



Women Enabled International

account**ABILITY** toolkit

Universal Periodic Review Fact Sheet



## Overview

The **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** is a reporting procedure that reviews the human rights record of every government that is a member of the United Nations, regardless of whether that State has ratified any U.N. human rights treaty. These reviews occur during sessions of the U.N. Human Rights Council, and any U.N. Member State can participate in the UPR of another State.

### What is the U.N. Human Rights Council?

The U.N. Human Rights Council is an intergovernmental body made up of 47 U.N. Member States elected by the U.N. General Assembly. It is responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights worldwide and meets in Geneva, Switzerland, during three regular sessions each year. In addition to conducting the UPR process, the U.N. Human Rights Council also holds discussions, adopts resolutions on important or urgent human rights issues, and appoints U.N. Special Procedure mandate holders.

The UPR examines the **full range of human rights obligations** of the State under review, rather than one specific treaty. This means that the States conducting the review can look at:

- Rights protected in the U.N. Charter;
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- Any international human rights treaties that the State under review has ratified;
- Any voluntary human rights pledges or commitments made by the State under review; and
- International humanitarian law.

The Human Rights Council has three UPR sessions annually, and 16 States are reviewed at each session. States coming up for review must submit a report outlining the human rights situation in the country.

The review itself consists of a 3.5-hour interactive discussion facilitated by a group of three States, called a **troika**, that serves as rapporteur for the review. The State under review will present its report and then respond to written questions and any oral questions, comments, or recommendations by other States during the discussion. Any State that is a member of the U.N., not just members of the Human Rights Council, can ask questions or make comments during the review.

Following the review, the troika prepares a **UPR outcome report** summarizing the questions, comments, and recommendations from the discussion, as well as the responses by the State. The State under review has an opportunity to review the report and clarify any responses or provide additional information before the report is formally adopted by the Human Rights Council.

### Politics of the UPR

The UPR is an inter-governmental process. This means that the questions are asked and recommendations are made by other governments, rather than independent human rights experts (as is the case with the State reporting process to U.N. human rights treaty bodies). As a result, the political relationships between States can impact the questions and recommendations that States make to one another. At the same time, because recommendations may be coming from States with whom a government has economic, military, or other geopolitical connections, the political nature of the UPR may result in greater pressure to implement recommendations.

# Civil Society Engagement with the UPR

Engagement with the UPR offers a useful tool to call international attention to human rights violations in a country. Civil society can use the UPR to increase political pressure on States to respect, protect, and fulfill their human rights obligations, including the rights of women and girls with disabilities. There are several ways civil society can participate in the UPR.

## Written Submissions

Civil society can submit written information to inform the review of a State's human rights record in the UPR. In addition to providing general information about the implementation of a country's human rights obligations, these written submissions can also highlight relevant recommendations made to that State by any of the U.N. treaty bodies in concluding observations or during prior UPR sessions. Written submissions are limited to 5 pages when submitted by individual organizations or can be up to 10 pages long when submitted in coalition with other organizations.

Written information should be submitted through the "On-line UPR submissions registration system" ([uprdoc.ohchr.org](http://uprdoc.ohchr.org)) and must be submitted seven months in advance of the session. It is important to note that the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) summarizes all written submissions made by civil society and other stakeholders in a summary report for U.N. Member States to review, rather than distributing the full written submission.

## Advocacy with Other States

Because U.N. Member States only receive OHCHR's summary report and do not otherwise have access to civil society written contributions, civil society can and should directly advocate with other States to bring attention to issues concerning women and girls with disabilities raised in written submissions and to encourage other States to ask questions and make recommendations on these issues.

Civil society should engage in written and oral advocacy with embassies in their home country or with U.N. country missions in either Geneva or New York City. This can be done by:

- Sharing written submissions along with suggested questions or recommendations; and
- Requesting in-person meetings or phone calls with relevant delegates at U.N. country missions or embassies to discuss suggested questions or recommendations for the review.

This type of advocacy should begin at least several months before the UPR session to allow embassies time to share information with the State's capital, which sets priorities for UPR questions and recommendations. Advocacy will be most effective with States that are likely to raise issues related to women and girls with disabilities, for example those that have raised these issues in questions or recommendations during past UPR reviews. Prior UPR recommendations are available through a database run by the organization UPR Info at <https://www.upr-info.org/database/>.

Civil society can also organize **Information Meetings** during the UPR sessions to share information and good practices, and States can attend these meetings. More information about Information Meetings and civil society participation in the UPR, generally, is available from the OHCHR at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/PracticalGuideCivilSociety.pdf>.

### Excerpt from the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Australia, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/31/14 (2016)

43. Montenegro asked about the concrete measures undertaken to address violence, exploitation and abuse experienced by women and girls with disabilities in institutional settings.
87. Australia assured delegates of its support of the right of people with disability to exercise their legal capacity and recognized that, in some cases, people with disabilities might require support in exercising that capacity. Regarding forced sterilization, the delegation noted that a sterilization procedure could only occur with the person's consent or, if the person were unable to give valid consent, with authorization from a court or guardianship tribunal.



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