



**Human Rights Council  
Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Malawi  
50<sup>th</sup> Session (November 2025)**

**Joint Stakeholders' Submission on:**

**Human Rights in Malawi**

**Submitted by:**

**Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)**

*(NGO in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)*

and

**Marist Brothers – Province of Southern Africa**

and

**Solidaridad, Educación y Desarrollo (SED)**

Geneva, April 2025

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholders' report is a joint submission of the above-mentioned organizations. The report highlights key concerns related to **children's rights** in Malawi, particularly **education, quality employment, health care, and general welfare**. Each section conveys recommendations to the Malawi Government.

2. The data and information obtained for this submission came from various sources and includes information from youth, teachers, educators, and other civil society actors living and working in Malawi. All information concerned the period from November 2020 to March 2025.

3. **Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)** is an international organization promoted by the Marist Brothers, present in 80 countries. FMSI has more than 15 years of experience working in the field of international solidarity, advocating for children's rights especially in the field of education. It works at the international level, participating in the UN human rights mechanisms in collaboration with other organizations with similar interests. It has been accredited by ECOSOC since 2011.

4. **The Marist Brothers – Province of Southern Africa:** The Marist Brothers is a religious congregation of consecrated men in the Catholic Church. They are involved in the education of children and young people in schools and other educational settings. The Province of Southern Africa is an Administrative Unit within the Marist Institute, composed of several locations and personnel living and working in Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe<sup>1</sup>. The Marist Brothers currently operate multiple schools in Malawi and provide essential social services for vulnerable children and youth.

5. **Solidaridad, Educación y Desarrollo (SED)** is a non-profit, state-wide, non-governmental development organization (NGO). It works mainly to promote the right to education in Africa and Latin America, as well as in some countries in Asia and Europe. SED's three objectives are: development cooperation, education for development and the promotion and training of volunteers. Its headquarters are in Madrid. It has four regional delegations in Barcelona, Valladolid, Pamplona and Seville. In Spain it works in the field of Development Education and Social Advocacy.

## II. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UPR MECHANISM

6. Malawi was reviewed in November 2020 at the 36th Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, receiving 232 recommendations. This coalition welcomes the constructive participation of Malawi in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). As the outcome of its UPR at Human Rights Council 46 (March 2021), Malawi adopted 192 of these recommendations and noted 40<sup>2</sup>.

7. We also welcome the adoption of many recommendations that are connected to the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup>: **16** - Peace, justice and strong institutions (42%); **5** - Gender Equality (19%);

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marist presence in the world: <https://champagnat.org/en/marist-institute/our-presence/>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "Matrix Recommendations Malawi" available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/mw-index>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. "Infographic" available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/mw-index>

**10** - Reduced inequalities (13%); **3** - Good health and well-being (6%); **8** - Decent work and economic growth (6%); **4** - Quality Education; **1** - No poverty; **2** - Zero hunger.

8. The Malawian government's adoption of these multiple recommendations demonstrates its commitment to safeguarding human rights. As a coalition, we acknowledge this commitment and respectfully urge the government to maintain its efforts to allocate the necessary resources and implement the requisite measures to ensure the effective implementation of these recommendations. This is crucial for advancing human rights, particularly among the most vulnerable members of the population. We therefore urge the government of Malawi to pay particular attention to the effective follow-up of these recommendations, in consultation with Civil Society.

9. We would like to express our gratitude to the government of Malawi for granting us the opportunity to submit this report, and for its adherence to the measures proposed by the United Nations for the participation of civil society. This joint submission represents the follow-up to the recommendations accepted by the State on the previous UPR cycle. We acknowledge the necessity to expand upon the previous recommendations and to address any new issues that may arise during the next session.

### **III. METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC**

#### **Methodology:**

10. The methodology entailed the active engagement of adolescents and young people, encompassing multiple groups of students between the ages of 12 and 18 from various educational institutions. Their responses were collected and focused on the issues affecting their educational and personal wellbeing. A total of 277 students participated, with 52% identifying as female and 48% as male. The primary issues that emerged from this fieldwork are addressed in this report, although it should be noted that additional concerns were identified beyond those explicitly mentioned.

11. This report also includes some direct voices of children and young people discussing the situation of rights in Malawi. These voices, marked "*in quotation marks*" and *in italics* throughout the text, are the result of interactions with and attentive listening to adolescents and young people during the data collection process. These voices serve to both inspire and reaffirm the theoretical work that has been carried out by the organizations presenting the report.

#### **Overview:**

12. **Education.** It is asserted by young people that the education system of the country should be strengthened, with the State being asked to take measures to guarantee access to education for every Malawian child (especially those living in remote areas), as well as to provide appropriate human resources (well-trained teachers and committed educational personnel), methodologies and materials.

13. **Quality employment and labor market.** Malawian youth participating in the consultation process recognize that having access to quality employment offers greater opportunities for the development of individuals and their families. Therefore, our coalition believes that it is essential to continue making efforts to create job opportunities, especially for young people who finish secondary and tertiary education allowing them to achieve their full development.

14. **Health care.** The importance of good health for the development of a dignified life is widely acknowledged. The youth of Malawi have identified the pressing necessity to enhance the nation's healthcare infrastructure by establishing health centers and providing essential health facilities. They have further emphasized the importance of augmenting the workforce to ensure that all segments of the population have access to essential treatment and medications.

15. **Poverty and Social issues constraining general welfare.** During the consultation process, Malawian youth identified other social issues as the most significant challenges to the development of the country and to the safeguarding of the rights of people, particularly those of children, youth, and the most vulnerable. These concerns encompass the prevalence of physical, sexual, and emotional child abuse; the ongoing presence of early marriages due to financial constraints; the absence of role models; the deleterious impact of peer pressure; the necessity for enhancing family dynamics; and the end of poverty.

16. The government of Malawi has enacted legislation and instituted public policies aimed at ensuring the protection of human rights. It is acknowledged that some of the challenges confronting the government are complex and require dedicated effort to address, both in the present and in the future. We deeply appreciated its commitment to maintaining these efforts.

#### IV. EDUCATION

17. Our coalition wants to join the efforts of the State of Malawi in the field of education. The adoption of several recommendations from the last UPR expresses the commitment of the country on this important aspect for the development and wellbeing of its people<sup>4</sup>.

18. The Malawi Ministry of Education has implemented the National Education Sector Investment Plan (NESIP) 2020-2030, which seeks to improve the quality and access to education<sup>5</sup>. Also, the Ministry has developed national education standards and teacher training programs to address the quality of teaching<sup>6</sup>. The most recent governmental report on this field shows that “the Government of Malawi allocated 4% of GDP to education, which falls slightly below the regional average of 4.6%” (pg. 16)<sup>7</sup> and “increased recurrent expenditures allocated to education from 20% in 2008 to 27% in 2019”<sup>8</sup>; the education system expanded in physical capacity to foster increasing enrolments at all levels; there is a progress in gender parity in primary education; new secondary schools have been built in order to increase access, particularly for girls and vulnerable groups; budgets for higher education focused on infrastructure and expanding capacity have been implemented regarding equitable access as a priority. However, “significant gaps remain in the quality of education, funding, and infrastructure” (pg. 18).

19. Among the most significant challenges faced by the educational sector in Malawi are:

- Demographic pressures seriously affect the education system producing limited access. This situation is evident given that although the net primary school enrollment rate is 85%, many children do not complete secondary education. Distance from school and lack of

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<sup>4</sup> Some examples: 122.113, 122.133 to 122.140

<sup>5</sup> Cf. <https://www.education.gov.mw/index.php>

<sup>6</sup> “National Education Standards” (2015), available at: <https://www.education.gov.mw/index.php>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. “The 2024 Education Sector Report: Education for Impact”, available at <https://www.education.gov.mw/index.php/edu-resources/2022-jsr-resources/category/51-jsr-2024>

<sup>8</sup> Cf. “NESIP 2020-2030”, page 6, available at: <https://www.education.gov.mw/index.php>

monetary funds are at the roots of this situation. The summary report of the “Improving educational outcomes among children in Malawi's social cash transfer programme” (pg. 1)<sup>9</sup> expresses that the average distance students enrolled in primary education should commute from their homes is 1.7 kilometers, and for secondary school students is 6.4 km.

- Shortage of teachers and educational materials, especially in rural areas: According to the quoted report, in primary schools “the learner/teacher ratio of about 148:1 is much higher than the average of 60:1 for Malawi, and 40:1 for sub-Saharan Africa” (pg. 2). Moreover, the budget allocation for Management and Administration only has been received from 1% to 5% between 2019 and 2024<sup>10</sup>.
- Gender inequality: Despite the efforts made by the Malawian government and the offspring of a new culture that sees value in girls’ education, they face significant barriers to accessing education, especially in rural areas. UNESCO highlights in its Global Education Monitoring Report the importance of inclusion and equity in education in Malawi<sup>11</sup> as a goal to be achieved. Also, the recommendation 122.144<sup>12</sup>, proposed by Belgium, asks for “the effective implementation of the Gender Equality Act, and in particular increase efforts to improve the literacy and education of women”.

20. The young people participating in the data collection for this report are aware of these challenges. The following needs were expressed by them:

- *“Most of the youths lack school fees to continue with the education... (they) fail to access high quality education because there are very few schools in this country, and less learning materials in most schools affects students’ academic performance”*
- *“Some parents restrict their children from going to school arguing that they should do home chores hence hindering their right to education”*
- *“Most African parents are not aware of the importance of education”*
- *“(Malawian youth) lack of financial support to higher education... We ask school fees because most learners finish schools but lacking money to pay in colleges or universities”*
- *“High levels of illiteracy: this is so because many do not go to school due to lack of school fees”*
- *“(There is a) poor distributions of schools which make other youth to drop out of school due to long distances”*
- *“In Malawi we need more schools since schools are far apart from each other which makes some students not to be at school”.*
- *“(Our country needs) More schools in rural areas” ... “Establishing some more schools especially universities where quality education will be provided”*
- *“We are worried about school facilities (e.g. school apparatus for laboratories, books, desks, etc. because most schools in Malawi have insufficient funds to acquire school facilities”*

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. <https://www.unicef.org/malawi/reports/improving-educational-outcomes-among-children-malawis-social-cash-transfer-programme>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. “The 2024 Education Sector Report: Education for Impact”, page 6

<sup>11</sup> Cf. “Global education monitoring report, 2020: Inclusion and education: all means all”, available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718>

<sup>12</sup> Similarly, recommendations 122.145 (Chile); 122.150 (Mozambique); 122.160 (Nepal); 122.133 (Sudan); 112.138 (New Zealand); 122.139 (Pakistan) ask for continuous efforts in the same direction.

- *“(We) lack of teaching and learning materials, for instance, library, laboratory, computer, infrastructure... class rooms and hostels, water supply and electricity”*

**21. Aiming to improve the educational situation in Malawi to ensure inclusive and quality education for all, in line with Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5, our coalition suggests the following recommendations:**

- Increase the number of primary and secondary schools, especially in rural areas, providing them with the staff, infrastructure, services and materials necessary to secure accessibility and provide quality education to all children and young people in Malawi.**
- Enhance quality education by providing bursaries and financial support to needy students, establishing Social Cash Transfer programs (or similar) or reducing school fees to ensure education affordability.**
- Enhance quality education by incorporating educational technological equipment (as computers and solar panels) and providing learning materials to all the schools.**
- Conduct civic education to encourage parental and community support for youth education by *“carrying out of awareness campaigns to parents on the importance of education”*.**

## **V. QUALITY EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR MARKET**

22. The Malawian government, with support from organizations like the ILO, is working to address labor market challenges through policy reforms, skills development programs, and efforts to promote decent work. In fact, the Employment (Amendment) Act No. 17 of 2021<sup>13</sup> aiming to secure worker’s rights, as a response to the recommendations 122.28 and 122.111<sup>14</sup>, provides legislation concerning “prohibition against unlawful labor”, including forced and tenancy labor; extends the grounds for non-discrimination; and provides special work conditions for pregnant or breastfeeding women, among other improvements.

23. Nevertheless, Malawians, particularly the younger generation, are confronted with a considerable challenge in the form of the limited availability of adequate employment opportunities, a situation that is especially pronounced in rural areas. As the ILO's ProAgro Youth program<sup>15</sup> declares “the formal private sector doesn’t create enough jobs for the growing youth population, while opportunities for entrepreneurship are limited”. Consequently, a significant proportion of young people nationwide are underemployed, meaning they work fewer hours than they desire or in jobs that don't fully utilize their skills, and remain constrained to the informal sector, characterized by low-wage and insecure employment.

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<sup>13</sup> Amended text: “Employment Act 1999 (No. 6 of 2000)”, available at: [https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3\\_isn=112666](https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=112666)

<sup>14</sup> Proposed by Norway and Sri Lanka respectively.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. <https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/proagro-youth>

24. According to the latest data from the ILO<sup>16</sup>, the proportion of young people neither in employment nor engaged in education or training is 19.4% (13.7% for males and 24.9% for females within the youth demographic). Furthermore, although the agricultural sector is the primary source of employment (accounting for 67.6% of jobs), labor conditions are found to be deficient in ensuring the rights of workers.

25. A critical issue is the gap between the skills workers possess and the skills employers demand. This is particularly evident in emerging sectors like technology. ILO's ProAgro Youth, quoted above, states that “the educational system and vocational training institutions do not always prepare graduates adequately for the available positions, resulting in skills mismatch”. There is a consistent lack of Formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) given that the system is underdeveloped, therefore the skills needed for the evolving work market are not being taught<sup>17</sup>.

26. This significant issue was addressed on multiple occasions by young people participating in the preparation of this report. Below, we voice some of their direct expressions:

- *“Normally most parents are not in good jobs, that lead to fail to source money to pass school fees for us”*
- *“Unemployment rate is big”*
- *“Many youths are also lacking employment opportunities due to lack of private industries and companies which increase job opportunities in the country”*
- *“Employment matters: Most graduated students are not employed due to lack of job opportunities in this country of Malawi”*
- *“Lack of job opportunities for the graduates: they lack finance to start minor business”*
- *“Young people often stay idle after schools (finishing) which makes them go astray”.*
- *“Job opportunities: most educated people especially youths which are done with their education they usually stay/have no job opportunities because there is a favourism of people in companies and other sectors they do employ people from their families”.*
- *“In Malawi graduands with good grades don’t get the jobs they deserve because they do not have relatives or friends in high offices. Instead, unworthy people tend to get high positions in companies and industries due to relationships”*
- *“More job opportunities should be given to every youth fairly (sic) without considering the background or the person”*
- *“Creating job opportunities by establishing manufacturing industries”.*
- *“(We recommend the creation of) training institutions which are specialized in training the young ... develop their talent at their maximum...”.*
- *“The outgoing students must be provided with some skills which they can use to run business”*
- *“Agricultural sector: lack of farm implements and inputs (e.g. fertilizers)”*
- *“Poor farming systems and lack of agricultural resources”*

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. [https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/?ref\\_area=MWI](https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/?ref_area=MWI)

<sup>17</sup> Cf. “TVET policy review: Malawi”, available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000190216>



**27. In order to address the provision of a robust labor market and better job opportunities, and to secure the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 17, our coalition recommends that the Government of Malawi:**

- a. Enhance productivity and generate employment opportunities through value-added processing and marketing in sectors exhibiting rapid growth, such as mining, tourism, communications and digital technologies, also ensuring the provision of effective regulation and investment to capitalize on their full potential.**
- b. Make efforts to “*improving the advanced farming systems (e.g. this can be provided by farming equipment in agricultural sector which will help farmers to produce more)*”, capable of creating chains of products and services, given that agriculture remains a major source of employment and has potential for growth, particularly within the agribusiness sector.**
- c. Invest in education and skills development by allocating human and financial resources to strengthen the Formal Technical Entrepreneurial Vocation Education and Training (TEVET).**
- d. Implement strategies for youth entrepreneurship and the development of an alternative economy, securing the necessary funds with the participation of the International Community.**

## **VI. HEALTH CARE**

28. It's crucial to acknowledge that Malawi's health situation is complex and influenced by various socioeconomic factors<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, our coalition acknowledge the implementation of several initiatives to address Malawi's health challenges and improve key indicators. Some notable efforts are the development of policy and programs<sup>19</sup> such as the Essential Health Package (EHP); the Health Sector Strategic Plan III 2023-2030 (HSSP III); the Health Financing Strategy 2023-2030; the Immunization Programs; the Nutrition Interventions HIV/AIDS and Malaria Control; and the Health Information Systems. These initiatives reflect Malawi's government commitment to improving health outcomes aiming to achieve universal health coverage, despite resource constraints, in response to the recommendations aroused by several countries during the previous UPR cycle<sup>20</sup>.

29. The country has improved its indicators<sup>21</sup> for reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health (RMNCH) showing continued reduction in under-five mortality rates due to enhanced vaccination programs and healthcare access, as well as improvements in maternal mortality rates, supported

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. “*Health Sector Progress Report for the 2023-24 Fiscal Years*” available at:

<https://health.gov.mw/download/annual-report-2023-2024/?wpdmdl=3405&refresh=67e52e83367201743072899>

<sup>19</sup> Cf. “*WHO Malawi 2023 Annual Report*”, available at:

<https://www.afro.who.int/countries/malawi/publication/who-malawi-2023-annual-report>

<sup>20</sup> 122.113 (Tunisia); 122.122 (Bangladesh); 122.123 (China); 122.124 (Djibouti); 122.125 (Egypt); 122.127 (Libya); 122.129 (Mauritius); and 122.131 (Ukraine).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. “*Malawi - Health Indicators*”, available at: <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/92226485-391c-4838-b915-7bcce0ffd31e>



by better healthcare infrastructure and skilled birth attendance<sup>22</sup>. There are improvements also in indicators for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and communicable diseases, making significant progress in HIV management and TB treatment success estimated at a rate of 90.7%<sup>23</sup>.

30. However, the health system faces significant challenges, including inadequate funding, a shortage of health workers, lack of equipment for diagnostics and treatment with little capacity for maintenance, and limited access to essential medicines and supplies:

- Government expenditure on health in 2022/23 represented only the 9.0% of the national budget, dropping by 0.4% from the previous 9.4% in 2021/22, and remaining below the Abuja Declaration target of 15%<sup>24</sup>.
- The country continues to face a high burden of communicable diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and diarrheal diseases. Recent outbreaks of cholera also pose a significant public health challenge.
- Although the number of health workers has increased by about 32.7% over the past five years, vacancy rates remain high, with shortages of pharmacists, nurses/midwives, laboratory technicians, and medical officers and specialists<sup>25</sup>.
- Access to quality health care is particularly difficult in rural, hard-to-reach areas, exacerbated by limited funding for outreach programs.

31. Young people experience this reality firsthand and have their own opinions about the state of the health care system:

- *“(The country has) poor healthcare facilities (e.g. people do not receive proper healthcare in the hospitals)”*
- *“Shortage of health facilities (e.g. drugs and there are few medical personnel)”*
- *“Health issues: Lack of medicine in most of hospitals to support the people; lack of enough hospitals in Malawi leads to death of many people in this country”*
- *“Lack of adequate health services”*
- *“Lack of knowledge on drug and substances”*
- *“Many Malawians face the problem of poverty thereby they cannot manage paying for medicine when they are sick”*
- *“There is a lack of medical resources such as basic equipment as well as medicine. There is also a lack of skilled medical personnel due to lack of medical schools”*
- *“There is a need of adequate supply of medicines in different hospitals in Malawi as some people die due to lack of recommended medicines, in hospitas”*

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. “Malawi National Health Indicators” available at:

[https://www.healthdatacollaborative.org/fileadmin/uploads/hdc/Documents/Country\\_documents/Malawi\\_National\\_Health\\_Indicators\\_FINAL\\_v11\\_clean\\_wt\\_sign\\_combo.pdf](https://www.healthdatacollaborative.org/fileadmin/uploads/hdc/Documents/Country_documents/Malawi_National_Health_Indicators_FINAL_v11_clean_wt_sign_combo.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Cf. “Health Sector Progress Report for the 2023-24 Fiscal Years”, page vi

<sup>24</sup> Cf. “Health Sector Progress Report for the 2023-24 Fiscal Years”, page ix

<sup>25</sup> Cf. “Health Sector Progress Report for the 2023-24 Fiscal Years”, page vii

**32. To strengthen the health system and address its current challenges generating significant improvement on the health status of people in Malawi, in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 3, our coalition makes the following recommendations:**

- a. Allocate a greater portion of the national budget to health expenditures to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of the Health Sector Strategic Plan III 2023-2030 (HSSP III) and the Health Financing Strategy 2023-2030**
- b. Upgrade existing medical infrastructure and equipment, and establish new ones, particularly in remote areas, including hospitals, laboratories, and primary care facilities.**
- c. Increase the recruitment of competent and motivated staff to meet the Human Resources for Health needs of the system.**
- d. Ensure the provision of essential medical treatment and medicines at affordable prices for all segments of the population, with a particular focus on those in dire need.**

## **VII. POVERTY AND SOCIAL ISSUES**

33. This concluding section offers a summary of the social concerns raised by young people and adolescents participating in the data collection process. Acknowledging that Malawi is one of the world's least developed countries, ranking 172<sup>nd</sup> out of 185 countries on the 2023/2024 Human Development Index<sup>26</sup>, youth participants have expressed their worries about the impact of poverty on their daily lives, as it leads to various circumstances that prevent them from fully enjoying their rights, hindering their well-being:

34. Firstly, the issue of child abuse and domestic violence against children, encompassing sexual, physical, and emotional violence which is a significant problem in Malawi. Statistics reveal alarming rates of sexual, physical, and emotional violence against children<sup>27</sup>. Additionally, a large majority of children face violent discipline within their homes<sup>28</sup>. Even if there appears to be a growing opposition to corporal punishment in Malawi, a significant portion of the population still views it as an acceptable disciplinary method<sup>29</sup>. This widespread practice indicates a normalization of violence and mistreatment in child-rearing, which can have detrimental effects on children's development and well-being.

The 2023 Child Multi-Dimensional Poverty governmental report sheds light on the intersection of poverty and child protection. The report indicates that 11.5% of children aged between 5 and 17 years experienced deprivation in child protection<sup>30</sup>. These statistics underscore the significant role

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) 2024 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2024-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi#/indicies/MPI>

<sup>27</sup> Shockingly, around one in five girls and one in seven boys have experienced sexual violence. Sadly, most of these children experience this abuse repeatedly. Cf. <https://www.unicef.org/malawi/protecting-children-violence-everyones-responsibility> and <https://www.unicef.org/malawi/media/1141/file/Child%20Protection%20Data%20Bulletin%202017.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> According to the 2019-20 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 82% of children in Malawi experience violent discipline within their homes. Cf. [https://www.unicef.org/malawi/media/11761/file/UNICEF\\_ChildProtection\\_Budget\\_Brief\\_2024-25\\_Final.pdf.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/malawi/media/11761/file/UNICEF_ChildProtection_Budget_Brief_2024-25_Final.pdf.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Cf. <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad924-malawians-oppose-corporal-punishment-see-lack-of-support-services-for-vulnerable-children/>

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Ibid, page 3

of poverty in driving children into vulnerable situations where they are at increased risk of abuse and exploitation.

35. A second issue of concern among Malawian youth is the prevalence of forced early marriages, a significant form of child abuse and exploitation. According to recent data, 3.4% of children between 15 and 17 of age experienced early marriage<sup>31</sup>. UN Women's data, highlights the prevalence of child marriage given that by 2018 37.7% of women aged 20-24 in Malawi were married or in a union before the age of 18<sup>32</sup>. This high rate indicates a potential normalization of sexual coercion among girls in Malawi, resulting in a significant proportion of young women, approximately one in three, who report their first sexual experience as non-consensual and, according to official data, 16% of all pregnancies in Malawi occurred among adolescents aged 15-19 years old<sup>33</sup>.

One of the reasons for early marriage to happen is that many families living in poverty see child marriage as a way to alleviate financial burdens. Marrying off a daughter can reduce the number of mouths to feed and sometimes provides a bride price and, in some cases, girls are married off as a form of debt repayment.

Early marriage persists despite legal frameworks aimed at preventing it, indicating a significant challenge in translating policy into practice and protecting girls from the harmful consequences of early marriage. This issue was a focal point during the previous UPR cycle, with numerous recommendations<sup>34</sup> proposed to address it.

36. Finally, many young Malawians, particularly those in rural areas, have limited exposure to positive role models who can inspire them to pursue education, entrepreneurship, or other productive paths. This lack of exposure can constrain their aspirations and create a sense of limited possibilities. Poverty and other societal challenges contribute to a lack of strong role models within communities leaving young people without guidance and support during critical stages of development.

Peer pressure can lead to risky behaviors, such as early sexual activity, substance abuse, and involvement in criminal activities. The desire to fit in and gain acceptance can cloud young people's judgment, leading them to make unwise decisions. Research has demonstrated that peer pressure exerts a significant impact on financial decisions in Malawi, leading people to spend money faster than they otherwise would<sup>35</sup>.

37. A range of concerns have been expressed by young people regarding their current situation and apprehensions for the future if poverty, mistreatment, neglect, and social degradation persist in society:

- *“Poverty among the youths: As we know that Malawi is a developing country, many youths, especially the jobless lack money for their daily needs. Youths with poor parents or*

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Ibid, page 3

<sup>32</sup> Cf. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/malawi> and <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/malawi.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Cf. “Health Sector Progress Report for the 2023-24 Fiscal Years”, page v.

<sup>34</sup> 122.141 (Italy); 124.42 (Iceland); 124.43 (Norway); 122.168 (Angola); 122.169 (Argentina); 122.170 (Belgium); 122.171 (Burkina Faso); 122.172 (Sudan); 122.173 (Japan); 122.175 (Luxembourg); 122.176 (Mexico); 122.180 (Sierra Leone); 122.162 (China); 122.164 (Germany); 122.174 (Libya); 122.177 (Myanmar); 122.178 (Netherlands); 122.179 (Turkey); 122.64 (Brazil); 122.65 (Latvia); 122.66 (Ukraine).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. <https://worldrenew.ca/our-stories/malawi-helping-students-flourish>

*guardians also lack money to pay for their school fees hence dropping out of school. This problem affects even the government a lot due to high illiteracy levels”*

- *“Going to school with empty stomach, if a student doesn’t have food, he or she may not understand what teachers are teaching”*
- *“Prices of commodities should be reduced since some citizens may not be able to purchase commodities so as to improve their living standard”*
- *“Fluctuation of prices or goods. Most struggling youth are finding it hard to cope with the fluctuation. For instance, increase in school fees, medical services, dietary needs, etc. This making it difficult to live a standard life”*
- *“Increase in street children due to poverty”*
- *“Nutrition foods: Some youth fail to eat healthy and nutritional foods due to poverty. They need nutritional foods to be very effective and energetic”*
- *“Poverty due to increase of school fees and lack of income generating activities in our homes”*
- *“Child abuse is the mistreatment of children’s rights. Examples: Physical abuse; Sexual abuse: when a person has been harassed by being touched its private partes; Emotional abuse: having emotional problems due to being harassed by someone else”*
- *“Cases of child abuse (lashing by teachers)”*
- *“Early marriages due to poverty”*
- *“Most youths are involved in early marriages as they are forced by parents”*
- *“Some parents do not really care about their children’s actions”*
- *“Favoritisms which discourages a child and brings stress”*
- *“There are a lot of young people with different talent which are not supposed”.*
- *“The talents are waisted as no one is able to support and help then to develop and build their talents (e.g. Music there are singers who have done manager hence there music due not go far” (e.g. Football, basketball, the player tend not to reach there full potential)”.*
- *(The country needs) “Sensitizing, social campaign and parental guidance to reduce abuse”; “encouraging parents to show love to their children”; “Organizations to help in fighting against early marriages”; “Opening NGOs where children can report the case of abuses”*

**38. To improve the general well-being of the nation, especially for children and youth, without regard for any forms of discrimination, the government of Malawi should take specific action to end poverty, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2 and 10. To this end, our coalition submits the following recommendations:**

- a. Implement and enforce existing child protection laws more rigorously, guaranteeing the collaboration between the police, social services, and the judicial system to ensure swift and effective responses to child abuse cases.**
- b. Develop and disseminate public awareness campaigns to educate communities about child abuse, its consequences, and reporting mechanisms, looking for the establishment of community-based child protection committees.**
- c. Enforce existing laws against early marriage and increase penalties for offenders.**

- d. Provide economic support, educational opportunities, and life skills training for girls' empowerment to reduce the financial incentives for early marriage.**
- e. Support community-based initiatives and after-school activities as youth clubs and organizations for support and empowerment, that promote positive role models through workshops, seminars, and cultural events.**
- f. Establish mentorship programs that connect young people with successful professionals and entrepreneurs as well as utilize media and technology to showcase successful Malawian role models, particularly in rural areas.**

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

39. As members of civil society, our coalition is grateful to the Government of Malawi for accepting many of the recommendations that were made in the last cycle. We commend the development of policy, and the decisions made to implement them, and we encourage the Government to persevere in its efforts to overcome obstacles and achieve the goals proposed for the betterment of the Nation's citizens.

40. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Government for taking into consideration the concerns voiced by members of civil society, particularly those of children and young people. They are the present and the future of the Nation. Their active engagement and responsible protagonism is essential to transform the present to ensure a secure future for themselves.

41. We recognize that the interconnected challenges of poverty, harmful social norms, and limited resources necessitate a multi-sectoral approach involving all stakeholders (government, civil society, communities, families, and individuals) collaborating to build a nation where the rights of all are guaranteed.

42. We are also grateful for the opportunity provided by the United Nations to participate through the UPR mechanism, which allowed us to raise the direct voices of adolescents and young people. Their active involvement and contributions have enabled us to address their concerns and demands, which are outlined in this report.