of this particular study. Notable absences in this report where girls' rights are at risk and must be acknowledged include: refugee and asylum-seeking girls; and the impact of changes to Legal Aid; and a greater in-depth examination of mental health and substance misuse.

We have therefore chosen to categorise the girls' voices and literature review under the headings of the SDGs. The aim is to promote the rights of girls to:

By doing so we intend to highlight the gaps in girls' rights in the UK and ask: 'What is the current state of girls' rights in the UK? How is the UK holding up to the international rights framework and do these rights address all aspects of a girl's life?' Most importantly, we ask girls in the UK what matters to them and present their findings in relation to the above frameworks. We aim to make sure the invisible are visible.

Daniel and Georgia, 18, Glasgow and rural Lancashire
Georgia and Daniel are moving to Scotland this year to study, "because of tuition fees".

Georgia: ***"[In the small village I live in] up until about Nov last year, the buses were regular – they were every 11 minutes – but that company went bust and they were taken over by a larger company that isn't as reliable. Like, to get a bus into [the nearest town], it used to take you 15 minutes. It can now take you 40 minutes because you're waiting so long for the bus. So I find it quite hard to get round so I end up walking most places now. It used to be really reliable."***
Daniel: ***"In the village I live there is a train station which is about a 20-minute walk from my house. But the trains to the nearest town of any significance are once every hour and 15 minutes. So that's not really substantial. And the bus service that used to run to the same city, into Preston – it's getting cut by the council at the end of the year. So we are sort of going to be a bit more isolated than we used to be."***

Chapter 1 Girls' education, future careers and stereotypes

LEARN

SDG GOAL 4: Quality Education

"People stereotype girls and expect them to not be as strong and determined as men"
Louise, 16, North Wales

Growing up as a girl in the UK automatically means entitlement and access to a free, full-time, universal education system. Such is their success, girls are repeatedly outperforming boys at all levels of academic achievement, from the number of GCSE passes achieved to attaining higher degree classifications.[1]

However, as shown by the girls who spoke to us as part of this research, this success belies the reality of the position and opportunities open to girls and women. A universal education system and higher academic achievement do not always translate into equality for *all* girls and women. Girls' economic wellbeing and experiences vary according to their ethnicity, age, religion, household income and where they live.[2] Reflecting this, girls have a diverse range of lived experiences which influence the issues they encounter as they negotiate the path through education towards realising their career aspirations.

"A piece of string is now a gendered toy!"

Sexism in day-to-day school life

In our interviews with girls and key professionals the first strong theme that emerged was gender stereotypes. Ideologies, which insist on a clear demarcation between masculine and feminine gender identities, were thriving within all aspects of school life. Those who did not conform were often policed or silenced. Homophobia, transphobia and sexism are an integral part of this ideology.[3,4]

For example, Josie, aged 12, describes how a boy behaving in a 'feminine' way was mocked by his male peers, who told him: "You're so gay!" In a different example, a focus group in Wales of black and ethnic minority 10-year-olds was asked if they knew any nice boys:
Grace: ***"Yeah, there was two [...] and they were really nice. But all the boys used to make fun of them. They stopped playing with girls because of other boys."***
Marie: ***"They [the other boys] just changed them."***

While the younger participants in the focus group did not report the same policing of their behaviour, they did talk about situations which suggested that some teachers, perhaps not always consciously, colluded in a culture of heteronormativity. Some of the girls, for example, wanted to play football, but their teachers perceived football as a 'boys' game' that girls should not participate in:
"A teacher in our school thinks we can't do it and shouts at us and tells us to play our own game."
Grace, 10

Staff were also reported as chastising boys whose actions did not conform to accepted masculine behaviours:
"He told my son, who was four or five at the time, that he shouldn't play with a skipping rope because 'skipping ropes are for girls'. A piece of string is now a gendered toy!"
Key Professional, Third Sector

This embedded sexism, whether conscious or unconscious, by teachers appeared to be fairly widespread. Emma, aged 13, gave the example of teaching staff asking for "two strong boys" and another teacher reinforcing the stereotype that boys are better than girls at technical 'hands-on' activities.

Our focus group of 10-year-olds in Wales talked about playing football at school. This led them on to a broader discussion about girls' lack of political representation:
Fran: ***"The only thing I don't like about schools is that the boys don't let us play football."***
Donna: ***"That's part of girls' rights; we should have a right to play football!"***
Fran: "Just because we're girls doesn't mean we can't play football."
Donna: ***"It's not just sports. Some boys don't think we're good at Maths either. Like in the Parliament, there isn't many women standing up for our rights. It would be good if we had more women on our side."***

"I think girls are better than boys"

Expectations that pit boys against girls

The strict demarcation between boys and girls before puberty became apparent in our focus groups. The girls' stories suggest that this is particularly so in terms of behaviour. Boys are generally perceived as much more unpleasant and more physically aggressive than girls. During

Scarlett, 12, Lincolnshire

a conversation with a focus group in the north of England, Eve, 10, says ***"I think girls are better than boys because boys always act real hard and think they are real clever and can hit yer."*** Chloe, aged 10, goes even further, stating that ***"boys are sometimes bullies and real nasty"***.

In the classroom, with boys being disruptive and teachers concentrating on classroom management, the girls feel they often get overlooked. ***"Sometimes we put our hands up,"*** says 10-year-old Grace, from Wales, ***"and the teacher doesn't notice. It gets a bit frustrating."***

A 16-year-old girl in the north of England explains that ***"some teachers prefer male students and spend more time helping them with their work"***. ***"Boys get away with more 'banter',"*** according to another girl. ***"Some male teachers seem to favour the boys."*** Some girls also feel that boys are being rewarded for their poor behaviour in school:

"Because the boys are naughty they get targets for behaviour. If they do one good thing, they get to go to the cinema and get sweets and that. We're good all the time. They don't give us nothing. They just give us extra work."
Honey, 10

"Dress codes are targeted at girls"

How schoolgirls' looks are scrutinised

As well as being restricted by a gendered expectation of what they should *do,* we heard from girls that they also face increasing scrutiny of how they look. At puberty, this pressure intensifies. Some of the girls recounted that self-consciousness about their appearance was a major pressure. Yet this pressure is not just coming from peers. In a key professional focus group, a female head teacher from a primary school with a significant proportion of Muslim pupils commented on how "plain" hijabs made the girls look. The head teacher was not consciously making a judgement about religion or ethnicity but thinking about body image. Another member of the focus group, who heard the head teacher's remarks, later commented:

"The head teacher said to me, 'What a shame it is that the girls can't look as pretty as they do on dress-down days, when they take off their headscarves.' With the headscarves [the head teacher] felt they were plain and that was a negative thing. This is parallel with the fact that girls are told straight away, 'Aren't you beautiful?' 'Aren't you pretty?' The biggest compliment for a girl is around physical attraction and physical appearance. That's not the first thing the boys get complimented on. Seeing it coming out from a head teacher in a school – that's a persuasive view."
Key Professional, non-statutory sector, Wales

Pressure also came from schools more broadly, either from individual teachers or via school policies on dress. Many girls felt that schools were stricter on girls than boys in their school-uniform policies and that girls' clothing restrictions in schools centred on controlling how the boys reacted to them. This is demonstrated by these remarks from sixth-form girls, aged 16 to 17, all white British except for one white/Caribbean mixed heritage, northern England:

"Dress codes are targeted at girls."
"There are more uniform restrictions for girls – skirts have to be knee length."
"Dress codes are much stricter for girls than for boys… Girls often must have skirts below the knee."

A group of 13-year-old girls from one school reported that teachers told them to roll down their skirts so boys could not see their knickers. A girl from another school felt that skirts had to be knee length, as ***"provocative clothing is deemed distracting for boys"***.

A group of 22 to 25-year-old young women in Northern Ireland told of how their schools had vigorously enforced a policy of skirts being no more than four centimetres above the knee:

Niamh: ***"The girls got our skirts measured every single week. Every week. Every single week!"***
Beth: ***"Are you serious?"***
Jane: ***"That's such an invasion of your privacy!"***
Emily: ***"That's like a total waste of time, like you have nothing better to do!"***

One of the group had also encountered censorship on dress within her university. A female student had been told that she should not wear shorts to lectures as it was too 'distracting':

Niamh: ***"Even with us being in uni now we are told what we have to wear… One of the girls was wearing a wee pair of shorts and she was told that if she came in like that again she'd have to leave."***
Group member: ***"Really?"***
Niamh: ***"Yeah, by one of our male lecturers."***
Group member: ***"What?!"***
Niamh: ***"Because if was 'distracting'."***
[Sounds of disbelief]
Niamh: ***"Don't, don't, because I reported it and everything. I thought that was ridiculous. You're at university, you're an adult, you should be allowed to come in wearing whatever you want."***

We can see that restrictions on girls' school uniforms are informed by ideas of appropriate femininity and female sexuality, with girls deemed responsible for controlling the behaviour, particularly the sexual behaviour, of boys. The perceived or actual behaviour of the boys is being tackled by modifying the appearance of the girls. A complaint from a number of the girls participating in the study was that schools did not take the issue of sexism within schools seriously enough, or failed to embed policies on sexism into everyday school practices. Esme, a white 16-year-old from an urban area in the north of England, told us:

"My school has been really good at trying to tackle homophobia and racism. We've had lots of assemblies talking about it and there are lots of posters up around the school, but the school's done nothing to tackle sexism."

"We can do anything we want!"

Stereotypes and subject choice

On the surface, girls appear to be doing well. They are more likely than boys to gain five or more GCSEs and are outperforming boys at A Level. However, there is a strong gender split in choice of subjects, and this has widened since 2010. More boys than girls select Maths and Science, and selecting science subjects at A Level is a good predictor of future job opportunities.[5] Boys are still entering traditionally male professions with generally higher wages. As the Equalities and Human Rights Commission notes, "Girls often do well at school, but tend to end up concentrated in employment sectors that offer narrower scope for financial reward. On the other hand, many of the highest paying sectors are disproportionately made up of male employees."[8]

There is also considerable variation in the exam performance of different ethnic groups in England. Eligibility for free school meals – an indicator that a child comes from a low-income household – is also worryingly an indicator of exam performance, with pupils from poorer backgrounds performing far worse than those not receiving free school meals. For instance, in 2015 only 32 per cent of White British girls and 40 per cent of Black Caribbean girls eligible for free school meals in state-funded schools gained five or more GCSEs A* to C including English and Maths. This is compared to the national average for girls and boys of 57.1

Girls' subject choices = lower pay

In 2015, only 8.5 per cent of pupils taking Computing A Level, 21 per cent of those taking Physics and 28 per cent of those taking Mathematics were girls. Conversely, only 23 per cent of those taking Sociology and 28 per cent of those taking English were boys.[6] A key factor in this is that gendered education and career choices at this early age lead to long-term economic disadvantage. Girls are still entering the lowest-paid professions and career choices are now known to directly affect the gender pay gap.[7]

per cent. Variables like these make taking overall performance figures at their face value problematic.[9]

Gendered subject choice may initially look like a problem for schools, but it should be seen as a wider societal issue. A Level choices are based on what girls and boys believe they can succeed in and what they see as 'appropriate' for their particular gender. Choosing the 'correct' subject for one's gender can reconfirm traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.[10]

A recent survey undertaken by British Gas[11] involving over 2,000 young people aged 15 to 22 found that almost half of young women (48 per cent) do not consider working in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) sectors when planning their future careers. According to the survey, they are turning their back on these sectors for a variety of reasons, including: a lack of STEM knowledge (30 per cent); a perception that the industries are sexist (13 per cent); and a belief that STEM careers are better suited to men (nine per cent). Furthermore, a parliamentary briefing published last year revealed that only 20 per cent of small and medium enterprises are female-led. In October 2015 it was announced that just 26 per cent of FTSE100 board members are female.[12]

"The horizon is only the edge of your vision."
Key Professional, Chief Executive, Cardiff

At times the younger girls in our research were keen to say that they have the same educational and career opportunities as boys and that they are not placed under any gender constraints:
"We can do anything we want!"
Fran, 10

"We have the same rights as boys!"
Paula, 10

But among the older girls there is a palpable change in attitude. They feel a greater sense of restriction in what they can do and achieve, a greater sense of gender-based differences in their aspirations, and gender-segregated patterns in subject choice and career paths.

"The younger ones seem keener to get out there and try it all and to get involved. And I think their mind-set is a bit broader. As they get older, it narrows down a bit… The older you get, the more those pressures come into it. I think there are a lot of interlinking issues."
Key Professional, Social Enterprise

So what are these interlinking issues? Research suggests a multiplicity of issues that help maintain the patterns of gender stereotypes in education and employment, including socio-culture and economic frameworks, the culture of educational institutions, media, socialisation (or 'gendering'), peer pressure, and parental or wider family involvement.[13,14,15] When it comes to the decision-making process, young people's hopes and expectations are 'depressed' as a consequence of living in socio-economically deprived areas.[16] In line with this, several professionals in our focus groups talked about the link between deindustrialisation, poverty and girls' perceptions of what is achievable in their careers. Living in more deprived communities can impact on young girls' aspirations and their attitudes towards stereotypical gender roles. One key professional said of some of the girls she has worked with:
"They had very low, non-existent or stereotypical aspirations – particularly in schools in the more deprived communities… Anecdotally, I think the aspirations of the girls in the Valleys are lower, particularly in the ex-mining communities. Mum and Dad don't work. Gran and Grandpa never worked or haven't worked for a long, long time. And it's that cycle of deprivation. Nobody works; that's normal."
Key Professional, Social Enterprise Organisation, Wales

Therefore it is impossible to ignore the impact of child poverty and the related impact on girls' experiences of education.[17,18,19]

"That's how I see it: the man always provides"

The impact of the family

When it comes to educational and career choices, families also have a key role in decision making for girls. For instance, in a 2008 survey, 63 per cent of respondents identified parental views as a major contributory factor in the choices they made.[20] Some of the girls drew on their family backgrounds and cultures when making decisions about their futures. Seventeen-year-old Klaudia explained how her background – her family originates from Albania and now lives in an urban area in Wales – has a significant impact on how she views her role as a wife, mother and worker:
"From the background I'm from, the man provides for the family and it's always been like that. My dad will provide for us and my step-mum will stay home with the kids, and she'll be the housewife. That's how I see it: the man always provides. It's a cultural thing. I didn't feel pressure to go to school."

These views are in line with the traditional breadwinner ideology, where the man provides and the woman assumes the role of primary caregiver to her husband and children.[21]

Parents and other family members may guide girls towards stereotypical careers that are perceived as being good choices within their own lived experiences and horizons, as one of the participants in an urban focus group in northern England explains:
"I've been told I'm good at doing hair, so I should be a hairdresser. I always do my little cousin's hair, and when we had my auntie's wedding, I braided her hair for her."
Roxy, 10

A similar experience was relayed by a key professional attending an event which was specifically targeted at encouraging girls to consider non-stereotypical career choices:
"I had a really thought-provoking conversation with a girl who came to one of our events and said she had thought about going into the police. Her mother said to her, 'You don't want to be doing that. It's too hard. You want to be a nursery nurse instead.' And that is the kind of thing, you know. I am sure it is coming from a good place. I am sure the mother was worried about her personal safety, but it is just the lack of thought in terms of the starting salaries."
Key Professional, Chief Executive

However, not all girls experienced these kinds of influences. Some had parents who placed a great deal of emphasis on their daughters' education, such as this 17-year-old from North Wales, and on the importance of making decisions about subject choices:
"When I was looking into my A Level choice, I explored a variety of different subjects – ranging from Science to Law. Upon finding out about this, my mum became angry and told me I was doing science-based subjects."
Debbie, 17

Ayesha, from urban Wales, who is also 17, explained how her mother, because of her own lack of education, had pressurised her into continuing with her studies:
"Because my mum is not from here – she is from Somalia – she thinks that education is really important. She is quite determined that I go to uni and that I get a degree and find a graduate job and everything. But I think it's mainly because she never got it and she doesn't want me to go through what she did. She doesn't have an education so she finds it hard to find jobs to get money for us and everything. I think education is the only pressure I have right now."

"oh my God, am I talking too much?"

Peer pressure and the desire to conform

Peer pressure can also influence decisions around subject choices at school and career pathways. For girls, this entails sexual objectification, subjection to everyday sexism in schools and elsewhere, and increased pressure

regarding their appearance. Social media, now an integral part of young people's lives, has intensified these issues. Unlike the younger girls in our research, who felt they were being overlooked in class discussions in favour of the boys, older girls' lack of participation has another root cause:
"Girls are less likely to put their hands up in class because they are very conscious of the way they look as they get less body confident. This anxiety is stopping them participating in class and in other activities. School sport kits also put girls off playing sports because they are worried how they look in that gear. Girls are limiting their aspirations or their behaviours because of these factors."
Key Professional, Third Sector

Phoebe, from Northern Ireland, told us that she felt girls are discouraged from taking up space not only physically but also verbally. She asked the rest of her focus group:
"Am I the only one who gets that persistent feeling that whenever I talk about something for more than 30 seconds, I think, 'Oh my God, am I talking too much?'"
Phoebe, 21

Boys also policed the girls' behaviours by reinforcing stereotypical behaviours and fending off threats to their 'masculinity'.
"The boys don't want us on their team. They are violent. If you have got the ball they literally attack you. Even in the football club, they said: 'You young girls are not allowed to join!'"
Grace, 10

More generally, it was felt that boys perceive girls as inferior to them:
"I think the worst thing about being a girl is that boys underestimate us."
Eve, 10

"Society would say it was wrong"

Stereotypes and career choices

The rules of masculinity and femininity are powerfully enforced from an early age in schools, families and peer groups.[22] This process is clearly recognised by the girls and young women in our research:
"People stereotype girls and expect them to not be as strong and determined as men."
Louise, 16

While the younger participants feel that girls can do anything they wish, the older girls are aware of societal pressures to conform. These particularly come to light if a girl wishes to undertake a 'masculinised' or traditionally male-dominated occupation, as this focus group of 17 to 19-year-olds in urban Wales shows:
"Society would say it was wrong."
Marie, 17

"Any job that is usually or commonly done by a man – a woman will always be told she'll never be as good as a man."
Kayleigh, 19

Some of the participants reported that these types of attitudes extended to the selection of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects.[23]

"I didn't take Physics at A Level because I was told it would be too difficult, especially as I was not planning on taking A Level Maths. I was told English would be a better choice."
Sarah, 16

"I was the only girl who actually stopped on at school to do sciences. It was all boys in my class. At the school I went to there was an awful lot of pressure on boys to get a good job: they had to be the main person to provide money for their family. I did Biology, Chemistry and Physics, and in my Physics class I was the only girl. The fellas were like, 'You're not going to do this shit!' – and I came out with better grades than the boys."
Niamh, 22

Not all participants agreed that it was particularly problematic for women to have to step over gender boundaries when making subject or career choices. Esther, aged 13 from Wales, described how her mother was a software engineer and spoke with pride about how she had succeeded in a male-dominated field of work. While this opened her horizons and expectations about undertaking a non-traditional career herself, she acknowledged that it was a difficult choice and that a number of women studying with her mother had dropped out. What is clear from our research is that girls of all ages are aware of the gender gap that persists in their career choices and their rights, and of the pressure to maintain gender-norms and stereotypes. One group of white British 12-year-old girls in rural northern England talked about their right to careers potentially being curtailed by persistent gender-stereotyping barriers:

Question: Do we have rights in law and in reality in every case?
Isabel: ***"I think it's like, for some things like jobs, by law anyone can do it."***
Milly: ***"In reality [the law] says you can, but not everybody… if you wanted to be a plumber, you might be the only girl there, and you could be discriminated [against] because you were a girl wanting to do what was seen as more of a masculine job."***

Most of the girls we spoke with said they knew they had the right to do the same jobs as men, but they were acutely aware of gender-based inequalities, citing, for example, sports as a particularly sexist arena:
Bella: ***"We have the right to do the same jobs as men!"***
Patricia: ***"But not in football and rugby. It's mainly men in sports; men get paid a lot more than women and it's not fair."***
Gemma: ***"Happens in all sports as well, like cricket and golf."***
Patricia: ***"It's not right."***
Bella: ***"We should stand up to fight against it."***
Gemma: ***"We should be better than them."***
Patricia: ***"Mostly our prime ministers are male; we haven't really had many female presidents or whatever they are called, prime ministers…"***
Patricia: ***"Like we have firemen*** [places verbal emphasis on 'men']***."***
All: ***"Yeah, yeah."***
Bella: ***"There's lots of stereotypes."***

"It is very clear that there are boundaries"

Sexism at work

Many of our older participants were working either part-time or full-time and recounted experiences of discrimination in the workplace. A young woman in London told of gender segregation in the sports shop where she worked part-time. Staff got the same basic rate of pay but could earn more by selling more. However, male staff were given the more lucrative job of selling footwear, which accrued more commission, and female staff were given more general sales or till work, where possibilities for commission were lower.

A focus group of young women aged 22 to 25 in Northern Ireland gave examples of how informal practices of sex discrimination informed and constrained their working lives, despite girls and women legally having equal access to jobs and to fair treatment in the workplace:
Beth: ***"Even though we have the same legal rights, it's not that apparent in practice; in work it is very clear that there are boundaries."***
Emily: ***"It's not as if someone is explicitly doing something wrong, like, straight up, by doing that. It's not that they are actually turning round and saying, 'You're weak, you're awful', but it's just the fact that it's those little things, like assuming you can't do something, you know."***
Niamh: ***"I've always worked with women, and this is the first environment where I've worked with men every day, and it is different. I mean, there's quite a lot of discrimination, like girls being talked down to, or even making inappropriate comments towards some of my friends at work."***

The girls and young women we spoke to also saw stereotypes and sexism impacting on women around them, as demonstrated by this discussion in a focus group of 16 to 17-year-old eastern European and white British girls from a coastal and urban area in northern England:

Question: What rights do you think you have access to as a young woman in England?
Marta: ***"[The right] to definitely have the same pay as men."***
Kasia: ***"Yeah, and not to be discriminated against in the workplace. Like, 'You can't do that job because you're a woman.'"***
Sophie: ***"I'm not sure. A lot of building firms are like that. 'You can't be a builder because you are a woman.'"***
Marta: ***"[Name of] Council are kind of like that when it comes to gardening. My mum has a gardening diploma, and she could go for a gardener. But the council would say 'no' to her because all the jobs are apparently too heavy, given the fact that she is over 50 as well. To be honest, she could easily do all the planting jobs… They don't even work heavy machinery. She's worked heavy machinery in her time. It's kind of annoying. My sister works at a factory and all these men say to her, 'Let me take this pallet off you!' And she is, 'No, it's all right!' and picks it up."***

It is important to note in this context that there are more women aged 18-24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) than young men (428,000 compared to 310,000).[24] Until very recently, apprenticeships were mostly taken up by men and boys. Over the past 13 years, however, the number of apprenticeships has almost tripled, and in 2014/15 there were 264,750 female apprentices and 235,140 male.[25] Yet apprenticeships are affected by the same gendered choices as those which occur in education. Women make up 94 per cent of childcare apprentices but just under four per cent of engineering apprentices.[26] These figures have not changed much in the last decade; in fact, the percentage of female engineers has declined in recent years.

There is a false assumption that fewer women are in employment, education or training because some women involved with childcare do not want to work.[27] In truth, one of the key factors is occupational gender segregation. The Young Women's Trust demonstrates that women lose out in apprenticeships on all indicators.[28] Women apprentices work in fewer occupational sectors. They receive lower pay, with male apprentices getting paid 21 per cent more per hour. They are less likely to receive training and more likely to be out of work at the end of their apprenticeship.[29]

"I am not a secretary"

What work looks like for young women

In the following exchange, a group of white British young women in urban northern England aged 19 to 22 illustrate their awareness of their rights to careers and employment free from gender-based harassment and normative stereotyping. Yet their experiences have shown them how stereotypes and gender roles can undermine women's rights:
Brooke: ***"Where I volunteer, the men undermine me a lot – especially when I'm in the building on my own. Especially cus I work with [the] homeless. They are all older than me and I get undermined quite a lot. I could just kick 'em! My colleagues say, 'Get your secretary to do this' and things like that. I'm not a secretary!"***
Jay: ***"I want to be doctor and some people assume a woman wouldn't want to be doctor. I can't see why I can't have that aspiration. I've always thought, since I was younger, that I had to choose between a career or children. If you choose children first, you can be so set back in your career. Whereas if you go for your career, you don't know how long it will take you to get stable. Obviously I chose the career. If you are a man, you can go through [your] career, meet someone, settle down and have kids. They don't have to think about it."***
Brooke: ***"It's like, if you do have a child and take time off, depending on how much time you take, it's going to be difficult to get back into it. I work with clients who have been mothers and they find it so hard to get back into work. It's such a big gap on their CV."***

Although women are visible and participate in the paid economy, the reality is that inequality remains powerfully entrenched. Women are still failing to get well-paid jobs, be promoted or gain positions of power. In addition, women are still largely responsible for unpaid care work, including looking after children, which severely limits their chances of advancing their careers. Glynn, one of the young women interviewed for 'The Clocks Turn Back for Young Women' said: "I wanted to work, but it was almost impossible to find anywhere that offered flexible working. I worked for one employer who didn't give any preference to parents or anyone with caring responsibilities. Their attitude was, 'If you want to work, you will make it work or we will find someone else to do the job.'"[30]

For those in lower-paid work, data shows that 12.9 per cent of 18 to 20-year-olds and 13.4 per cent of 21 to 24-year-olds are paid at or below the national minimum wage (NMW) for their age group. These statistics, from the Low Pay Commission's report,[31] are not broken down by gender, but the report does state that 59 per cent of jobs at or below the NMW are being done by women. The national minimum wage for those aged 25 and over is £7.20 per hour; for those between 21 and 24 it is £6.70; for 18 to 20-year-olds, £5.30; and for apprentices, £3.30. Job Seekers' Allowance for those aged 25 or above is capped at £73.10 per week, whereas for those between 18 and 24 it is capped at £57.90.

Research by the Young Women's Trust[32] demonstrates that being in work does not guarantee stability. Many young women are in part-time or temporary jobs, have few employment rights and are on relatively low pay. Increasing numbers of those under 24 are on zero-hours contracts, with no guaranteed hours or work patterns. Women who had not previously been in employment, education or training are more likely to be unemployed.[33]

A recent poll showed that young women today think that fewer opportunities are open to them than their mothers think there are: 89 per cent of older women thought that girls could become IT technicians, whereas only 65 per cent of younger women felt the same. Likewise, only 13 per cent of older women thought that nursing and caring were roles better suited to women, compared with 30 per cent of younger women.[34]

Some of these embedded beliefs about the roles of women and men are reinforced by the lack of good role models. Emma, a young woman who spoke to the 'Clocks Turn Back' report, says: "Every IT technician I have ever met was male. Similarly, all my IT teachers at school were men. The media doesn't help, either. TV shows like 'The IT Crowd' portray it as a geeky, all-male environment."[35]

The personal testimonies of young women reported in the 2015 Scarred for Life Inquiry show the range and complexity of emotional and practical challenges young women face in the job market.[36] Many of these challenges diminish self-confidence and lead to feelings of uselessness. They affect young women with a variety of educational qualifications. Emalene, who was not in employment, education or training for three months, despite having a degree and spending evenings and weekends gaining experience, reported: "I knew I was going to have to work my way up from the bottom, but I couldn't even get a job at the bottom. I wasn't expecting to have my dream job land in my lap, but at the same time I wasn't expecting to be turned away from places like McDonald's."[37]

On paper, at least, girls and young women in the UK have the right to equality, to a quality education and to employment and an equal income. But thanks to the persistence of gender stereotypes, such rights and opportunities are in reality seriously curtailed. Gender and age-related discrimination is then compounded by identity-related discrimination, such as that based on class, race, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexuality, which we explore further in Chapter 7.

Annisa, 17, London

"I really connected with the religion. That's why, only recently, I've become more strong in my faith. I have more faith and that's why I decided to wear the headscarf just to remind myself I'm a Muslim girl living in a Western society…

"I have nothing against women wearing clothes which might show off their skin. I have no problem with them. So another person shouldn't have a problem with me covering myself entirely, you know? I feel like, if we agree with each other's opinions, regardless if they're right or wrong, 'cause there's not always a right answer, we should build a consensus and not conflict and not fight over what's right or wrong: because everyone thinks they're right, but really we're not, it's just the way you see things, it's your perception of the world. So I feel like we should be more accepting, and not ignorant. I think we should always ask questions, find out more, and accept it…

"People need to ask more questions and they need to understand more. 'Cause I feel like if you don't, you're just going to have this one small mind-set of a certain group and that's the worst way you can live, I think. You should always ask questions and find out more about something that you've never seen before."

Chapter 2 Citizenship and voice in a digital world

LEAD

SDG 5: Gender Equality **SDG 10**: Reduced Inequalities
SDG 16: Peace and Justice

"Politics is 'male, pale and stale'."
Key Professional, Wales

It is clear, not least from the previous chapter, that systemic and cultural change is as critical to creating the transformation that is needed for girls everywhere. The struggle for gender equality and for girls' rights – the carving out of pathways to power – is multidimensional and involves changes in the social, political and economic spheres of governance. Crucial to that change is girls' ability to be active citizens, to take part in policy and political decision making and to take on leadership roles on their own terms. Girls continue to be limited by the double jeopardy of their being young and female, and these factors have a significant impact on their rights and opportunities to lead.[1]

"[It] is the responsibility of society to make sure that girls can fulfil their right to express themselves and go about their day as an equal citizen. So something needs to change structurally to enable this to happen. It's not all girls' responsibility. It is societal responsibility. Girls expect to have equal rights to participate in X, Y or Z, and they want that for their futures. But research shows that as they get older they realise some of the things they expect to be true aren't – because of these [gender] inequalities."
Key Professional, non-statutory sector, England, 2015

The arena of citizenship is one in which girls, and young people generally, access fewer formal rights. Children are not considered to be full citizens of the nation within law and government, and no one under the age of 18 currently has the right to vote in local or general elections in the UK. Young people aged 18-24 are less likely to register to vote or to participate in elections – with a key exception being the Scottish Referendum (see below).

"I think we should be old enough"

Extension of the vote to 16-year-olds

A historic expansion of the voting franchise occurred in 2014 when, for the first time, 16 and 17-year-olds were invited to participate and vote in the Scottish referendum on independence. At 84.6 per cent, the turnout was the highest recorded at any Scotland-wide poll since universal suffrage, and for around 10 per cent of voters the referendum was their first experience of voting at any statutory poll.[2] In total, 109,593 16 and 17-year-olds were included in the register and 75 per cent of those asked by the Electoral Commission claimed to have voted. Importantly, 97 per cent of those who had voted said they would vote again in future elections and referendums.[3] This experience is evidence that many young people want to be active citizens and decision makers in the political process – if they perceive an issue to be important to them. As a key professional from the statutory sector in Scotland noted:
"[It was] massive. We saw this major political engagement amongst young people; they really felt they had a say in what was going to happen to Scotland. There were no gender differences in this. Both young women and young men were equally politically engaged."

Poppy, 18, working in the seaside arcades, North East England

However, she emphasised that this engagement was the result of an extended period of work to engage young people:
"This whole engagement has partly been facilitated by active efforts to get people involved in the political process. For example, [going] into schools throughout Scotland to hold debates to encourage young people to express their views on issues that matter to them. It is not always about politics, or even specific political parties, but about engaging young people in debate. I think it is events such as these that really facilitate young people getting engaged and involved in the political process."

When we asked a group of Asian young women aged 18 to 20 in Scotland about voting at 16, they were generally in favour, although some expressed reservations, as the following exchange illustrates:

Question: Can I ask your opinions on the Scottish Referendum and voting at 16?
Zahra: ***"Definitely a good thing. A lot of people had a stereotype about age and how much you know. But it turns out me and my friends are very political people; even when we are hanging out we talk about politics. Everything social and, you know, women's rights. And to be actually given a chance to say, 'Yeah I'm actually mature. I'm not like everyone else, getting drunk or whatever.' And that desire to do more study so that I knew what was going on. I knew all the political issues and agendas and I actually got to say, 'Yeah, I want independence!' So it was nice having a little power, and not waiting for a couple of years to vote.***
Zainab: ***"I thought 18 was an okay age [to vote]. I have mixed feelings about the vote at 16, from high school and people in my year… We had a lot of people who were in politics and stuff like that. But there were some people who used to just get hyped up because everyone was talking about it. They used to go with the flow, not think on their own. Whereas when we went from high school to university, you became more mature. At uni, you don't just go with the flow. You think on your own."***
Similarly, girls aged 16 to 17 whom we spoke to in a coastal/urban focus group in northern England in 2015 felt that the vote should be extended to 16 and 17-year-olds. Although some also expressed concerns that they would not be responsible enough to vote at 16:
Marta: ***"At 16 and 17 I think we should be old enough to make the right decision."***
Sophie: ***"At my school, in Year 11… in the last election we all knew who was supporting what. We all watched the news and were pretty big into politics."***
Kasia: ***"We had genuine arguments about who should win."***
Jackie: ***"The older generation are, like: 'You are not old enough to vote!', but it's our future you are messing [about with]. So why shouldn't we have a say in who runs the country?"***
Marta: ***"I believe that if 16 and 17-year-olds were allowed to vote, we wouldn't have Cameron in. It would be Labour, because Labour most appeal to students, because they want to bring university fees down. Because we are not allowed to vote, the election turned out differently. But if it had been teens as well it would have been completely different."***
Critically, the majority of those girls surveyed in the 2014 Girls' Attitudes Survey agreed that:

- there are not enough female MPs;
- girls' voices would be listened to more if there were more female MPs;
- political parties should make sure there are more female MPs; and
- more diversity (of sex, age, ethnicity) among politicians would encourage young people to be more interested in politics.[4]

The 2014 Girls' Attitudes Survey found that over half of the girls and young women said they don't feel listened to by politicians, and the majority reported that they are not interested in politics. However, they were also in favour of wider political and citizenship education in schools. More than half of the girls surveyed supported more political education in schools (55 per cent) and mandatory teaching about citizenship, democracy and human rights (54 per cent).[9] This is echoed by comments from our Northern Ireland focus group of young women aged between 22 and 25:
Niamh: ***"It's interesting how you don't feel the need [to take part in politics], you feel like it's kind of separate from you. I do feel like politics generally, as an abstract concept, is a boys' club. I felt it had nothing to do with me, that I shouldn't voice my opinion; it's a bunch of white men in a conference room."***
Jane: ***"Old white men!"***

The view that girls need training in citizenship and leadership skills from at least primary education onwards is supported by our key professional interviews:
"[There is a] lack of opportunity for girls to be leaders, to develop their leadership skills… The work that has been done is with women; we are trying to get more women into public life, but all of that [work] needs to start lower down with girls. So, for example, it could be as simple as there being an equal mix of boys and girls putting themselves forward to be on primary school council. The older they get, the less attractive that becomes, for all sorts of reasons. I think there is more of a tendency for girls to defer to boys. If you put yourself forward to be a leader, or empowered in that way, it is seen as a negative."
Key Professional, non-statutory sector, Wales

Youth voting trends

Analysis from Ipsos Mori shows that in 2015 there appeared to be no significant increase in turnout among young people, with 18 to 24-year-olds almost half as likely to vote as those aged 65 (43 per cent compared to 78 per cent). In the 2010 general election, the estimated turnout for 18 to 24-year-olds was 44 per cent.[5] In the EU referendum held on 23 June 2016, estimates of the percentage of 18 to 24-year-olds who voted have varied[6] but more recently suggest the turnout was 64 per cent.[7] Given that an estimated 73 per cent of young people who voted, voted to remain (compared to 52 per cent of the population as a whole voting to leave), this has significant implications for both youth engagement in elections and intergenerational discourse going forward.[8]

"…acceptance is a big part of it"

Citizenship rights for girls

While we will be examining body image in more detail as a key theme later in this section, it is important first to examine acceptance as part of the conversation about citizenship, leadership and gender equality in the digital world. For many women and girls, social acceptance and approval are closely linked to how they look.[10] Even when women achieve success and status in society, their appearance and bodies are under scrutiny in a way that men's are not; women are often judged first and foremost on how they look rather than on what they do.

"I think acceptance is a big part of it. My whole life, all I've been doing is gaining acceptance from people. Acceptance is one of the biggest things, be that with body image or friends or sexuality or anything. Acceptance is probably one of the biggest things that young girls struggle with, because no one teaches you how to accept yourself. No one teaches you that. You have to conform to society for them to accept you."
Jackie, 17

Jackie's description of the pressure on girls to conform to a particular vision of femininity, including a particular body image, in order to gain acceptance, echoes feminist writers.[11]

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, for example, has been critical of the way in which the media has focused on her appearance. She explains that there is a running commentary on her appearance that is "hideous and quite cruel", explaining: "literally every time I'm on camera, as well as there being commentary on what I've said, there'll be commentary on what my hair looked like, what I wear."[12] A review of press coverage of the economy and the lack of female voices led the Fawcett Society to run their pre-2015 election 'Views not Shoes' campaign about listening to women.[13]

Many high-profile women are subjected to "hideous and cruel" comments in the media and online (for example, the social media abuse Olympic swimmer Rebecca Adlington and Professor Mary Beard have received, the latter after she appeared on 'Question Time'). But attacks on their appearance is also something that women across the divides of class, ethnicity and age endure on a daily basis.[14]

Dolapo, 19, London on the day of the EU referendum vote

"A lot of people think politics is, like, yeah, it's kind of like – a 'man thing'. I'm really interested in politics, so maybe a career in mainstream politics, like being a politician, would be ideal. That's what I'm kind of aiming for right now. You know, to represent my beliefs and my community and whatever my community want.

"I'm grateful for the democracy we have in our country; we can often get carried away and say 'I hate the government' and 'I don't care'. When you compare it to democracies around the world, to some extent it's way… better and we should be grateful for that. But obviously there are some parts, especially for students and education, when they change the education system, that's not very good…

"I think there are a number of different issues [for girls], so, like, political education and telling women… you can enter politics... you can enter jobs, professions like banking and law you don't have to feel, like, those are jobs just for men, and also science is very important as well… I know there are initiatives that I like within schools to encourage young women to be interested in science and don't think it's a job just for men.

"Some women still believe that they are not able to reach the top position because of having children. When we ask female bankers, 'how do you feel about this issue?' they don't lie to us, they tell us the truth, 'it's a problem. It's still existing'."

Chapter 3 "You can't live without it" Girls' narratives on digital life

LEAD

SDG 5: Gender Equality **SDG 10**: Reduced Inequalities
SDG 16: Peace and Justice

We need to encourage young people, and girls in particular, to engage in politics and to become the leaders of the future. However, we must not forget that this future will be digital. The majority of influencers and decision makers are now using digital and the media to communicate and to lead and govern.

The girls we interviewed for this report placed great emphasis on the importance of the digital world. We wanted to examine the crucial question of how girls' right to voice and agency is – and can be – facilitated digitally.

The overwhelming majority of children and young people in the UK have access to the internet,[1] with teenagers and young adults using the internet and social media more than any other age group.[2] Young people aged between 16 and 24 spend an average of 27.6 hours per week online via computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones.[3] Over 70 per cent of five to 15-year-olds have access to a tablet or computer at home, and eight in 10 children aged 12 to 15 own a mobile phone, with numbers continuing to rise.[4] Recent research shows a shift from home computer access to tablet and smartphone use. One consequence of this is that it can often make parental surveillance of children's internet activities harder. For children, the online and offline world can no longer be easily separated. The digital world is integrated into their education, their friendship networks, their leisure activities and their consumer habits.

In the UK, there is no significant difference in gendered access to the internet amongst children,[5,6] although access is affected by socio-economic status: children from more advantaged backgrounds are likely to use it more often and for longer[7] and have "advantage in the range and quality of internet use."[8] Broadband coverage across the UK remains patchy, so girls (and boys) from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds or living in areas with poor coverage face additional barriers to accessing the internet and the opportunities it offers.[9,10] Specific gendered differences exist in terms of how girls and boys use the internet: boys show a greater preference for gaming and girls engage more in online communication.[12]

All the girls in our discussion groups acknowledged that having access to internet, digital and/or mobile communications was an essential part of young people's daily lives. Indeed, the online and digital world was one of their most discussed topics, indicating how central digital and online communications are in their lives. Our participants vividly described their attachment to their technology, as can be seen in comments from our coastal/urban focus group of 16 to 17-year-old girls in northern England:

Kaisa: ***"My iPad is pretty much surgically attached to me!"***

Jackie: ***"There is no other life than technology. Remove the technology and there is no life."***

Sophie: ***"It has become an addiction; you can't live without it. If you don't have the internet, then you can't do anything."***

Question: What would you do if you couldn't access the internet and social media for a week?

Jackie: ***"I'd cry! We wouldn't be able to survive because we depend on it that much."***

Marta: ***"If we didn't have internet for a week, some of us would go so crazy we'd jump off a building!"***

The girls explained how having access to digital communication, particularly messaging services and social media, was now a vital and integral part of forging and developing relationships, particularly peer relationships. Without access to online messaging, they would be left out of friendship networks and feel socially isolated. As Ayesha, a 17-year-old of Somalian heritage from urban Wales, explains:

"If you never had a phone, that's quite restrictive, because you wouldn't be able to communicate with your friends. You would be left out. They'd go out and you wouldn't know or couldn't invite you unless they called you on your house phone or knocked at your door, which we don't do."

"My dad thought we were using the internet too much, so he switched it off for a day. I was okay; I had my college books and stuff. But my little sister was, like, 'It's a right!' But the internet has never been a right. It's a luxury, but it's always been there – so other kids are seeing it as a human right to have access to the internet. It's not, but it's how they've been brought up."
Kasia, 17

Most of the girls communicated with existing groups of friends online, and, for many, digital communication was also an integral part of the development of more intimate dating or sexual relationships. For some, the internet was a space to forge potential relationships beyond their physical group of friends, although the girls were ambivalent about the benefits of such networks:

"On Twitter you would follow people and they would tweet things and you would tweet them and they would reply to your tweet. They are Twitter friends, I guess. You do make social media friends. I know people online but I don't know who they are." Ayesha, 17

"I find it weird when people talk to people from different cities. You don't know them at all. You will never know them. I'd follow people if I thought they were good-looking! But I wouldn't make an effort to speak to them. If someone popped up to me I'd find it really weird. I like to socialise and speak to people I know." Klaudia, 17

Many of the girls taking part in the research talked about the pleasures of being online. For them, it was a key site in which friendships were cultivated, images and videos viewed and shared, games played and music downloaded, and where self-expression and intimacies could be explored. As described in other research,

Internet use amongst children

The growth in internet use amongst children and young people has been accompanied by concern over the risks that they may encounter online. Concerns, highlighted by the NSPCC, are varied and encompass anxieties that:

- children spend too much time online, at the expense of other less sedentary activities, contributing to increases in childhood obesity;
- children are susceptible to cyber-bullying, either as victims or perpetrators;
- children can easily access age-inappropriate content such as pornography;
- children are vulnerable online to grooming and sexual abuse;
- children may share too much personal information;
- children can be accessed by people that they do not know;
- children might be coerced into sharing sexual images of themselves, and that might in some cases result in revenge porn (the further sharing of those images online without consent).[11]

For the girls, the digital and online world was identified as:

young people "find digital flirtation and sexual communication pleasurable, exciting and fun […] a vital part of the 'drama' of the peer culture",[13] and this was reiterated in our study by many of the participants.

However, it is critical to also understand power dynamics expressed online. For instance, research undertaken by EU Kids Online suggests that cyber-bullying is now more prevalent than face-to-face bullying in UK, most frequently occurring on social networking sites.[14] The same research notes that 15 per cent of nine to 16-year-olds in the UK "have been bothered, uncomfortable or upset by something online in the past year. Such experiences are reported much more by girls, older teens and those from high socio-economic status homes."[15] Seventeen per cent of the children reported seeing sexual images, online or offline, in the past year: "This is more common among teenagers, and girls, who are also more likely to report being upset, or even very upset by this." The study concludes that "a new gender gap in risk seems to be opening up, with girls more likely to report being bothered or upset by online encounters, necessitating a gender-sensitive approach to safety provision".[16] A study of the experiences of 11 to 16-year-olds similarly shows that girls were more likely than boys to "have an upsetting experience online". The study found that girls were more likely "to report being upset by exclusions from social groups or friendships, and pressure to look or behave in a particular way".[17] In another report, cyber-bullying is reported as being a significant issue for girls and young women. Among those aged 11 to 21, two in five (42 per cent) say they have experienced bullying on social media.[18] Bullying can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, and for some can lead to more serious mental-health issues, such as self-harm and suicide.[19]

The internet has therefore come to be seen as a particularly unsafe space for girls and young women. A 2014 study noted that "girls are more likely to experience ongoing cyber-bullying than boys and are more vulnerable to different kinds of risk, particularly of chatting to people online they do not know; being asked for personal details; receiving unwanted sexual comments; or being disturbed by violent or offensive pornographic context."[20] Girls' activities online are also more likely than boys' to be monitored by parents.[21]

Understanding online risks

When trying to understand the reality of girls' risks online, a number of issues need consideration:

- the actual extent of girls' risk;
- the kinds of risk girls are particularly susceptible to;
- the impact of gender on risk (whether girls are more susceptible to certain risks because they are female);
- how perceptions of risk are informed by norms of appropriate gender behaviour.

"They will pressure you"

Sexting

Alongside cyber-bullying, another recent concern has been young girls sharing sexual images and messages online, commonly described as sexting.[22,23,24,25] This has emerged as another risky behaviour because it can lead to various negative outcomes for children and young people, including through its potential use within bullying and exploitation. Particular concerns about sexting, and pressure to post 'sexy' photos online, were expressed by some of the older girls in the focus groups, including Jay, a white 21-year-old from northern England:

"I think there is more contact now. When we were at school, there was just MSN, but now there's social media, Facebook, Twitter. You can't really get away from it these days, whereas we could just turn off the computer. One of the pressures on females these days is the pressure of sexting, because you get ridiculed if you say you don't want to send a picture. They will call you names or they will pressure you. It's horrible."

Areena, 17, South West England

"I know so many unhappy people that use social media as a way to make their life seem better. I think that's the saddest thing there is about that. Sometimes I hate social media. I have these days I don't want to be around it, because I feel there is always this pressure to create an image and a desirable life. I don't want to be part of that – I feel it takes away so much [that is] genuine in life.

"I have a really big love-hate relationship with Instagram. I love it – I met so many of my friends on there – but it is extremely superficial. You can see people that have thousands of followers, people that are very good-looking… There's this pressure to be like one of these people, to hang out with them, be cool enough, and good enough to be followed. There's so much pressure to show your life as something desirable; some people post on Instagram pictures of people they pretend to hang out with.

"I have to admit I'm quite addicted [to social media] as well; I think there's so much of life you're missing out if all you have to do is spend time on your computer. I remember when I was 10, running around with my bicycle, hanging out with my friends. Now I see kids walking around with iPads and I think that's horrible, to expose a child to technology so quickly. I remember going back to my neighbourhood where I used to just run around, and it was completely empty, no kids playing on the streets. I found it very scary, the fact that we might be the last generation that had that sort of purity… without the interference of technology."

Question: Who is the pressure coming from?
"If you are talking to a guy, as soon as you show interest they all expect pictures. If you don't [send them], they will start calling you names, accusing you of not being interested or of being a man or not who you are, because you won't show a picture. They will try anything to force you to show them a picture."

Studies show that harassment following sexting is usually directed by young men towards young women.[26] They conclude that sexting is not a gender-neutral practice; it is shaped by the gender dynamics of the peer group in which, primarily, boys harass girls, and it is exacerbated by the gendered norms of popular culture, and by families and schools failing to recognise the problem or support girls. In researching this, a 2012 study found considerable evidence of the age-old double standard by which sexually active boys are admired and sexually active girls denigrated and called 'sluts'. It concluded that this creates gender-specific risks where girls are unable to speak openly about sexual activities and practices, while boys face peer exclusion if they do not brag about their sexual experiences.[27]

"They can't win"

Girls bearing the responsibility

Though the official response[32] has been to consider sexting under laws that prohibit the taking and distribution of sexually explicit images of minors, it is worth noting the key concern that by flagging up only the negative dimensions of sexting, this denies "the capacity to express positive experiences and how sexting might be embedded in wider systems of bonding, courtship and friendship".[33] Therefore, the risks to girls and women of sexting need to be considered within the broader context of society's gendered and sexual double standards, in which female sexuality is more likely to be viewed negatively.[34,35,36] Not only are young people's practices of sexting informed by gendered and sexual double standards (with boys more likely to ask girls for photos and also more likely to share them without consent) but broader societal perceptions of appropriate online behaviour are also gendered (so girls who do share photos are perceived as sluttish or bad in a way that boys are not).[37]
One key professional working in child protection underscored the dilemmas girls and young women face negotiating this sexual double standard:
"One of the things that is big at the moment is sexting, where girls send naked or provocative pictures of themselves to young boys. The pressure is huge. They feel they have to send these images, in order to fit in… Social networking is part of young people's lives… They all have phones, iPods and what not. They all go on social media and send messages and pictures to each other. It's the new form of dating. If girls don't send images, they get called names. If they do send them, but send too explicit ones, they get labelled as whores. They can't win."
Key Professional, Preventing Child Exploitation sector, England

Furthermore, an additional danger is that, in a bid to protect girls online, sexual and gendered double standards are reproduced, either by restricting girls' sexual expression (in a way that is not applied to boys), or victim blaming, for example by putting the onus of responsibility onto girls when naked or sexually explicit images of them are shared without their consent. The short film produced by the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre to highlight the dangers of sharing sexually explicit photos online has, for instance, been critiqued for reproducing such sexual double standards, because it focuses on the danger girls put themselves in when they send images, rather than on the boys who circulate them without consent.[38] If we are to support girls' rights to digital lives free from harassment and coercion, we must promote safety and equality of access without reinforcing sexist double standards – which should be challenged instead.

The concerns around teen girls and sexting assumes that the practice is widespread (and this was endorsed across our own interviews with key professionals working with girls and young women), but research indicates significant variation in rates and practices of sexual messaging amongst teens. Research in two London schools identified a culture in which sexual communication was rife amongst the children's digital peer networks (particularly in terms of girls being asked for photos "outside an intimate dating relationship"),[39] whereas a survey of young people aged 13 to 18 in Australia indicated that sexting was most common in long-term relationships, and that the practice was usually described by the participants as consensual.[40] So attendance to the risks of sexting needs to be balanced against girls' right to self-representation[41] and to express their sexuality and desires online on equal terms with boys.

What is recognised across the research is the importance of speaking to girls and young women about their online practices (rather than focusing primarily on the opinions of parents, policy makers or the media) to find out what they think and feel about the digital and online dimensions of their lives. One report notes that "privileging adult perceptions [regarding sexting] can reproduce the very inequalities and double standards young girls already experience", and that "the voices of the young women who have actually *engaged in* the practice need to be heard and clearly distinguished from what the broader cohort *think* or *perceive* about the practice".[42]

In our research, girls expressed a range of strategies to maintain autonomy and privacy online. Some found themselves caught between their desire to participate in peer group interactions and family expectations of appropriate social relationships, as this conversation between a group of young Asian women aged 18 to 20 in urban Scotland illustrates:
Zainab: ***"We have a lot of guy friends we get on so well with whenever we go out as a group. It is so difficult trying to hide it from our families. Everyone posts something on Facebook or tags us all in; then you have to delete all your cousins so your parents or your uncles don't find out. The golden rule for Asian girls is: don't have your family on Facebook!"***
Asma: ***"I deleted all my family on Facebook."***
Saleena: ***"I don't have cousins or anything. Any posts or pictures you have with guys, you just block them off it completely. Or if you go out somewhere and you don't want them to know about it, you just completely block them off it."***
Zainab: ***"We all took a group picture when we were out bowling. And there was a guy standing next to me and my cousin saw it and she told her mum. And her mum pulled me up for it. We were just casually going out bowling, and she was, like, 'You shouldn't have***

Sexting

Sexting in particular is an area that requires attention, due to the different impacts it has on girls and boys:

- 12 per cent of 11 to 16-year-olds in the UK have seen or received sexual messages online. Two per cent receive them more than once a week, with girls slightly more likely to have received them than boys (14 per cent compared to 10 per cent).[28]
- One in three UK teenagers has received 'sexually suggestive' messages.[29]

- A small survey of 11 to 18-year-olds found evidence of abuse via personal images, with half of recipients knowing of cases where sexual messages had been circulated beyond the originally intended recipient (and half of those thought the intention was to cause distress); 30 per cent knew someone who had been adversely affected by sexting.[30]
- Sexting is about as common as exposure to sexual or pornographic content online, and more common than cyber-bullying – although of all the risks, cyber-bullying was the one that most often upset the children who encountered it.[31]

this.' And I was, like, 'It's just a picture!' It was just my friend, but she thought he was my boyfriend. It was quite awkward."

"We don't know who she is actually talking to"

Girls' thoughts about risks online

While many of the girls recounted positive experiences of being online, they also described the internet as a site of risk and anxiety which had to be navigated, and a source of concern regarding safety, harassment, coercion and bullying. This ranged from worries about 'stranger danger' (expressed more frequently by the younger girls in the focus groups, or by older girls in relation to their concerns for younger girls), to issues of peer-on-peer cyber-bullying, to sexual coercion and grooming. A 12-year-old girl from rural England told us, for example, how a friend had been the victim of cyber-bullying after she posted a selfie on a social messaging site. Other young people had written "nasty comments" about how she looked. Another white British girl from coastal/urban northern England told us how she had concerns about her younger sister's safety online:
"My little sister is in the popular group, and you've got to be seen to have hundreds of thousands of friends on Facebook. If you don't, you aren't classed as popular. And the only way you can achieve that is by adding these random people who you don't actually know. That's what worries me. My sister does that: she takes a photo and tags everything, even [photos of her] in her school uniform. I've had a go at her about it. Someone could track down that logo, and it has been known for people to wait for someone outside the school. And she's my little sister and I don't want anything happening to her."
Jackie, 17

She went on to explain how the generational gulf in the use and understanding of social media makes it hard for parents to regulate children's online activities properly:
"We don't know who she is actually talking to, because even when my parents check Facebook she can just delete the message, and they will have no evidence that she ever talked to them. It is scary how much [access onlin] kids do have, which the parents don't know about. And that we can go behind their backs and they will never know. My parents are really controlling on the internet but they are controlling the wrong thing. They are not checking if my sister has Snapchat and all these other websites they don't know about. I've told them about it but they are just more concerned about Facebook."
Jackie, 17

Another girl from the same focus group said:
"Facebook is nothing. Facebook is like a tiny dog when you have all these Alsatians."
Sophie, 17

In the main, the girls were very aware of the risks of being online and talked in detail about the strategies they, or their parents, put in place to try to be safe, as the following conversation between white British girls from urban Wales aged 12 to 13 indicates:
Karen: ***"My parents are quite protective of me and watch over me. I'm only allowed to follow people I know and accept follower requests from people I know. Because the dangerous thing about social media is that the person behind the screen could be someone different from who you are looking at."***
Amy: ***"My mum and dad were against me having social media until my auntie told them I could have it private. No one could look at it unless I said. I only really have it for friends from primary who are not in school with me [any more]. I want to keep in touch with them. It's the only reason I've got social media."***
Josie: ***"Most of my followers on Instagram are my family and close friends."***
Karen: ***"It depends if you want people to know about yourself – which I certainly don't. With people you don't know you are kind of exposed, if you think about it. If you send a photo to people and then delete it, that picture isn't deleted, and they can find out more things about you, which is dangerous. And that's how most people are. In danger."***
Cerys: ***"Sometimes, if someone requests to follow me who I don't know, I say yes and then look through all their followers to see if there is anyone I know who is following them. If I don't know them, I block them."***

The following quote from a focus group of 10-year-olds from urban northern England echoes concerns expressed by many of the research participants about digital dangers and how they can transfer into the real world:
"My cousin was texting me, and then she rang and told me, 'This thing has come up on my phone' – tell me where you go to school, everything like that. She said she did it and then this person knocked on her door and she didn't know who it was. Her mam answered it and rang the police because it was someone they didn't know."
Roxy, 10

"I didn't know who I was talking to"

Grooming and exploitation

"The proliferation of smartphones and tablets, and their use by children and young people to access the internet, often away from adult supervision, makes it very difficult for parents to control access to these [pornographic] images."[43]

Some of the girls participating in our study had been the victims of online grooming. Abigail, a white British young woman from coastal/urban northern England, now in her twenties, had been the victim of online grooming when younger, and is now receiving support from an organisation working with victims of child sexual exploitation:
"I don't have a phone or anything. So it is hard to see my friends; I only really see one of my friends, but I don't live near him any more so it makes it a lot harder. I have to be able to get the money to get down to see him so it makes things more stressful for me… I did have two phones and an iPad. Social media can get out of hand. I got a bit addicted to talking to people online. And I think that's what makes, especially younger girls, less safe. I didn't know who I was talking to. I'd talk to more people, older people than I would in real life, face-to-face… That can lead to grooming. It led to grooming with me."
Abigail, 23

"Facebook is nothing. Facebook is like a tiny dog when you have all these Alsatians."

Abigail's response to her exploitation, and her strategy to keep herself safe now, was to avoid all digital technology. In doing so, however, she isolated herself from her peer group and from potentially positive relationships and social opportunities.

However, other girls we interviewed also described the importance of mobile technology in trying to keep safe when out and about. A group of 13-year-old white British girls from north London described how they always messaged friends to say they had got home safely and would always check up if they did not hear from each other. Another group, of 13-year-old Asian British girls from London's East End, said they always made sure that they had their phones with them when using public transport, and that at moments when they felt unsafe walking in public spaces they would ring a friend or a family member for a chat – this made them feel less vulnerable. Similarly, Roxy, a 10-year-old girl from a city in the north of England, described how having her phone with her made her feel safer when she was out playing:
"I think it's important to have a phone all the time because I play out sometimes and I have to walk quite far to the park. There is this long path and flickering lights… I have to walk all the way down there by myself. It's scary."
Roxy, 10

Emily, 15, Blackpool

"It's way too easy for people to screenshot on Snapchat and send things around, and just bully people online, and there's nothing anyone can do about it. It's really easy to be hurt on it."

Chapter 4 "Behind all that make-up" Girls and body image

DECIDE

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing
SDG 5: Gender Equality

When promoting girls' rights in the UK, including in the digital space, we need to challenge the ways in which society cultivates a rigid view of femininity and exalts an idealised body image. Girls are continually bombarded with conflicting messages about their bodies and behaviour: they must look sexually available but not show an interest in sex; they should make an effort with their appearance, but too much make-up or revealing clothes receive negative labelling. The idealised body is unhealthily thin and impossibly flawless. In the midst of this conversation, however, we must also defend girls' right to express themselves through their bodies without fear or risk of reprisals.

Question: If girls of your age face pressures, what do you think they are?
"Their appearance. I think that's what they care about the most. They want to make a good impression. They are a bit self-conscious about what they look like behind all that make-up."
Karen, 12

A recent study of questionnaires completed by schoolchildren in England found that emotional problems in girls aged 11 to 13 increased by 55 per cent in five years, but other mental-health problems stayed the same.[8] The authors concluded that "there must have been significant changes over the past five years which have specifically affected young girls."[9] Dr Helen Sharpe, one of the co-authors of the paper, urged caution around hypotheses about potential causes, but she noted: "One potential cause is body image, because it seems to go some way to explaining why we are particularly seeing an increase in girls… A second factor, which goes hand in hand with that, is social media use… There is not much data on the impact of social media on young people's wellbeing, but it's clear that it's substantially changing the way in which young people are interacting with their peer group…[Social media is] predominantly visual; it places greater emphasis on appearance… It seems a reasonable hypothesis that this focus on appearance could have a greater impact on girls [than boys], given that we believe pressure on body image is stronger for girls, particularly at this age."[10]

Dr Sharpe also conducted a study of more than 10,000 primary and secondary-school students to examine the link between body image and emotional problems.[11] There was a significant gender difference: "In the children whom we studied from Years 4 to 6 [from eight to 11 years old], it was quite clearly the case that emotional problems predicted later body dissatisfaction. So children who started feeling anxious and depressed tended to be the ones who went on to feel negatively about the way they looked – boys and girls. But… when we looked at the adolescent samples (studied from Years 7 to 9 [from 11 to 14 years old]), the same was true for boys, but for girls the whole directionality flipped, so at that age, for girls, suddenly body dissatisfaction predicts later emotional problems. So, it seemed for the adolescent girls there was something specific about body dissatisfaction emerging at that point as a risk factor for later emotional problems."[12]

Our interviews with key professionals working with girls and young women underscored the impact of negative body image on girls' and young women's confidence. A professional working with girls who were at risk of, or were subject to, sexual exploitation told us:
"Seventy per cent of my caseload suffer from low self-esteem. A lot of the young women I meet are not happy with their body, or are not happy with how they look. If you asked any of my young people whether they would have plastic surgery if they could afford it, ultimately, they would say yes. Whether it be a boob job, bigger bum... That big bum, small waist, massive boobs and perfect face is the kind of look the kids want."
Key Professional, urban northern England, working with victims of child sexual exploitation

Laura Bates, the founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, noted in a recent article: "I am reminded of a 14-year-old girl who recently told me, in a matter-of-fact way: 'If you don't have a thigh gap, you need to get a thigh gap.' Her peers, she explained, would take diet pills, restrict their food intake to just fruit, and exercise for several hours a day in an effort to live up to the bodily ideals epitomised on social media. She called those peers 'Tumblr girls'."[13] Bates notes that a study by the *Journal of Adolescent Health*[14] revealed that one girl in five is now at risk of emotional problems.

Body image: the facts

Statistics from the UK show that anxiety around body image is a significant issue for girls. In 2012, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Body Image[1] reported that:

- Over half of girls think their peers have body-image problems;
- Between one third and half of young girls fear becoming fat and engage in dieting or binge eating;
- One in four seven-year-old girls have tried to lose weight at least once.

Similarly, the 2014 Girls' Attitudes survey tells us that:

- 45 per cent of girls feel ashamed of how they look because they are not like girls and women in the media;[2]
- 12 per cent of girls say they would consider cosmetic surgery.[3]
- Over a third of girls feel they should try to look more like the pictures of girls and women they see in the media (37 per cent), and think they are more likely to be successful if they look like celebrities (33 per cent rising to 43 per cent among those aged 17 to 21).[4]

Research by government and commercial bodies suggests similar trends:

- An Ofsted survey reported that, by the age of 20, a third of girls "cited their bodies as their main source of worry".[5]
- Research by Dove concluded that "70 per cent of teenage girls don't participate in certain activities because of body image anxiety".[6]
- The 2014 Girls Attitudes survey reported that two in five 11 to 21-year-old girls had desisted from participating in 'fun activities' because they were anxious about their appearance; 30 per cent took part less in class or at work because of body-image issues.[7]

The right to be me and to like myself: Body image and self-esteem

Our work raises the question of whether girls have any right to an accurate education about their bodies, to learn what is healthy and that bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes. There is also a gap in support to help girls learn to like their bodies and to like themselves. Recent research has expressed concern that girls are being subjected to body-image pressures from an ever-younger age. The 2011 Bailey review[15] suggests a link between the increasing sexualisation[16] of childhood, including the marketing of adult-style clothes to children and the sexualisation of media content aimed at children (for example, pop music videos),

and pressures on girls to conform to a certain body shape and size.

The Imkaan Purple Drum project consulted young women who were particularly vocal about their dissatisfaction with media representations of young women and people of colour. They said they were keen to challenge such representations, and subsequently formed a project to create a platform for young women to speak out and challenge racism and sexism in music videos.[17]

A key professional we interviewed reiterated how girls' anxiety about how they look "is stopping them participating in class and in other activities. They are worried about putting their hand up in case anyone looks at them." Esme, a white 16-year-old from the north of England, told us that she quit competitive gymnastics because the girls were not allowed to wear shorts over skimpy competition leotards. Similarly, a 10-year-old told us she didn't like wearing shorts for P.E. because she thought she had fat thighs.

The issue of body image surfaced again and again in our focus groups, whether the girls were talking about school or work, accessing the internet, or their friends and families.

It was clear from our discussions that concerns about body image and sexuality were a major barrier to the girls' freedom of expression and often inhibited or compromised their participation in the world around them.

"I am 14 years old and society seems to be teaching young girls that 'sexy' is the way. We see it every day in magazines, social media, television, everywhere. And the moment in which a woman decides she does want to look 'sexy', she is suddenly a slut or a whore and anything that happens to her is her own fault." Girl, 14, quoted in the Everyday Sexism Project, 2015[18]

A 2010 government review[19] made the connection between the increasing sexualisation of mainstream culture and greater pressure on girls to achieve a certain kind of body and appearance. "In the past," the report writers said, "it was adult women who felt the imperative to look 'hot' and 'sexy'; now this imperative is being adopted by younger and younger girls who will inevitably face the same feelings of inadequacy and failure to live up to an unrealistic ideal. The mass media promotes and reinforces an idealised notion of beauty for both men and women, presenting standards – of thinness for women and of muscularity for men – that few can ever hope to achieve. And now we're starting to see what happens when you tweak the message – young women need to be not only thin, but also sexually desirable. As anorexia increases, so now does the number of young women having breast implants at an increasingly younger age.'[20]

> Girls' concerns and anxiety about body image and sexuality are a major barrier to their freedom of expression and often inhibit or compromise their participation in the world around them

Many media headlines and recent government reports[21,22] have focused on the rise in the 'sexualisation' of children and the commercialisation of childhood. Although often not conceptualised in these reports, sexualisation can be seen as "the imposition of adult sexuality on to children and young people before they are capable of dealing with it, mentally, emotionally or physically".[23] It can be argued, however, that sexuality and sexual learning are a part of children's everyday lives and that children are negotiating contradictory messages about themselves and their bodies. Adult fears that children are growing up too fast can be seen as being disconnected from children's own experiences. Children are under pressure to conform to gender norms and girls, in particular, talk about the difficulty of just "being yourself" and "fitting in".[24]

Almost all the girls in our focus groups acknowledged that there is pressure on them to conform to a certain body type and/or a certain way to look and dress. They told us they felt under pressure to:

- 'Be the perfect weight and have the perfect figure'
- 'Be a smaller clothes size'
- 'Wear less clothing'
- 'Buy certain clothes' brands to fit in better'
- 'Look skinny'
- 'Spend money on clothes to fit in with friends'
- 'Look good all the time'
- 'Be heterosexual'

"They judge you really quickly"

Dress and body image

During a focus group in northern England, Jackie, who identifies as gay, explained how she comes under pressure from her family to look and behave in a stereotypically heterosexual or 'girlie' way, particularly on certain social occasions. We explore this further in Chapter 7 on identities including sexual orientation rights.

Jane, 24, from Northern Ireland felt that her 'more masculine' appearance helped deflect sexism in the workplace: ***"I work in the building trade, but I think because I have a more masculine energy I don't get that same kind of [sexism]. The more feminine you are perceived, the worse that's going to be. It's all about the way you present yourself. I think for me it's easier to present a more masculine side."***

A group of white 13-year-old girls from north London explained how they had to make a conscious effort to dress for themselves and not for other people. They all expressed the desire to resist peer pressure to look a certain way, and to be their own person. However, they felt particularly worried about what other girls (rather than boys) thought about how they dressed. Other girls taking part in the research talked about how they felt pressure to dress a certain way to be attractive to boys: ***"… to look perfect at all times. I feel everything is so focused on how boys will see us."*** Helena, 17, northern England

A group of young Asian women aged 18 to 20 in Scotland reflected on the conflicting pressures they felt from family and their peer group to dress certain ways and how this was informed by ethnicity, religion and gender:

Zainab: ***"Appearance, yeah. I think there is still a very backward thing that you can't go out 'like that'. You can't wear this, you can't do this."***

Saleena: ***"I think especially Asian girls get judged a lot. Just in general, you get judged a lot."***

Zainab: ***"For example, if you are wearing your scarf and you do something wrong, they base it on that: 'I thought you were Islamic, but that doesn't mean anything.' You just can't do anything and be like a normal girl. They judge you really quickly, just on the fact that you are Asian. You need to act the way they think you ought to act. You just can't be yourself."***

Saleena: ***"I think parents are stricter on the girls in the house rather than the boys. If you are dressed a way they think you shouldn't be…"***

Zahra: ***"People say, 'a hijabi'; I have accepted it and I am completely fine with that. They say, 'you hide your beauty'. And then again I'm, like, walking around and there are girls with lots of make-up on. But with a hijab on, people are, like, 'Wear some make-up!' They ask me if I have seen any guys in uni but I'm not going to wear it for them. I am not going to wear the make-up for them. I am going to wear it for myself, when I am going out with my friends. And it's just given, these huge hypocritical, contradictory views that we are living with. It's kind of messed up and it is restricting my freedom."***

Zainab: ***"My house is kind of divided. Half my family is, like, 'No, you shouldn't wear make-up, apart from eyeliner, which is fine in Islam.' Then you've got the other half saying: 'You should try putting some effort in. Have some pride. Put some make-up on!' I get in trouble either way and I can't do anything."***

"Maybe I should be doing it now..."

Pressure to have sex

A group of young women aged 19 to 22 from an urban area in the north of England explained the pressures they had felt when younger to become sexually active with boys:

Jay: ***"I think I was pressurised into sex quite young. I don't think I should have started when I did."***

Tina: ***"I didn't feel pressurised but I can remember there being an age where there is always the first few who do it first. I remember thinking, maybe I should be doing it now. I was very young – 13 or 14."***

Brooke: ***"That was about the time I lost my virginity – and it was just me."***

Many of the older girls talked about how girls and boys were judged differently when it came to sexual behaviour. Two white girls aged 16 and 17 from a coastal/urban area in the north of England summed up the perspectives of many of the girls interviewed:

Marta: ***"To be fair, lads can shag hundreds of girls and it is seen that the lad has done something amazing. Whereas if a girl sleeps with more than three or four guys, she is seen as a slut."***

Sophie: ***"Men can sleep with whoever, how many times they want and it's seen as an achievement. But if a girl was to do that: oh, my God! You'd get so much shit for it."***

"Is this picture suitable?"

The pressure of digital on body image

The pressure to look a certain way is magnified online. The girls in our focus groups said they often feel open to even greater scrutiny and therefore consider carefully what pictures they should post online:

"Girls are so reliant on the way they look online that if people see them face-to-face, people are going to be, like, 'She looks like this online, but she doesn't look like this face-to-face. What's going on?' It's horrible. What I do is, if I have a picture of myself, I send it to all my friends and say, 'Is this suitable for me to put up?' And then they either say 'yes' and give me a reason or 'no' and give me a reason. So it is a lot of pressure, especially when you have Instagram, which is a picture blog."

Ayesha, 17

Celebrity culture sways how the girls see themselves, with celebrity bodies and looks held up as yardstick.

"I feel pressured by the people I see around me every day, and I think about how they look compared to me. But I also feel pressured by the girls I see in the media, both on TV and social media."

Anna, 16

The girls in our focus groups were very aware of how the media manipulates images of celebrities by airbrushing or Photoshopping them, and that these photos are not how the celebrities look in real life. But while they were critical of these practices, the digitally enhanced bodies still fed into their idea of how girls *should* look and how they felt they needed to look themselves. Despite cultural pressures to conform to a certain body type, paying attention to how they look is also a source of pleasure and creative self-expression for many of the girls we spoke to. A group of Asian British 13-year-olds from east London said that dressing up, sleep-overs and hanging out with friends were the best things about being a girl. One also talked about the pleasure of digitally manipulating images of herself online:

"I am one of those people who will edit, but only because I think it's fun to play with the lighting and all that."

Amy, 12

In turn, some of the girls digitally manipulated their own online images, as seen in this discussion from our focus group of 16 and 17-year-old girls from coastal/urban northern England:

"I'm an amateur photographer and I know what Photoshop can do, but for the young girls that don't know the extremes that Photoshop can change, you can create a whole new image and it's quite scary that so many young people don't understand the extremes to which it can change an image."

Jackie, 17

Question: Do you feel pressure to know how to use all the technology, or is it something you just know how to use?

"The funny thing is that school taught us how to use Photoshop, so half the people we know might be Photoshopping their photos. Even my phone does a thing called 'Beauty Face', which airbrushes your face."

Does it make you look realistic, though?

"No, you look like a doll! We basically make ourselves look like dolls."

Marta, 17

This is echoed by Karen, a white 12-year-old from Wales:

"The only problem, in my opinion, of posting photos of yourself online is that you pretend to be someone you're not sometimes. You make yourself look prettier. If you don't edit them, you can show who you are. By editing it, you are saying, 'Look at me, I'm beautiful!'"

Karen, 12

How we come to understand our bodies, and the bodies of others, is informed, at least in part, by digital constructions of what bodies should be like.

Digital and commercial pressure

A key question in this report is whether the existing international rights framework can keep up with the speed of the ever-changing digital world, particularly in ensuring girls' safety and right to have a voice on this global platform. Furthermore, there is a question about whether a rights framework can respond effectively to pressures of a market-driven digital world that purposely seeks out girls as potential consumers. If being thin and having flawless skin, and the accompanying factors of expected body image, remain as commercial drivers, what factors exist to protect girls from such messages?

The law in the UK acknowledges the wider commercial pressures British children are exposed to, and the potential negative impacts they can have – including on children's health. Limits on advertising sweets and sugary foods for children are emerging, along with the ban on tobacco advertising. In the 2016 Budget, the Chancellor for the Exchequer cited the UK's growing obesity problem, particularly among children, and proposed increased taxes on sugary drinks, acknowledging the link between purchase choices and poor health. In the past the UK government has pledged to address the issue of body image,[25] but nothing has yet made meaningful changes to the messages girls receive about what is considered beautiful or what a healthy body looks like.

"I feel pressured by the people I see around me every day, and I think about how they look compared to me."

Francesca, 17, London

"I think in terms of behaviour of girls, in particular pornography, is quite damaging because it reinforces this thing that a girl has to be respectable in the real world, but in the bedroom she has to be something else. When I say something else – it's not my word of choice – but a 'slut'… A girl is meant to be reserved but is also expected to do these wild sexual things, but then she's mocked for it afterwards. I think that is damaging for girls…

"Body types are also an issue. You've got this staple type of a skinny girl with a tiny waist, big boobs, massive butt and anything outside of that is considered a fetish and not normal… Not everyone has that or has that type of body. So if you're not like that, you feel like you're part of this niche group that only a certain amount of people would like…

"I think a no is always a no and that should just be. If a dog can understand when you say no, then so can a person. I don't think there should be any controversy around that. If someone doesn't want something to happen then it shouldn't happen. They are in their own right to protect themselves and their body and to decide what happens to it…"

Chapter 5 Right to health and quality of life

DECIDE

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing
SDG 5: Gender Equality

The National Health Service provides extensive health coverage free at the point of need, so access to healthcare is significantly better for girls in the UK than in many other countries globally. However, there are limitations to accessing that healthcare and in some areas it appears that the most vulnerable girls are not having their rights met regarding their physical and mental health.

Health is a complex issue which involves both physical and mental factors, and experiences in adolescence are likely to have a strong effect on health in later life. There has been an improvement in health across Europe in recent years but there is robust evidence to suggest that some children remain disadvantaged because of their gender, region or country of residence, or their families' socio-economic status.[1] This is explored further in our discussions about life expectancy in Section Three. These factors affect their health, but also education and employment opportunities. Gender gaps in adolescent health are widespread and are getting wider in some countries, including the UK, where the gap has increased since 2002.[2]

An HSBC report[3] on health behaviour in schoolage children collected data from young people in Europe and North America. It found that as children get older, their perception of having poor health increases, and this was more prevalent amongst girls. British girls are high in the report's league table of those who considered their health to be only poor/fair. Wales, in particular, was second-highest in the table, with 32 per cent of 15-year-old girls reporting their health as poor.

Anxiety about body image may make girls reluctant to take part in sports, which then affects their health and fitness levels. Girls across European countries generally do less physical activity than boys, and this is particularly the case in the UK.[4] Given the growing concern about the impact of rising obesity levels on quality, as well as length, of life, it is important to acknowledge that those from poorer backgrounds are more likely to be obese. In two-thirds of European countries, girls from poorer homes are more likely to be overweight.[5]

Another area of ongoing concern is alcohol consumption by adolescents. Alcohol is widely available and used by adolescent girls and boys for both personal and social reasons. Frequent drinking can pose a considerable health risk.[6] Although alcohol use has decreased since 2003, with 43 per cent of 11 to 15-year-olds saying they had drunk alcohol 'at least once' in 2012 compared with 61 per cent in 2003, the Institute of Alcohol Studies reported in 2013 that the number of those who had drunk alcohol 'at least once' increases with age, with almost four in five 15-year-olds having done so.[7] Alcohol Focus Scotland say that one third of 13-year-olds and two-thirds of 15-year-olds in Scotland have drunk alcohol and that 44 per cent of 13-year-olds and 70 per cent of 15-year-olds who have tried alcohol have been drunk at least once.[8] Historically, girls have consumed less alcohol than boys, but there is evidence now that this is changing, with girls reporting as much weekly drinking as boys.[9] This remains a health concern as research indicates many girls are regularly drinking over the recommended amount.[10]

Additionally, increasing evidence has shown the connection between alcohol and sexual assault and other violent crimes against women and girls. A review conducted by the Institute of Alcohol Studies stated: "Research typically finds that between 25 and 50 per cent of those who perpetrate domestic abuse have been drinking at the time of assault, although in some studies the figure is as high as 73 per cent. However, cases involving severe violence are twice as likely as others to include alcohol, and other research found that the risk of rape was twice as high for attacks involving drinking offenders."[11]

"You cannot stop someone's right to choose"

Reproductive rights

When thinking about girls' rights, it is important to consider their rights over their own body. We have already explored this with regard to digital health and body image, and later will look at girls' rights over their own body in relation to violence against girls. Another area of concern is abortion.

Under British law, an abortion can usually be carried out during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy as long as certain criteria are met as directed in The Abortion Act 1967,[12] which covers England, Scotland and Wales but not Northern Ireland.

The situation regarding reproductive rights is different in Northern Ireland. A comprehensive analysis by Amnesty International in 2015 stated: "The law governing abortion in Northern Ireland is one of the most restrictive in Europe both in law and in practice; only Ireland and Malta are more restrictive. It also carries the harshest criminal penalty in abortion regulation in Europe – life imprisonment for the woman undergoing the abortion and for anyone assisting her. Abortions are only lawful in extremely restricted circumstances, namely where there is a risk to a woman's or girl's life or a real and serious long-term or permanent damage to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman. Abortions procured for other reasons carry a risk and threat of life imprisonment, including abortions sought because the pregnancy is a result of a sexual crime, such as rape and incest, and in cases of fatal foetal impairment. Although that criminal sanction is not applied in practice, the risk and threat of possible severe criminal sanction continue to exert a chilling effect on women and healthcare providers alike."[13]

The Amnesty International report quotes a woman from County Down who had an abortion in England when she was 17. "My guilt and shame was not about my decision to have an abortion," Aoife explained, "it was because society had made me feel like I was a fallen woman, dirty and criminal. That shame, that stigma was the most damaging part of my experience. Not being able to say a word in case I outed myself as some sort of perceived murderer. My silence was suffocating." Amnesty's research also found that, "due to restrictive laws, harsh criminal penalties and a lack of guidance from the Department of Health, medical professionals are fearful of providing even lawful abortions, leading to a 'postcode lottery' for women trying to access abortion advice and services across Northern Ireland. This has resulted in women in certain health trust areas, such as western and rural areas, being unable to access termination of pregnancy services."[14] According to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, between 1970 and 2014, "59,614 women from Northern Ireland have had no other choice but to travel to England to seek abortion care."[15]

Although many of the girls in our Northern Ireland focus group were clear they would not choose an abortion for themselves, they were broadly in favour of the right to access an abortion in Northern Ireland.

"I really do not understand how you can put policy towards something that you cannot understand unless you have been through it. You cannot stop someone's right to choose."
Jane, 24

Sexual health and the right to sex and relationships education

A survey of adolescent health across Europe[16] found that in more than half of countries, boys were more likely to have had full sexual intercourse by the age of 15 than girls. In England and Wales this changes, with 23 per cent of boys and 32 per cent of girls found to have had full sexual activity by the age of 15. British girls were also found to have lower rates of condom use than their European counterparts.[17] The UK still has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe[18] (this matter is explored in greater depth in Section Three), yet sex and relationship education is not compulsory in all UK schools,[19] and what sexual and relationship education there is does not provide girls and boys with the support they need.[20]

An End Violence Against Women (EVAW) coalition survey conducted in 2010 found that 40 per cent of 16 to 18-year-olds said they didn't receive lessons or information on sexual consent, or didn't know whether they did.[21,22] In February 2015, the Parliamentary Education Select Committee recommended the introduction of compulsory personal social health and economic (PSHE) education, but this was rejected in February 2016 by the government. A recent review of the UK's obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child led the Committee to recommend that the government "ensure that meaningful sexual and reproductive health education is part of the mandatory school curriculum for all schools, including academies, special schools and youth detention centres, in all areas of the State party. Such education should provide age-appropriate information on: confidential sexual and reproductive healthcare services; contraceptives; prevention of sexual abuse or exploitation, including sexual bullying; available support in cases of such abuse and exploitation; and sexuality, including that of LGBT children."[24]

In December 2015, Plan International UK hosted a Youth Action Festival to explore the issue of school-related gender-based violence. Attendees aged 13 to 21 emphasised the importance of sex and relationships education as one of the solutions to the problem:

"There should be a compulsory PSHE course for all schools on both sexual safety and social responsibility. E.g. gender inequalities."

Youth Action Festival 2015 attendee

Mental health and access to services

Health has a social dimension: family and peer support is crucial for the maintenance of young people's health. A recent study[25] found that overall life satisfaction is an important part of psychosocial wellbeing. It decreases for both genders as young people get older, but particularly for girls. England and Wales are near the bottom of the European table,[26] with girls in these countries reporting less peer support. Girls from more affluent families report more family and peer support, except in Wales, where the reverse is true.

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

With reference to its general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the UK: "Establish structures for the active and meaningful participation of children and give due weight to their views in designing laws, policies, programmes and services at the local and national level, including in relation to discrimination, violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, harmful practices, alternative care, sexual and reproductive education."

In addition the Committee was concerned that: "Relationships and sexuality education is not mandatory in all schools, its contents and quality varies depending on the school, and LGBT children do not have access to accurate information on their sexuality."[23]

Office for the Children's Commissioner, England: findings

A recent lightning review[27] by the Office of the Children's Commissioner found:

- a slight over-representation of girls being referred to child and adolescent mental-health services (CAMHS);
- a slight over-representation of children and young people who are mixed race being referred to CAMHS;
- a major over-representation of children in care being referred to CAMHS. While fewer than 0.1 per cent of children in England are in care, four per cent of those referred to CAMHS were;
- Over three-quarters of CAMHS did not gather data on whether children referred had a disability, and the majority of the CAMHS that did only gathered data on children and young people with learning disabilities, because they offered specialist provision in this area.

There are considerable gender differences in relation to mental health. More teenage girls than boys present with psychiatric problems, but studies caution that this is because they have better communication skills and are more socialised to talk about their troubles.[28] While girls have a lower rate of suicide than teenage boys, they are much more prone to self-harm.[29] In addition, far more girls have eating disorders.[30]

A lightning review by the Office of the Children's Commissioner found that many children are waiting a long time to be seen by mental-health services and are falling out of the system because they miss appointments and then have to be re-referred. There are also large variations in practice across the country, suggesting that access to CAMHS is a postcode lottery.[31] The report also noted that "of particular concern were some of the 3,000 children and young people we heard about who were referred to child and adolescent mental-health services (CAMHS) with a life-threatening condition (such as suicide, self-harm, psychosis and anorexia nervosa), of whom:

- 14 per cent were not allocated any provision;
- 51 per cent went on a waiting list;
- and some waited over 112 days to receive services."[32]

In the UK, a 2015 report pointed in particular to increasing problems of mental wellbeing amongst girls in the UK. Almost half of girls aged 17 to 21 in the report "have personally needed help with their mental health". Over 80 per cent of those aged 11 to 21 "say adults don't recognise the pressures they are under".[33]

Furthermore, according to the Health and Social Care Information Centre in 2013, what children are treated for in English NHS hospitals is markedly different depending on their age and gender.[34] They found a much higher number of self-harm hospital cases among teenage girls than boys. In the 12 months to June 2013, there were 13,400 hospital cases where 15 to 19-year-old girls received treatment for an external cause of intentional self-harm, compared to 4,000 cases among boys of the same age. There was also a high degree of variation in admission rates for self-harm regionally, with rates in northeast England nearly three times higher than in London (330 compared to 114 per 100,000 population).

Emma, 18, working in her food kiosk on the sea front, North East England

"[Working in this food kiosk] Yeah, it's all right. I think a lot of people… they try and have a go at me and they try and be rude because I'm a girl, I think. Because the boys don't get it in there...

"There was one time, I was underage, but I think I was 17 so I wasn't too young, but we do have girls that work here that are 15 or around 14 sometimes and, erm, there was a big group of males because they were showing the football, and they came out and they were drunk, they were really drunk. But they just tried to order loads of ice cream, like a lot, like a stupid amount. They clearly didn't want the ice cream; they were just being horrible. And afterwards they just threw money on the ground and then when I bent down to pick it up they called me things like 'cum bank', you know, just 'slag', you know, typical things like that. But I remember 'cum bank' specifically. Yeah that was just horrific...

"It's really common. Like, me and my friends discuss the kind of people we get at work and the kinds of comments we get at work almost every day. You know someone has something to say every day about something someone's said. It's not always, you know, sexual, like that kind of thing… they make out that I just don't know how to do anything, that I just don't know how to do my job, and I've been working here for such a long time. Just little things, really patronising things."

Chapter 6 Safety and Violence against Women and Girls

THRIVE

SDG 5: Gender Equality **SDG 8**: Decent Work and Economic Growth
SDG 10: Reducing Inequalities **SDG 16**: Peace and Justice

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is the term given to acts of violence and abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls and is directed at them because of their gender. This includes: rape and sexual crimes, human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), so-called 'honour' violence, and forced marriage. Gender-based violence is directly linked to inequality and therefore preventable, not inevitable.[1]

We know that women and girls experience gender-based violence across the UK and that it cuts across all other identity factors, although there are also culturally specific practices and points at which identity factors intersect. End Violence Against Women and Imkaan's 2016 campaign, for example, focused on racist and sexist harassment of women on the streets.

National statistics tell us that it is girls who are reporting the highest numbers of rapes: 30 per cent of female rape victims are under the age of 16.[2] Approximately 85,000 women and 12,000 men are raped in England and Wales every year, and one in five women aged 16 to 59 has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16.[3] Though sexual violence reporting to the police is on the increase, it is still considered to be vastly under-reported.[4]

Girls and young women aged between 16 and 19, and between 20 and 24, were found to be more likely to be victims of any domestic abuse (13.1 and 10.1 per cent respectively) compared with those aged 45 to 54 or 55 to 59 (7.1 and 5.9 per cent respectively).[5]

Girls aged between 10 and 14 were most likely to be victims of sexual offences other than rape, making up 23.5 per cent of total recorded victims when they only account for 2.6 per cent of the population.[6] In addition, women aged 16 to 19 and those aged 20 to 24 were more likely to be victims of stalking (7.5 and 7.8 per cent respectively) compared with all other age groups.

The 2007 and 2009 Maps of Gaps reports[7,8] mapped for the first time the postcode lottery of essential support services such as Rape Crisis Centres and domestic violence refuges. A third of local authorities across the UK were shown to have no specialised services, leaving many girls and young women without the support they deserve and need to access their rights. This research usefully demonstrated gaps in services for women and targeted budget holders with evidence of those gaps. This model has now been replicated across local areas, demonstrating its usefulness for professionals.[9]

> "Why is it that guys can get away with it? And when girls say something, they are told to just be quiet. It is not right. They should have a voice to be heard as well."

"only steps away"

Safety and harassment on the streets

Many of the girls and young women expressed the importance of the right to be safe, whether at home, in public spaces, at school or online. Across the interviews we heard many examples of how the girls' safety had been compromised and how they had been physically or verbally harassed. Zainab, a 20-year-old of Asian heritage from Scotland, gave an example of a recent experience of sexual harassment:
"Just the other day I was in KFC with one of my best friends. There was these two or three guys and they just kept looking and it was annoying me because I was just trying to have a good time. And I was just walking past and they kind of, like, touched me in the wrong places. And I said to my friend, 'I am not going to start a fight', but I was going to say to them, it's not right. And my friend was, like, 'No, just leave it, cus it is going to start a fight.' Why is it that guys can get away with it? And when girls say something, they are told to just be quiet. It is not right. They should have a voice to be heard as well."

Some of the girls we spoke to also talked about how wearing certain types of clothing made them feel vulnerable in certain situations out and about. Though they often felt under pressure to wear revealing clothes – to be attractive or to fit in with mainstream fashion trends and peer-group culture – they sometimes felt less safe in such clothing. The 2015 Girls' Attitudes report[10] revealed that 51 per cent of girls said that fear of sexual harassment impacted their clothing choices.

"It would be good to wear a miniskirt without worrying what is going to happen." Bea, 13

Zahra, aged 18 from Scotland, spoke about how the combination of being a girl, parental concerns and traditional modest dress challenged her freedom:
"It restricts our freedom. It's annoying; they don't want us to go out. If the guys say, 'Let us out, we're guys', then it's fine. It's really infuriating. It is a really hypocritical kind of thing, it is like they don't trust you and it pushes you over to the edge."

Zainab told us that she felt her freedom to wear what she wanted was curtailed by expectations in sections of her community about suitable dress for Asian girls:
"If you plan to go out with your friends somewhere, you feel nicer if you dress up a bit. But you have to think twice, because a lot of Asian guys they just, like, [make] really bad comments. And they give girls really dirty looks. I'm not trying to be racist here, but white boys don't make comments or come up to you and try and touch you. Today we were in uni at the library. And there were Asian guys and they were annoying us a bit. We come across this on a daily basis. So before going out you think twice about putting a bit of make-up on; you think: 'Should I? Is it worth it?' We have got some guy friends as well and they are very protective of us – they know what it is like just being out there. They always [say]: 'Text us when you get home. Be careful.' I wish we could go out there and be free."

A young woman from Northern Ireland recounted a story of how she and a group of friends had been confused by a quirky plaque for sale on a market stand which said: "Walk sexy like you have three men behind you." It was being sold alongside supposedly motivational and humorous signs, but the young women could not see what was funny about the motto. Walking as if three men were behind you evoked in them fears of street harassment and danger:
"All the girls in the group were literally, like, 'Walk with your keys in your hand, pretend to be calling your mother, drop hints that you're a judo instructor, sprint… And the guy behind the stall heard us talking about it and he was, like, 'It's meant to mean, look, you know, pretty much sexy, stick your butt out and walk real sexy, always walk like you're trying to impress a man'. But we girls were looking at it, going, 'How is this supposed to be cute and inspiring? I feel like I'm in danger with this.'"
Jane, 24

Though the young woman narrated the story humorously, it points to a serious problem and to the prevalence of gender-based street harassment within the UK. Girls and young women from across the

UK taking part in our research spoke of having to be constantly alert to the possibilities of harassment in public spaces.

Researchers Jane Brown and Mandy Winterton refer to what is called "a continuum of violence" and distinguish between the 'routine', that is acts or behaviour which we may take for granted, and the 'extreme', such as incidents of school violence that we hear about in the media.[11] But Dr Carlene Firmin, Senior Research Fellow researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking, argues that extreme incidents are related to those we take for granted and the two should not be too readily separated.[12] Firmin's work demonstrates that lower-level acts of violence can in fact build up to major acts. The cumulative effect of violence and harassment is something that UK law is only just beginning to come to terms with.[13]

School-based sexual violence and harassment

We know that girls are experiencing violence and sexual harassment in schools, but data on the exact nature and extent remains limited The results of a 2010 EVAW and You Gov survey are very concerning, for example:

- Almost a third of 16 to 18-year-old girls said they had been subjected to unwanted sexual touching in UK schools.[15]
- Nearly three-quarters of all 16 to 18-year-olds (boys and girls) said they heard sexual name-calling with terms such as 'slut' or 'slag' used towards girls at school on a daily basis or a few times a week.[16]
- Only two per cent of girls had never heard sexual name-calling towards girls at school.[17]

Six years later, the picture appears no better. It was announced in 2015 that more than 5,500 alleged sex crimes in UK schools had been reported to the police in the previous three years. There were nearly 4,000 alleged physical sexual assaults and more than 600 rapes.[18] The offences ranged from voyeurism and exposure to sexual assaults.[19] At least a fifth of offences were carried out by children, so-called 'peer-on-peer' abuse. The National Police Chiefs' Council lead for child protection, Chief Constable Simon Bailey, fears the problem may be even worse. "I believe these figures are the tip of the iceberg," he said. "It is good news that more victims have the confidence to come forward and report abuse, although – while I cannot prove this – I believe more child abuse is taking place. That includes children being raped on school premises."[20] According to the latest Department for Education statistics, 60 children in England were permanently excluded for sexual misconduct in schools in 2013/14. There were no exclusions in Wales and Scotland. Northern Ireland was unable to provide figures[21] as they are not recorded as a separate category.[22]

Work commissioned by Plan International UK found that one in five women (22 per cent) in the UK reported some experience of sexual touching, groping, flashing, sexual assault or rape while they were in or around school.[23] Gender can impact reporting. Some girls, for example, may accept sexual harassment as part of being female, while boys may feel that telling a teacher about bullying undermines their masculinity.[24]

A girl inspired by Plan International UK's campaign to end violence and harassment of girls in school, Learn Without Fear, told us:

"In my school, there's loads of boys who sexually harass girls. There's a few boys in my class who have done the same thing to me: 'accidently' hitting my bum, scraping my thigh. Teachers are completely oblivious, and we don't say anything because, honestly, we're scared…"

Megan, 14

Additionally in 2015, a study found that 75 per cent of girls and young women reported their lives being affected by anxiety about potential sexual harassment.[25] "Lad culture is a big issue," one of the girls in the report explained. "It is really common. In my school, lads would come up to girls and grab their ass, try and push them into the changing rooms and stuff and then say, 'Don't get upset, it's just banter.'"

A group of 13-year-old girls from another school said their school had made an effort to tackle sexual harassment after a teacher was convicted of the sexual assault of pupils, but had failed to develop a unified approach to addressing sexism within the school. For these girls, a particular problem was the prevalence of 'rape jokes' amongst their male peers. Such behaviour made them feel uncomfortable, but to challenge it was to be called a prude or humourless. The girls were united in their opinion that the school needed to do more to tackle sexist behaviour within peer groups. They felt, in particular, that sex education was given too late and that it should be extended to cover personal relationships more broadly, not just sexual relationships. Discussions of consent should be started much earlier – "Year 10 is just too late."

Similar opinions are found in the wider literature. Girls in the 2013 Girls' Attitudes survey,[26] for example, wanted schools to help them address the current trends of feeling unsafe in school and experiencing inequality and sexist attitudes by providing them with the information they need to negotiate a rapidly changing world as they grow up. The 2014 survey found that three in five (62 per cent) of those aged 11 to 21 think that schools should have to teach gender equality.[27]

"I just wish we could go out there and be free"

Harassment travelling to and from school

Research with young people[28] found that 34 per cent of young people did not feel safe walking to and from school. Twelve per cent stated they had been sexually assaulted.[29] Nineteen per cent of women surveyed by Hollaback, an international movement to end street harassment, said that street harassment had led them to miss school or skip classes.[30]

"On my way home from school with some of my friends, there used to

Learn Without Fear: Defining School-Related Gender-Based Violence

Plan International UK's 2013 report 'Learn Without Fear'[14] defined school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) as acts:

- of sexual, physical or psychological violence
- inflicted on children in and around schools
- that are due to stereotypes and roles or norms attributed to or expected on the basis of sex or gendered identity.

SRGBV also refers to the ways in which experiences of and vulnerabilities to violence may be gendered. In most societies, unequal power relations between adults and children, as well as deeply rooted gender stereotypes and roles, leave girls especially vulnerable to sexual harassment, rape, coercion, exploitation and discrimination from teachers, staff and peers. Boys and girls who do not conform to dominant social, cultural and religious norms, including dominant norms of masculinity or femininity, are also vulnerable to sexual violence and bullying. Both boys and girls are perpetrators of violence in schools, although the form it takes may differ.

In addition, SRGBV can occur in any school area or during travel to or from school. Toilets, empty classrooms and corridors are all potential spaces where violence can occur. Isolation and lack of sufficient oversight and management can exacerbate the problem. Outside school walls, millions of girls and boys are at risk of bullying, rape, unwanted touching, and unprovoked sexual advances in transit to and from school, along walking routes, at bus stops and at taxi stands.

be a man, probably in his late fifties, who used to sit outside his house on a camping chair at the end of the road where our school is. He would call out to girls as they made their way down to the bus station. The comments would range from things about our skirt length to unwelcome 'compliments', but all completely inappropriate. The comments made us feel completely uncomfortable and unsafe when we were only steps away from our school."
Ella, 13, Youth Action Festival 2015 attendee

One focus group of 10-year-olds from urban northern England came from an area where a man had been harassing several local girls had the following to say:
Lucy: ***"There has been this man going round, I think everyone knows this, this 'white van man' who jumps out of the van and jumps all the kids that he can."***
Rosie: ***"I had to stay [playing out only] in my street for quite a lot time."***
Lucy: ***"He [the threatening male stranger] says, 'Do you want to see these bunnies?' and then he takes you inside his van. There's a black car following it as well, though."***

Girls also talked about their clothing. Many girls taking part in our study recounted receiving unwanted attention and catcalling, mostly from adult men, when they were wearing their school uniforms and walking to and from school.
"It's happened when I'm walking to school in my school uniform that men have beeped and shouted as they drove past. For God's sake, I'm wearing trousers and a baggy sweatshirt!"
Esme, 16

Pornography and how it shapes attitudes to women and girls

To examine violence and harassment of girls, we wanted to achieve a greater understanding of how our society shapes young men's attitudes towards girls and women. One of the significant changes for young people today is the increased availability of pornography, particularly online. In 2013 the Office for the Children's Commissioner Rapid Evidence Inquiry team found that use of and children's access to pornography emerged as a key theme.[31] It was mentioned by boys in witness statements after they had been apprehended for the rape of a child. One said that the experience was "like being in a porn movie". Professionals told the inquiry team stories of the extent to which teenagers and younger children routinely access pornography, including extreme and violent images. Sue Berelowitz, the Deputy Children's Commissioner for England, reported finding "compelling evidence that too many boys believe that they have an absolute entitlement to sex at any time, in any place, in any way and with whomever they wish. Equally worryingly, we heard that too often girls feel they have no alternative but to submit to boys' demands, regardless of their own wishes... Explicit sex and violent still and moving images depicting rape, bestiality, the use of pain and humiliation are potentially just a few clicks away... In addition, there is a significant problem of sexual bullying and harassment through children and young people sending personal, intimate images to others; this can have profoundly distressing consequences."[32]

The review team stated that they could therefore confidently conclude that access and exposure to pornography affected children's and young people's sexual beliefs. They explained, for example, that pornography is linked to: unrealistic attitudes about sex; the belief that women are sex objects; sexual uncertainty (the extent to which children and young people are unclear about their sexual beliefs and values); and less-progressive gender-role attitudes (such as male dominance and female submission). They also concluded that children and young people learn from and may change their behaviour due to exposure and access to pornography, and that there was a link between such access and exposure and their engagement in "risky behaviours". For instance, young people who used pornography were more likely to report having had anal sex, sex with multiple partners, and using alcohol and drugs during sex.[33] One study in the review found that exposure to sexualised material was linked to the likelihood of young people engaging in more sexualised behaviour, because they perceived more social pressure to have sex.[34]

In 2016, a further lightning review was conducted.[35] Many of the same conclusions were reached. In addition, they found:

- Just over half of the boys surveyed viewed pornography as 'realistic', with 44 per cent of boys (compared to 29 per cent of girls) reporting that online pornography had given them ideas about the types of sex they wanted to try out.

It also found that most children viewed their first online encounter with pornography as a negative experience, but this view shifted with continued exposure. Boys were more likely than girls to agree that pornography had taught them about the roles that men and women can play in sexual relationships. The report concluded that attention needs to be paid to the messages and expectations that boys take from pornography, and to how girls can be influenced as a result of pornography within potential or actual sexual relationships.

Sexual exploitation

"The sexual exploitation of children and young people has been identified throughout the UK and in all parts of the world... It robs children of their childhood and can have a serious long-term impact on every aspect of their lives, health and education. It damages the lives of families and carers and can lead to family break-ups. Sexually exploited children should not be regarded as criminals and the primary law enforcement response must be directed at perpetrators who groom children for sexual exploitation."[36]

Child sexual exploitation is difficult to define but describes "sexual abuse in the context of exploitative relationships, contexts and situations by a person of any age – including another young person".[37] The recent sexual exploitation cases in Rotherham, Oxfordshire and Manchester, and the well-publicised abuse by celebrities such as Jimmy Saville, have brought these issues to the forefront of public awareness. Yet these known cases could be just the tip of the iceberg.[38]

The horrors perpetrated by child exploitation gangs across the UK have only come to light in recent years. Subsequent reports on both the abuse itself and the reaction of support services have scrutinised the cases and questioned how such abuse could have been missed. The violence, rape, torture and sexual abuse against girls has shocked both professionals and the public. Two strong themes that emerge from the studies are:

- That the abuse predominantly affects girls;
- That the extent of the abuse in the UK is unclear and there may be more cases as yet unknown.

A 2009 government report noted that "estimating the extent of child sexual exploitation nationally is difficult, given the low awareness of the indicators of this abuse among service providers and the varying responses from local areas in terms of assessing their local situation".[39]

The Office of the Children's Commissioners Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups revealed shocking rates of sexual violation of children and young people in these contexts. A total of 2,409 children were known to be victims of child sexual exploitation by gangs and groups.[40] The Inquiry team heard children recount appalling stories about being raped by both older males and peers, often in extremely violent and sadistic circumstances, and in abusive situations that frequently continued for years. The majority of victims were female.[41]

The high-profile media coverage of child sexual exploitation cases has been misleading, suggesting that it is a phenomenon associated with Asian gangs

Sexual exploitation of girls in the UK

The 2013 Rochdale report on child sexual exploitation notes that areas known to have child sexual exploitation cases are: Blackpool; Sheffield; Greater Manchester generally, including Oldham; Blackburn with Darwen; Derby and Kent.[42] To date, there are also known cases in: Rotherham;[43] Oxfordshire; Bristol;[44] Telford;[45] Peterborough;[46] Banbury; Aylesbury;[47] and Keighley.[48]

victimising white girls alone.[49] This ignores the abuse and exploitation of Asian girls[50] and girls from other ethnic minority backgrounds.

It is important to place the cases of sexual exploitation firmly within a rights framework and emphasise the lack of girls' rights and the failure of those duty bearers whose role it was to uphold girls' rights. The 2014 Jay report, which focuses on Rotherham, notes "it is difficult to describe the appalling nature of the abuse that the victims of sexual exploitation in Rotherham have endured over the years".[51] Victims were raped by multiple perpetrators, trafficked to other towns and cities in the north of England, abducted, beaten and intimidated. A child was doused in petrol and threatened with being set alight, children were threatened with guns, children witnessed brutally violent rapes and were threatened that they would be the next victim if they told anyone. Girls as young as 11 were raped by large numbers of male perpetrators, one after the other. One young person told us that 'gang rape' was a usual part of growing up in the area of Rotherham in which she lived."[52]

Violence against women and girls and access to justice

"My personal experience was that the way the police dealt with victims and survivors, with just complete disregard, was basically inhuman. Obviously this isn't everyone, but the fact is, who do you go to when something horrendous has happened to you? You go to your council, you go to your police. And these people, the victims, were constantly denied that."

Sarah Champion MP[53]

On paper, the justice system seems to be accessible for girls, with police on the beat day to day, courts in action and laws to prevent and address violence against women. But if we look beyond the surface, what emerges is a series of examples where girls either feel they cannot trust the police and the wider justice system, or are discriminated against because of their gender and stereotypes.

As discussed above, the Jay report[54] into the sexual exploitation of girls in Rotherham revealed shocking histories of how the girls had been treated. The report findings show that in many cases the girls were known to social services and had been in contact with the police prior to receiving any kind of support for exploitation. It was not their vulnerability that was the focal point of recorded discussions amongst professionals, however, but rather the fact that the girls may have entered the criminal justice system as perpetrators of a crime, or that such girls were not deserving of better treatment. A 2015 inspection report[55] noted that "inspectors wondered if some of this inaction [to protect girls as victims of sexual exploitation] was rooted in the attitudes of some South Yorkshire Police officers to the victims. They did not seem to believe the girls, or their families, or those who reported problems. They did not treat them as victims." One police officer was quoted as saying: "The girls were blamed for a lot of what happened. It's unbelievable and key to why it wasn't taken seriously as an issue."

"There was no awareness," said one of the key partners (professional organisations) taking part in the inspection research. "The view was that they were little slags." Another added: "They didn't understand the situation, and thought that the girls were happy, or complicit in it. The sense was that if there had been any offence it had been by the girls, for luring the men in."[56]

The report continues: "There were numerous occasions in which girls were

Access to justice – when no one believed girls[58]

"Child A was 12 when the risk of sexual exploitation became known. A child protection case conference was held… The CID representative argued against the category of sexual abuse being used because he thought that Child A had been '100 per cent consensual in every incident'. This was overruled."

"The social worker's assessment was that Child C's mother was not able to accept her growing up. In fact, she was displaying what are now known to be classic indicators of child sexual exploitation from the age of 11. By the age of 13, she was at risk from violent perpetrators, associating with other victims of sexual exploitation, misusing drugs, and at high risk."

"Child D was 13 when she was groomed by a violent sexual predator who raped and trafficked her. Her parents, an NGO and Child D herself all understood the seriousness of the abuse, violence and intimidation she suffered. Police and children's social care were ineffective and seemed to blame the child. An initial assessment accurately described the risks to Child D but appeared to blame her for 'placing herself at risk of sexual exploitation and danger'."

not believed. They were threatened with wasting police time, they were told they had consented to sex, and, one occasion, they were arrested at the scene of a crime, rather than the perpetrators."[57] The Independent Police Complaints Commission is investigating 150 police cases (55 of which involve South Yorkshire Police) and 11 police forces.[59]

So why were the girls not listened to? It appears from case studies and quotes from professionals that stereotypes based on age, gender, class and location led to presumptions about what girls should and should not do and how they should behave. These presumptions and prejudices then played a significant role in the decisions that were made about the support the girls should receive.

More generally, there are ongoing issues with reporting of sexual offences. ONS data[60] on reporting sexual assault found that 33 per cent of those who had experienced a serious sexual assault since the age of 16 had not told anyone about their most recent experience. Of those who had reported it, 58 per cent had told someone they knew personally and 28 per cent had told someone in an official position. Only one in six (17 per cent) had told the police. Despite the low level of reporting to the police, in cases where the police did come to know about an incident of serious sexual assault, the majority of victims (64 per cent) said they found the police to be very or fairly helpful, with 36 per cent saying they found the police not very helpful or not at all helpful. Around two-fifths (41 per cent) of those who had told someone but hadn't told the police said it was because they were embarrassed. About a third (30 per cent) said they didn't want more humiliation, and around a quarter (26 per cent) didn't think the police could help. Of those who didn't tell anyone at all, 42 per cent said it was because they were too embarrassed.[61]

Nor can we ignore that there are significant tensions between some ethnic minority communities and the police, and the relationship between young people and the police is often one of mistrust and tension.[62] Activities such as Stop and Search, for example, have been cited as key sources of the increased alienation between young black and ethnic minority people and the police. Though Stop and Search predominantly affects young men, the associated tension in the community may well impact girls. They may wonder whether they will be treated without prejudice if they need to seek justice and protection from the system, and they may not feel safe to seek it out. Critically, children from black and ethnic minority communities are often under-identified as victims,[63] while black and ethnic minority individuals are often over-identified as perpetrators.[64]

> 33 per cent of those who had experienced a serious sexual assault since the age of 16 had not told anyone about their most recent experience.

Harmful traditional practices

Harmful traditional practices violate girls' and women's human rights and reflect deep-rooted inequalities between men and women. They include Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), so-called 'honour'-based violence (HBV), breast ironing, acid attacks and forced marriage. They are global problems occurring in many countries and cultures around the world today and are addressed in rights frameworks and the SDGs.

Our focus is on the practices known to affect girls in the UK; these global problems are also local issues and need both global and local policy approaches to end them. Sometimes, they do not actually happen in the UK: the girls are taken out of the country in order for them to be carried out elsewhere. It is therefore important for us to view girls in the context of their family, wider community and cultural beliefs, including outside the UK.

A **Forced Marriage** is defined as "a marriage conducted where consent of the bride, groom or both has been obtained through emotional pressure or physical abuse. Forced marriages are different from arranged marriages. In an arranged marriage, both the bride and groom consent to marry the person suggested to them by their families; in a forced marriage consent is missing."[65] In 2015, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) gave advice or support relating to a possible forced marriage in 1,220 cases.[66] Of these, 329 (27 per cent) involved victims below the age of 18 and 427 (35 per cent) involved victims aged 18 to 25. Eighty per cent involved female victims.[67] In cases of forced marriage, victims may suffer mental and physical abuse, including rape, unlawful imprisonment; feelings of isolation, shame and humiliation; a loss of educational and employment opportunities; and removal from family. Many victims self-harm.[68]

The World Health Organisation defines **FGM** as "all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons."[69] Procedures can cause severe bleeding and problems with urinating, potentially leading to cysts, infections and complications in childbirth. FGM is overwhelmingly practised on girls between infancy and the age of 15. There are an estimated 137,000 women and girls with FGM, having been born in countries where FGM is practised, permanently resident in England and Wales in 2011.[70]

So called **'honour'-based violence** (HBV) constitutes "any form of violence perpetrated against females within the framework of patriarchal family structures, communities, and/or societies, where the main justification for the perpetration of violence is the protection of a social construction of honour as a value system, norm or tradition".[71] Approximately 12 honour killings are recorded in the UK each year, though it is likely that this is just a fraction of the true number.[72]

Breast ironing is a form of mutilation where a girl's breasts are beaten or burned to stop them developing. The practice is performed at the onset of puberty, to prevent the risk of sexual abuse. Around 1,000 girls in the UK are said to be at risk.[73]

Acid attacks involve the throwing of acid over a person's head or body in order to cause disfigurement, scarring and blinding. It is a crime that disproportionately affects women and girls across the world.[74] Incidents of acid attacks have nearly doubled in the UK in the past 10 years,although reports show that, contrary to the worldwide trend, the majority of victims in the UK are men.[75]

Katy, 20, London

"I think being a woman means being someone who is really strong, because women have to deal with so much shit… When I dated straight men there was this thing of authority… It was kind of that thing of ownership over my body. It's not something you realise then, but it's things as simple as, 'Oh, can you next time shave down there… I'm the man and you're the woman.' That distinction. I think it can be really problematic. Especially for young girls, it can be really dangerous because boys, like, start realising their authority when they're really young so they can treat you however they want.

"I don't feel like I wake up every day feeling like a woman. Some days I just don't want to be any gender and sometimes I'm, like, 'I'm a woman today'… I just really hated femininity and I hated being feminine. I just wanted to get away from it as much as I could because I thought that's what held us back and… that's what caused oppression. I didn't want to be feminine and I cut off all my hair and I didn't want to dress in a feminine way. It was just really hard. I thought that if I just stopped being feminine, I would be seen stronger…

"If you're a woman you're meant to look a certain way and have a certain body and I don't fit into that and I don't want to fit into that… It's such a taboo, talking about the female body… If it wasn't for having that privilege of being able to use the internet and read and watch things, I wouldn't have probably become a feminist or being queer…"

Chapter 7 Identity discrimination: who girls are and what happens to them

Through Plan International UK's Youth Advisory Panel and youth engagement work, girls have told us that they are concerned about identity-based discrimination. Girls are not just their gender. Their worlds are formed by the many differing aspects of their identity, and their experiences of, or lack of, rights are affected by myriad identity factors. Yet there is very little data available on the intersection of gender and other forms of discrimination. In 2015, the Equality and Human Rights Commission reported equality challenges including "a rising incidence of Islamophobic and anti-Semitic hate crime". In addition, "bias/hostility continued to be experienced by disabled people, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, transgender people and immigrants".[1]

The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Rashida Manjoo, has recently recognised that "violence against women remains a pervasive challenge throughout the United Kingdom" and expressed her concern about how "the current austerity measures are having a disproportionate impact, not only in the specific provision of violence against women services, but more generally, on other cross-cutting areas affecting women, such as poverty and unemployment, which are contributory factors to violence against women and girls". She further recognises that "women from black and minority ethnic communities, women belonging to the LGBTI community, and women with disabilities, are further affected by these cutbacks. These women are, for many reasons, often linked to entrenched discriminatory practices in the political, social and economic spheres, and are more likely to depend on benefits and on support from an increasingly under-resourced non-profit sector."[2]

In our interviews with key professionals, there was a recurring concern that rights should be viewed and understood holistically and that the intersections of identities and differing needs and experiences of girls should be taken into account:

"We need to think about global rights for girls. I don't mean like a world view, but rather rights for all girls in the UK. But then we need to make sure we aren't doing a 'one size fits all'. Sometimes, one box or one solution isn't enough, because you may need more support depending on all the different barriers you face. So you could be from an ethnic minority and a woman or you could be a lesbian…"

Key Professional, statutory sector, northern England

Racism and religious discrimination

The police recorded 52,528 hate crimes in 2014/15, an increase of 18 per cent from the previous year; 42,930 (82 per cent) of them were race hate crimes.[3] Black and minority ethnic women and girls experience multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination related to ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, class and disability.[4] For example, many black women have to deal with racism as part of their sexual harassment.[5] One woman featured in the film 'I'd just like to be free' by the EVAW Coalition talks about "being called a 'black whore' because you wouldn't give your number away to some guy in a club who's harassing you the entire

time… My experiences are different as a black woman than they are for my white friends… I should be 'up for it'. Or I am 'fair game' or I shouldn't care if my body is touched in a certain way." Another woman says that if she ignores the harassment of men, "that's when it turns racial. That's when it might be, 'You black this, you black that. How dare you ignore me?"[6]

Religious discrimination and attacks takes many forms, we have detailed here just some of the forms it takes that girls have told us about. It is worth noting that during 2015/16 the Police Service of Northern Ireland recorded 1,352 incidents where there was a sectarian motivation, of these, 913 contained one or more recorded crimes (1,001 recorded crimes in total).[7]

Islamophobia

Islamophobic crime is defined as any offence targeted at those known to be Muslims. Crimes range from cyber-bullying to extreme violence. MAMA, an organisation monitoring these attacks, claims that around 60 per cent of Islamophobic attacks affect women.[8] Those at street level tend to target women wearing the hijab (headscarf) and in particular the face veil. Incidents are probably under-reported because female victims feel reporting them will only exacerbate the situation. Metropolitan Police statistics show that hate crimes against Muslims in London rose by 70 per cent in 2014/15.[9]

The Metropolitan Police do not give a gender breakdown, but they acknowledge that Muslim women are more likely to be targeted. In reporting current rates, they maintain that the rise in numbers relates in part to better methods of recording incidents.[10] In a newspaper article and in a speech available on YouTube, 15-year-old Isra Mohammed talks about her experiences of Islamophobia: "I had people come to me in school this week and last week, telling me that because I am a Muslim, I am a terrorist. This is something I go through every day of my life… I have a seven-year-old sister. She came home from school crying last Monday. When I asked why, she said, 'People in school were blaming me for the Paris attacks.' She said, 'I don't want to go back'… I was in Tesco's just last week, I walked in, the guy was like, 'These are the people we want out of our country. These are people you don't want around.'"[11]

Anti-Semitism

In 2015, the Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 924 anti-Semitic incidents in the UK, the third-highest annual total CST has ever recorded.[12] Three-quarters of incidents took place in Greater London and Greater Manchester, where the UK's two largest Jewish communities are based. Eighty-five incidents targeted Jewish schools, schoolchildren or teachers.[13] Fifty-five per cent of the reported incidents had the gender of the victim recorded, with female victims accounting for 26 per cent of incidents and groups of males and females together nine per cent.[14]

Young women from Gypsy, Irish Traveller, New Traveller and Roma communities

Travellers are not a homogenous group; they include fairground people, New Travellers, Roma and many others. They have often been overlooked and remain invisible in much policy and data collection. Where research on Gypsy and Traveller girls exists, it highlights an overwhelming story of hostility and racism, as 18-year-old Kiela told researchers: "If I feel comfortable speaking to you and I feel like you won't mind and it won't change our friendship, I will be open about who I am. But if I think that you're going to be a bit prejudiced as soon as you know I'm a Gypsy, I'll tend just to shy back a bit."[15]

Girls and young women often experience racism in the form of verbal abuse and attacks in the media. This contributes to lower self-esteem and makes them less willing to take part in education or leisure activities with settled communities.[16] In a 2009 review of the lives of young Gypsy and Traveller people, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission's "strongest and most pervasive finding was in relation to the racism experienced by young people in school, in the street, in shops and on sites, especially unauthorised sites".[17] The types of racism included violent threats and attacks. Reports found that racism was experienced not just from the public but from people in authority, including the police.[18]

Young people were also found to be excluded from policy areas and not to have their voices heard. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission concluded that "these experiences constitute widespread discrimination and a denial of human rights".[19]

Participation in secondary education remains extremely low for girls and boys from these communities. Discrimination and abusive behaviour on the part of school staff and other students are frequently cited as reasons for children and young people leaving education at an early age.[20]

Sarah, a 16-year-old Traveller, told researchers in 2006: "We're not treated fairly, really… They just think you don't understand nothing." Jo, a 25-year-old Gypsy, added: "If we walk into a room, they're better than us… It don't matter if they're our friends, they're better than us… Everybody's better than us, and that's the feeling we get… They're that much higher than us, and that makes us feel very uncomfortable. They just look at you and think 'Gypsy equals dirty'."[21]

Traditionally, there is a strong gender divide in Gypsy and Traveller culture. Most girls are taught from a young age that their role is to contribute to everyone's wellbeing. They are responsible for everything domestic, such as keeping the home spotlessly clean and looking after children.[22] This may lead to resistance from girls or their families to training and work opportunities if they leave education.[23]

Cultural taboos can also make it hard to discuss the situation at home. If young women witness or experience domestic violence, for example, they may not access support services because they fear racism, "even from those who should be supporting them".[24]

Homophobia, invisibility and social pressures to be heterosexual

In 2014/15 there were 5,597 hate crimes recorded against gay men and lesbians in England and Wales, a rise of 22 per cent on the previous 12 months.[25] The violence and harassment experienced by girls can be gendered; for example, being threatened with rape. Such gendered abuse has led Jane Czyzselska to coin the phrase 'Lesbophobia', which she says is "homophobia with a side-order of sexism."[26] A 19-year-old student, Lily, reported in 2012:[27] "I've been threatened with rape by two boys, when my friends and I were walking home. They were both sentenced in court and ordered to pay my friends and me compensation."

Despite great strides having been made in legal equality, including the passing of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act on 17 July 2013, the lived experiences of girls and young women reveal ongoing pressures. One of these is the pressure to look and act 'heterosexual'. Some of the girls we spoke to resisted the pressure to look, behave and dress in stereotypically female and heterosexual ways, but this was often difficult and met with opposition, even hostility, from peer groups and family members.

In our research, Jackie, aged 17, from northern England, who identifies as gay, explains how she comes under pressure from her family to dress in a 'girlie' way, particularly on certain social occasions: ***"Sexuality was a big struggle for me. It always has been. When I was in primary school, there was always that push [to be heterosexual]. I still get asked now, 'Do you have a boyfriend?' It's never, 'Do you have a partner?' Everything is heterosexual; there is no mix. As a young girl in primary school I knew I wasn't attracted to boys. But I still dated boys because I thought that's what I was meant to do. That's what everyone else was doing. It was never said it's okay not to be a certain thing."***

Jackie felt that she was not being taken seriously because she is gay: ***"There needs to be a hell of a lot more acceptance. It's not just in school; it's***

parents, government, families. When I came out to my parents, they turned round and said: 'Come back when you're old enough, when you're 18." It was a hard thing for me to do and I had put years and years of thought into [coming out]. I bet when I'm 18 they'll say, 'Come back when you're 21.' I've brought people [girlfriends] home and they've treated them like my friend, like we're not in a relationship. But when my little sister brings a boy home, it's completely different."

Young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or intersex (LGBTQI) or encounter discrimination and homophobic verbal and physical bullying in educational settings. Studies from 2001[28] and 2014[29] demonstrate that in some ways little has changed, with schools still being unsafe environments for LGBTQI pupils. This presents real challenges to their emotional and physical wellbeing and can lead to ill-health or suicide.[30]

In the past two decades, schools have had a growing awareness of LGBTQI pupils but have tended to treat them as problematic and as victims in need of support. While LGBTQI children still need to be encouraged to share experiences of bullying and to talk about incidents that have occurred, a school-wide structural change of approach, which sees LGBTQI identities as normal, is also necessary.[31]

Gay rights campaigning group Stonewall conducted research with lesbian, gay and bisexual young people about their experiences of discrimination in schools.[32] Their findings revealed that 96 per cent of gay pupils hear homophobic remarks such as 'poof' or 'lezza' used in school.[33] Almost all (99 per cent) hear phrases such as 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' in school.[34] Only half of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils report that their schools say homophobic bullying is wrong; even fewer do so in faith schools (37 per cent).[35] Stonewall found that 90 per cent or more of students refer to anything broken, defective or unwanted as 'gay' and a common insult is to call someone else 'queer', 'gay' or a 'faggot'. The report quoted 15-year-old Sophie, who attends a private secondary school: "It's not what they say to me individually that gets at me, it's the constant stream of anti-gay remarks that people don't even know they make. I feel awful all the time. It eats away inside you and sometimes knowing what they'd do to me if they knew makes me lose the ability to breathe."[36]

The report found that homophobic bullying was experienced by 66 per cent of gay pupils in all-boys schools and 45 per cent in all-girls schools.[37] Stonewall found that three per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils experience sexual assault.[38] Almost 10 per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people who experience bullying have had to change schools because of it, and a further 41 per cent have considered it.[39] One in three gay pupils who experience homophobic bullying change their plans for future education because of it.[40] "In classes, the bullying was so severe my notes were often ruined," 16-year-old Jody told the researchers. "It was impossible to concentrate on the lesson as I was being physically attacked. I was just too scared to attend lessons. My work suffered. The bullying meant I had to change schools in the middle of my GCSEs. My grades fell. I wanted to be a marine biologist, but my science grades were no longer high enough."[41]

Such stories illustrate that the impact of bullying reaches well beyond the classroom and can have a long lasting and damaging effect on girls' lives.

Transgender rights

The Women and Equalities Committee recently published a report on transgender equality.[42] It highlighted a number of serious concerns about the lack of rights for transgender children and about

Being transgender at school

At school, gender-variant children face challenges with matters such as:

- recording a change of name and gender;
- bullying;
- inclusion in sport; and
- access to toilets.[43]

Sophia, age 19

"[Sex and Relationships education at school was] terrible. In my school, it essentially did not exist. We had one lesson where we put condoms on dildos. But that was it. And we were 12. Something like that needs to be repeated later on, because 12 year olds are not generally going to be receptive to that... And it's simply not enough. It's all so basic. There is no education on different ways of having sex, there's nothing about lesbian sex. Even now, I still get asked by my intelligent and fairly clued-up friends, 'How do you have sex though?' ...and fair to them, I didn't even know how to have sex until it actually happened. There's nothing about contraception aside from condoms. There's nothing about dental dams! I've been a sexually active lesbian for two years, and I only discovered this very recently!... I learned nothing.

"I think social media IS my life. Maybe that's an exaggeration now, but only now – from 13 to 18 it literally was. I spent most of my time on Tumblr and Twitter, and it was how I formed most of my friendships. Twitter is still a place that I make friends... and is a huge source of connection, which is particularly important to me at the moment, as my family moved away from London... and I've felt quite isolated. It's also probably where I learn the most these days... I feel like the internet is the reason that I'm clued up on feminist issues and politics and stuff like that.

"Without [the internet and social media], I wouldn't be as comfortably out as I am, I wouldn't have words for myself beyond lesbian, I wouldn't feel as connected to my community as I do. And it helps me to keep learning about myself, every day."

transphobic attacks. It also highlighted the traumatic effect these can have on mental health, and the fact that about half of young transgender people have attempted suicide.

As witnesses to the Committee reported, gender is everywhere in school, from toilets to uniforms.[44] Evidence from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) stated that "91 per cent of trans boys and 66 per cent of trans girls experience harassment or bullying at school, leading to depression, isolation and a desire to leave education as early as possible… This poor treatment at school has a knock-on effect on their mental health, attendance and ability to learn."[45] The report clarifies that, under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful for schools to treat pupils less favourably on grounds of gender reassignment. However, the EHRC argues that the Act does not provide protection from harassment related to gender reassignment for students in schools, unlike most other protected characteristics.[46]

Disability discrimination

In 2012/13, the police recorded 1,841 disability hate crimes, compared with 1,757 offences the previous year – a five per cent increase.[47] A larger proportion of young disabled people in England report being victims of all types of bullying, compared with other young people.[48]

Women and girls with disabilities are likely to experience 'double discrimination': they face not only gender-based violence and abuse but also the marginalisation, discrimination and invisibility experienced by many disabled people.[49]

Disability-based bullying

Incidents of bullying include:

- verbal abuse (75 per cent of victims), such as name calling;
- harassment (20 per cent);
- physical attacks such as hitting, punching, pushing or spitting (14 per cent);
- abuse online through social-media platforms like Facebook and Twitter (28 per cent).[50]

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's research found that disabled people may be targeted because of 'intersectional' aspects of their identity, including age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or sexual identity, as well as disability. It suggested that women and younger people may be more at risk of experiencing harassment and that those with learning disabilities and/or mental-health issues are particularly at risk and suffer higher levels of actual victimisation.[51] The Commission also heard from disabled men and women who described incidents of sexual harassment, including unwanted touching, strangers' knees inserted between their legs while on public transport, being asked if "disabled people like sex", and being followed. At its worst, this harassment included rape and sexual assault.[52]

Disabled women are between two and four times more likely to experience serious sexual assault than either disabled men or non-disabled women, according to Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance.[53] The prevalence of rape is reported as being significantly higher for disabled women than non-disabled women.[54]

In 2014, a literature review was conducted of the vulnerability of disabled children to abuse.[55] One retrospective study from Norway that was reviewed by this work demonstrated the high level of risk to deaf children, and found that 45.8 per cent of deaf girls and 42.4 per cent of deaf boys had been exposed to unwanted sexual experiences. Deaf girls experienced childhood sexual abuse with physical contact more than twice as often as hearing girls, and deaf boys more than three times as often as hearing boys.[56]

"As a young disabled woman, for a long time I didn't think my gender impacted on my life experience, because the discrimination I faced both as a young person and as a disabled person was very obvious. However, what I've come to realise is that my identity as a whole, including my gender, causes me a great deal of inequality. For example, one of my schools deliberately removed me from sex education classes to address the additional requirements I needed because of my disability. When questioned about this decision I was told it [sex education] wasn't important for me."

Zara Todd, campaigner and Inclusion London Chair, interviewed by Human Rights Europe[57]

Poverty

Poverty can be defined as "when a person's resources (mainly material resources) are insufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)".[58] It involves not only monetary resources, but also how people are treated. To be poor is often to be excluded, leading to feelings of powerlessness. It is difficult to estimate exactly how many girls and young women are living in poverty, because the Family Resources Survey only has data on households, rather than individuals.[59] Within households, it is not easy to know what share of the income accrues to women and girls. There is evidence to suggest that they often do not get their rightful share or, if they do, they deny themselves in order to benefit others in the household.

In 2007, it was estimated that a million young women aged between 16 and 30 were living in poverty; that is, living in households with incomes below 60 per cent of the average household.[60] The rate of poverty among ethnic minority women is much higher than for white women – an estimated 40 per cent of ethnic minority women suffer hardship. It is especially high for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, almost two-thirds of whom live in poverty.[61] One study looking at multiple discrimination confirmed these findings, and also found high rates for Black African women and relatively high rates for Caribbean and Indian women.[62] Women with disabilities also face difficulties in finding work, as do mothers of disabled children: only 16 per cent are in paid work compared to 61 per cent of mothers generally.[63]

Young women are affected by poverty in a particular way, with the risks faced by young mothers significantly heightened. The reasons for this are varied:[64]

- Many are single parents who have limited access to childcare[65] and/or cannot afford it and therefore cannot work;
- They lack formal qualifications. Only 16 per cent of women aged 16 to 24 without qualifications are in full-time employment, compared with 45 per cent of young men without qualifications;
- They can only work part-time because of childcare commitments;
- They are in low-paid jobs with little chance of progression, and suffer from the gender pay gap. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in particular experience a very large pay gap;
- Accessing training can be difficult when balancing it with caring responsibilities. The lowest-paid work does not necessarily offer girls and young women in-job training and can leave them unable to progress;
- Support for part-time study and benefits do not take into account the way young women who have children, or experience very disrupted lives, move through education, and so they miss out.

As documented in Chapter 1, poverty has a direct impact on educational career choices. Research conducted between 2013 and 2015 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Children's Society, UNICEF and the Child Poverty Action Group have all documented a series of concerns about the links between austerity cuts in the years since 2009 and children's experiences of education and play.[66] Girls and poverty are explored in greater depth in Section Three of this report.

The rights of Looked After Children

Children are looked after by the state for a range of reasons, from abuse and neglect through to the need to offer parents or children a short break because of severe disability. Although being 'looked after' is fulfilment of a child's rights to protection from violence[67] and is specifically mentioned in Article 20 of the Child Rights

Convention (children are "entitled to special protection and assistance"),[68] the outcome is not always a happy one, and is generally worse than for children of the same age who are not in state care.

The data from England shows that more boys than girls are in state care (55 per cent compared with 45 per cent). The majority of the children are white (77 per cent), with 'mixed' groups and 'black or black British' making up approximately nine and seven per cent respectively compared to around five per cent of the UK child population as a whole.[69]

Most of the children (75 per cent in 2015) are placed with foster carers. The rest are cared for in secure units, children's homes, residential schools and hostels, or they are living at home, with their parents, under the supervision of social services. In 2014, 5,220 children were living in children's homes. One in four of these children were living in a children's home that was only deemed 'adequate' by regulator Ofsted; 146 local authorities (97 per cent) had placed children in one of the homes labelled adequate or worse.[70]

In England, children of all ages in state care attain lower school grades than the national average. Only 14 per cent achieved five GCSE Grades A* to C, including Mathematics and English, compared with 55 per cent nationally.[71]

Girls and the criminal justice system in the UK

Once inside the criminal justice system, girls' access to their full rights can be limited and it is clear that the most vulnerable girls are the ones that are getting drawn deepest into the system. Children who find themselves in conflict with the law must, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, be treated as children first and foremost, and every attempt must be made to keep them out of the criminal justice system. The minimum age of criminal responsibility remains eight years in Scotland and 10 years for the rest of the UK. This has been repeatedly criticised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child amongst others.[72]

In the criminal justice system, many children feel that they are not listened to.[73] Once inside the system, girls can acquire criminal records, which often makes it hard for them to find work afterwards.

Access to education and health services, including mental-health services, is insufficient for children in custody.[74] In addition, the UN Committee on Torture continues to raise concerns about the treatment of children in Young Offender Institutions, especially the continued use of restraint techniques that inflict deliberate pain.[75]

Girls frequently come into the penal system because they suffer from neglect, abuse and/or poverty.[76]

In England and Wales, a total of 147,506 girls under the age of 21 were arrested in 2014/15 for notifiable offences ranging from violence against a person to drug offences. Of these, eight were girls under the age of 10; 15,659 were aged 10 to 17, and 13,455 were aged 18 to 20. This compares to a total of 166,784 arrests of boys under 21 in the same period.[77]

In 2011, girls in England and Wales committed 22 per cent of youth crimes, most of which were minor offences. The number of girls arrested each year has been falling.[78] Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that girls are being criminalised for behaviours which a decade ago would have been ignored.[79] Evidence to the 2012 APPG on Women in the Penal System stated "there is frequently an over-punitive response to girls offending, rather than a supportive response. Girls tend to be treated more severely than boys by the youth justice system…"[80]

Because of their relatively low number, the distinct needs of girls in the youth justice system sometimes get overlooked in a system primarily designed to deal with offending by boys.[81,82]

A key factor in why entry into the criminal justice system matters is that the most disadvantaged girls and boys are over-represented. Thirty-three per cent of boys and 61 per cent of girls in custody are looked-after children, despite less than one per cent of all children in England being in care.[83] Eighty-nine percent of young women in youth offending institutions have been excluded from school, with more than a third being younger than 14 when they were last in school.[84]

The UN Committee on Children noted that the number of children in custody remains high, with disproportionate representation of ethnic minority children, children in care, and children with psycho-social disabilities.[85] An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation,[86] which examined the caseloads of six Youth Offending Teams working with girls in the criminal justice system, noted that many girls who are offending are themselves vulnerable individuals. Of particular concern to the Inspectorate were the interconnections of girl offenders and sexual exploitation:

"In the light of recent revelations about the extent of child sexual exploitation, a particular concern for us is that many of the girls we came across during this inspection were vulnerable to exploitation. Many had experienced situations… which they were struggling to understand and come to terms with. Though entitled to all the rights and protection a child should receive, in too many cases this protection was absent, and staff were often ill-prepared to deal with, or unaware of, the problem of actual or potential sexual exploitation. There was a complex interplay between offending and sexual exploitation: some girls were more vulnerable to exploitation because of their offending (their offending behaviour put them into situations where they were more likely to be sexually exploited); others were being sexually exploited, which often acted as a trigger for offending behaviour."[87]

The rate of self-harm incidents per 100 young people in custody was markedly higher for girls, at about 25 in 2012 and 2013, 15 during 2014 and over 40 in 2015 compared with between four and seven per 100 boys during the same period.[88]

In Summary

By combining the voices of 103 girls from focus groups with the opinions of key professionals and a review of the extensive literature, we have scratched beneath the surface of girls' rights in the UK. What we can see is that although support services exist and function well on paper, in girls' lived experiences there are significant gaps in their rights. These gaps range from societal to institutional practices that create systems in which girls' rights are overlooked or made invisible. Whether through one-to-one, local community or online interactions where girls face prejudice and stereotypes, the girls' own aspirations, body image and sense of self-worth are undermined. Also emerging clearly is the message that digital technology now dominates girls' lives. Parents, support services, the law and human rights frameworks are struggling to keep up and to help girls have a digital voice and be safe. Girls' desire to feel safe and to feel they can live their lives without judgement or harassment were prominent in many conversations we had, as was the importance of identity and how it intersects across all gender issues. A further conversation theme was that of the importance of where the girls lived and what their local area offered. We explore this in greater depth in Section Three.

Lexian, 19, London

"On my basketball team… there's only boys there. Like, I'm the only girl and they still just don't get it in their head we can do as much as you can… most of them say, 'She can't do it because she's a girl'…

"In the basketball community when you're a girl it's kind of harder, because the boys think you're weak and you're slow because you don't have [as] much strength as them so sometimes my coach would be, like, 'You guys, you got to understand that Lexian's not as strong as you, so you got to take some responsibility and not give her so much things to do, because she's weaker.' I'm a girl. And I'm thinking, umm, 'Because I'm a girl doesn't mean that I'm actually that weak.' You can give me a little credit, 'cause I'm doing the same thing as them but they make it seem like I'm fragile because I'm a girl…

"I just keep on playing as best as I can and attend training and become more healthier and fitter so I can't keep up, but show them that even though I'm younger and a girl, I can still flip you out of your chair…"

WHY GEOGRAPHY AND PLACE MATTER FOR GIRLS' RIGHTS

Stella, 14, Yorkshire

"I have a lot more patience, than [my brother], with animals… My dad's really bad with needles, so usually me and my brother have to help give injections to poorly animals. I think everybody is involved, really, you all help where you can. Say, if someone was struggling, you wouldn't wait for a boy or a man to go, you would go."

Why geography and place matter when it comes to girls' rights

"A good place to live is a place where you have freedom and you can go to work or school, or stay at home, if you want, and you can marry who you want to marry."
Isabel, 12

We began this report by asking how well the UK – a relatively rich country – is measuring up against the highest levels of international rights frameworks and the new Sustainable Development Goals. We then heard what girls themselves have to say, and looked at other reports on issues affecting girls. As seen in Section Two, girls' experiences vary due to a wide variety of factors, including age, ethnicity and sexual orientation. In this section, we explore the impact of geographical differences at a local level, and ask: 'Do girls experience equality of rights and quality of life in different parts of the UK?'

The UK is not a homogenous place: it is made up of different countries, devolved governments and administrations, local authorities, police force areas and more. The local picture can look very different from the national. In 2008, the World Health Organisation (WHO) held up the UK as a symbol of geographical inequality: "A child born in a Glasgow, Scotland, suburb can expect a life 28 years shorter than another living only 13 kilometres away," it reported.[1,2]

This report is about girls from across the UK. To understand what it means to grow up as a girl here, it is necessary to explore how geography and place matter. Others have discussed how local context affects the lived experiences of those who occupy that space, or how geography and place may also play a role in gender identity.[3] Therefore, in order to understand what growing up as a girl means in contextually specific terms, we need to look at what is happening in the places where girls and young women live. Our study is the first attempt to map girls' rights at local authority level in the UK using comparable datasets.

"Women of all classes face barriers. Rather than thinking 'are the people different?', it is really that horizons and opportunities are different. But, actually, people are the same and want the same types of things. It's just that the culture, environment and context have an impact on people's horizons."
Key Professional, Chief Executive, Third Sector

Geography and place matter: what others have found

In the UK there have been no nationwide reports that seek to map what is happening to girls across the UK by local area. There have been some attempts to create analysis on violence against women, with the best known being the 'Map of Gaps' 2007[4] and 2009.[5] These were scoping exercises of violence against women and girls (VAWG) services across the UK. The report revealed that women in the UK encounter a postcode lottery in their access to basic support services, showing that geography and place are significant. The authors stated that the study "provides incontrovertible evidence that access to support depends on where you live, and that some regions of the UK, and thus the women who live there, are especially poorly served. Conversely, there are good stories to tell, locations where coverage is more equitable and/or encompasses many forms of

Louri, 12, with Richard (her father and football coach), South Wales

Louri: ***"I was quite interested [in football] from a young age; then the club opened and my dad became the coach, so I was properly involved for a long time. It's [still] more of a man's sport: the men football players get more attention, people want to see them more, because girls' football isn't out in the world as much as men's. [Girls] are as capable [as boys at football]. It shouldn't make a difference really if it's girls or boys.***

"We recently played against Cardiff. They [had beaten] us by a lot last time. But we beat them 1-0 at a tournament, so we were quite impressed because they are, like, [at the] top. We worked as a team, passing and communicating.

"[In my local area] there is a lot of sport [facilities] around. It is quite a safe area. Sometimes we take public transport. It's fine taking public transport, I always feel safe.

"[When I am older] I want to stay [in this town], because I like all the people here and it's a friendly environment."

Richard: ***"I value the female game just as much as the male game. It's really important that we (pardon the pun) create a level playing field. There is still a way to go, but we are getting there.***

"The [local men's team]'s home kit is sky blue; our home kit is sky blue. Their away kit is black, so we mirror the men by having a black kit as well. It doesn't matter if it's male or female, as far as I'm concerned it's one club and all players should be treated the same."

violence. Whilst relatively rare, such areas demonstrate that it is possible to build integrated and comprehensive service provision."[6]

The study drew on data from primary and secondary sources[7] and a database was then compiled of VAWG services in the UK by map and location. When the report was updated in 2009, "specialised services were still absent in over a quarter of local authorities".[8]

Another mapping exercise for women, called 'What about women in London?',[9] looks at the state of women's (in)equality in the capital across a range of indicators, including: economic equality; access to services; experience of violence; choices around family and work life; and women's representation.

Methodology note: indicators

To look at the impact of place, we wanted to compare indicators of girls' rights and quality of life at a local level. A quantitative analysis of government, policy and statistical sources relating to girls' rights and quality of life was carried out at local/unitary authority level[10] to gather the statistical data. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all devolved nations/territories, which produce and distribute their own statistical data in various and differing formats. (See Appendix 1 for more details on methodology.)[11] The depth of data we required for a robust statistical analysis at a UK-wide level – for example, data disaggregated by gender, age and local or unitary authority – was frequently unavailable, or not available in comparable formats (See Appendix 2). As a result, Scotland and Northern Ireland had to be precluded from our data tables and are reviewed separately.

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission report

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission 2016 report[12] found that there are massive differences between different parts of the country in the chances that poorer girls and boys have of doing well in life. Their key findings were that:

- **"London and its commuter belt are pulling away from the rest of the country**. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who live in these areas are far more likely to achieve good outcomes in school and have more opportunities to do well as adults than those in the rest of the country.
- **Coastal areas and industrial towns are becoming real social mobility coldspots**. Many of these areas perform badly on both educational measures and adulthood outcomes, giving young people from less advantaged backgrounds limited opportunities to get on.
- **England's major cities are failing to be the places of opportunity that they should be**. While London is way ahead, none of our other major cities do particularly well, although there is still a marked difference between cities like Manchester, Birmingham and Southampton (which are about average against the Social Mobility Index) and cities like Nottingham, Derby and Norwich (which perform very badly).
- **Many of the richest places in England are doing worse for their disadvantaged children than places that are much poorer**. While there is undoubtedly a link between the affluence of a local area and the life chances of disadvantaged young people – with richer areas tending to do better against the Social Mobility Index and poorer areas worse (especially those outside London) – there are many affluent areas that fail young people from poor backgrounds.
- **Very similar areas that are only a few miles apart do very differently on social mobility despite having similar challenges and opportunities**. There are large differences in life chances between similar areas that are only a few miles apart."

Of course, the things which girls think make somewhere a good place to grow up are not necessarily encompassed in the statistical data available to us – which reflect just some of the material conditions of girls' lives in particular areas. Had we been able to include as statistical data the wider quality of life issues that matter to girls (as gathered through the qualitative narratives), such as access to parks, clean, safe spaces, leisure activities, public transport and safety, the results may have been quite different. In addition, issues such as cyber-bullying were raised by girls in our focus groups as being increasingly prevalent as a result of social media becoming ubiquitous in their lives. Official statistics, however, are not produced on either face-to-face bullying or cyber-bullying. Facts and figures pertaining to both types are only available via smaller surveys.[13]

Under the circumstances, we believe that our analysis gives the best approximation, using the most relevant available data, of how geography and place impact on girls' lived experiences. Yet we recognise that there is much more to be done to ensure greater public accessibility to data sets relating to girls. Data must be broken down by gender and age, at a local level, to allow greater analysis of girls during adolescence. This is a time of rapidly changing realities for girls and such analysis would allow a fuller picture of their rights and quality of life to emerge.

Isabel, 9, showing her sheep at the Great Yorkshire Show

"I really like it when they all start lambing, all the sheep, I really like to help. It's really fun. If there are large groups, sometimes some are friendlier than others, so you have to sort of grab them and push them into the pens so the others will follow. Oh, and Uncle Rob taught me!

"I love riding around the farm on the quad bikes and the tractors. I'd quite like to be a farmer when I'm older.

"I hadn't shown Safi [the sheep] before, so that was quite difficult for me. A few of my sheep that I've shown before were a lot less strong than her and a lot littler than her. [My favourite sheep was] Buttons! She was two and she was a brownie black, so she looked like chocolate, sort of, so I called her Buttons, chocolate buttons. I showed her at the Yorkshire Show two years ago, I think it was. But when she had a lamb she died; it's not fair."

Dannetta, 18, London

"In the neighbourhood I lived in I did feel pretty safe because I kind of knew everyone in the neighbourhood and they made me feel welcome… I felt at home and quite loved by the community which was really good…

"A gang was situated there. So any time they were around, 'cause it was full of boys and stuff, it was quite intimidating as well. It was kind of just, like, you wouldn't know what would happen – they might come up to you and whatever. But I always just tried to keep my head down and focus on where I was going. Rather than try and draw attention to myself and maybe possibly look for trouble. I always tried to avoid a certain situation and block it out of my mind.

"I think it was a bank holiday and we were around the square and they were selling food and playing music. This group of boys, all of a sudden, you could see the crowd gathered in on area, I heard shouting and bottles being thrown. We had to run; my mum was, like, 'Go, go, go home now because they are fighting!' It ruined the rest of my day; I was enjoying my time… The violence has driven so many people away from the area so you feel like you don't want to come back.

"Recently there was a couple of boys as I was walking home late at night one time with my sister. And they were calling us… it was late, I wasn't trying to stop and talk to these boys. I just kept on going. But some boys, when they don't really get the response that they want, their verbal words kind of turn aggressive, which shows that there is still a lack of respect for certain things and they still don't respect a female if they reject them…"

Indicator 1: Child Poverty

THRIVE

SDG 5: Gender Equality **SDG 8**: Decent Work and Economic Growth
SDG 10: Reducing Inequalities **SDG 16**: Peace and Justice

"Poverty is a relational issue which refers to the uneven distribution of life chances and experiences amongst those people who have no or limited access to capital and cultural assets. Poverty is equated with deprivation and lack of social power, and thus with social and spatial inequalities."[14]

Why it matters

The link between the realisation of child rights and the eradication of child poverty has been clearly made by human rights bodies, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which in its recent review and concluding observations of the UK's obligations stated: "In accordance with Article 4 of the Convention [on the Rights of the Child] and Sustainable Development Goal 10, Targets 10.2 and 10.4, the Committee urges the State party to allocate the maximum extent of available resources for the implementation of children's rights, with a special focus on eradicating child poverty and reducing inequalities within and across all jurisdictions."[15]

There are many strong links between poverty and gender. Women and girls can suffer from economic dependence and become more vulnerable to abusive relationships if they do not have the funds to leave.[16] As soon as girls become responsible for domestic roles, they may also bear the brunt of poverty by going without and managing the household budget. This can particularly be true for girls and young women who have become mothers.[17] Stress, ill health, shame, guilt and isolation can all be effects of poverty on girls and young women.[18]

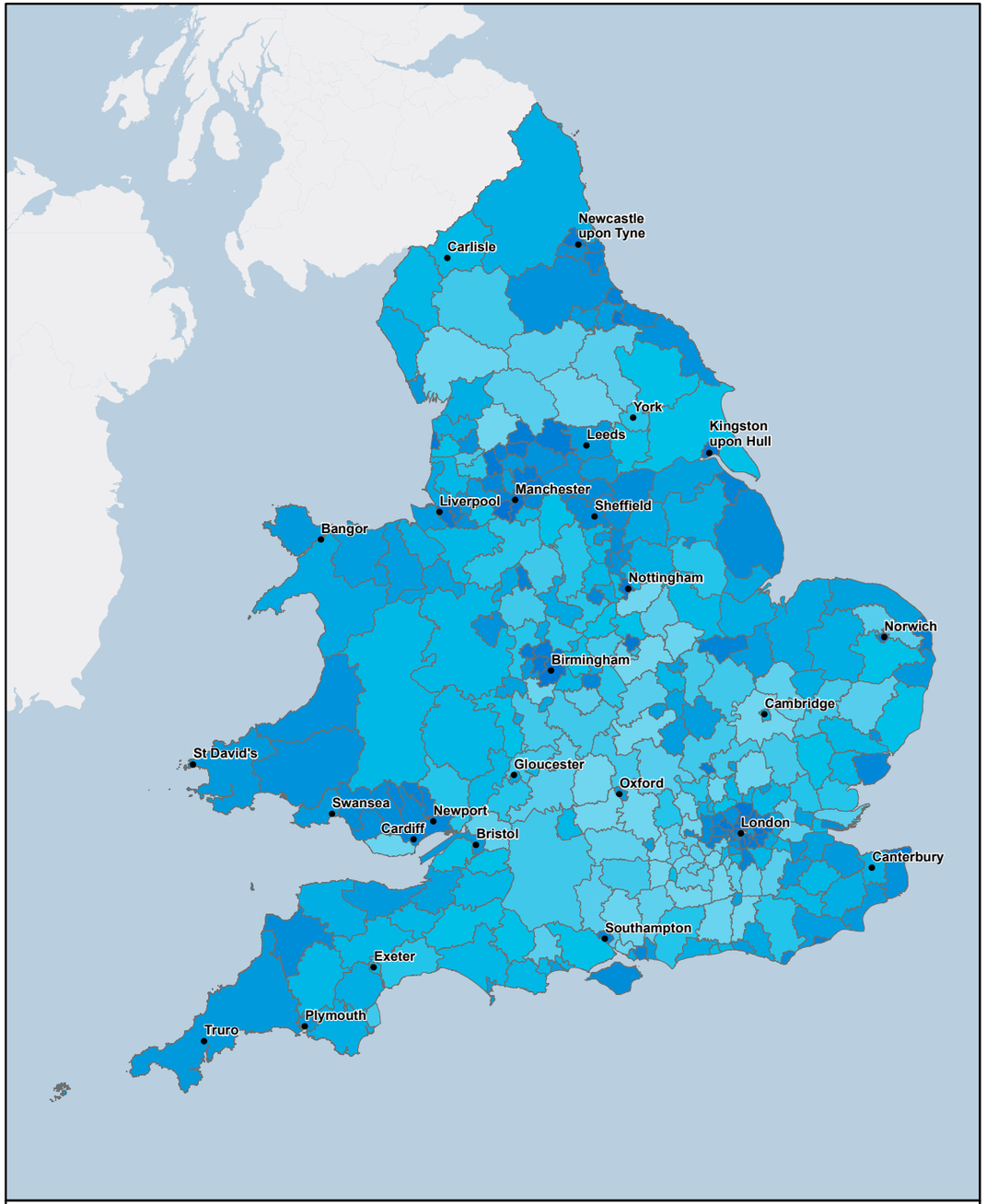
Additional links between poverty and gender often relate to the gender pay gap and a propensity for women to have a broken employment history as a result of their caring duties.[19] Periods of leave to care for young children or other dependants affect women's employment possibilities and may lead to persistent poverty.[20] In 2014, 91 per cent of single parents are female[21] and single women and lone parents have persistent rates of low income.[22]

The Women's Budget Group recently

Child poverty as a rights concern

The Committee **on the Rights of the Child** highlighted areas of serious concern regarding children's standard of living in the UK and expressed concern that: "Research indicates that the infant and child mortality in the State party, including suicide, is linked with the level of social and economic deprivation."[23]

Other concerns highlighted include "the rate of child poverty [which] remains high, with a disproportionate representation of children with disabilities, children living in a family or household with person(s) with disability, households with many children, and children belonging to ethnic minority groups, and affecting children in Wales and Northern Ireland the most". The Committee also expressed concern about the repealed statutory target to eradicate child poverty by 2020.[24]



Child Poverty – England and Wales local authorities ranked best to worst

Best (1)

Worst (346)

N

0 20 40 80 120 160 200 Kilometres

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Poverty: Children and young people

The latest Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey[25] (which looked at boys and girls together) noted that the impacts of poverty included:

- Over 500,000 children (four per cent) live in families who cannot afford to feed them properly and where adults are cutting back on their own food;
- 12 per cent of young people aged 18-25 (500,000) cannot afford to buy appropriate clothes for interviews;
- In 2007, Barnardo's noted that families living in poverty have less than £13 per person per day to buy everything they need, including food, heating, toys, clothes, electricity and transport.[26]

noted that "of the 82 billion of cumulative tax changes and cuts in social security spending since 2010 that will have been implemented by 2020, 81 per cent will come from women.[27] Female lone parents are most affected, losing 17 per cent of their disposable income.[28]

How we measure it

The child poverty indicator used is based on the *Child Poverty Map of the UK 2014* produced by the Child Poverty Action Group.[29] This indicator, compiled officially as a local estimate of child poverty, is based on tax credit data, which is used to estimate the percentage of children living in low-income families in local authorities, parliamentary constituencies and wards across the UK. The data sets have been adjusted to produce figures compatible with the measures derived from the national survey of income, which shows how many children live in households with income below 60 per cent of the median.

Although this data is not disaggregated by gender, we felt that it was essential to include because of the significant impact of deprivation on quality of life for girls (as well as for boys), and because it helps to demonstrate the importance of geography and place.

Abbie, 17, at work, Newcastle

"Since I was really little I was always doing art stuff with my dad; it just ran in my blood… What I really want to do is tattooing… It's definitely a male populated job. But I feel, like, now there's a lot more women doing it. If you look at the likes of [famous tattoo artist] Kat Von D [and besides] some people feel more comfortable being tattooed by a woman… If you wanna do something, you should do it, it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks.

"Newcastle is quite an open community. People from all, like, cultures, like… They're all accepted here.

"I like Newcastle. I feel like it's a nice place to live, all my family is here, I was brought up here, I got lots of friends here. I feel, like, there's always people around to protect you, [but] it is quite scary when you're travelling by yourself.

"Obviously, like, with [reality TV show] 'Geordie Shore' and everything, it's portrayed to be a bad place, like, where people get drunk every weekend. And that does happen, but I feel like they try and portray the young people all like that, and it's not. It isn't like that at all. Obviously there is people that do that, but then there's people like me who would rather stay in and draw."

Indicator 2: Life Expectancy

THRIVE

SDG 5: Gender Equality **SDG 8**: Decent Work and Economic Growth
SDG 10: Reducing Inequalities **SDG 16**: Peace and Justice

Why it matters
Life expectancy is one of the best indicators of why geography and place matter. The World Health Organisation (WHO) Commission on Social Determinants of Health surveyed the global situation and concluded that "social injustice is killing on a grand scale".[30] The 2010 Marmot Review explained that "while within England there are nowhere near the extremes of inequalities in mortality and morbidity seen globally, inequality is still substantial and requires urgent action. In England, people living in the poorest neighbourhoods will, on average, die seven years earlier than people living in the richest neighbourhoods… People in poorer areas not only die sooner, they will also spend more of their shorter lives with a disability."[31]

The 2015 King's Fund report cites a recent study commissioned by Public Health England, 'Due North',[32] which confirms that health across the north is worse than levels of income deprivation alone would predict.[33] There are also hidden or overlooked health differences by area.[34]

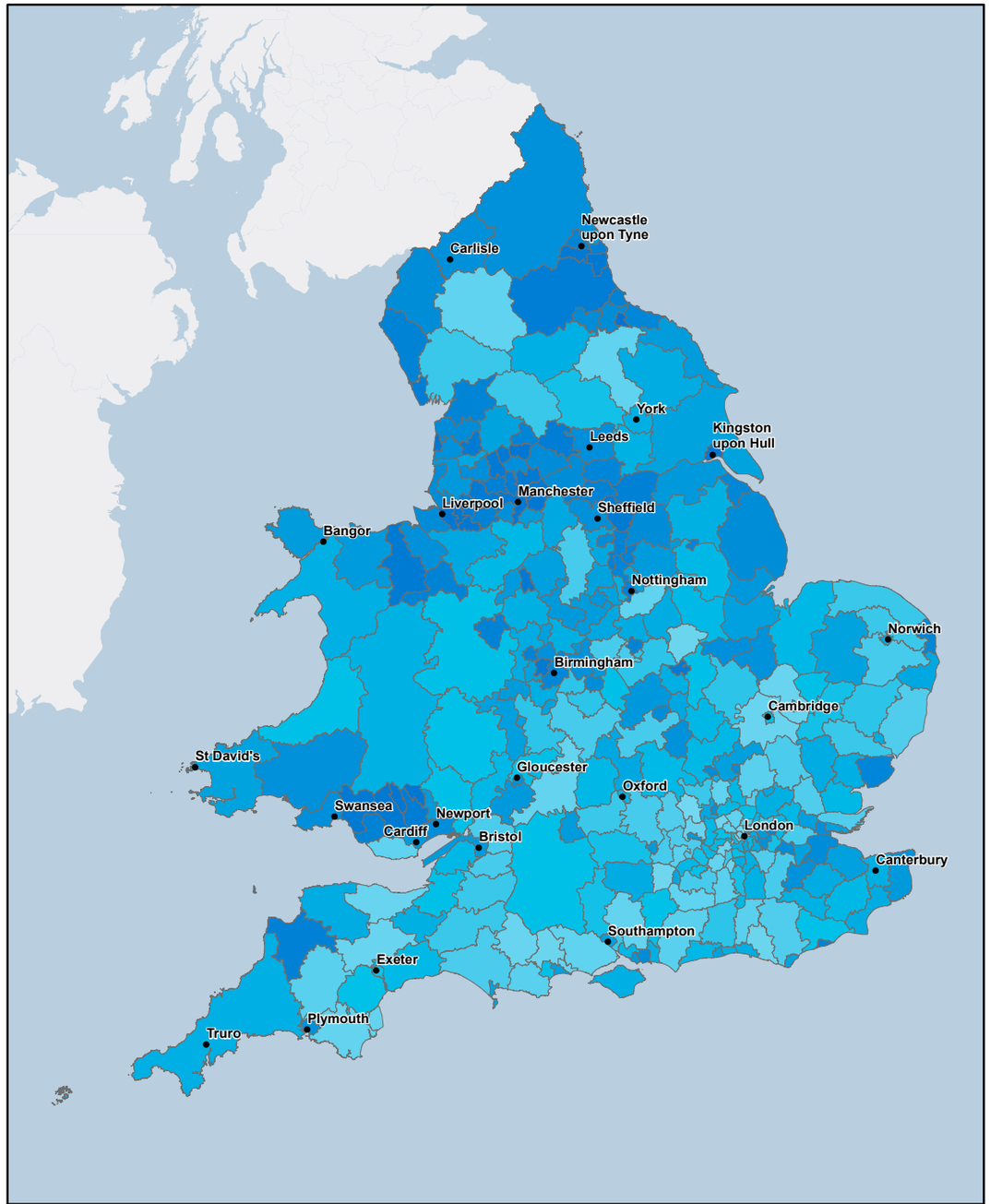
How we measure it
Life expectancy is the number of years a person would be expected to live, starting from birth (life expectancy at birth) or at age 65 (life expectancy at age 65), based on the mortality statistics for a given observation period. Although at face value life expectancy measures length rather than quality of life, it speaks to a wider range of socio-economic quality of life factors that can lead to reduced length of life. It is thus a widely used indicator of the health of a population.

Life expectancy at birth was selected for this indicator, and statistics are based on data available for girls born between 2012 and 2014, produced for England and Wales by the Office of National Statistics.[35] The ONS data present male and female life expectancy at birth and at age 65 for England and Wales at local authority level.

The numbers: why geography and place matter

Current life expectancy figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show that:

- From 2012 to 2014, life expectancy for newborn girls was highest in Chiltern (86.7 years) and lowest in Middlesbrough (79.8 years).
- From 1991 to 1993, East Dorset had the highest male and female life expectancy at birth. If we jump forward to now and compare that life expectancy, baby boys in Blackpool and baby girls in Middlesbrough today can still expect lower life expectancy than those in Dorset two decades ago.
- The inequality between the local areas with the highest and lowest newborn life expectancy has increased, despite improvements across local areas over the past two decades.
- The majority of local areas in the bottom 50 for life expectancy at birth (68 per cent of areas for boys and 70 per cent for girls) were in the North East, the North West and Wales.[36]



Life Expectancy – England and Wales local authorities ranked best to worst

Best (1)
Worst (346)

N

0 20 40 80 120 160 200 Kilometres

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Indicator 3: Teenage Conception Rates

DECIDE

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing
SDG 5: Gender Equality

Why it matters
As a result of a successful drive to reduce the teenage conception rate there has been a 50 per cent reduction since 1998.[37] The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted the reduction in rates, but stated that it remained concerned that the rate "is still higher than the European Union average and higher in more deprived areas".[38]

The concerns about health and social outcomes for young mothers in Public Health England's 2015 report, 'A framework for supporting teenage mothers and young fathers' includes:

- Child Poverty: 63 per cent higher risk for children born to women under the age of 20;[39]
- Poor maternal mental health: mothers under the age of 20 have higher rates of poor mental health for up to three years after giving birth;[40]
- Young women not in education, employment or training (NEET): 21 per cent of estimated number of female NEETs aged 16 to 18 are teenage mothers;[41]

Teenage parents, and teenage mothers in particular, have long been the subject of negative media portrayals, blame and stereotypes.[42] We recognise that teenage mothers themselves are rightly concerned about the way they are portrayed within the wider society.

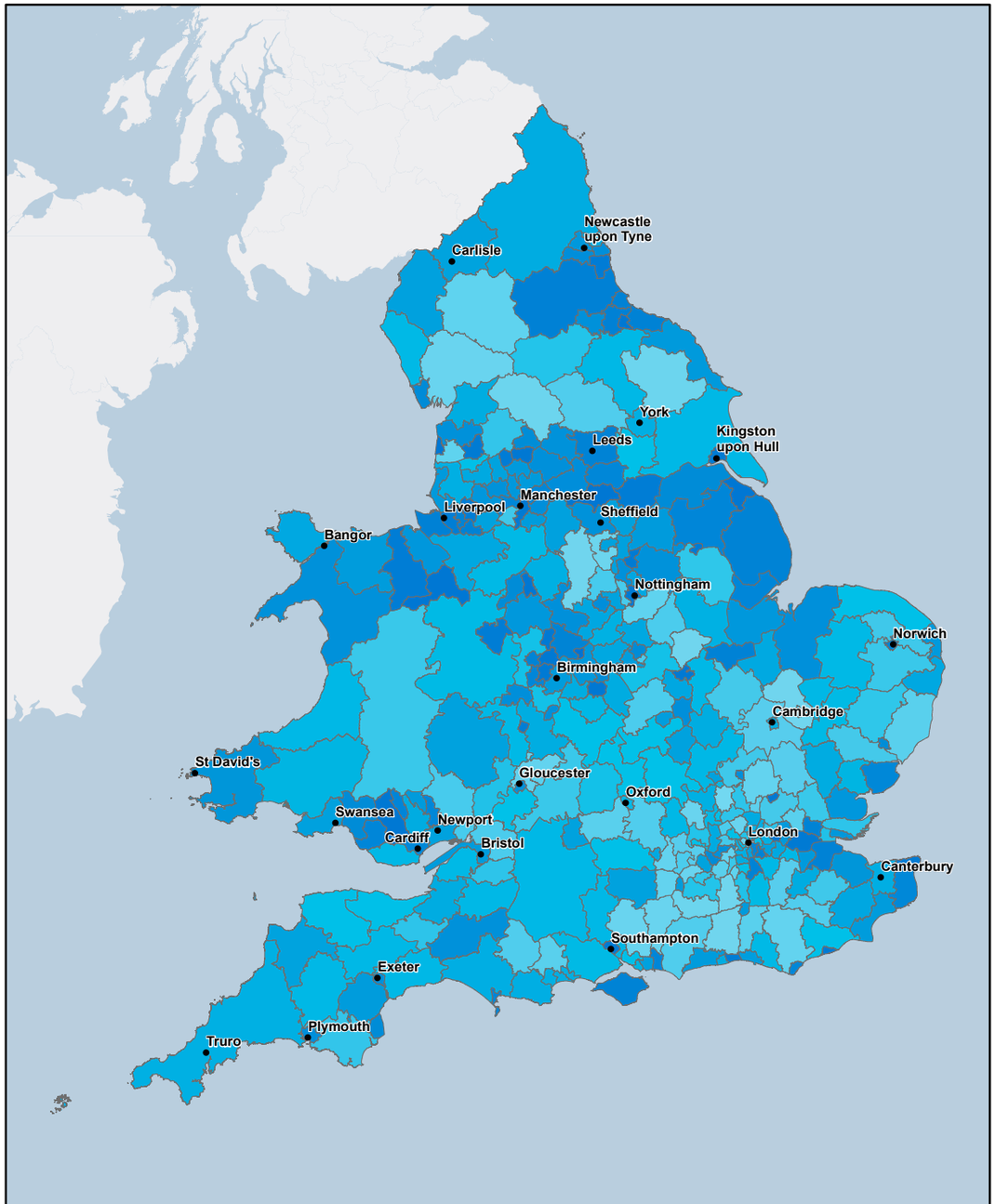
Including teenage pregnancy within these indicators is not a value judgement on teenage pregnancy or parenting. For some young women, young parenthood is a positive choice and can be life-enhancing. However, as it is frequently linked to other indicators of disadvantage and to regional approaches to girls' rights, teenage conception rates have been included as one of our indicators.

How we measure it
Calculations for the statistical analysis in this report were based on the latest available figures (2013) produced by the Office of National Statistics for England and Wales on conception rates per 1,000 in the 16 to 18 age group.[43]

Risk factors and vulnerabilities

Public Health England's 2015 report highlights why this indicator is important: "Like all parents, teenage mothers and young fathers want to do the best for their children and some manage very well; but for many their health, education and economic outcomes remain disproportionately poor, which affects the life chances for them and the next generation of children...

"…the area and individual risk factors for early pregnancy highlight the vulnerabilities with which some young people enter parenthood: family poverty, persistent school absence by age 14, slower than expected attainment between ages 11 and 14; and being looked after or a care leaver. Some young parents will have missed out on the protective factors of high quality sex and relationships education, emotional wellbeing and resilience, positive parenting role models and having a trusted adult in their life. For a minority, these vulnerabilities may make parenting very challenging. Almost 60 per cent of children involved in serious case reviews were born to mothers under 21."[44]



Teenage Conception Rates – England and Wales local authorities ranked best to worst

Best (1)
Worst (346)

N

0 20 40 80 120 160 200 Kilometres

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Indicator 4: GCSE Attainment

LEARN

SDG GOAL 4: Quality Education

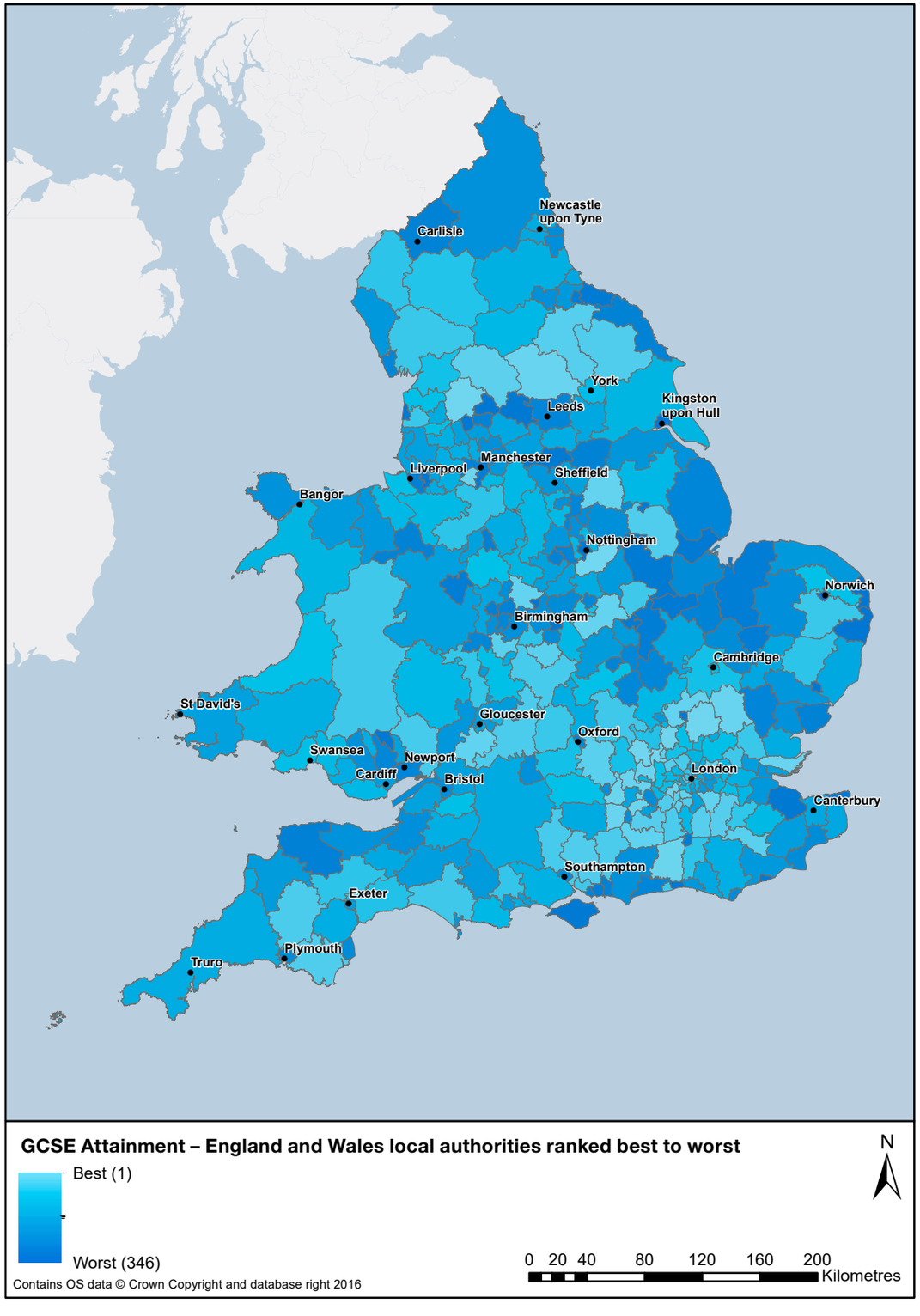
Why it matters

Plan International UK works towards the realisation of a quality education for all girls. This includes supporting attainment, but also the wellbeing and skills development of girls in education. We acknowledge that GCSE attainment is not the only, or even best, measurement of a quality education. Indeed, the evidence presented in Section Two, Chapter 1 shows clearly this is not the case. However, given the lack of wider education data disaggregated by age, gender and local authority, GCSE results do provide a useful measurement of the geographical differences in attainment.

How we measure it

This indicator provides data for the number of schoolgirls in England and Wales at the end of Key Stage 4 achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and Mathematics. This is the widely applied Level 2 benchmark of educational attainment. GCSEs are available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland has its own qualification framework. Data used for the statistical analysis in England and Wales was gathered from two sources. For England, the 2014 results were collated from the online and interactive Office of National Statistics resource, Neighbourhood Statistics.[45] Comparable 2014 figures for Wales were collated from StatsWales.[46]

Gwen, Year 10, South Wales



Indicator 5: Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

LEARN
SDG GOAL 4:
Quality Education

THRIVE
SDG 5: Gender Equality
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
SDG 10: Reducing Inequalities
SDG 16: Peace and Justice

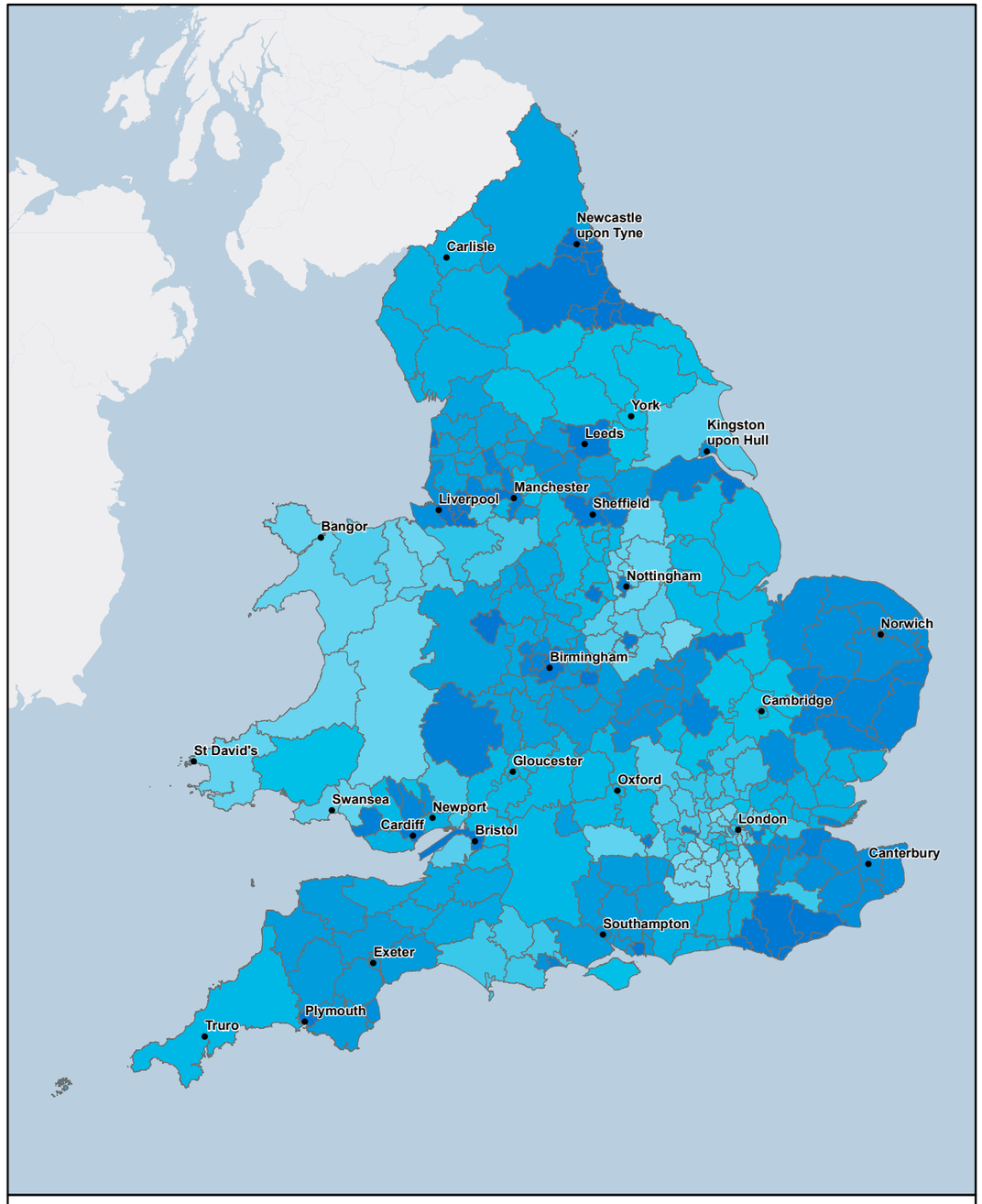
Why it matters
There are a range of reasons why NEET is useful as an indicator for girls' rights. It is estimated that 12 per cent of all young people aged 16-24 were NEET between January and March 2016, although it is impossible to accurately identify all of them.[47]

There are currently 428,000 young women known to be NEET, compared with 310,000 young men.[48] Girls who have been NEET are likely to remain unemployed longer than their male peers.[49] On finding work they will earn less and are more likely to get stuck in minimum-wage jobs.[50] Qualitative research demonstrates that girls in this position feel judged and denigrated. They lack confidence and frequently suffer from eating disorders and depression.[51]

More young NEET women than men are likely to be caring for children or elderly relatives. This makes it more difficult for them to access work and training. The problems which men have in accessing work and training are often those highlighted across government think tanks and local authorities, with girls tending to disappear off the radar.[52]

How we measure it
NEET data pertains specifically to 16 to 18-year-olds and is collated from 2013 statistics produced by the Department of Education, National Statistics (England) and the Welsh Government.[53] The NEET statistics do not fully correspond to the local/unitary authority areas as provided in the other indicators we are using in this ranking exercise. Rather than a total of 342 local/unitary authority areas[54] across England and Wales, the NEET data is divided into a combination of both local/unitary authority areas and a few counties in a way that is inconsistent with other local authority statistical data gathering for indicators relevant to this study. Where local authorities do not appear in the NEET data, a combined county-level statistic is provided. In these cases, we have allocated the same NEET statistic provided for the county as a whole to each local authority within that county area.[55] Despite this difference in the data provided, it is clear that being NEET has the potential for long-term negative consequences for young women and so merits inclusion.

Impacts
Research shows that:
- Many young people who are NEET have an income below the poverty line and are lacking in skills to improve their economic position.[56]
- Once they have dropped out of education they receive little access to careers advice and have limited access to training or other support.[57]
- Being NEET damages young people's wellbeing, saps their confidence and puts them at greater risk than others of mental and physical illness.
- Their long-term prospects are also not good and they are more likely than their peers to be unemployed or in low-paid jobs in the future.
- They also suffer from social exclusion.[58]



NEET* – England and Wales local authorities ranked best to worst

Best (1)
Worst (346)

*Not in Employment, Education or Training

N

0 20 40 80 120 160 200 Kilometres

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Violence Against Girls: The Missing Indicator

Why it matters
In Section Two of this report we dedicated a chapter to the subject of violence against women and girls (VAWG). We know that specific forms of violence affect girls and young women differently according to age; we also know that there are poorly understood issues for girls, such as sexual exploitation and street harassment. Given the evidence available at a national level on rates of violence against girls and young women, we were disturbed to find a dearth of publicly available data about rates of violence against girls and young women at the local/unitary authority level. Despite VAWG data not being disaggregated specifically by age, it remains an important rights indicator for girls.

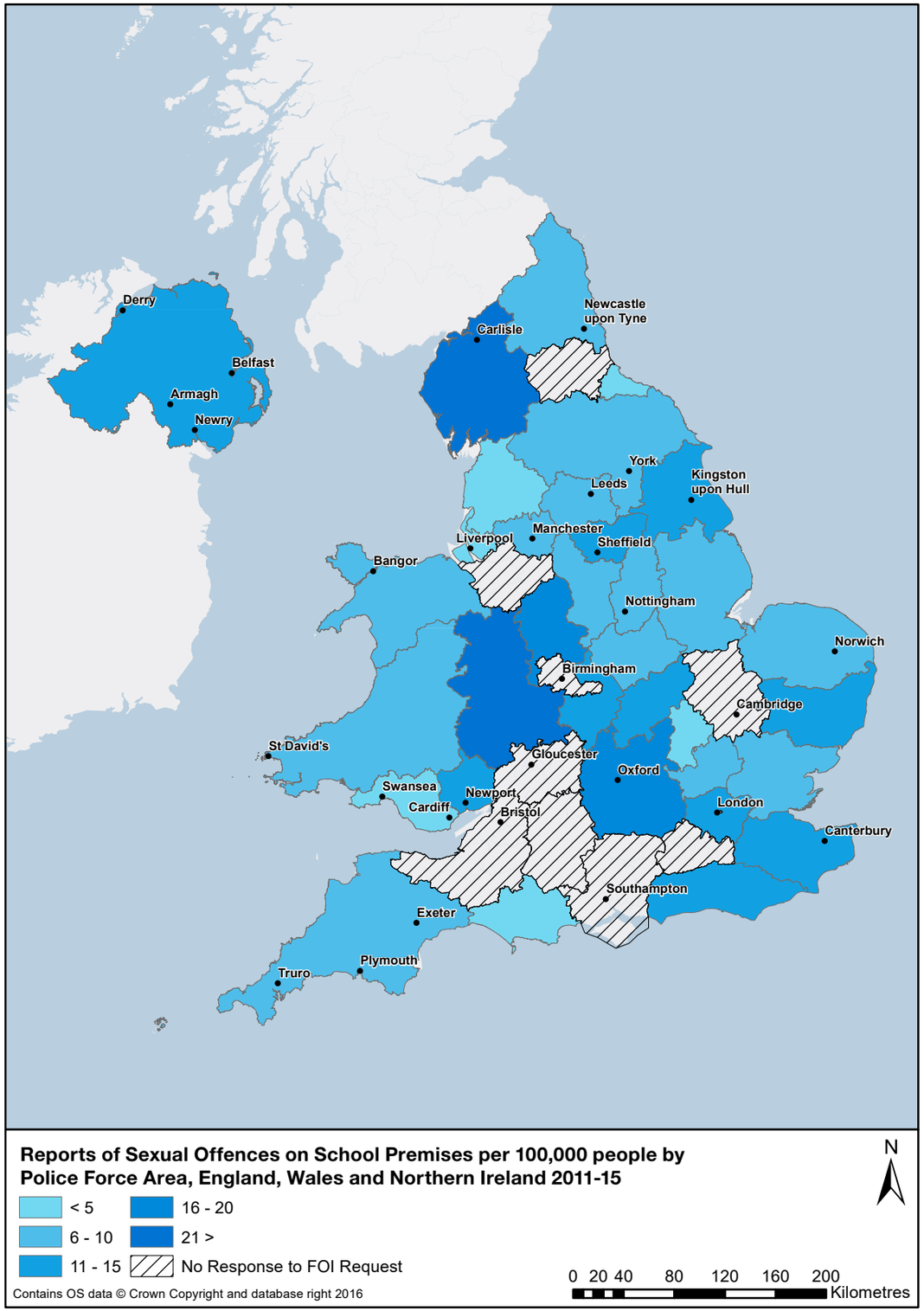
How we measured it
Ideally we would have produced a set of ratios to compare the number of pre-charge recorded incidents with convicted cases in each area. Despite efforts to secure this important information, it proved impossible at a local level. However, we were able to request an exclusive dataset showing numbers of reports of sexual offences in schools between 2011 and 2015. We also examined the local-level data on successful convictions for sexual offences in England and Wales in 2013.

Ultimately, police force, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and other national statistics provide only a partial picture regarding the extent of violence committed against women and girls in the UK, not least because of the high probability that these types of offence are often not reported to the police.[59] Successful convictions, whilst being firm evidence that an offence has taken place, are only the tip of the iceberg. Furthermore, they represent times when the justice system *is* fulfilling girls' rights, and therefore cannot be seen as binary

Why age matters

The statistics, laid out in Section Two, bear repeating:

- Approximately 85,000 women and 12,000 men are raped in England and Wales every year.[60]
- ONS data clearly shows that rape victims are most likely to be in younger age groups: "Victims were most likely to be aged 15 to 19 years, accounting for nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of rape offences recorded by the police, although this age group only made up around 6 per cent of the population […] This was followed by victims aged 10 to 14 years (16 per cent of rapes, five per cent of the population) and victims aged 20 to 24 years (14 per cent of rape offences, seven per cent of the population)."[61]
- One in five women aged 16 to 59 has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16.[62]
- The 2013/14 Crime Survey for England and Wales reported that the prevalence of intimate violence was higher for younger groups. Women aged between 16 and 19 and between 20 and 24 were more likely to be the victims of domestic abuse (13.1 and 10.1 per cent respectively) compared with those aged between 45 and 54 and between 55 and 59 (7.1 and 5.9 per cent respectively).[63]
- Young women were also found more likely than any other age group to be victims of sexual abuse in the previous year: 6.7 per cent of women aged 16 to 19.[64]



representation of good versus bad rates. Yet it is still important to note regional discrepancies in data and to question why girls' rights are not being upheld to the same levels across the UK.

Even where data was collected, our investigation unearthed gaps and inconsistencies in the reporting process. For instance, we were not able to locate adequate pre-charge or reported VAWG data broken down by age and gender (of victim and offender) at the local authority or police area level. This breakdown only exists for those offences catagorised as 'domestic abuse', for police force area.[65] The data that is publicly available is, more often than not, only captured by police force area and only from the age of 16. A key finding of our investigation is the urgent need for better publicly available information on VAWG at the local level, so that the true scale of the problem can be addressed.

Using the two sets of data by police force area, we offer some illumination on what is happening to girls regionally.

Reports of sexual offences on school premises

In April 2016, as part of Plan International UK's Learn Without Fear campaign to address the global problem of violence and sexual harassment against girls in schools, we made a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to all the police forces of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales for all their recorded incidents of sexual offences in schools by age and gender of the victim and perpetrators and the outcome of police investigation. The request sought the number of reported cases of sexual offences on school premises each year between 2011 and 2015.

There are 43 police forces in England and Wales (plus the British Transport Police, Civil Nuclear Constabulary and Ministry of Defence Police). This figure rises to 45 when including the police forces of Northern Ireland, and to 46 when including the newly formed Police Scotland.[66] Police force areas cover a larger geographical area than local/unitary authorities and so will include several local/unitary authorities. As this information was only available at police force area, we were not able to use it as an indicator directly comparable to the five indicators above. We therefore decided to present this information separately.

Police Scotland declined to answer on the grounds of cost. However, we received 32 responses from the remaining 45 police forces across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Some of this data was partial and some fully supplied. Importantly, the data was originally produced in absolute numbers rather than percentages.

Interestingly, when you match these figures with general population data from each police force area (see map on page 123), Cumbria and West Mercia police forces have the highest numbers of reports of sexual offences in schools per 1,000 people. Neither Cumbria nor West Mercia police force area cover a local authority which appears in the 10 worst ranked local authorities in England and Wales. Bedfordshire, Dorset, Lancashire and Merseyside police force areas have the lowest numbers of reports of sexual offences in schools per 1,000 people. This is despite Liverpool ranking as the fifth-worst local authority in England and Wales according to our indicators.

Successful convictions of violence against women and girls

For the successful convictions of VAWG offences dataset, we took the information provided by the CPS on successful

Reports of sexual offences on school premises

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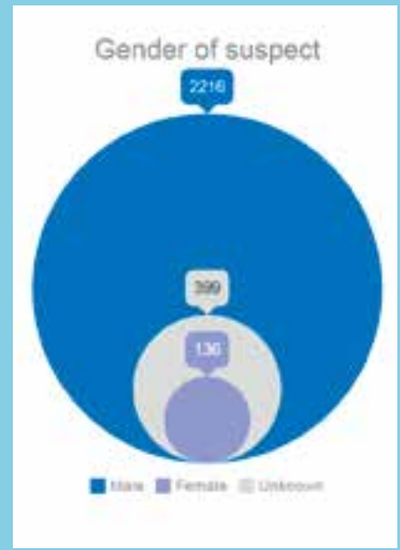
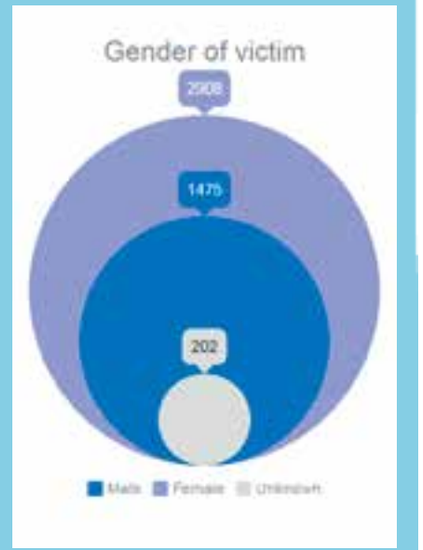
Sexual harassment of girls in schools

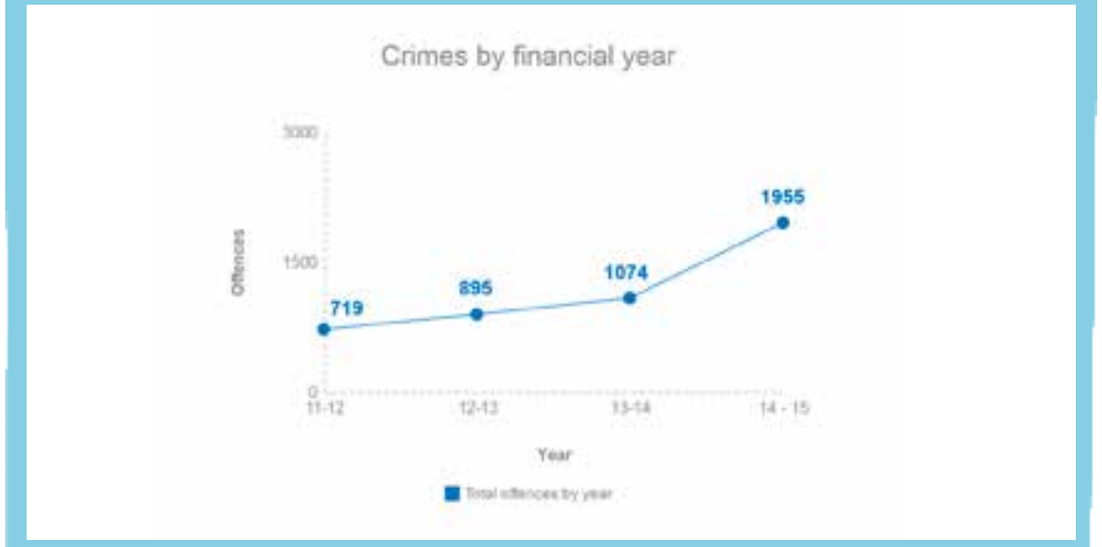
The key findings from this Freedom of Information request are:

- Reported sexual offences have more than doubled in the period 2011-12 to 2014-15. This does not necessarily reflect an increase in sexual offences during this time, but rather an increase in *reported* sexual offences. This trend of increased numbers of reported sexual offences in schools is borne out across the different police forces.





- Six out of 10 victims of reported sex offences on school premises are girls or women (66 per cent). This has been calculated by total female victims / total victims where gender is known.
- Ninety-four per cent of sexual offences reported in schools are committed by men or boys. This is based on the calculation of total suspect male / total suspect where gender is known.
- Fifteen per cent of sexual offences on school premises are committed by teachers or school staff, and 29 per cent are committed by pupils. This has been calculated by total suspects teacher + total suspects school staff / total suspects. However, there is a large proportion of total suspects whose occupation has been recorded as 'other/unknown' due to inconsistencies in the police reporting on this variable.



convictions for VAWG offences per police force area and mapped this onto population statistics for girls and women in each police force area. The CPS provides statistical data on the combined indicators of domestic violence, rape, and other sexual offences under the heading 'Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)' and also on each separate incident category. We have chosen to focus on the combined data in this section. This data does not, however, break down adequately by age, but remains an important measure.

We took the data compiled for 2013, which shows absolute numbers of successful convictions in England and Wales, and analysed the figures on successful convictions in relation to the population size of girls and women in each police force area. We were then able to make a geographical comparison of the areas, to show varying rates of convicted violent offences against girls and women.

The data shows that cases of VAWG in terms of successful criminal convictions are almost five times as high in Lancashire as they are in Warwickshire. Overall in 2013/14, there were 90,516 prosecutions for VAWG offences in England and Wales; 74.4 per cent of prosecutions ended in successful convictions, with the highest proportion in Suffolk (83.5 per cent) and the lowest in London (65.3 per cent).

The 2013/14 CPS data tells us that in England and Wales the police force areas with the highest rates in terms of successful convictions in VAWG are:

Area	Rates of VAWG per 1,000 girls/ women in England and Wales, 2013
Lancashire	5.11
Greater Manchester	3.69
South Wales	3.61
Gwent	3.20
West Yorkshire	3.09

The police force areas with the lowest rates in terms of successful convictions in of VAWG are:

Area	Rates of VAWG per 1,000 girls/ women in England and Wales, 2013
Warwickshire	1.19
Surrey	1.21
Gloucestershire	1.30
Bedfordshire	1.42
North Yorkshire	1.50

Available violence against women and girls data

If we break down VAWG convictions into their constituent offences (Domestic Violence; Rape; Sexual Offences (excluding rape), we can see that:

- The lowest rates for domestic violence were in Surrey (0.97 per 1,000 girls and women) and Gloucestershire (1.03 per 1,000 girls and women);
- The highest rates for domestic violence were in Lancashire (4.58 per 1,000 girls and women) and Greater Manchester (3.30 per 1,000 girls and women);
- The lowest rates of rape were in North Yorkshire (0.0024 per 1,000 girls and women) and in Warwickshire (0.0216 per 1,000 girls and women);
- The highest rates of rape were in Lancashire (0.1423 per 1,000 girls and women) and Humberside (0.1264 per 1,000 girls and women);
- The lowest rates of sexual offences (excluding rape) were in Warwickshire (0.130 per 1,000 girls and women) and Cambridgeshire (0.141 per 1,000 girls and women);
- The highest rates of sexual offences (excluding rape) were in Cleveland (0.381 per 1,000 girls and women) and Lancashire (0.371 per 1,000 girls and women).

Morgan, 18, Lincolnshire

Morgan is part of a theatre group. For our photo, she tried on a number of outfits to show how gender roles can be played with in the theatre.

"There's very few areas where I would feel completely safe, to be honest. Down my road, I don't like walking alone anywhere any more, and my parents don't let me walk anywhere alone. They like to send someone with me, someone larger, like a man, cos then you think: 'It's okay, no one's gonna touch you if you've got someone with you that looks like they could beat them up.'

"I have a lot of catcalling and I know a lot of my friends experience that. I don't like it; I feel a bit scared by that... Guys, they'll shout inappropriate things; you wouldn't say that, a girl wouldn't say that to a guy. So why is a guy saying that to a girl? I used to go running quite a lot. I don't go running without a partner now and I don't really like running at all. Cos I used to go, 'Well it's hot!' Crop top, and shorts, that'll do me, to go for a run. But I used to get so many beeps, and so many comments, that I thought, 'Okay, next time I'll buy a long-sleeved top, though I'm not gonna wear long trousers. I haven't done my make-up... I'm the least sexual I could possibly be right now.' I still got comments, and I thought, 'Right, I can't do this any more.' It stopped me from going running; I didn't feel safe. It only got worse when I went running with my sister: a blonde and a brunette seemed like it was to everyone's taste; all of a sudden we got twice as many comments! It just got out of hand. Mum didn't like us going and I didn't like going any more. It's not enjoyable. It's kinda funny once, but repetitively it's not funny any more. You think: 'I'm just trying to get on and run.'"

Indicator data for Scotland and Northern Ireland

Scotland

As previously explained, we were unable to find information across all five indicators down to unitary authority level in Scotland and were unable to include Scotland in the rankings tables. Instead, we have gathered data for Scotland across the five indicators and where possible for the violence against girls data in order to provide some context to the lived experiences of girls in Scotland.

Indicator 1 Child Poverty: More than one in five of Scotland's children are officially recognised as living in poverty.[67] In 2014/15, 16 per cent of children were living in absolute poverty before housing costs in Scotland, compared with 17 per cent in the UK. After housing costs, 22 per cent of children were living in relative poverty in Scotland, compared with 29 per cent in the UK. While child poverty after housing costs in Scotland was unchanged, there was a small increase across the UK, compared with the previous year.[68]

Indicator 2 Life Expectancy: The Scottish Government on its website states: "Underlying trends in both [Life Expectancy] and [Healthy Life Expectancy] at birth show a general improvement in Scotland over recent years. Girls born in 2014 would be expected to live 81.4 years on average, 62.6 of these years being 'healthy'".[69] Information from the Office of National Statistics that compares Life Expectancy across the UK between 2010-12 includes the following information:[70]

The majority of local areas in Scotland (72 per cent) were in the fifth of local areas in the UK with the lowest male and female life expectancy at birth. Conversely, only 15 per cent of local areas in England were in this group.

None of the local areas in Scotland were in the fifth of areas with the highest male and female life expectancy at birth in UK. In contrast, a quarter of local areas in England were in this group.

- Male life expectancy at birth was highest in East Dorset (82.9 years) and lowest in Glasgow City (72.6 years).
- Female life expectancy at birth was highest in Purbeck (86.6 years) and lowest in Glasgow City (78.5 years).

Indicator 3 Teenage Conception Rate: According to a release on 5 July 2016 on Scottish national statistics between 1994 and 2014:[71]

- Teenage pregnancy rates in all age groups have continued to decline in 2014. The teenage pregnancy rate for under 20s has dropped from the most recent peak of 57.7 in 2007 to 34.1 per 1,000 women in 2014, a decrease of 40.9 per cent.

In 2014, of the Scottish mainland NHS Boards, NHS Borders recorded the lowest rates of teenage pregnancy in both the under-18 and under-20 age groups and NHS Tayside recorded the highest rate of teenage pregnancy across all age groups.

There is a strong correlation between deprivation and teenage pregnancy. In the under-20 age group, a teenage female living in the most deprived areas is five times as likely to experience a pregnancy as someone living in the least deprived areas.

Indicator 4 GCSE Attainment: The Scottish equivalent of GCSEs are the Scottish Qualifications Authority's national examination qualifications. The most recent information broken down by gender is for the year 2014, when for National 5 examinations boys made up 47 per cent of those entered and girls 53 per cent. Grades A to C across all subjects were obtained by 79 per cent of boys and 83 per cent of girls.[72]

Indicator 5 Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET): This data in Scotland is only covered for 16 to 19-year-olds; the most recent analysis in 2015 by both age and gender was based on the 2011 census information and found that the proportion of 16 to 19-year-old males who are NEET (14.6 per cent) is higher than the proportion of females who are NEET (12.7 per cent).[73]

Violence Against Women and Girls: As previously stated, Police Scotland declined to respond to our freedom of information request on the numbers of reported sexual violence offences in schools on the grounds of costs. Information specific to Scotland on violence against girls includes:

A 2005 study involving 1,395 young people aged between 14 and 18 found that a third of young men and a sixth of young women thought that using violence in an intimate relationship was acceptable under certain circumstances. The same study found that 17 per cent of young women had experienced violence or abuse in their own relationship with a boyfriend.[74]

The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey conducted in 2015 found that only three in five people in Scotland think a woman is not at all to blame for being raped if she wears revealing clothing (58 per cent) or is very drunk (60 per cent). However, younger people were significantly less likely to blame the victim for being raped – 70 per cent of those aged 18 to 29 years old thought a woman wearing revealing clothing was 'not at all to blame' for being raped, compared with 38 per cent of those aged over 65.[75]

Kirsty, 17, Glasgow

Indicator data for Scotland and Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland

As previously explained, we were unable to find information across all five indicators down to local government district level in Northern Ireland and so were unable to include Northern Ireland in the rankings table. Instead, we have gathered data for Northern Ireland across the five indicators and where possible on our missing indicator of violence against girls in order to provide context to lived experiences of girls in Northern Ireland.

Indicator 1 Child Poverty: Twenty-three per cent of children were in poverty in 2013-14, approximately 101,000 children. This is an increase from 20 per cent the previous year.[76]

Indicator 2 Life Expectancy: In Northern Ireland, girls born between 2011 and 2013 can expect to live on average to 82.4 years of age. Life expectancy was lowest in Belfast (81.0 years) and girls born in Mid Ulster can expect to live the longest (83.5 years).[77]

Indicator 3 Teenage Conception Rate: In Northern Ireland, as with the rest of the UK, the total annual number of teenage births as a percentage of total live births decreased, from 6.9 per cent in 2003, to 3.4 per cent in 2014.[78] The Abortion Act 1967 does not cover Northern Ireland and this is examined in more detail in Section Two, Chapter 5.

Indicator 4 GCSE Attainment: In 2014/15, 86.2 per cent of girls in Year 12 achieved five or more GCSEs (including equivalents) at grades A* to C, compared with 79.4 per cent of boys. This is compared with 74.2 per cent of girls eligible for free school meals and 65.7 per cent of boys eligible for free school meals.[79]

Indicator 5 Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET): The youth unemployment rate (percentage of economically active 18 to 24-year-olds who are unemployed) was 17.5 per cent and was down 0.3 percentage points over the year and higher than the UK average rate (11.7 per cent).[80] In 2014 Ms Margaret Ritchie MP (South Down) (SDLP) stated that "Almost one in four young people in Northern Ireland are out of work. Many are forced to seek agency jobs on zero-hours contracts, while others are taking the path to emigration because of the downturn in the construction industry."[81]

Male and female participation on the ApprenticeshipNI programme became more evenly balanced from the beginning of 2009, but since the quarter ending January 2013, this has shifted to a lower number and proportion of female apprentices.[82] In addition, all participants on Mechanical Engineering Services (Plumbing) and Electrotechnical frameworks are male. Female participation is highest on frameworks such as Child Care, Learning and Development and Beauty Therapy (99 per cent).[83]

Violence Against Women and Girls: In its submission to the Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission noted that "The number of domestic abuse incidents and crimes in NI is high and disproportionately affects women. 10 per cent of *all* crime in NI has a domestic motivation."[84] The new National Strategy 'Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland' notes that: Population-based studies of relationship violence among young people (or dating violence) suggest that this affects a substantial proportion of the youth population.

- Overall, children with disabilities are 2.9 times more likely to be victims of sexual violence.
- In a recent study, minority ethnic women were identified as at increased risk of domestic abuse but less likely to report to the police. Traveller women were identified as being three times more likely to suffer but still less likely to report.

The strategy also proposes a number of measures focusing on teacher skills and capacities, as well as ensuring an effective preventative curriculum is offered in schools to begin targeting the problem at a young age.[85]

Responding to concerns about violence in younger women's lives, Women's Aid in Ireland recently launched 2in2u,[86] a campaign to highlight the issue of violence and abuse against young women in dating relationships. They explain: "It is specifically targeting younger women to try to prevent the next generation of domestic abuse."[87]

Sexual offences have been showing an upwards trend over the last two years. With a couple of exceptions, the level generally increased in most months between December 2014 and October 2015, to reach 285 offences recorded. As with the previous year, the level fell between October 2015 and December 2015 before increasing again in January 2016 to 276 offences recorded. The level has increased in both May and June, with 280 offences recorded in June 2016 (third-highest in last two years).[88]

Alex, 12, east Northern Ireland

Poppy, 18, working in the seaside arcades, North East England

"[In this place] it's just bland, if that makes sense. There's not much to do for people. There's not many job opportunities unless it's seasonal, as it's a seaside town. Unless you want part-time jobs every summer then there's not much you can really do."

What the data says

Wales

There are 22 unitary authorities in Wales. In our table we combined the results for all areas in England and Wales. What leaps out about the Welsh ranking is that the best and worst areas are separated by 270 local authorities, clearly demonstrating the depth of inequality in outcomes that exist. However, interestingly, the worst places in Wales do not then go on to register in the joint England and Wales ranking. The best Welsh unitary authority is Monmouthshire. Second best is Powys in Mid Wales, the most sparsely populated county in Wales, with most residents living in small towns and villages. The second most sparsely populated area is Ceredigion, which is third on the list; when placed alongside English local authorities, it comes in the top sixth of areas. In 2008, Powys was deemed the UK's happiest place to live, in research carried out jointly by the Universities of Sheffield and Manchester.[89] Personal factors (such as educational qualifications, employment and health) were reported as being contributory factors to happiness, rather than geographical location.

Merthyr Tydfil, which forms part of the central valleys, is bottom ranked as the worst area in Wales in which to grow up as a girl. According to information available from StatsWales,[90] youth unemployment in Wales stood at 22.2 per cent for the year ending 31 March 2013. Several unitary authority areas in Wales have rates of youth unemployment considerably above the Welsh, UK and EU averages.

What do we mean by best and worst ranking? How it works

The analysis of the statistical data was carried out for England and Wales collectively. In the following discussion of the research findings, tables and maps have been produced to aid the understanding of the statistical analysis. A ranking system has been used, whereby the most successful area is denoted with a rank of 1. Wales has 22 unitary authorities, so the poorest-performing area in Wales has been given a rank of 22. London has 32 boroughs (we did not include the City of London) and so the poorest performing borough is given a rank of 32. Together, England and Wales have 346 unitary/local authorities and so the worst performing is ranked at 346.

The five indicators were each given a score. The smaller the score, the better the outcome. By totalling the five indicator scores in each unitary/local authority, we arrive at the most successful area with the best outcomes (the best place to be a girl) which has the smallest combined score, and the poorest-performing area with the worst outcomes (the worst place to be a girl), which attracts the largest score.

Table 1: Wales Unitary Authorities ranked from best to worst

Unitary Authority	Rank	Unitary Authority	Rank
Monmouthshire	1	Neath Port Talbot	12
Powys	2	Denbighshire	13
Vale of Glamorgan	3	Wrexham	14
Ceredigion	4	Newport	15
Gwynedd	5	Torfaen	16
Flintshire	6	Blaenau Gwent	17
Swansea	7	Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	18
Carmarthenshire	8	Bridgend	19
Isle of Anglesey	9	Caerphilly	20
Pembrokeshire	10	Cardiff	21
Conwy	11	Merthyr Tydfil	22

Iman, 19, South East England

England

England has 324 local authorities and there are 346 local or unitary authorities across England and Wales. The table results for England and England and Wales combined are the same so are shown in the following tables for the 10 best and worst ranking local authorities.

Middlesbrough is ranked the worst local/unitary authority in England to grow up as a girl. According to the 2007 report 'It doesn't happen here: the reality of child poverty in the UK',[91] more than two-thirds of children in some neighbourhoods in the northeast of England live in families that are supported by out-of-work benefits. News broadcasts[92] are quick to point out that Middlesbrough has one of the worst unemployment levels in the UK. According to the English Indicators of Deprivation 2010,[93] Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Manchester, Knowsley and the City of Kingston-upon-Hull are the local authorities with the highest proportion of most-deprived areas.

Interestingly, none of the top 5 local authorities in Wales and England are cities. The highest-ranking city in Wales is Swansea; in England, the highest-ranking city is St Albans, which is ninth on the list. In addition, it is worth noting that the predominantly rural area of Rushcliffe, ranked second-best local authority, is adjacent to the urban area of Nottingham UA, ranked fourth-worst.

In Table 3 we can see that the 10 worst ranking places to be a girl in England and Wales are all in England. It is interesting to note that the two worst ranking places are in the North East and North West of England.

Table 2: 10 best places to be a girl in England

Local Authorities	Rank
Waverley	1
Rushcliffe	2
Chiltern	3
Mole Valley	4
Epsom and Ewell	5
Rutland	5
Elmbridge	7
Wokingham	8
St Albans	9
East Hertfordshire	10

Table 3: 10 worst places to be a girl in England

Local Authorities	Rank
Sandwell	337
Salford	338
Kingston upon Hull, City of	339
Hastings	340
Knowsley	341
Liverpool	342
Nottingham	343
Manchester	344
Blackpool	345
Middlesbrough	346

London

As the capital, and the largest and most diverse city in the UK, we wanted to scrutinise how London fared when it comes to geographical inequality.

Rankings

London is in many ways representative of the rest of England and Wales in the sizeable differences between areas. Richmond upon Thames barely misses the top 10 best places, ranking at number 13 for the whole of England and Wales. When looking at where London boroughs rank against all local/unitary authorities in England and Wales, what stands out is that there are a full 300 local authorities that separate Richmond upon Thames and the worst ranking place, Barking and Dagenham. The worst ranking places are also significantly lower in the ranking (placed at 239 for Lewisham, 293 for Greenwich and 313 for Barking and Dagenham) than their other London counterparts.

Table 4: Best and worst places to be a girl in London, all boroughs ranked

Borough	Rank
Richmond upon Thames	1
Barnet	2
Harrow	3
Kingston upon Thames	4
Westminster	5
Sutton	6
Redbridge	7
Bromley	8
Camden	9
Brent	10
Kensington and Chelsea	11
Merton	12
Ealing	13
Bexley	14
Wandsworth	15
Hillingdon	16
Havering	17
Haringey	18
Hammersmith and Fulham	19
Waltham Forest	20
Hounslow	21
Enfield	22
Southwark	23
Hackney	24
Lambeth	25
Croydon	26
Tower Hamlets	27
Islington	28
Newham	29
Lewisham	30
Greenwich	31
Barking and Dagenham	32

Overall results: The best and worst-ranked places to be a girl

Throughout this report we have set out to:

- Ask: 'What is the current state of girls' rights in the UK?'
- Scrutinise what is happening to girls at the local level, highlighting that geography and place matter to girls' rights.

By bringing together five important indicators to measure girls' rights and quality of life, we have been able to rank all local authorities in England and Wales against each other to consider where ranks best and worst to be a girl. We had wanted to include Scotland and Northern Ireland in these figures, but due to the difficulties in getting data that was recorded in the same way and that gave us enough detail, we were not able to do so. What we can see from alternative evidence from Scotland and Northern Ireland is that girls are missing out: violence against girls is a problem and the data, and how it monitors girls' rights, needs to improve.

The evidence tables we do have shine a spotlight on why geography and place matter. If you grow up in Waverley, Rushcliffe or Chiltern your outcomes as a girl are likely to be better than if you grow up in Middlesbrough, Blackpool or Manchester. A quick glance at the map also shows a worrying trend that the best-ranked areas dominate the south east of England and small parts of the more rural places in Yorkshire and Oxfordshire, whilst some of the worst-ranking areas are in urban areas.

Above all, what stands out is that where you live changes both your experiences as a girl and your opportunities. It is a part of every girl's life, but the impact it can have on a girl is not necessarily always taken into account. Geography and place – where you live, where you go to school, access to youth groups and local transport, amongst many factors – are often the forgotten identity factor.

National and devolved government strategies to end violence against women and support girls' and young people's quality of life are improving in the way they consider identity factors. And there is an increasing recognition for the need to adapt strategies to meet the needs of individuals, not homogenous groups. These and other strategies now need to consider in greater depth the impact that geography and place have on girls and what changes are needed to improve the inequalities experienced by girls in their daily lives.

As Tables 5 and 6 show, there was no single authority that was consistently at the top or bottom for all indicators. For example, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Hackney rank very poorly for child poverty, but don't fare as badly in Life Expectancy and Teenage Conceptions. Tamworth, Stoke-on-Trent and North East Lincolnshire stand out as areas with high teenage conception rates, but they don't place significantly in other matters.

Individual Indicators – the best and worst places to be a girl

Table 7 (overleaf) shows the best and worst place to be a girl for each of the indicators. These tables show that there is no single local authority that consistently ranks as the best or worst-performing authority across all indicators.

Though more rural areas featured in the top-ranked places in England and Wales, there were conflicting views about them

Table 5: Best 10 Local Authorities in England and Wales by Individual Indicators Ranking

Local/Unitary Authorities	Child Poverty Ranking	Life Expectancy Ranking	Teenage Conceptions Ranking	GCSE Ranking	NEET Ranking	Total	Rank
Waverley	5	26	7	23	1	62	1
Rushcliffe	5	26	25	1	25	82	2
Chiltern	16	1	14	3	53	87	3
Mole Valley	5	33	2	47	1	88	4
Epsom and Ewell	28	10	24	28	1	91	5
Rutland	16	9	6	59	1	91	5
Elmbridge	5	21	33	43	1	103	7
Wokingham	1	52	21	8	25	107	8
St Albans	16	26	1	2	76	121	9
East Hertfordshire	16	33	22	6	76	153	10

Table 6: Worst 10 Local Authorities in England and Wales by Individual Indicators Ranking

Local/Unitary Authorities	Child Poverty Ranking	Life Expectancy Ranking	Teenage Conceptions Ranking	GCSE Ranking	NEET Ranking	Total	Rank
Sandwell	323	320	329	283	283	1538	337
Salford	294	334	280	300	338	1546	338
Kingston upon Hull, City of	323	337	323	341	248	1572	339
Hastings	294	304	327	325	332	1582	340
Knowsley	294	337	298	342	323	1594	341
Liverpool	312	337	313	311	340	1613	342
Nottingham	334	309	333	339	303	1618	343
Manchester	342	344	328	315	303	1632	344
Blackpool	323	344	343	332	319	1661	345
Middlesbrough	331	346	340	316	345	1678	346

Table 7: Best and Worst Local Authorities by Individual Indicators

	Child Poverty	Life Expectancy	Teenage Conception	GCSE	NEET
Best Places	Wokingham	Camden, Chiltern	St Albans	Rushcliffe	Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Harrow, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead, Runnymede, Rutland UA, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley, Woking
Worst Places	Tower Hamlets	Middlesbrough	Tamworth	Norwich	Newcastle upon Tyne

amongst the participants. Younger girls (aged 12 and 13) highlighted the benefit of living in a rural area in terms of the freedom and safety it afforded them:

"A good place to live is a place where you have freedom and you can go to work or school, or stay at home, if you want, and you can marry who you want to marry."

Isabel, 12, rural focus group, North England

"There's no pressure about feeling insecure [or not feeling] safe."

Milly, 13, rural focus group, North England

Older girls, however, highlighted the constraints of rural areas for older teenagers. A lack of transport networks can impact adversely on their lives, for example by placing particular restrictions on their social activities. For those girls who are from ethnic minority backgrounds, the importance of integrating into their local areas was also recognised:

"Being in a multi-cultural place [means] you can integrate better. We live in a place where there aren't any other non-white families, and [it is] hard to feel part of a community."

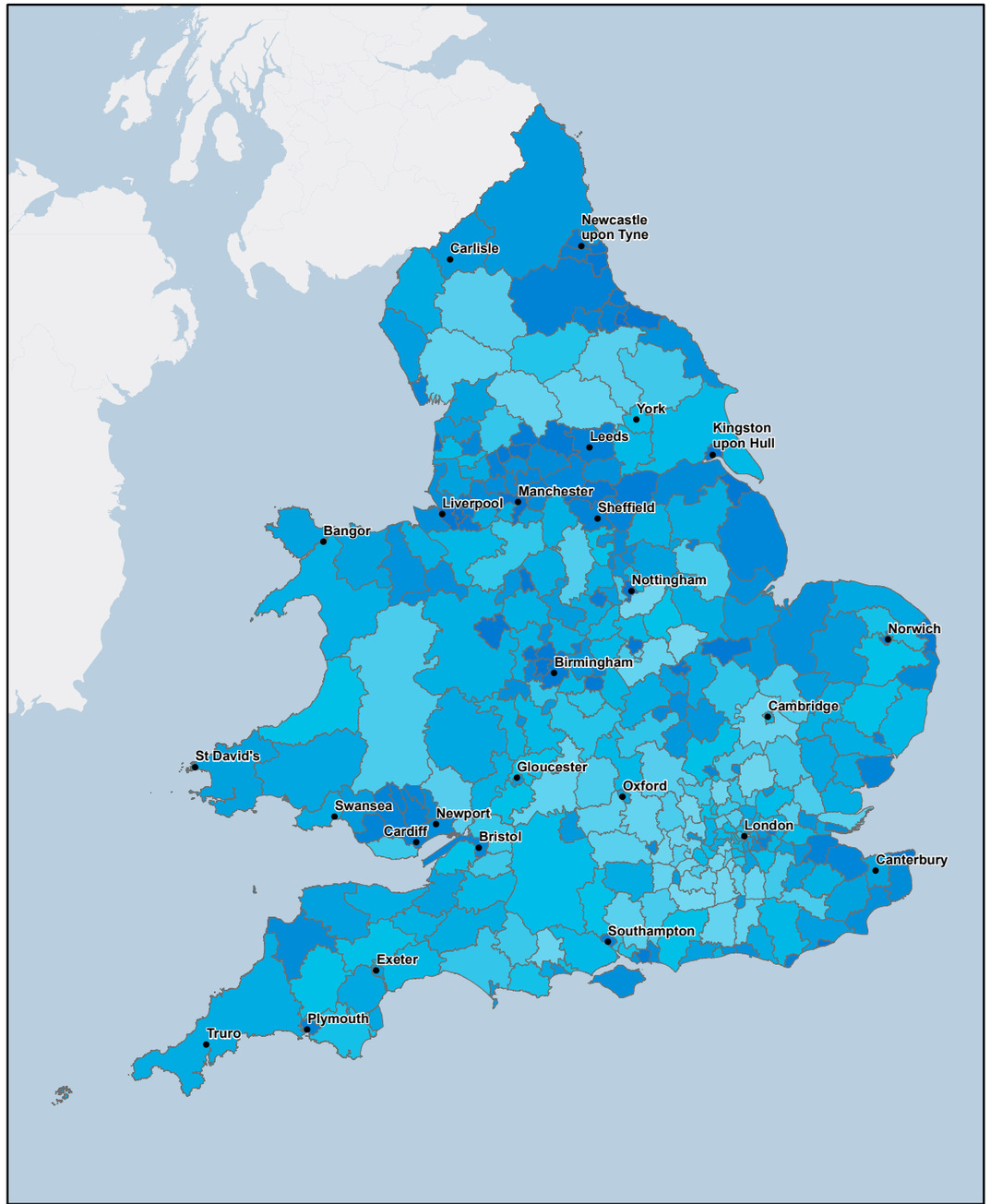
Sumara, 18, London

So it is important to note that rural areas that rank highly in the Top 20 places across England and Wales may not be perceived as a good place to live by all girls or all age groups.

Lack of safety is a concern for both younger and older girls in terms of identifying a bad or unpleasant place to live. Girls living in London identified sexual harassment on the London Underground as an issue that concerned them. Areas with problems of substance misuse (people taking drugs or being visibly under the influence of alcohol) were also recognised by girls and young women as amongst the worst and most unsafe places to live. Conversely, good schools and the opportunities they afford were seen as crucial ingredients in the best places to live. Poverty was linked by the girls to more limited opportunities to leave a place. Whether or not girls felt a place was 'good' or 'bad', they expressed a need to have their voices heard:

"Safe spaces like youth groups can empower girls and boys to realise the power of their voices. We need more safe spaces, like youth groups and in schools, where girls are encouraged to speak."

Fatima, 18, London



The best to worst-ranked place to be a girl: overall ranking of England and Wales local authorities

Best (1)

Worst (346)

N

0 20 40 80 120 160 200 Kilometres

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Courtney, Dónal and Shannon, 19, Belfast

Courtney: ***"I don't think we ever will be 100 per cent equal. I think boys will also be slightly ahead. Hopefully we can change things like the abortion laws… Male hierarchy is so wrong. But there will never be a world we live in where we won't have to worry about this sort of thing… If you want to get an abortion you have to travel to England… I do feel boys are favoured more and it's more acceptable for them to do more things."***
Shannon: ***"Girls don't have as many high-up jobs. My friend goes out and protests but loads of guys have a go at her online. Why? If a guy was saying the things she said would they do that?... I think it's a lot better than other countries in the world. But there's still a divide where girls can't do certain things like LGBT rights, and girls can't get an abortion in Northern Ireland, it's illegal. You have to travel to England, but there are still places you can go and visit in Northern Ireland. Girls and boys are not segregated that much any more; it is better than it was, say 20, years ago."***
Courtney: ***"I always feel that with relationships and things boys have the final word. It's never girls. A girl still can't ask out a boy out. A boy at a party can switch on one minute and off the next. As girls, we're expected to just put up with that and deal with it."***
Shannon: ***"I used to do kick boxing and jujitsu. People give me weird looks when I say that. Today it is getting better. We are so close to getting there. But, there are still some underlying issues that mean it's not quite equal."***

Scarlet, 12, and
Lily, 13, Lincolnshire

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

From our research into girls' rights in the UK, it is evident that although girls have rights on paper these are proving hard to realise. The reality of their lives, and the way they actually experience their rights, is very different from the vision of equality embodied in human rights law. As part of Plan International's girls' rights global campaign, Because I am a Girl, we are committed to gender equality and to enabling girls everywhere to **learn, lead, decide and thrive** and this must include girls in the UK. During our research for this report we listened to girls from all over England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales who did want to seize the opportunities presented to them but who were held back by pervading stereotypes, harassment and discrimination

In **Section One** we emphasised the importance of universal rights for all girls. Girls can, and often do, become invisible; their rights, and the particular challenges they face, concealed, either under the ageless category of 'women', or the gender-neutral category of 'children'. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a new set of international targets which the UK government has signed up to. As part of Plan International's global ambition to realise girls' rights, we identified key themes and targets to ensure that the SDGs will work for girls around the world, including in the UK.

Section Two was structured around the opinions, thoughts and concerns of the 103 girls we interviewed from across the UK and combined with the SDGs to highlight the connections to girls' rights in the new global goals framework. We identified a number of areas where girls' rights are not being delivered, including:

- Education, future careers and stereotypes
- Citizenship and voice
- Digital health
- Body image
- Health and quality of life
- Violence and safety
- Identity discrimination

It is clear that girls are not a homogenous group. The exclusion or discrimination they suffer may be based on more than one characteristic. They will concurrently experience many intersecting factors of marginalisation, including: gender, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, income and demographics. Girls' rights should not be at risk due to the intersection of these factors; all girls should be able to realise their rights.

In an unprecedented analysis of available data, **Section Three** shows stark regional variations in the challenges girls face. This new data cuts to the core of social mobility, demonstrating that where you live changes your opportunities and acknowledging the need for change.

In line with the SDGs we focus on the principle of **'Leave No One Behind'** and take the global ambition to secure girls' rights down to the local level. In the UK, geography matters and rates of important indicators such as child poverty and teenage pregnancies vary significantly across England and Wales. Whether you grow up in Waverley in the south east of England, or in Middlesbrough, Monmouthshire or Merthyr Tydfil, your quality of life as a girl varies significantly. It is this geographical inequality, combined with gender discrimination, which needs to be tackled.

This approach to local and unitary authority data revealed that the best

Lottie, Year 10, Wales

"Girls are a lot less likely to be loud; they are not allowed to be wrong, or rude and loud and funny. You see that a lot with girls. There are a lot of subtle expectations of girls to be nice, to be pretty and to be kind. A lot less on boys: they are allowed to be class clowns and they are also allowed to be quiet and sit at the back of the class. Girls are seen as loud if they are loud. I'm seen as loud and boisterous. I'm generally not much louder than any boy is, but girls are seen not to behave that way in general."

Jessica, 17, South East England

quality of life for girls in England and Wales was found predominantly in the south east, and towns further north such as Middlesbrough, Blackpool and Manchester ranked poorly in comparison. In Wales, areas such as Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff and Caerphilly all remain behind their neighbours in Monmouthshire and Powys. Yet a major issue in conducting this research was the lack of adequate data. There was very little information available broken down by both age and gender at the local or unitary authority level.

We also collated police force data on reports of violence in schools. The results were shocking, in as much as they revealed the rise of reports of violence across the UK, but perhaps equally shocking were again the gaps in accurate record keeping.

Across a broad range of areas, the girls' stories and interviews underlined how gender, stereotyping and limiting expectations affect their choices and opportunities. Girls experience day-to-day obstacles in accessing the rights that exist on paper because of persistent and pernicious sexism and discrimination.

Girls in our research were aware of the structural barriers in their way. Most knew, for example, that women have the right to do the same jobs as men, but they also recognised that they face obstacles in entering 'male' professions, just as boys do when entering 'female' professions.

Overall what became apparent from the girls' testimony was the extent of the 'everyday sexism'[1] and harassment that they have to negotiate on a daily basis. This is so prevalent that it is just 'normal'. They have developed strategies to survive and resist this, but girls' lives, choices and actions are nonetheless challenged by an environment in which institutional and individual sexism are endemic.

As you might expect, girls' experiences varied across their life course and in relation to ethnicity, income, sexuality, locality, religion and disability. Young women in Northern Ireland told us how, in many contexts, their religion (or perceived religion) was the most significant marker of their identities. Nonetheless, their narratives also illustrated how their experiences and opportunities were shaped further by their gender.

Given the above, the largely gender-neutral nature of mainstream rights and children's rights discourse is problematic. Without attention to the ways in which the rights of girls and young women are shaped specifically by gender as well as age, a plausible policy agenda to secure rights for girls and young women cannot be achieved. For instance, some key questions arise from our analysis of girls' rights in the UK, including:

Mary, 17, South East England

- Are the rights and needs of girls in a digital world being met? Girls tell us they feel unsafe online, but that being online is essential to their day-to-day lives both formally, because of education and information needs, and socially.
- Should there be a right to 'be me and to like myself'? Although such a concept at first seems ill placed in a rights context, deeper investigation reveals that girls are subject to a continuous onslaught of negative messages about their looks, skills and bodies, to the point that a large proportion feel very negative about their health, abilities and looks. We also identified a gap in support to help girls learn to like their bodies and to like themselves.

A final, all-pervasive, question raised in the report was about the difference between girls' rights as they appear on paper, for example in UK or international law, and how they are experienced by girls on a daily basis. Two examples of this are:

- the commonly held assumption that girls outperform boys at school;
- that girls have equal access to justice.

Even though girls as a whole are seen to perform well in exams and may have better academic qualifications, this is not the whole story. This report suggests that girls' experience of sexism, sexual violence and harassment in the school environment can have an adverse impact on the opportunities and experiences they will enjoy in the future. Also, girls' access to justice, despite the existence of an apparently strong justice system, is questionable. In reality, our literature review told us that the most marginalised girls, like those experiencing sexual exploitation, were not supported by the system and that many girls still do not report offences against them to the police.

Gender stereotypes in career choices, sexual harassment in schools, online grooming, FGM, forced marriage, and violence against women and girls are often seen as separate issues, but they are all symptomatic of a wider pattern of sexism, discrimination and violence that needs to be addressed. Moving forward from this report, we must continuously question why girls' rights are not being met, and ask what more needs to be done. The UK Government and devolved governments have made a number of very significant commitments over the years to the international rights frameworks, including the recently agreed SDGs. These commitments must be delivered and the authorities held to account.

Recommendations

In responding to the changes needed in the UK for girls' rights, we recognise that the most effective approaches will be tailored to local circumstances and, in particular, to the devolved governments. We also recognise that there has been progress in approaches to violence against women and girls. The development of the UK Government's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy[2] is one example. It highlights prevention and response and includes two national campaigns for younger age groups on abuse in relationships (*This is Abuse*[3] and *Disrespect NoBody*[4]), helping to bring these issues out into the open. Similarly positive is the Welsh Assembly's Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015[5] which places emphasis on prevention, protection and support. Further, departments are also working to deliver a joined-up Whitehall approach to address global issues; with, for example, Department for International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office combining efforts to help end FGM and forced marriage.[6] We also welcome the recent inquiry by the Women and Equalities Committee into violence and sexual harassment in school. However, much more needs to be done.

To support further dialogue and action, we have selected a number of recommendations (right) that span the areas covered in the report.

Drawing together these findings, Plan International UK wants to see the UK Government treat girls as a priority group to highlight and address their needs in a way that hasn't been done before. Girls' Rights Champions should be appointed at national, devolved and local levels, to work with existing structures and bodies and bring within them a new focus on girls.

We must listen to girls

Policy makers must start from the position that girls understand best what is happening in their own lives. Combining their first-hand testimony and ideas with relevant expert opinion can create powerful solutions to the problems girls are facing. Investments should be made to enable meaningful participation of girls at the local level. We should expand on outreach strategies already implemented in some areas, creating Girls' Committees, where girls and policy makers can pool ideas about how services can better meet girls' needs.

We must involve men and boys

This report in unapologetic in its focus on girls and their lives. However, to tackle gender inequality men and boys must be part of the process. Given that much of the sexism, harassment and violence experienced by girls and young women comes from their peers, it is critical to work with and engage boys and young men. Their lives too are affected by negative gender stereotypes and expectations and they too must be part of the solutions.

We must tackle root causes of gender inequality – and this starts in schools

Our research shines a light on persistent, harmful stereotypes that limit girls' opportunities and wellbeing. A whole school approach, including engaging boys and parents, is required to tackle gender inequality. Mandatory status for sex and relationships education should be the cornerstone of this effort.

We need a more joined-up approach to end violence

If we are serious about ending violence against girls, a holistic approach is necessary, one that joins up different thematic areas as well as geographical areas. A good starting point would be to ensure greater breadth in the cross-departmental engagement in the delivery and development of the government's existing strategy to end violence against women and girls.

We need better data

In order to respond to the needs of girls, policy makers need data at local authority level to invest in the right thematic and geographic responses. This data should be publicly available so that civil society, including girls, can hold those in power to account.

We need a UK SDG delivery strategy

There is an urgent need for a cross-departmental UK Government SDG delivery strategy that includes a focus on how the SDGs are being met in the UK and for girls.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Methodology for Section Three data analysis

We began with a broad list of suggested indicators for girls' rights and quality of life and aimed to reduce them to a core group. To produce this set of core indicators, we focused on data which could be broken down at local/unitary authority level. Our belief is that this provides the appropriate level of detail needed to examine the impact of geography and place on girls' lives and on their access to, and realisation of, their rights and life chances. In addition, we chose datasets which could be broken down by gender and age. Child poverty was the exception to this as it cannot be disaggregated by gender but was felt to be so important it should still be included.

Ideally, we would have made use of numerous comparable and consistent datasets, but the relevant data for some factors we wanted to explore in more detail (such as truancy from school) could not be found with a gender, age and local breakdown. It was therefore necessary to exclude such datasets from our analysis.

Investigating to such a depth presents a number of challenges, not least because the available information comes from different sources that may not cover the same time period and cannot always be broken down by key demographic factors (such as gender or age) or mapped onto comparative geographical areas.

So, for example, school exam attainment at 16 and 18 would have been informative indicators to include, especially given the persistence of gendered subject choices at GCSE, AS and A2 levels[1] (as discussed in Section Two) and the extent to which apprenticeship programmes are segregated by gender. But none of the publicly available statistical information breaks this data down by region, local authority and gender. This was also the case with the three health indicators we wanted to consider (hospital admission for substance/drug misuse, self-harming and child obesity – see right). We know all of these issues are influenced by gender but we cannot accurately assess data at a local level.

Given these constraints, we selected indicators that have a rights or quality of life focus (such as poverty, health and education) for girls in different geographical localities, but it has been necessary to use datasets from different years. For example, Indicators 1 (Child Poverty) and 4 (GCSE Attainment) refer to 2014; Indicator 2 (Life Expectancy) is for girls born in 2012 and 2014; and Indicators 3 (Teenage Conception Rates) and 5 (NEET) refer to data from 2013.

Appendix 2 – Precluded Indicators: Gaps in the data sets

To find the below precluded indicators, we searched for publicly available national data. We recognise that some data may be available in greater detail at an individual local/unitary authority level, but the scope and capacity of the report limited the possibility to reach out to each individual local authority. In addition, our intention was to scrutinise publicly available data at national level, as this reflects the needs of policy makers who would create national strategy and budgets for girls.

We detail our concerns regarding the lack of data on violence against girls in Section Three of the report.

Topic		Details of Available and Unavailable Data
Education	School Truancy	Data is not disaggregated by region or local/unitary authority and gender. Qualitative information (2014) is provided concerning interventions available to address pupils' poor attendance and behaviour at school.
	School Exclusion	Data is not disaggregated by region or local/unitary authority and gender. The Department for Education (2012) provides a narrative guide to the legislation governing the exclusion of pupils from: maintained schools; academy schools / free schools; alternative provision academies / free schools; and pupil referral units in England from 1 September 2012.[2]
Training and Employ-ment	Apprentice-ships by Gender	Data is disaggregated by age, gender and subjects chosen by young people but not by local/unitary authority. The three sectors that account for the highest num-ber of apprenticeships in Wales, for example, are Health (16 per cent female), Con-struction (11.4 per cent female) and Business Administration (12 per cent female).[3]
Activism and Citizen-ship	Voter Engagement & Gender Voting Trends	Data is not disaggregated by region or local/unitary authority and gender. Narrative information available investigates the fact that among 18 to 24-year-olds fewer than 40 per cent are believed to have voted in the general election and attempts to investigate the causes and consequences of limited youth voter turnout.[4]
	Youth Councils	Data is not disaggregated by region or local/unitary authority and gender. Narrative reporting focuses on how to empower young people aged 25 and under to influence and inform the decisions that affect their lives.[5]
Health and Well-Being	Bullying and Cyber-bullying	UK-wide, regional or local/unitary authority or statistical data is not produced. Some facts and figures relating to both bullying and cyber-bullying are collated by Ditch the Label's Annual Bullying Survey.[6]
	Hospital Admission for Substance/ Drug Misuse	Data is disaggregated by local authority but not by gender. It focuses on the prevalence of substance/drug misuse among adults and the types of drugs most commonly used. Relationships between drug use and other socio-demographic and lifestyles factors are included. Age disaggregation is available with a focus on substance/drug misuse among young adults (aged 16 to 24) and among children (aged 11 to 15).[7]
	Self-Harm and Suicide	We found data disaggregated by local authority but not by gender, and separate data disaggregated by age, gender and clinical commissioning group (CCG).[8] Unfortunately, we could not map CCG data onto local authority data. However, certain headline statistics are available by gender (see Section 2, Chapter 5).
	Child Obesity	Data is disaggregated by local authority but not by gender. For instance, the latest figures, for 2014/15, show that 19.1 per cent of children in Year 6 (aged 10-11) were obese and a further 14.2 per cent were overweight. Of children in Reception (aged four to five), 9.1 per cent were obese and another 12.8 per cent were overweight. This means a third of 10 to 11-year-olds and over a fifth of four to five-year-olds were overweight or obese.[9]

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Section One

Executive Summary

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- In the Middle East, it is just 6 six per cent.
- Women are 37 per cent less likely than men to own a mobile phone if they live in South Asia.
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SECTION 4

Conclusions and recommendations

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Appendix

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