

# Terms of Reference

**Exploring the Role of Gender Transformative Education as a Response to Anti-Gender and Anti-Rights Movements: Case Study of Ecuador to Inform Belgian Development Cooperation**

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## 1. About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters, and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until adulthood and enable them to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national, and global levels using our reach, experience, and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

Plan International Belgium is one of Plan International's 75 local offices. As a national organisation, we have a double mandate. We mobilize resources to implement projects in the global south, through Plan International's Country Offices (COs). Our support goes to development projects and/or humanitarian interventions focussing mainly on Protection from Violence (PfV), Inclusive, safe, and quality education (IQE) and Skills and Opportunities for Youth Employment (SOYEE), located in 14 countries. Secondly, we implement our own activities in Belgium where we work with children, adolescents and youth, schools and universities, civil society organisations, policy makers, etc.

More information can be found on our website (in FR/NL): [Plan International: égalité pour les filles et droits de l'enfant](https://www.planinternational.be/nl/over-plan) (or <https://www.planinternational.be/nl/over-plan>).

### **Plan International Glossary:**

**Empowerment** is a strategy to increase girls', boys' and young people's agency over their own lives, and their capacity to influence the relationships and social and political conditions that affect them. Lack of power is one of the main barriers that prevent particularly girls and young women from realising their rights. This can be overcome by a holistic and sustainable strategy of empowerment, involving girls, boys, and young people in changing gender norms to the benefit of all. Gender-based empowerment focuses on promoting simultaneous change in norms, attitudes and behaviours; social and economic resources and safety nets; as well as policy frameworks and budgets. It is a core strategy of any effective work promoting gender equality and inclusion. While empowering girls and young women is key if promoting their rights, it is also essential to engage boys and young men as partners and co-beneficiaries in the realisation of gender equality. Gender norms and stereotypes often privilege boys and young men; however, their behaviours and decision-making are also constrained and shaped by rigid social and cultural expectations. Men and boys can play an important role in overcoming gender inequality and discrimination both as power holders and as beneficiaries of change.

**Gender** reflects the norms, expectations and beliefs about the roles, relations and values associated with different genders, including female and male, in a specific society. Gender plays a significant role in defining relationships and power dynamics between and among people, and in shaping people's barriers and opportunities. In most societies there is a binary understanding of gender (with just two options - 'female' and 'male, or 'feminine' and 'masculine'). This does not accurately reflect people's diverse identities and tends to make invisible some of the specific forms of exclusion faced by LGBTIQ+ people.

**Gender-based violence** is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between male and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private. The term "GBV" is most used to underscore how systemic inequality between males and females, which exists in every society in the world, acts as a unifying and foundational characteristic of most forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls. The term "gender-based violence" also includes sexual violence committed with the explicit purpose of reinforcing gender inequitable norms of masculinity and femininity.

**Gender equality** means that all persons, regardless of their gender enjoy the same status in society; have the same entitlements to all human rights; enjoy the same level of respect in the community; can take advantage of the same opportunities to make choices about their lives; and have the same amount of power to shape the outcomes of these choices. Gender equality does not mean that women and men, or girls and boys are the same. Women and men, girls and boys, and individuals with other gender identities

have different but related needs and priorities, face different constraints, and enjoy different opportunities. Their relative positions in society are based on standards that, while not fixed, tend to advantage men and boys and disadvantage women and girls. Consequently, they are affected in different ways by policies and programmes. A gender equality approach is about understanding these relative differences and intersecting identities, appreciating that they are not rigid and can be changed. It is important to keep these differences and intersecting identities in mind when designing strategies, policies, programmes and services. Ultimately, promoting gender equality means transforming the power relations between women and men, girls and being fair to produce equal and measurable outcomes.

**Gender Transformative Approach** refers to Plan International's commitment to contribute to gender equality and inclusion by explicitly tackling the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations, discriminatory social norms, and legislation, in all our work.

**In all their diversity:** The term "in all their diversity" is used throughout the Gender Transformative Marker. Diversity acknowledges that everyone is unique. It means recognising, accepting, celebrating, and finding strength in individual differences such as gender, age, nationality, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

**Inclusion** is about bringing people into a process in a meaningful manner. It is the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society and to fully enjoy their rights. It requires addressing the root causes of exclusion and understanding how intertwined the roots of different forms of exclusion are. Inclusion involves improving the opportunities available to girls, boys, youth, in particular those who are vulnerable and excluded, including children with disabilities, who are excluded based on the social groups they identify with or are associated with, as well as respecting their dignity.

**Sexual and gender-based violence** refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It encompasses threats of violence and coercion. It can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual in nature, and can take the form of a denial of resources or access to services. It inflicts harm on women, girls, men and boys.

**Social norms:** Norms are shared beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour in a group of people, including women, girls, men, and boys. Around the world, social norms on gender shape the unequal status of women and girls and the expectations of their role in society.

## 2. Background and context

Across the world, the rights of women and girls are facing renewed and coordinated attacks. Anti-rights and anti-gender movements are gaining influence at multiple levels—locally, nationally, and globally — threatening hard-won progress on gender equality and human rights. This backlash is evident across global north and global south countries alike, both within Belgium<sup>1</sup> and in partner countries where Plan International works<sup>2</sup>. While these movements often begin by opposing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), their reach quickly extends beyond the classroom, influencing national and international policy agendas that undermine gender equality, human rights, and democratic values<sup>3</sup>. The practical impact on the daily lives and rights of girls and young women is far-reaching: restrictions on access to education and sexual and reproductive health services, increased gender-based violence, attacks on LGBTQIA+ rights, and rising resistance to climate justice<sup>4</sup>.

These movements are not only shaping political discourse and policy outcomes. They also aim to reinforce harmful gender norms and unequal power structures in everyday life. Anti-gender actors make strategic use of digital platforms to spread misinformation, recruit support, and influence public opinion. Their presence fuels online gender-based violence<sup>5</sup>, promotes toxic masculinity, exposing young people — particularly boys — to misogynistic content. Research shows that social media content is shaping adolescent attitudes towards gender equality, contributing to rising misogynistic views among young men in Europe<sup>6</sup> and other regions<sup>7</sup>.

The consequences of these movements are felt most acutely by girls. Harmful gender norms shape every aspect of their lives — from education and public participation to their safety and autonomy. Consultations with young people in Belgium and Senegal reveal deep concern about the impact of toxic masculinity and the persistence of social norms that justify or excuse gender-based violence<sup>8</sup>. These realities limit girls' opportunities, silence their voices, and restrict their rights.

Responding to this growing threat requires coordinated action at multiple levels. Legal and policy engagement is essential to uphold human rights frameworks, protect civic space, and reform national laws. This calls for solidarity and support for feminist movements and women's rights organisations — especially those led by girls and young people — who are proven leaders in opposing the anti-rights movement and progressing equality. At the same time, sustainable change depends on transforming harmful gender norms at the individual, community, and institutional levels. This requires long-term investment in gender norm change and the leadership of girls and young people. A key strategy in this effort is gender-transformative education (GTE). Beyond improving access to education for girls, GTE engages stakeholders, students, teachers, communities and policy makers, to challenge and shift harmful norms and power imbalances<sup>9</sup>. It equips young people with the skills to critically reflect on

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<sup>1</sup> Report on anti-gender campaigns in Belgium, Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen, 2024. Review at [this link](#).

<sup>2</sup> Plan International recently supported a study in coordination with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which will be published as an official reference document of the OAS (Organization of American States) on regressive movements and their impact on the rights of children and adolescents in the Americas region.

<sup>3</sup> Manufacturing Moral Panic: Weaponizing children to undermine gender justice and human rights, 2021, Duarte, Ángela, Martínez, Juliana, Rojas, María Juliana, Elevate Children Funders Group and Global Philanthropy Project. Review via [this link](#).

<sup>4</sup> Shrinking Civic Space and the Rollback on Rights: Position Paper, Plan International, forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> State of the World's Girls 2021: The Truth Gap, Plan International, 2021. Review via [this link](#).

<sup>6</sup> Gender Equality Index 2024: Tackling violence against women, tackling gender inequalities, 2024, European Institute for Gender Equality. Review via [this link](#).

<sup>7</sup> Cala, P., Flores, P., Koester, D. (2024) Social media and masculinity norms among adolescents: Insights from Mexico. ALIGN/Mexfam Report. London: ALIGN/ODI Global. Review via [this link](#).

<sup>8</sup> De impact van mannelijkheden op de preventie van seksueel en gendergerelateerd geweld, Plan International, 2022. Review via [this link](#).

<sup>9</sup> Gender Transformative Education: Reimagining Education for a Just and Inclusive World, Plan International, 2021. Review via [this link](#).

gender inequality and lead change in their communities, showing strong potential to create more gender-equitable environments for all<sup>10</sup>.

**As anti-gender and anti-rights movements continue to gain ground, bolder, more coordinated, and better-supported efforts are urgently required to protect progress and ensure the rights of girls and young women are upheld.** This imperative echoes the Belgian Government's commitment to defending women's and girls' rights (including sexual health and reproductive rights) in the face of growing anti-gender movements<sup>11</sup>, recognising that in times of rising tension and uncertainty, sustained investment in gender equality is essential and must remain a priority in its foreign policy, development cooperation, and multilateral engagement. This stance also aligns with Belgium's proposed approach<sup>12</sup> to accelerate the impact of its development cooperation by focusing on gender and youth, and by building the skills and competencies needed to address global challenges such as climate change, public health, and geopolitical instability.

## 2.1. The project

It is against this background that we are seeking a consultant/s to carry out this study. In response to the growing threat posed by anti-rights and anti-gender movements globally, this scoping study intends to inform and influence Belgian development cooperation. Its core aim is **to demonstrate the potential of Gender Transformative Education (GTE) as a proactive response to these movements**: one that equips young people and their wider communities to challenge harmful gender norms, promote gender equality, and build more resilient and inclusive communities.

Using Ecuador as a case study, the research will investigate **how anti-gender and/or anti-rights actors operate at national, regional, and community levels, and how they are impacting girls' rights** — particularly in the areas of education, civic participation, and protection from violence. At the same time, it will document the range of civil society responses to this backlash, including the efforts of Plan International Ecuador, its partners, and other organizations. This includes work with girls and young people, as well as engagement with governments and other key stakeholders, to defend human rights, influence national laws, and promote positive social norms change, with a specific focus on GTE and other gender-transformative approaches.

A limited number of youth testimonies will also be collected in parallel to enrich the study's findings. These accounts will complement the research by illustrating how GTE can empower young people to become advocates and agents of change within their communities. Together, the research and these complementary voices will generate actionable insights into how GTE can serve not just as an educational approach, but as a strategic tool to challenge harmful gender norms, strengthen youth advocacy, and build community-level resilience against anti-gender and anti-rights discourse.

Through this work, the study will provide Belgian policymakers with an evidence-based understanding and illustrations of what is at stake, what is already being done, and **how Belgian development cooperation can more effectively support inclusive and transformative responses to anti-gender movements and protect girls' rights.**

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<sup>10</sup> Nurturing gender-equitable masculinities: lessons for transforming norms through education systems, Align Platform, 2024. Review via [this link](#).

<sup>11</sup> Press release: International Women's Rights Day: 30 years after the Beijing Declaration, the fight for gender equality remains crucial, 2025. Review via [this link](#).

<sup>12</sup> Beleidsnota, Buitenlandse Zaken, Europese Zaken en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 2025. Review via [this link](#).

### 3. Purpose of the study

#### 3.1. Main objective

The objective of the consultancy is to conduct **a scoping study that supports Plan International Belgium's advocacy towards Belgian development cooperation** policymakers and stakeholders. The study will provide **evidence-based recommendations on how to effectively employ gender transformative responses (focusing mainly on Gender Transformative Education) as a strategy to counter anti-gender and anti-rights movements** in partner countries. Using Ecuador as a case, the study will explore the impact of these movements on girls' rights and examine how GTE and other gender transformative approaches in advocacy and programming can promote gender norm transformation and build community-level resilience in collaboration with girls and young people, wider civil society, and governments.

#### 3.2. Specific objectives

Specifically, the consultant will be expected to:

- **Analyse the landscape and impact of anti-gender and anti-rights movements in Ecuador:** Conduct a desk review of relevant literature, policy documents, and civil society reports to examine how anti-gender and anti-rights movements operate and influence gender norms, laws, and public discourse in Ecuador — particularly in relation to girls' rights in education, civic participation, and protection from violence.
- **Map out gender transformative (education) interventions, strategies and programming in Ecuador:** Document and analyse how civil society (Plan International Ecuador, its partners, schools) are responding to anti-gender and anti-rights movements through rights-based advocacy, policy engagement, community mobilisation, and gender transformative programming. Identify promising practices, emerging strategies, and areas for improvement, with a specific focus on GTE-related interventions.
- **Conduct key informant interviews** with Plan International staff, civil society representatives, educators and/or local experts to complement the desk review and mapping, and to gather deeper contextual insights on the challenges posed by anti-gender movements and the potential and effectiveness of current responses, particularly those involving gender transformative education.
- **Illustrate the value of GTE through gathering a limited number of youth testimonies:** These stories will not serve as formal evidence but will complement the study by showcasing the lived experiences of young people engaged in gender transformative learning initiatives (such as Champions of Change and LEAD programs) and its impact on their capacity to challenge gender norms and advocate for equality.
- **Generate concrete advocacy messages and policy-oriented recommendations** for Belgian development cooperation stakeholders how to strengthen the role of GTE and other gender transformative strategies in resisting anti-gender and anti-rights movements and enhancing girls' rights.
- **Provide advocacy and influencing content to the Plan International Ecuador Country Office** to support their advocacy and programming efforts against anti-gender and anti-rights movements.
- **Facilitate mutual learning between the scoping study and a planned youth exchange**<sup>13</sup> between Belgium and Ecuador by ensuring a two-way flow of insights: integrate the stories and

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<sup>13</sup> In October 2025, Plan International Belgium, in collaboration with the Country Office in the selected partner country, will organize a youth exchange between young people from Belgium and the partner country, aiming to empower them to apply GTE principles in their own communities and take on leadership roles to challenge harmful gender norms. The youth exchange will serve both as a learning space and an opportunity to engage youth in discussions on the study's preliminary findings and gather testimonies.



lived experiences of young people into the study, while using preliminary findings (particularly from the desk review) to inform, contextualise and enrich discussions with participants during the exchange.

### 3.3. How the study report will be used:

- **Advocacy by Plan International Belgium:** The study will underpin Plan International Belgium's advocacy efforts towards policymakers, particularly around key political and awareness-raising moments such as the International Day of Education (January 2026). It will provide Belgian development cooperation and foreign policy actors with concrete, evidence-based insights and recommendations to employ GTE and other gender transformative strategies and better support youth- and women-led civil society in resisting anti-gender and anti-rights movements. Findings may be used as a foundation for developing future advocacy tools (e.g. policy briefs or position papers) in collaboration with youth advocates.
- **Youth-led campaign:** Findings will feed into a national youth campaign, co-created during a youth exchange between Belgium and Ecuador. This campaign will promote GTE as a key lever for advancing gender equality, targeting young people (15–24 years old) through schools. Preliminary findings from the study will help prepare for and enrich discussions during the exchange, ensuring a two-way flow of insights between research and youth-led action. Findings may further serve as a foundation for the development of educational tools within the campaign framework, contributing to global citizenship education interventions that engage young people in critical reflection on gender equality and international solidarity.
- **Support to Plan International Ecuador's programming and advocacy:** Although the primary audience is Belgian stakeholders, the report will also contribute to the work of Plan International Ecuador. Findings will support local programming, strengthen advocacy efforts, and provide context-specific evidence to counter anti-gender and anti-rights movements at the national and community levels.
- **Tool for stakeholder learning and engagement:** The report will serve as a learning tool for stakeholders in Belgium and internationally, including educators, civil society, and development practitioners (including NGOs with international programming). It will stimulate dialogue and critical reflection on the transformative potential of education in challenging harmful gender norms and promoting gender equality.

## 4. Research questions

The study will address the following overarching research questions, which will be refined in collaboration with the selected consultant during the inception phase. Up to six final, context-appropriate questions will be agreed upon jointly.

1. **How do anti-gender and anti-rights actors shape gender norms, policy agendas, and public discourse in Ecuador — at community, national, and regional levels — and what are the consequences for girls' rights, particularly in relation to education, civic participation/youth leadership, and protection from violence<sup>14</sup>?**
  - What are the key strategies and narratives used by these actors?
  - To what extent are these actors targeting young people — particularly through discourse on masculinity, femininity, and gender roles — in ways that may influence attitudes toward gender equality?
  - To what extent are these movements restricting the civic space and activities of civil society working on gender equality and girls' rights?

<sup>14</sup> **Impact areas:** The analysis focuses on three impact areas outlined in Plan International Belgium's Vision and Strategy 2036 and aligned with Plan International's Areas of Global Distinctiveness (AoGD): (1) Protection from Violence, including limited access to essential services such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); (2) Inclusive Quality Education, including access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE); and (3) Girls, Boys, and Youth as Active Drivers of Change (LEAD).



- How does this compare or connect to broader trends in anti-gender backlash globally or in the Belgian context, where relevant?
2. **In what ways are Plan International Ecuador, its partners, and wider civil society actors addressing gender norm transformation through programming and advocacy to respond to anti-gender and anti-rights movements?**
    - What types of legal/policy engagement, human rights-based advocacy, or community-based approaches are being used, and how do they interact or complement one another?
    - What promising practices or gaps emerge from these strategies?
  3. **What does the available evidence — from Ecuador and other contexts<sup>15</sup> — suggest about the potential of Gender Transformative Education (GTE) to promote more equitable gender norms among young people and contribute to resilience against anti-gender movements?**
    - What indications exist (from program implementers, educators, and available documentation) that current GTE initiatives in Ecuador are influencing young people's capacity to recognize, challenge, and shift harmful gender norms within their communities?
    - What contextual or implementation factors appear to enhance or limit GTE's effectiveness in these efforts?
  4. **What concrete insights and promising practices from gender transformative education (GTE) and related approaches implemented in Ecuador can inform Belgian development cooperation and foreign affairs strategies?**
    - How can Belgian policymakers better support inclusive, youth-led, and feminist responses to anti-gender movements through education and broader gender transformative programming in partner countries?

## 5. Methods for data collection and analysis

This scoping study will adopt a **qualitative, mixed-methods methodology, combining desk research, mapping, and key informant interviews (KIIs)** to assess the influence of anti-gender and anti-rights movements on girls' rights in Ecuador, examine the strategies and responses of civil society, and explore the potential of gender transformative education (GTE) as a strategic response.

The study shall be conducted in the following phases:

### 5.1. Phase 1: Desk Review and Mapping Exercise

#### Desk review

The desk review will form a foundational component of the scoping study and should provide a **comprehensive and critical analysis of how anti-rights and anti-gender movements operate and influence gender equality and girls' rights in Ecuador**. The review should map the presence, strategies, narratives and influence of these movements at community, national, and regional levels, and assess their impact on the rights and lived experiences of girls and young women — particularly in the areas of education, civic participation and leadership, and protection from violence. Additionally, the review should incorporate existing evidence — both from Ecuador and other contexts — on **the potential of Gender Transformative Education (GTE) to promote more equitable gender norms among young people and to strengthen resilience against anti-gender discourse**.

The consultant is expected to:

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<sup>15</sup> The scoping study will explore how gender transformative education (GTE) can serve as a proactive and strategic response to anti-gender and anti-rights movements, using Ecuador as a case study. While the focus is on the national context, the research will also consider global and regional evidence that illustrates the broader relevance and potential of GTE to promote gender-equitable norms, particularly among young people.

- Analyse relevant legal and policy frameworks relating to girls' rights in the three core thematic areas, including any regressive developments influenced by anti-gender or anti-rights movements.
- Assess how harmful gender norms and backlash affect the implementation of existing rights frameworks and the effectiveness of current interventions, including evidence on GTE's role.
- Identify trends, challenges, and opportunities linked to the presence of anti-rights movements, including their impact on civil society space and the ability of feminist and youth-led organizations to operate.
- Examine evidence or indications from available documentation on how GTE initiatives in Ecuador and beyond promote more equitable gender norms among young people and potentially contribute to resilience against anti-gender movements.

The review should draw from a diverse and sufficiently comprehensive set of recent, relevant, and credible sources. These should include:

- Academic research and peer-reviewed literature
- Reports by civil society organisations, women's rights groups, and youth movements
- Publications and evaluations from international and national development agencies
- Legal and policy documents from government and intergovernmental institutions<sup>16</sup>

To ensure quality and credibility, the consultant is expected to demonstrate source triangulation across these types of documents, integrating different perspectives and evidence bases. A list of key documents to be consulted should be proposed in the inception report (as an annex) and referenced clearly in the final desk review. The review should prioritise documents that are directly relevant to the research questions and adhere to recognised standards for evidence quality and rigour.

The findings from the desk review will directly inform the key informant interviews and serve as the analytical basis for the final report. Limitations, such as data availability or access to up-to-date information, should be transparently acknowledged.

### Mapping exercise

As part of Phase 1, the consultant will conduct **a comprehensive mapping of civil society strategies and responses to anti-gender and anti-rights movements in Ecuador**. This will include the identification and analysis of initiatives aimed at advancing and defending girls' rights — particularly in education, youth leadership and civic participation, and protection from violence — implemented by a range of actors, including Plan International, its partners, and other civil society organisations.

The purpose of this exercise is to contribute directly to Research Questions 2 and 3 by exploring **how gender norm transformation is promoted and how anti-gender narratives are countered through advocacy, programming, and mobilisation** — particularly through Gender Transformative Education (GTE) and related approaches. It will complement the desk review and key informant interviews, and provide insight into promising practices, strategic gaps, and areas for collective action.

The consultant is expected to:

- Identify and categorise relevant initiatives and strategies across civil society that aim to transform gender norms or respond to anti-gender narratives and backlash.
- Analyse how these interventions address backlash and promote resilience, particularly through GTE and other transformative or rights-based approaches.
- Identify promising practices, strategic gaps, challenges, synergies, and lessons learned across different actors and approaches.

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<sup>16</sup> Plan International recently supported a study in coordination with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which will be published as an official reference document of the OAS (Organization of American States) on regressive movements and their impact on the rights of children and adolescents in the Americas region.

The mapping should provide both a descriptive and analytical overview, situated within the national and regional context, and should include initiatives and strategic approaches such as:

- Engagement in international, regional, or national human rights mechanisms, including advocacy linked to processes such as the Universal Periodic Review, CEDAW, or the Commission on the Status of Women.
- Legal and policy advocacy at national and regional levels (e.g. Activities aimed at promoting or defending laws, policies, and national frameworks that protect and advance girls' rights, for example, legal reforms on child marriage, SRHR, gender-based violence, or education.)
- Gender transformative education and community-based norm change initiatives, including school-based programmes, teacher training, extra-curricular clubs, and peer education approaches that engage young people, caregivers, educators, and communities. These interventions aim to shift harmful gender norms, promote critical reflection, and foster inclusive, rights-based attitudes, often through work with both girls and boys, and the broader community.
- Supporting or partnering with independent girl and youth-led groups and organising, through capacity building, accompaniment or provision of direct funding or institutional support, encouraging and enabling them to challenge harmful gender norms and advance rights-based agendas.
- Use of digital platforms or campaigns for activism (e.g., peer education, safe online spaces for youth, SRHR awareness.)
- Service delivery and education: Strengthening access to comprehensive sexuality education, youth-friendly health services, and protection programmes tailored to girls' needs.

The mapping should draw on a triangulated mix of sources, including:

- Internal and public documents, programme reports, or evaluation reports from civil society organisations and networks
- Key informant interviews with civil society leaders, practitioners, and technical experts
- Complementary insights from the desk review

Findings from the mapping will feed directly into the final analysis and recommendations and will inform the identification of potential entry points for future programming, policy advocacy, and youth engagement. The consultant should outline proposed initiatives to be included in the mapping in the inception report, and ensure that documentation is recent, relevant, and reflects diverse types of actors and approaches.

## **5.2. Phase 2: Key Informant Interviews:**

Key informant interviews (KIIs) will be a critical component of the study, aimed at capturing the programmatic, political, and social dynamics shaping the anti-rights and anti-gender landscape in the selected country. They will also explore the strategies of civil society actors, including Plan International, and provide insight into the perceived role and effectiveness of gender transformative approaches, including Gender Transformative Education (GTE).

**The insights gathered through these interviews will complement and enrich the desk review and mapping exercise by validating findings, filling information gaps, and offering additional contextual depth.** KIIs are expected to contribute evidence and perspectives relevant to all research questions, including:

- The strategies, narratives, and influence of anti-gender and anti-rights actors;
- The ways in which these movements impact girls' rights and civic space;
- Civil society's responses, including GTE and other norm change approaches;
- Reflections on the effectiveness, limitations, and potential of GTE interventions;

- Relevant lessons for Belgian cooperation.

The consultant will be expected to identify and conduct **12–16 in-depth interviews** with a diverse range of key informants, including but not limited to:

**Plan International Ecuador Country Office staff**, such as:

- Gender and Gender Transformative Education Specialists
- Champions of Change (CHoC) or LEAD facilitators and youth engagement staff
- Staff supporting civil society engagement, particularly youth- and women-led organisations
- Technical advisors, advocacy staff, programme managers, M&E specialists, and programme directors (to be confirmed based on country context)

**External stakeholders**, including:

- Representatives from civil society organisations, particularly those working on gender equality, children/girls' rights, and human rights
- National or local experts and researchers with in-depth knowledge of the socio-political context and anti-gender movements

The consultant will be responsible for preparing interview guides tailored to the study's objectives and research questions, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring ethical and safeguarding standards are upheld throughout the data collection process. Based on the consultant's proposal and internal discussions, the final decision on whether interviews will be conducted online, in person, or through a combination of both will be jointly agreed. In addition to Plan International staff identified for KIIs, the Plan International Ecuador Country Office will assist in identifying relevant external stakeholders.

## 6. Youth exchange: Integrating illustrative youth testimonies

While the study will not directly collect formal data from young people for the purpose of answering the research questions, the consultant will have the opportunity to **draw on insights and testimonies from a planned youth exchange in October 2025 taking place in Ecuador**. This exchange, led by Plan International, will bring together young people from Belgium with young people from Ecuador who have participated in Plan International GTE programming. It will serve as a platform for:

- Deepen participants' understanding of gender norms, stereotypes, and inequalities across contexts.
- Share lived experiences and reflections on Gender Transformative Education.
- Facilitate intercultural dialogue on how young people perceive and respond to anti-gender narratives in their communities.
- Engage youth in discussions on the study's preliminary findings.
- Co-create a youth-led campaign (to be launched in Belgium) inspired by the study's themes.

Where relevant, and with informed consent and ethical approval, **selected testimonies from the youth exchange may be used illustratively in the final report**. These narratives will not constitute evidence for answering the study's research questions but may be used to enrich and complement the study findings.

The consultant's potential role may include:

- Identifying themes, questions, or insights from the desk review, mapping, or KIIs that could be further explored with youth participants;
- Advising on participatory, youth-friendly tools, activities or facilitation approaches for the exchange;
- Supporting or observing the exchange activities in person or remotely (as feasible); or via collaboration with a local counterpart;
- Collaborating with Plan staff to ethically integrate relevant youth testimonies into the final report;

- Analysing testimonies or workshop outcomes to identify illustrative quotes or narratives that align with the study's evidence base.

Any illustrative content from the youth exchange will be clearly labeled and contextualized within the report.

## 7. Analytical approaches

- **Intersectionality:** The analysis must apply an intersectional lens to understand how multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination shape the lived experiences of girls and young women. For instance, gender-based exclusion may be compounded by other identity factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, migration background, disability, or geographic location. The study should highlight how these intersecting factors influence access to rights, particularly in education, protection from violence, and civic participation, and expose the ways in which anti-rights and anti-gender movements may disproportionately impact girls who are already marginalised. This approach will allow for more targeted and inclusive recommendations.
- **Legal and policy analysis:** The study should include an analysis of the legal and policy landscape in Ecuador. This includes examining existing laws, regulations, and institutional frameworks relevant to girls' rights, such as those relating to education, protection from gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The consultant should assess whether and how these frameworks are influenced by anti-gender narratives or backlash, and how this affects the implementation of rights on the ground.
- **Geographic and socio-cultural diversity:** Recognising that national contexts are rarely uniform, the study should account for geographic, linguistic, and socio-cultural diversity within Ecuador. Differences between rural and urban areas, regional legal or administrative frameworks, and varying cultural attitudes towards gender roles may all influence how anti-rights/anti-gender movements manifest and how they can be countered. Where possible, the analysis should reflect these nuances to ensure that findings are not overgeneralised and that recommendations are contextually appropriate.

## 8. Ethics and Child Protection

Plan International is committed to ensuring that the rights of those participating in data collection or analysis are respected and protected, in accordance with [Ethical MERL Framework](#) and our [Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy](#). All applicants should include details in their proposal on how they will ensure ethics and child protection in the data collection process. Specifically, the consultant(s) shall explain how appropriate, safe, non-discriminatory participation of all stakeholders will be ensured and how special attention will be paid to the needs of children and other vulnerable groups. The consultant(s) shall also explain how confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be guaranteed and how data will be used in accordance with GDPR guidelines. The consultant(s) will be expected to actively participate in Plan International's Ethical Review Process, including the completion of a Safeguarding Risk Assessment.

Although the study will not involve direct primary data collection with young people, **the consultant may be given the opportunity to engage with youth participants during a planned exchange in Ecuador, where selected testimonies could be used to illustrate study findings.** where selected testimonies may be used to illustrate the study's findings. These testimonies, shared voluntarily and with informed consent, would be used to enrich the analysis by bringing in youth perspectives and lived experiences relevant to the study's themes.

Given the possibility that young people may share reflections on personal or sensitive issues during this engagement, the following ethical considerations must guide the consultant's approach:

- **Safe and inclusive participation:** Consultants must ensure that all engagement methods (e.g., interviews with key informants, observation during the youth exchange) are inclusive, safe, and non-discriminatory. Particular care should be taken to respect the rights and dignity of all individuals involved, with sensitivity to the specific needs of girls, young people, and marginalised groups.

- **Protection from harm:** As the study may involve discussions of sensitive topics such as gender-based violence, harmful gender norms, or anti-rights movements, appropriate safeguards must be in place to avoid harm, exploitation, or re-traumatisation. Consultants have a duty of care to ensure all participants are engaged in ways that are ethically sound and emotionally safe.
- **Informed consent and assent:** Informed consent must be obtained from all individuals who contribute to the study. Where illustrative testimonies from young people participating in the youth exchange are included, consent procedures must be age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and in line with Plan's safeguarding policies.
- **Confidentiality and anonymity:** The confidentiality and privacy of all individuals must be protected throughout the process. Any identifying details must be anonymised where necessary, and data should be stored securely and used solely for agreed purposes, in compliance with GDPR and Plan International's data protection standards.
- **Creating safe spaces:** All engagements (whether interviews or youth engagements during the exchange) should be conducted in respectful, inclusive environments. Consultants should foster psychological safety, establish clear norms for respectful dialogue, and actively mitigate any forms of discrimination or marginalisation.
- **Cultural sensitivity and power awareness:** Consultants must demonstrate cultural competence and an awareness of social power dynamics, especially when engaging across differences in age, gender, race, language, or nationality. They should be mindful of their own positionality and avoid imposing assumptions or biases.
- **Linguistic accessibility:** All materials and communication should be adapted to the language and literacy levels of participants to ensure clarity and inclusion. This is especially important when engaging with youth during the exchange or working in multilingual contexts.

Upholding these ethical standards is essential to ensure that all engagements conducted throughout the study (including key informant interviews and potential engagements with young people) are respectful, empowering, and aligned with Plan International's values.

## 9. Key deliverables

Deliverable	Format	Length
Inception Report	Word document	~10 pages
Safeguarding Risks assessment, in collaboration with PI staff	Excel/PDF documents	N/A
Final data collection tools (interview guides and consent forms)	Word/PDF documents	As needed
Completed consent forms	Scanned PDFs	As needed
Cleaned data (including KII transcripts and mapping exercise)	Word document	~5–10 pages
Draft Study Report (excluding executive summary and recommendations)	Word document	~25–30 pages
Final Study Report	Word document (PDF)	~35–40 pages + annexes
Presentation of Findings to Plan International Belgium staff	Verbal + PowerPoint presentation	~10–15 slides
One-pager summarizing promising practices (TBD with consultant)	PDF/Word document	1 page



## 10. Timeline

Activity	Deadline	Responsible
<b>Publication of Terms of Reference</b>	30/05/2025	Plan Belgium
Deadline to receive applications	22/06/2025	Plan Belgium
Analysis of proposals received & shortlisting	24/06/2025	Plan Belgium
Interviews with preselected consultants	By 28/06/2025	Plan Belgium
Background checks and contracting	02/07/2025	Plan Belgium
Kick-off meeting with selected consultant	03/07/2025	Plan Belgium
<b>Submission of Inception Report</b>	17/07/2025	Consultant
Feedback on Inception Report	24/07/2025	Plan Belgium & PI Ecuador
Submission of revised Inception Report and data collection tools	31/07/2025	Consultant
Feedback on revised Inception Report and data collection tools	07/08/2025	Plan Belgium & PI Ecuador
<b>Submission of final Inception report and data collection tools</b>	14/08/2025	Consultant
Validation of inception report and tools	21/08/2025	Plan Belgium & PI Ecuador
<b>Submission to Plan International's Ethics Review Team (ERT)</b>	22/08/2025	Plan Belgium, PI Ecuador & Consultant
<b>Start Phase 1: Desk review and mapping</b>	26/08/2025	Consultant
<b>Presentation of preliminary findings from desk review/mapping</b>	16/09/2025	Consultant
First feedback from ERT	By 11/10/2025	Plan ERT
Responses to ERT comments & adjustments	By 17/10/2025	Consultant & Plan Belgium
Validation of study design & data collection tools by ERT	21/10/2025	Plan ERT
<b>Start Phase 2: Key Informant Interviews</b>	22/10/2025	Consultant
TBD: Youth Exchange (observation and testimony gathering)	25/10–02/11/2025	Plan + Consultant
<b>Presentation of preliminary findings from KIIs and selected youth testimonies</b>	12/11/2025	Consultant
Data analysis, integration of testimonies, and report drafting	13/11–04/12/2025	Consultant
Validation workshop with stakeholders	05/12/2025	Plan Belgium, PI Ecuador, Consultant
<b>Submission of draft study report (excl. exec. summary &amp; recs)</b>	16/12/2025	Consultant
<b>Feedback to draft report and deliverables</b>	23/12/2025	Plan Belgium & PI Ecuador
Submission of final deliverables	04/01/2026	Consultant



## 11. Budget

The maximum budget available for this study is €25,000 (VAT included). This amount must cover all costs associated with the assignment, including consultant fees, travel, accommodation, insurance, visas, and any other related expenses<sup>17</sup>. Proposals exceeding this amount will not be considered.

Interested applicants must submit a detailed budget as part of their financial and technical offer.

Plan International Belgium will provide regular feedback on draft reports and respond to queries throughout the assignment. Payments will be made in instalments, contingent upon the timely and satisfactory submission of deliverables and formal approval by Plan International.

Milestone	Amount to be Paid (%)
Inception report	30
Final Report and other deliverables	70

## 12. Expected qualifications

A successful applicant (individual or team) is expected to meet most or all of the following criteria:

- Academic background: Advanced university degree in a relevant field such as social sciences, gender studies, international development, or human rights.
- Thematic expertise:
  - Strong understanding of gender equality, gender transformative (education) programming, anti-gender movements and human rights.
  - Proven experience working on issues related to girls' rights, gender-based violence, (gender transformative) education, youth leadership, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and/or civic space.
  - Good understanding of feminist, intersectional research frameworks/methodologies.
- Professional experience:
  - Minimum 5 years of experience in gender programming, policy analysis, or research/evaluation in development or humanitarian contexts.
  - Demonstrated expertise in conducting independent, gender-sensitive research using qualitative methods such as key informant interviews and desk reviews.
  - Familiarity with legal and policy environments related to girls' rights, education, protection from violence, and youth leadership/civic participation in Ecuador.
  - Experience working with children and young people in research or storytelling contexts, ensuring ethical and safeguarding standards.
  - Proven ability to develop policy-relevant research outputs and actionable recommendations.
- Skills and competencies:
  - Excellent analytical and writing skills, with a proven ability to produce high-quality, policy-relevant research outputs.
  - Strong organisational skills and ability to manage timelines independently.
  - Fluency in English is required; Fluent proficiency in Spanish is essential for conducting interviews, engaging meaningfully with local stakeholders, and ensuring ethical and safeguarding standards in interactions with young people; proficiency in Dutch and/or French is an asset.
  - Existing networks with relevant civil society actors, experts, or institutions in Ecuador are an advantage.

<sup>17</sup> A separate budget will support the logistics and facilitation of the international youth exchange and campaign-related activities.

### 13. Contact

Please address any question related to the present ToRs to [evaluna.maes@planinternational.be](mailto:evaluna.maes@planinternational.be) before **06/06/2025**. Responses to the questions will be sent to all applicants by 13/06/2025.

### 14. Applications

Interested applicants should provide a proposal covering the following aspects:

- Detailed response to the TOR
- Proposed methodology
- Ethics and child safeguarding approaches, including identified risks and mitigation strategies
- Proposed timelines
- CVs
- Example of previous work
- 2 recommendations
- Detailed budget, including daily fee rates, expenses related to data collection, potential travel costs, taxes etc.
- Police Certificates of Good Conduct

You are also requested to review, complete, and submit the following documents: Annex 3 – [Supplier Questionnaire](#) and Annex 4 – [Non-Staff Code of Conduct](#).

Please send your application to [Tender@planinternational.be](mailto:Tender@planinternational.be) and [evaluna.maes@planinternational.be](mailto:evaluna.maes@planinternational.be) by **20/06/2025** referencing “*Scoping study: Anti-gender movements and Gender-Transformative Education*” in the subject line and including support documents as outline.

The selection will be based on a cumulative analysis, where the technical proposal accounts for 70% of the total score and the financial proposal for 30%.

#### Technical evaluation criteria (70 points total) include:

##### 1. Consultant(s) skills: 40 points

- Proven expertise in gender transformative education and girls' rights. (15 points)
- Proven expertise in qualitative and inclusive research. (15 points)
- Fluency in English and Spanish (required); knowledge of French and/or Dutch is a plus. Strong communication and organizational skills. (5 points)
- Knowledge of Ecuador's context and actors; existing networks are an advantage. (5 points)

##### 2. Quality of the proposal and proposed methodology: 30 points

- Clear understanding of the objectives of the study. (10 points)
- Sound methodology with a logical link between approach, tools, and expected results. (10 points)
- Feasibility and responsiveness to ToR objectives, including safeguarding and ethical considerations. (10 points)

#### Financial Evaluation (30 points total):

The lowest price will receive the full 30 points. Other proposals will be scored as follows:  
 $30 \times (\text{lowest bid} / \text{evaluated bid})$ .

The final score will be the sum of the technical and financial scores. The proposal with the highest total score will be selected.

Plan International Belgium reserves the right to cancel the procedure if fewer than three candidates apply or if the quality of the applications is deemed insufficient.

## 15. Annexes

Annex 1: [Global Policy: Safeguarding Children and Young People](#)

Annex 2: [Ethical MERL Framework](#) and [Guidelines for Safeguarding in MER](#)

Annex 3: [Supplier Questionnaire](#)

Annex 4: [Non-Staff Code of Conduct](#)