



# AGIP at Women Deliver 2026

## SAFEGUARDING RIGHTS AND AGENCY: ADOLESCENT ENGAGEMENT IN SHRINKING CIVIC SPACES EVENT REPORT

As civic spaces continue to shrink globally, adolescent girls and young feminist advocates are increasingly navigating unsafe and hostile environments both online and offline, including surveillance, online harassment, political exclusion, and anti-rights backlash linked to their participation in advocacy and public life. At the same time, safeguarding conversations are evolving beyond physical protection toward broader questions of dignity, mental wellbeing, digital safety, participation, accountability, and power, highlighting the need for safeguarding systems that are better resourced, more consistent, and grounded in the lived realities of adolescent girls.

Against this backdrop, AGIP, together with members FRIDA|The Young Feminist Fund, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Plan International, Restless Development, and Women Deliver, and co-hosts the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), convened the concurrent session ***Safeguarding Rights and Agency: Adolescent Engagement in Shrinking Civic Spaces during Women Deliver 2026***.

Bringing together adolescent girls, youth advocates, feminist organisers, civil society actors, UN representatives, and other allies, this girl-centered event reimaged safeguarding as a shared political and ethical responsibility in shrinking civic spaces. It elevated adolescent girls' perspectives on safety in the sector, while surfacing practical recommendations on changes needed in existing safeguarding practices to respond to the emerging risks due to shrinking civic spaces, tech-facilitated harms, and resourcing challenges.

## SETTING THE SCENE

Chaired throughout by AGIP Programme Manager, Olivia Burns, the event began with two impactful interventions. First, from **Awa Faly Ba** Director of PACE at Plan International and AGIP Co-Chair, and Rushna Zubair, Girl Advisor from AGIP's Adolescent Girls Advisory Committee Cohort 1.

Awa reflected on safeguarding within the current context of shrinking civic space, anti-rights backlash, digital harms, and under-resourced advocacy spaces, highlighting that adolescent girls are increasingly exposed to political, social, and online risks when participating publicly. Drawing from Plan International's approach, she emphasised that safeguarding must go beyond compliance and be understood as a rights-based responsibility connected to participation, power, and accountability.

Building on Awa's reflections on safeguarding as a shared and evolving responsibility, Rushna grounded the discussion in the lived realities of adolescent girls and young advocates themselves. Drawing from her experiences with AGIP and Women Deliver as an adolescent leader, she highlighted the need for adolescents to help define what safeguarding looks like within their own realities and concluded by calling for approaches that truly shift the power:

***"Let us continue evolving and expanding what safeguarding means so it goes beyond protection towards justice, compassion, and true intergenerational leadership."***

***~ Rushna Zubair, Girl Advisor, AGAC***



## INSIGHTS FROM THE PANEL

Following the opening interventions, the room heard expert reflections from a panel moderated by **Sapphire Alexander**, Coordinator at Transform Education, featuring **Paige Andrew**, Co-Executive Director at FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund; **Leyla Sharafi**, Chief of the Gender, Human Rights and Inclusion Branch at UNFPA; and **Grace Aumua**, Youth Officer at the Samoa Family Health Association (SFHA).

- **Grace** reflected on how shrinking civic space and political repression are increasing risks for adolescent girls and young women engaging in advocacy and public life. She emphasised that safeguarding is rooted in power, inclusion, and solidarity, and stressed the importance of creating spaces where girls can speak without fear. Highlighting the principle of “nothing for us without us,” Grace called for adolescent girls to be meaningfully included in decision-making and funding conversations affecting their lives.
- **Leyla** focused on the growing impact of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) on adolescent girls, highlighting issues including online grooming, surveillance, coercive control and exposure to harmful content. She stressed that safeguarding systems often fail to address the broader technological and structural factors enabling online harm and highlighted the direct link between TFGBV and girls’ mental health and participation in public life. Leyla called for stronger safeguarding and reporting systems, improved digital literacy, better language moderation across platforms, and safety-by-design approaches within technology development.
- **Paige** reflected on how rigid funding systems and reporting structures can unintentionally create safeguarding risks for adolescent girls and young advocates. She highlighted how strict timelines, inaccessible grant processes, and lack of flexible support often disadvantage girls navigating advocacy spaces while balancing school, wellbeing, and care responsibilities.



# INSIGHTS FROM THE BREAKOUT SESSION

## Civic Repression

**Challenges:** Participants highlighted the growing impact of anti-rights movements, shrinking civic space, and fragmented feminist organising on adolescent girls' participation and safety. Discussions noted that girls, particularly those from rural communities, continue to face limited opportunities for meaningful political engagement, while many young feminists lack safe spaces for organising, joy, rest, and activism. Participants also reflected on how movement fragmentation weakens collective safeguarding, solidarity, and rapid response efforts.

**Recommendations** focused on strengthening collaboration across feminist and youth movements, creating safer and more accessible civic participation pathways for adolescent girls, and building stronger safeguarding, legal, and protection systems for activists and human rights defenders. Discussions also highlighted the importance of integrating civic education within schools and normalising girls' public leadership and political participation.

## Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

**Challenges:** Participants highlighted major gaps in policies, accountability systems, and digital safeguarding responses related to TFGBV. Discussions noted that online harms remain poorly addressed within many safeguarding systems, while low digital literacy, weak implementation of safeguarding policies, limited reporting awareness, and language barriers on digital platforms continue to expose adolescent girls to online abuse and exploitation. Participants also raised concerns around digital labour exploitation and unsafe online working environments.

**Recommendations** included strengthening digital safeguarding policies and reporting systems, improving access to helplines and safeguarding training, integrating risk tracking into emerging technologies, and improving language moderation across digital platforms. Participants also called for stronger collaboration between feminist movements and the technology sector to create safer and more inclusive online spaces.

## Funder Responsibility

**Challenges:** Participants highlighted the critical role funders play in creating safer and more sustainable environments for adolescent girls' participation and leadership. Discussions emphasised the need for more flexible, long-term, and responsive funding that can adapt to changing contexts, reach grassroots and girl-led organisations, and address the root causes of challenges facing girls. Participants also called for adolescent girls to be meaningfully involved in shaping funding priorities, while ensuring that responsibility for driving change is shared across the ecosystem and does not fall on girls alone.

**Recommendations:** Funders should provide more flexible, long-term, and accessible funding that reaches grassroots and girl-led organisations, invests in care and wellbeing, and meaningfully involves adolescent girls in shaping funding priorities and decisions without placing the burden of change solely on them.



## IN THEIR WORDS

Speakers underscored the urgency of strengthening safeguarding approaches that go beyond compliance to centre care, dignity, accountability, and meaningful participation for adolescent girls. Discussions highlighted the importance of co-creation, collective responsibility, and practical actions organisations, funders, and advocacy spaces can take to build safer and more supportive environments for adolescent girls and young feminist advocates. Here are some of the highlights:



*“Repression isn’t always obvious; it often shows up through silence, exclusion, and pressure to conform.”*

~ Grace Aumua - Youth Officer at the Samoa Family Health Association (SFHA)

*“Flexible, trust-based funding approaches are essential to safeguarding adolescent girls. Funding mechanisms must be adaptable, prioritise wellbeing and care, provide fair compensation and capacity strengthening, and ensure that adolescent girls’ realities and needs are central to funding strategies rather than treated as an afterthought.”*

~ Paige Andrew - Co-Executive Director at FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund



*“The concept of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence needs to be understood through a more holistic lens because it disproportionately affects adolescent girls through online grooming, image-based abuse, and the rise of AI deepfakes, all of which continue to impact their wellbeing, safety, and participation both online and offline.”*

~ Leyla Sharafi - Chief of the Gender, Human Rights and Inclusion Branch, UNFPA



*“Safeguarding is not an extra layer. It is not something symbolic. It is the foundation of meaningful participation. It is what makes respect real, not rhetorical. It is what allows girls to speak without fear, to lead without harm, and to participate without paying a personal cost for their voice.”*

~ Nagla Abbas - Legal Officer, Save the Children International, Zanzibar



## KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE EVENT



### 1. Safeguarding must go beyond physical protection and should be a shared responsibility

The session reinforced that safeguarding must fully address online harms, psychosocial wellbeing, political participation, and the realities adolescent girls face within shrinking civic spaces. Participants stressed that safeguarding must be understood as a shared and collective responsibility rather than the role of one actor alone. Discussions highlighted the importance of governments, civil society organisations, the United Nations, conference organisers, donors, movements, and advocacy spaces working together to strengthen accountability, protection systems, and meaningful safeguarding support for adolescent girls and young advocates.

### 2. Participation without safeguarding is harmful

Participants stressed that inviting adolescent girls into advocacy, leadership, and public participation spaces without adequate safeguarding structures can expose them to additional emotional, political, and physical risks. Discussions highlighted that meaningful participation requires more than visibility or representation alone; it must also include protection systems, psychosocial support, accountability pathways, and continued accompaniment before, during, and after engagement. Without these systems in place, girls are often left to navigate harm, backlash, online abuse, and unsafe environments on their own.

### 3. Safeguarding is deeply political

Discussions highlighted that safeguarding cannot be separated from broader political and social realities affecting adolescent girls globally. Participants reflected on how shrinking civic space, anti-rights movements, online repression, and harmful gender norms continue to shape who is allowed to safely participate in public life and advocacy spaces. Safeguarding was therefore framed not only as a protection issue, but also as a question of power, inclusion, participation, and justice for adolescent girls and young feminist activists.

### 4. Collective care and solidarity are essential

Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of collective care, movement solidarity, and shared responsibility in strengthening safeguarding systems for adolescent girls and young advocates. Discussions highlighted that safeguarding cannot rely on isolated organisations or individuals alone, particularly within increasingly hostile political and funding environments. Instead, participants called for stronger collaboration across movements, organisations, funders, and advocacy spaces to build safer, more supportive, and more sustainable systems of care, protection, and accompaniment for young feminist activists.



## EVENT CONCLUSION

Nagla Abbas, a Legal Officer at Save the Children International supporting One Stop Centres in Zanzibar, closed the session by reflecting on her personal experiences navigating systems that failed to protect and support young women, both as a young law student and later while working with survivors of violence. She highlighted that safeguarding is not only about physical protection, but also emotional wellbeing, accountability, care, and creating systems where girls can participate safely and with dignity.

The session reinforced the growing urgency of strengthening safeguarding systems and organisational cultures that are responsive to today's political, digital, and social realities. Across discussions on civic repression, online harms, tokenistic participation, movement fragmentation, and safeguarding accountability, participants consistently stressed that adolescent girls cannot continue carrying the burden of navigating unsafe advocacy spaces alone. The event highlighted the need for safeguarding systems that are participatory, properly resourced, culturally grounded, and intentionally designed with adolescent girls themselves.

Closing the session, Olivia Burns, Programme Manager at AGIP, shared a call to action with the audience: ***"I invite us all to move from compliance to care, from restriction to responsibility, from individual resilience to collective accountability. Let us build organisations, movements and global moments where girls do not have to shrink to be safe where their leadership, questions, and even dissent are not merely protected, but made possible."***

