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Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence
against the girl child
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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations

Computer skills and access to the Internet are becoming increasingly important for participation in politics, business, and society, for both men and women. It is therefore important for all girls to have access to the Internet appropriate for their age and to acquire computer skills. In 2001, the proportion of households with Internet access varied in Europe between 10% in Greece and 69% in Sweden. However, the proportion of young people, and in particular the proportion of girls, who have Internet access depends not only on computer access at home, but also on computer access at school. For this reason, complaints have been raised regarding the poor extent of PC provision in schools in some European states. In Norway and Denmark, one PC is available for every three school students. In Germany, 15 school students have to share one PC. Several European states will have to provide schools with much better equipment in order to ensure that both girls and boys have access to PCs and the Internet appropriate for their age.

Throughout the EU, girls rate their state of health as poorer than boys do. Girls are affected by psychosomatic symptoms more frequently than boys. The conditions include diseases such as depression, dejectedness, eating disturbances, anorexia, etc. Depression occurs twice as frequently among girls as among boys. In 2002, on average 40% of 15-year-old girls in European countries felt dejected. Girls regard themselves and their own bodies in a more critical way. 23% of girls ages 11–15 eat an inadequate diet. Girls frequently (about 40%) feel that they are too fat, despite having a normal weight or being underweight.

Cigarette and alcohol consumption among girls has increased in recent years throughout Europe. The proportion of girls who smoke daily is now higher than that for boys in many countries. Alcohol and drugs – such as cannabis, for example – are consumed by boys more frequently than by girls, but there are large country-specific differences. In Switzerland and the United Kingdom, 40% of girls have already had contact with cannabis, compared with only 15% in the Ukraine, Croatia, and Portugal. Supporting girls in developing a feeling of well-being and helping them develop health-conscious behaviour are still urgent tasks for schools and youth institutions in Europe.

There are currently no reliable figures for violence against girls that are comparable throughout Europe. The Coordinated Action on Human Rights Violations (CAHRV) network is making efforts to improve the data situation. Crime s2ol8(tion) aswith olye sureroatia, twith ofeelh-7.6(ov,-)5.3

A study conducted in 28 OECD states in 1998 showed that in many states, women are subject to substantial disadvantages as a result of early maternity. In 13 European states, the poverty risk is twice as high for teenage mothers as in other members of their age group.

In 19 of the 28 countries studied, the number of teenage mothers has halved in the last 30 years. This development is reducing the poverty risk for young women, as well as reducing the extent to which poverty is passed on from one generation to the next. As the teenage pregnancy rates differ widely among European countries, it can be assumed that there is a continuing need for prevention, at least in countries with higher birth rates among women under 18. In 1998, the United Kingdom had the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in Europe, with 31 pregnancies per 1000 girls under 18. Slovakia and Hungary followed in second and third place. Sex education and easy access to contraceptives ought to be ensured in every country. In addition, improved vocational and professional prospects for girls could play an important role.

The child poverty rate has been increasing in recent years in several European

differently in different countries, comparable figures are not available. In Germany, girls with an immigrant background are found more often in fields of vocational training without any prospects. Many young foreign women in Germany withdraw from the job market very early. With regard to their health, both foreign girls and German ones report physical symptoms