



TRAINING MANUAL · 2026

Reporting on the Maputo Protocol: A Manual for Shadow Reports

A step-by-step guide for women's rights organisations engaging with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

4 October 2026

Women Leaders Network for Development (RFLD)

Pan-African feminist network · 1,143 member organisations · 35+ countries

About RFLD

Founded in 2013 by Dossi Sêkonnou Gloria AGUEH, the Women Leaders Network for Development (RFLD) is a pan-African, Afrofeminist network of 1,143 member organisations working in more than 35 African countries on human rights, gender equality, health, development, and peace and security.

RFLD is registered as an International Organisation in Senegal and as a non-governmental organisation in Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and The Gambia. Its Africa Office is in Accra, with Francophone hubs in Dakar and Porto-Novo, an ACHPR liaison office in Banjul, a Nigeria office in Lagos and a member platform office in Igolo.

- **Observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (No. 553)**
- **Co-chair of the SEA-T Programme Advisory Council (BMZ/GIZ)**
- **NGOsource 501(c)(3) Equivalency Determination**
- **Candid Seal of Transparency 2025**
- **DCNÛÈSÈ Data Center: twelve open data tools on women's rights in Africa**

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Contents

Introduction	5
How to use this manual	6
Who it is for	6
How it is organised	6
A word on terms	6
Module 1. The Maputo Protocol and the duty to report	7
1.1 The Protocol in brief	7
1.2 Ratification and reservations	8
1.3 The legal duty to report	9
1.4 How States are doing	9
1.5 Why shadow reports matter	9
1.6 What States owe: respect, protect, fulfil	10
Module 2. The African Commission and the reporting procedure	11
2.1 The African Commission	11
2.2 The rules that apply	12
2.3 The reporting cycle, step by step	13
2.4 The Guidelines for State Reporting under the Protocol	13
2.5 General Comments	14
2.6 Observer status, affiliate status and other ways in	14
2.7 The NGO Forum	15
2.8 Case study: the 89th Ordinary Session	15
Module 3. Planning a shadow report	16
3.1 Should you prepare a shadow report?	16
3.2 Find the State report and the timeline	16
3.3 Choose your focus	17
3.4 Build a coalition	17
3.5 Work plan and budget	18
3.6 Working with the national human rights institution and the government	18
3.7 Full or thematic report?	19
Module 4. Collecting evidence	19
4.1 What counts as evidence	19
4.2 Structure, process and outcome	19
4.3 Triangulation	20
4.4 Use the State's own figures	20
4.5 Budget evidence	20
4.6 A human rights-based approach to data	20
4.7 Documenting cases	21
4.8 Digital security	21
4.9 Where to find evidence, cluster by cluster	21
Module 5. Ethics, safety and do no harm	22
5.1 The principle of do no harm	22
5.2 Informed consent	22
5.3 Research on sexual violence	23
5.4 Reprisals	23
5.5 A trauma-informed approach	24

Module 6. Writing the shadow report	24
6.1 Format rules	25
6.2 A proven structure	25
6.3 Engage the State report paragraph by paragraph	26
6.4 Writing good questions	26
6.5 SMART recommendations	26
6.6 Guidance cluster by cluster	27
6.7 Style	29
6.8 Final checklist before submission	30
Module 7. Submitting and advocating around the session	30
7.1 Submitting the report	30
7.2 Briefing Commissioners	30
7.3 At the NGO Forum	30
7.4 At the public session	31
7.5 A three-minute oral statement	32
7.6 Working with the media	32
7.7 A briefing note for Commissioners	32
7.8 Social media	33
Module 8. After the session: follow-up	33
8.1 Concluding observations	33
8.2 A national follow-up plan	33
8.3 Preparing for the next cycle	34
8.4 When a State does not report	34
Module 9. One evidence base, three mechanisms	34
9.1 Comparing the mechanisms	35
9.2 Cutting the same evidence three ways	35
Annex A. Three-day workshop agenda	36
Annex B. Self-assessment for participants	37
Annex C. Model extract of a shadow report	37
Annex D. Key legal texts	38
Annex E. Glossary	39
Annex F. Useful resources	39
Annex G. Sample questions by article	40
Annex H. Planning calendar	41
Abbreviations	41
References	42

THIS MANUAL AT A GLANCE

- 1 Article 26 of the Maputo Protocol requires every State Party to report on the measures it has taken for women's rights, as part of its periodic report to the African Commission under Article 62 of the African Charter.
- 2 Only about half of the States Parties had ever submitted a report under the Protocol by late 2024, which leaves women's organisations a central role in bringing evidence to the Commission (ISHR, 2024).
- 3 A shadow report must reach the Secretary to the Commission at least 30 days before the examination of the State report, and it should follow the Commission's 2022 Guidelines on Shadow Reports: 15 pages at most, plus annexes (ACHPR, 2020b, 2022a).
- 4 Strong shadow reports engage the State report paragraph by paragraph, combine statistics with documented cases, propose questions the Commission can ask and offer recommendations it can adopt word for word.
- 5 The work does not end with submission. Advocacy during the session and national follow-up of the concluding observations are where change is won.

Introduction

Twenty-three years after its adoption, the Maputo Protocol has changed laws across Africa. States have raised the minimum age of marriage, criminalised female genital mutilation, reformed land and inheritance laws and opened access to reproductive health services. Yet the gap between these commitments and the daily lives of women remains wide, and much of what happens in that gap never reaches the African Commission.

State reporting is the main channel through which the Commission can examine that gap. When a State reports, the Commission can compare what the State says with what women experience. That comparison depends on independent information. Without it, a State report risks becoming a list of laws and plans, examined in a few hours and quickly forgotten.

Women's organisations hold much of that information. They run shelters, accompany survivors to court, monitor health services, train community paralegals and collect data that official statistics miss. Turning that knowledge into a shadow report that Commissioners can use requires specific skills: knowing the rules, choosing a focus, building evidence, protecting the people who share their stories, writing precise recommendations and following up after the session.

This manual aims to make those skills accessible to every organisation in RFLD's network and beyond. It is published shortly before the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission, which meets in Dakar from 12 to 21 October 2026 and at which three States will present reports under the Maputo Protocol. RFLD hopes it will help many more organisations bring their evidence to future sessions.

How to use this manual

Who it is for

This manual is written for women's rights organisations, community-based groups, networks, lawyers and national human rights institutions that want to bring evidence on women's rights to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). It assumes no prior experience of the Commission. Experienced practitioners will find checklists, templates and examples that can save time.

RFLD holds observer status with the African Commission (No. 553) and maintains a liaison office in Banjul. The manual draws on that experience, on the Commission's own rules and guidelines, and on the guides produced by peer organisations, in particular the facilitators' manual of UNDP and Equality Now (2023) and the road map of the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR, 2025).

How it is organised

The manual follows the life cycle of a shadow report in nine modules. Modules 1 and 2 explain the legal framework and the procedure. Modules 3 to 6 guide you through planning, evidence, ethics and writing. Modules 7 and 8 cover advocacy around the session and follow-up. Module 9 shows how the same evidence can serve the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Each module contains:

- learning objectives;
- the core content, with references to the official texts;
- at least one exercise, marked with a gold band;
- templates where relevant, which you can copy into your own documents.

Running a workshop

Each module can be taught in a session of two to three hours. Annex A proposes a three-day workshop agenda for 20 to 30 participants. Facilitators should adapt examples to the State whose report is coming up for examination and invite a member of the national human rights institution where possible.

A word on terms

The Commission uses the term **shadow report**. Other bodies use **alternative report** or **stakeholder submission**. They mean the same thing: information submitted by an organisation other than the State to help a supervisory body assess the State's record. This manual uses "shadow report" when it refers to the African Commission.



Members of RFLD's network during a training session on regional human rights mechanisms.

Module 1. The Maputo Protocol and the duty to report

Learning objectives

- Describe the main rights guaranteed by the Maputo Protocol.
- Explain the reporting obligation under Article 26 of the Protocol and Article 62 of the African Charter.
- Identify the reporting status and reservations of your own State.

1.1 The Protocol in brief

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, known as the Maputo Protocol, was adopted in Maputo on 11 July 2003 and entered into force on 25 November 2005 (African Union, 2003). It is the most detailed regional treaty on women's rights in the world. It covers civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, and rights linked to peace, environment and development.

Table 1. Main rights in the Maputo Protocol

Articles	Content
2 and 3	Elimination of discrimination; right to dignity
4 and 5	Rights to life, integrity and security of the person; elimination of harmful practices, including female genital mutilation
6 and 7	Marriage: free consent, minimum age of 18, registration; rights in separation, divorce and annulment
8 and 9	Access to justice and equal protection; right to participation in political and decision-making processes
10 and 11	Right to peace; protection of women in armed conflicts

Articles	Content
12 and 13	Rights to education and training; economic and social welfare rights
14	Health and reproductive rights, including family planning and medical abortion in specified cases
15 and 16	Food security, including clean drinking water; adequate housing
17 to 19	Positive cultural context; healthy and sustainable environment; sustainable development
20 to 24	Widows' rights; inheritance; elderly women; women with disabilities; women in distress
25 and 26	Remedies; implementation and monitoring, including reporting and budgets

Source: African Union (2003).

1.2 Ratification and reservations

In July 2026, 46 of the 55 AU Member States were party to the Protocol (ACHPR, 2026e). The Central African Republic was the 46th State to ratify (Equality Now, n.d.-a). The nine States that had not ratified were Burundi, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Morocco, Niger, Somalia and Sudan (ACHPR, 2026b).

Nine States Parties have entered reservations or interpretive declarations. In March 2026 the African Commission adopted an Advocacy Framework for Withdrawing Reservations, which encourages civil society to run advocacy campaigns and impact studies and reproduces concluding observations urging several States to reconsider their reservations (ACHPR, 2026b). The Commission had already adopted Resolution 632 in March 2025 on raising awareness for the withdrawal of reservations (ACHPR, 2025a).

Table 2. Reservations and interpretive declarations to the Maputo Protocol

State	Provisions concerned
Algeria	Articles 6, 7 and 14
Cameroon	General interpretive declaration
Ethiopia	Articles 6(c), (d), (f); 7(a); 10(3); 21(1); 27
Kenya	Articles 10(3); 14(2)(c)
Mauritius	Articles 4(2)(k); 6(c); 9; 10(2)(d); 11(3); 12(2); 14(2)(c)
Namibia	Article 6(d)
Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic	Articles 2(c); 6(a) to (c), (e); 7(b), (d); 8(d), (e); 14(1)(a), (b); 19(a); 21
South Africa	Articles 4(j); 6(d), (h)
Uganda	Articles 14(1)(a); 14(2)(c)

Source: ACHPR (2026b).

1.3 The legal duty to report

Article 62 of the African Charter requires each State Party to submit, every two years, a report on the legislative or other measures taken to give effect to the rights and freedoms recognised and guaranteed by the Charter (ACHPR, 1981). Article 26(1) of the Maputo Protocol adds that States shall, in these periodic reports, indicate the legislative and other measures undertaken for the full realisation of the rights recognised in the Protocol. Article 26(2) commits them to provide budgetary and other resources for implementation (African Union, 2003).

Reporting on the Protocol therefore does not have a separate cycle. It is part of the Charter report. Since 2009, the Commission has asked States to present their report in two parts: **Part A** on the Charter and **Part B** on the Protocol (ACHPR, 2010). The Commission's 2023 Guidance Note on State Reporting asks States to cover the Charter, the Maputo Protocol and the Kampala Convention on internally displaced persons together (ACHPR, 2023b).

1.4 How States are doing

Reporting remains weak. At the 81st Ordinary Session in October 2024, only 21 of 45 States Parties had submitted at least one report under the Maputo Protocol (ISHR, 2024). Equality Now repeated this figure to the 83rd Session in April 2025 and called on the other 24 States to report (Equality Now, 2025).

Table 3. Reporting status under the African Charter, as presented by the Commission

Status	81st Session (Oct 2024)	85th Session (Oct 2025)	87th Session (May 2026)
Up to date	10	7	7
In review cycle or catching up	5	4	5
One report overdue	10	13	10
Two reports overdue	3	4	6
Three reports overdue	1	1	2
More than three overdue	19	19	18
Never reported	6	6	6

Sources: ISHR (2024); ACHPR (2025b, 2026c).

The 89th Ordinary Session, to be held in Dakar in October 2026, shows the situation is changing. Three of the four State reports on its agenda include a report under the Maputo Protocol: Zambia (first report), Cameroon (first to third reports) and Guinea-Bissau (a report covering 2010 to 2025). Mauritius will present a Charter report only (ISHR, 2026).

1.5 Why shadow reports matter

State reports tend to describe laws and policies. They rarely show what has changed in women's lives, and they seldom mention what has not been done. Shadow reports fill this gap. They allow the Commission to compare the State's account with independent evidence, to ask sharper questions and to adopt recommendations that address real problems.

The link between a shadow report and a change in law is rarely direct. Several organisations, institutions and events usually contribute. The examples below are best read as stories of contribution.

Mauritius: from a shadow report to a minimum age of marriage

In October 2018, Gender Links Mauritius, with Media Watch Organisation, SOS Femmes and Young Queer Alliance, submitted to the CEDAW Committee what it describes as the first shadow report by a Mauritian NGO. The report showed that religious marriages were not registered, that no minimum age applied to some religious marriages and that civil law allowed marriage at 16 with parental consent (Gender Links, n.d.).

The Committee urged a minimum age of 18 for civil and religious marriage, without exceptions. The Children's Act 2020, fully in force since 24 January 2022, prohibits causing or forcing a child under 18 to marry, whether civilly or religiously (Gender Links, 2022). Gender Links credits NGOs, activists and the Ombudsperson for Children together.

Kenya: a coalition report on the Maputo Protocol

Equality Now and 17 Kenyan civil society organisations produced a joint shadow report on Kenya's implementation of the Protocol, published in December 2021. It covered equality, political participation, sexual and gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, child marriage, technology-facilitated violence, reproductive rights and the rights of women with disabilities and indigenous women (Payne, 2021). The review was postponed, and concluding observations on Kenya's 14th Charter report and second Maputo report were finally adopted at the 88th Session in July 2026 (ACHPR, 2026d). The lesson: plan for delays and update your report before a rescheduled review.

1.6 What States owe: respect, protect, fulfil

Human rights law describes State obligations at three levels, and a shadow report is stronger when it shows which level has failed:

- **Respect:** the State and its agents must not violate rights themselves, for example by forcing medical procedures on women or by discriminatory laws.
- **Protect:** the State must prevent and respond to violations by private actors, such as violent partners, employers or traditional authorities. This includes the duty of due diligence: to prevent, investigate, punish and provide redress.
- **Fulfil:** the State must take positive steps, including legislation, policies, services and budgets, so that women can enjoy their rights in practice.

The Maputo Protocol reflects all three. Article 4(2), for example, requires States to enact and enforce laws prohibiting violence against women, to punish perpetrators and to provide rehabilitation and reparation for victims (African Union, 2003). Article 26(2) adds the budgetary dimension of the duty to fulfil.



Understanding State obligations helps advocates frame clear demands. RFLD training session.

EXERCISE Know your State

Work in groups by country. Using the Commission's "States Reporting Status" web page and Table 2, answer the following questions.

1. Has your State ratified the Maputo Protocol? On what date?
2. Has it entered any reservation or declaration?
3. When did it last report to the Commission? Did the report include a Part B on the Protocol?
4. When is its next report due?

Share your answers in plenary and note the gaps in information. (45 minutes)

Module 2. The African Commission and the reporting procedure

Learning objectives

- Describe how the African Commission examines State reports.
- Locate the rules and guidelines that apply to shadow reports.
- Understand observer status, affiliate status and the NGO Forum.

2.1 The African Commission

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights was established by the African Charter and began work in 1987. It is based in Banjul, The Gambia. Its eleven Commissioners serve in their personal capacity. Under its Rules of Procedure, the Commission may create special mechanisms such as Special Rapporteurs, committees and working groups (ACHPR, 2020b, Rule 25).

The most important mechanism for women's rights is the **Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa**, created by Resolution 38 in 1999. Her mandate includes monitoring the implementation of the Charter and the Protocol, assisting governments to develop policies in line with the Protocol and helping to define reporting guidelines on women's rights (ACHPR, n.d.-b). Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie of The Gambia held the mandate in 2026, after renewals in 2022 and in November 2024 (ACHPR, 2024a). Because the mandate runs for two years, check the final communiqué of the 89th Session to confirm who holds it from November 2026.

The Commission also has a **Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Focal Point on Reprisals in Africa**, whose mandate was extended to reprisals in 2014 (ACHPR, 2023d). This mechanism matters for anyone who fears retaliation for engaging with the Commission.

2.2 The rules that apply

The Commission's Rules of Procedure were adopted in 2020 (ACHPR, 2020b). The rules most relevant to shadow reporting are summarised below. Always check the current text, as rules can be amended.

Table 4. Rules of Procedure most relevant to civil society

Rule	What it provides
Rule 27	Sessions are public unless the Commission decides otherwise; proceedings may be broadcast; a final communiqué is issued
Rule 28	Four ordinary sessions a year, two of which include public proceedings
Rule 33(3)(e)	Observers may propose items for the provisional agenda
Rule 34	The provisional agenda is sent to States and observers seven days before the session and posted online
Rule 38	The working languages are those of the African Union
Rules 71 and 72	Affiliate status for national human rights institutions; observer status for NGOs
Rule 74	States must ensure that there are no reprisals against persons who provide information to the Commission
Rule 78	Reports must follow the Commission's guidelines and cover the Charter and other instruments, including the Maputo Protocol
Rule 79	Timeline for State reports; Rule 79(3): shadow reports must reach the Secretary at least 30 days before the examination
Rule 80	The State answers questions from the Commission; the Commission may use information from NGOs (Rule 80(4))
Rules 82 and 83	Concluding observations are adopted within two sessions, sent to the State within 30 days and published; they set priorities and the date of the next report

Source: ACHPR (2020b). Rule numbers as summarised from the 2020 Rules; verify against the official text before citing in a submission.

Rule 79(3) is the key provision for this manual. It states that institutions, organisations or any interested party shall send their contributions, including shadow reports, to the Secretary at least thirty days before the examination of the report, and that such contributions should follow the Commission's Guidelines on Shadow Reports and speak to the actual report (ACHPR, 2020b).

2.3 The reporting cycle, step by step

The Commission does not have a formal “list of issues” stage like the United Nations treaty bodies. The procedure has five main steps (ACHPR, 2020b; ISHR, 2025):

1. **180 days before the session**, the Chair asks the State to confirm that it will present its report.
2. **120 days before the session**, the State’s report must reach the Commission electronically. It is then published on the Commission’s website.
3. **At least 30 days before the examination**, shadow reports must reach the Secretary.
4. **During a public session**, the State presents its report and answers questions from Commissioners. Civil society cannot question the State directly, but it can influence the dialogue through its shadow report, briefings and suggested questions.
5. **At the next session**, or no later than two sessions after the examination, the Commission adopts concluding observations. They are sent to the State within 30 days and then published.



The public sessions of the African Commission are where civil society meets Commissioners and State delegations. RFLD convening.

2.4 The Guidelines for State Reporting under the Protocol

In November 2009, at its 46th Ordinary Session, the Commission adopted Guidelines for State Reporting under the Maputo Protocol. The Commission’s website dates the document to February 2010 (ACHPR, 2010). The Guidelines ask States to submit Part B of their report in eight thematic clusters. They suggest that Part B should preferably not exceed 50 pages for a first report and 30 pages afterwards.

Table 5. The eight clusters of Part B

No.	Cluster	Main articles of the Protocol
1	Equality and non-discrimination	2, 3, 8, 9, 12, 13, 17
2	Protection from violence	3, 4, 5, 11, 22, 23
3	Marriage	6, 7, 20, 21
4	Health and reproductive rights	14

No.	Cluster	Main articles of the Protocol
5	Economic, social and cultural rights	12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19
6	Right to peace	10
7	Armed conflict	11
8	Specially protected groups of women	22, 23, 24

Source: ACHPR (2010). The mapping of articles to clusters is indicative and prepared by RFLD for training purposes.

For each cluster, States are asked to report on legislation, institutions, policies, education and awareness, remedies, challenges and accessibility. A good shadow report on the Protocol mirrors these clusters, so that Commissioners can read it side by side with Part B of the State report (ACHPR, 2022a).

2.5 General Comments

General Comments are the Commission's authoritative interpretations of specific provisions. Several of them state that State reports must take them into account, which makes them powerful tools for shadow reports.

Table 6. General Comments relevant to the Maputo Protocol

General Comment	Provision	Adopted
No. 1	Protocol Art. 14(1)(d) and (e): HIV and sexually transmitted infections	2012, 52nd Session
No. 2	Protocol Art. 14(1)(a), (b), (c), (f) and 14(2)(a), (c): contraception, family planning, safe abortion	2014, 55th Session
No. 6	Protocol Art. 7(d): property rights on separation, divorce or annulment	2020
Joint GC with ACERWC	Ending child marriage (Protocol Art. 6(b))	2017
Joint GC with ACERWC	Female genital mutilation (Protocol Art. 5)	Launched in November 2023

Sources: ACHPR (2012, 2014, 2020a); ACHPR & ACERWC (2017); Equality Now (n.d.-b).

General Comment No. 1 states that State reports should include consideration of the General Comments, and General Comment No. 2 states that reports must take it into account (ACHPR, 2012, 2014). A shadow report can therefore ask the Commission to check whether the State has done so.

2.6 Observer status, affiliate status and other ways in

Observer status for NGOs is now governed by Resolution 572, adopted in November 2023, which replaced Resolution 361 of 2016 (ACHPR, 2023a). An application must reach the Commission at least three months before the session and include a letter of application, the list of board members, authenticated statutes, proof of legal registration, sources of funding, independently audited accounts, the latest activity report and a strategic plan covering at least two years. Observers must present activity reports every two years. Around 600 NGOs held observer status after the 87th Session in May 2026 (ACHPR, 2026c).

Affiliate status for national human rights institutions is governed by Resolution 370 of 2017 (ACHPR, 2017). Affiliated institutions may take part in sessions without a vote and can submit their own shadow reports, as the

Kenya National Commission on Human Rights did before the 69th Session in 2021 (KNCHR, 2021).

Do you need observer status?

No. Any organisation or interested party may submit a shadow report under Rule 79(3). Observer status is needed to make oral statements in the public session and to propose agenda items. If your organisation does not have it, partner with one that does.

2.7 The NGO Forum

Before each public session, the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) convenes the Forum on the Participation of NGOs. The Forum adopts resolutions and a joint statement that are presented to the Commission. Before the 89th Session it takes place in Dakar from 8 to 10 October 2026, with draft resolutions due by 5 October (ACDHRS, 2026; ISHR, 2026). Special interest groups, including one on women's rights, prepare recommendations that feed into the final statement.

2.8 Case study: the 89th Ordinary Session

The 89th Session illustrates how the procedure works in practice. Its private segment was held online from 21 September to 1 October 2026. Its public segment runs in Dakar from 12 to 21 October 2026 (ACHPR, 2026d; ISHR, 2026).

Table 7. State reports scheduled for examination at the 89th Session

State	Date	Instruments covered
Mauritius	15 October 2026	11th periodic report under the Charter (2019 to 2024); no Maputo report
Zambia	16 October 2026	8th Charter report; first Maputo Protocol report; initial Kampala Convention report (2020 to 2025)
Cameroon	17 October 2026	7th to 9th Charter reports; 1st to 3rd Maputo Protocol reports; Kampala Convention and other protocols (2019 to 2024)
Guinea-Bissau	17 October 2026	Charter report covering 1988 to 2025; Maputo Protocol report covering 2010 to 2025

Source: ISHR (2026).

Three lessons stand out. First, a long-overdue State can catch up with a combined report, as Guinea-Bissau is doing with a Charter report covering 37 years. Second, a Charter-only report, such as that of Mauritius, is still an opening to raise the Protocol: Mauritius holds reservations to seven of its provisions (ACHPR, 2026b). Third, a single session can examine several instruments at once, so a shadow report must state clearly which report it addresses.

EXERCISE Count back from the session

The public segment of the 89th Session runs in Dakar from 12 to 21 October 2026. Mauritius is scheduled for examination on 15 October, Zambia on 16 October, and Cameroon and Guinea-Bissau on 17 October (ISHR, 2026).

1. Using Rule 79(3), calculate the latest date for submitting a shadow report on each State.
2. Which of these States presented a report under the Maputo Protocol?
3. For a State whose report will be examined in the next public session, draw up a timeline from today to the examination.

Answer to question 1: 15 September 2026 for Mauritius, 16 September for Zambia and 17 September for Cameroon and Guinea-Bissau. (30 minutes)

Module 3. Planning a shadow report

Learning objectives

- Decide whether and when to prepare a shadow report.
- Choose a focus that matches your evidence and the State report.
- Organise a coalition, a work plan and a budget.

3.1 Should you prepare a shadow report?

A shadow report takes time and resources. Before you start, answer four questions honestly:

- **Is there a State report?** A shadow report should “speak to the actual report” (ACHPR, 2020b, Rule 79(3)). If your State has not reported, see section 8.4 on the Commission’s proactive approach and consider other tools, such as a statement on the human rights situation or a letter to the Special Rapporteur.
- **Is there enough time?** You need at least three months to collect evidence, write, validate and translate a report. The State report is usually published about four months before the session, which leaves roughly three months before the 30-day deadline.
- **Do you have evidence?** A report built only on press articles is weak (ISHR, 2025). You need official data, documented cases, research or court decisions.
- **Can you follow up?** The value of a shadow report is multiplied when the same organisations brief Commissioners, speak at the session and monitor the concluding observations.

3.2 Find the State report and the timeline

The Commission publishes State reports on its website once they are received, and it updates a “States Reporting Status” page. Examination dates are usually confirmed only a few weeks before the session, in the provisional agenda and in alerts issued by organisations such as ISHR (ACHPR, n.d.-a; ISHR, 2026). Dates can move: the public segment of the 89th Session was first announced for 21 to 30 October 2026 and then moved to 12 to 21 October (ACHPR, 2026a, 2026d). Always work from the most recent communiqué.

A practical rule

As soon as your State's report appears online, assume it will be examined at the next public session. Count back 30 days from the first day of that session and set your submission date one week earlier, to allow for delays in sending and receipt.

3.3 Choose your focus

A shadow report does not need to cover everything. The Commission's guidelines limit the main text to 15 pages (ACHPR, 2022a). It is better to cover three or four issues with strong evidence than fifteen issues with weak evidence.

To choose your focus:

1. Read Part B of the State report and list the claims it makes under each cluster.
2. Mark the claims you can confirm or contest with evidence.
3. Identify the most serious gaps that the State report does not mention.
4. Check previous concluding observations: which recommendations has the State ignored?
5. Agree on priorities with your coalition, taking into account the expertise of each member.

3.4 Build a coalition

The Commission encourages joint reports and asks that all signatories be listed on the cover or in an annex (ACHPR, 2022a). Coalitions bring broader evidence, greater legitimacy and some protection for individual organisations.

The Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) coalition, founded in 2004, brings together more than 70 organisations in 33 countries and has tracked the ratification and implementation of the Protocol for two decades (SOAWR, n.d.). The Kenya joint report described in Module 1 shows how a national coalition of 18 organisations can share the work of research and writing (Payne, 2021).

TEMPLATE Coalition agreement

Name of the coalition	<i>Name used on the report cover </i>
Lead organisation	<i>Coordinates the work, holds the final text, submits the report </i>
Member organisations	<i>Name, contact person, thematic responsibility </i>
Decision-making	<i>How the coalition validates the text; deadline for objections </i>
Use of data	<i>Who owns the data; how case information is stored and shared </i>
Safety	<i>Whether any member requests anonymity; who assesses risks </i>
Communication	<i>Who speaks to the media and at the session; agreed key messages </i>
Costs	<i>How translation, travel and printing are shared </i>



Coalition work: RFLD members preparing joint positions during regional convenings.

3.5 Work plan and budget

A realistic work plan protects the quality of the report. The table below shows a typical sequence for a three-month process.

Table 8. Indicative work plan for a shadow report

Weeks	Main tasks
1 and 2	Read the State report and previous concluding observations; form the coalition; agree on focus and roles
3 to 6	Collect evidence: data requests, interviews, case files, court decisions; ethics and safety checks
7 and 8	Analyse evidence; draft issue sections, questions and recommendations
9	Coalition review; legal check; fact-check every figure against its source
10	Executive summary, final edit, translation into a second AU language if possible
11	Validation meeting; signature by coalition members
12	Submission to the Secretary at least 30 days before the examination; briefing note for Commissioners

Source: RFLD, drawing on ISHR (2025) and UNDP & Equality Now (2023).

Budget lines usually include research costs, a validation meeting, translation, layout, travel to the session and communication. Many organisations underestimate translation. Commissioners work in several languages, and a report available in both English and French reaches more of them.

3.6 Working with the national human rights institution and the government

A shadow report is independent, but it does not need to be adversarial. Many national human rights institutions hold affiliate status with the Commission and can share data or submit their own report. Government officials who prepare State reports are often open to dialogue with civil society, especially when it brings data they lack. A meeting with the ministry in charge of the State report, before and after the session, can make the follow-up of concluding observations much easier. Keep a clear line, however, between consultation by the State and your own independent submission.

3.7 Full or thematic report?

Some coalitions cover all eight clusters. Others focus on a single article, such as Article 14 on health, or on one group of women. Both approaches are valid. In 2022, two Rwandan organisations submitted a 14-page shadow report on Article 14 alone, based on document review, focus groups and interviews with 155 participants in nine districts (Save Generations Organization & Réseau des Femmes Ouvrant pour le Développement Rural, 2022). A thematic report allows depth. A full report gives Commissioners a broader picture. If several coalitions work on the same State, coordinate so that your reports complement each other rather than repeat the same points.

Module 4. Collecting evidence

Learning objectives

- Identify reliable sources of evidence on women's rights.
- Test State claims at the levels of structure, process and outcome.
- Apply a simple rule of triangulation.

4.1 What counts as evidence

The Guidelines on Shadow Reports ask for reliable and objective information, such as court cases, official reports, research, surveys and up-to-date statistics (ACHPR, 2022a). ISHR warns against relying only on press sources (ISHR, 2025). Useful sources include:

- official statistics: censuses, Demographic and Health Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, administrative data from ministries, police and courts;
- budgets and audit reports, which show what is actually spent;
- court decisions, including judgments that apply the Maputo Protocol;
- reports of national human rights institutions, ombudspersons and parliamentary committees;
- reports and data of UN agencies and treaty bodies, including previous concluding observations;
- academic research and evaluations;
- your own documentation: case files, interviews, focus groups, monitoring visits.

4.2 Structure, process and outcome

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) proposes three types of indicators that help you test each State claim (OHCHR, 2012):

- **Structure:** is there a law, a policy or an institution? For example, does the law set 18 as the minimum age of marriage?
- **Process:** is it applied and funded? For example, how many marriages of girls under 18 were registered or prevented, and what budget supports the law?
- **Outcome:** has the situation of women changed? For example, what share of women aged 20 to 24 were married before 18?

State reports often stop at the level of structure. A shadow report that shows the gap between the law on paper and the reality of process and outcome gives the Commission precisely what it needs.

EXERCISE From claim to indicator

Take one claim from your State's report, for example "The Government has adopted a national strategy to end gender-based violence."

1. Write one structure, one process and one outcome indicator that would show whether the claim is meaningful.
2. For each indicator, name the source where you could find the data.
3. Mark which data are missing, and turn the gap into a question for the Commission.

(40 minutes)

4.3 Triangulation

RFLD applies a simple rule in its own work: every major claim in a shadow report should rest on at least two independent types of source, for example official statistics and documented cases, or a court record and field interviews. This is RFLD's method guidance and not a formal requirement of the Commission, but it protects the credibility of your report and of the coalition.

4.4 Use the State's own figures

The most persuasive evidence often comes from the State itself. Budget documents, ministry statistics and statements to other bodies can contradict the narrative of the State report. Equality Now describes shadow reporting as a way to hold States to their own word (Payne, 2021). When you quote a State source, give the exact title, date and page so that Commissioners can verify it.

4.5 Budget evidence

Article 26(2) of the Protocol requires States to provide budgetary and other resources for implementation (African Union, 2003). In 2024 the Commission ordered an addendum on data to its Tunis Reporting Guidelines, which supports requests for disaggregated data (ACHPR, 2024b). Simple budget questions are powerful: how much was allocated to the gender ministry, the shelters or the specialised courts, and how much was actually spent?

4.6 A human rights-based approach to data

OHCHR's guidance on a human rights-based approach to data sets out six principles that apply to your own data collection (OHCHR, 2018):

Table 9. Six principles of a human rights-based approach to data

Principle	What it means for a shadow report
Participation	Involve the women concerned in deciding what to collect and how
Data disaggregation	Break down data by sex, age, disability, location and other relevant grounds
Self-identification	Let people define their own identity in surveys and interviews

Principle	What it means for a shadow report
Transparency	Explain your methods and sources in the report
Privacy	Protect personal data and never identify individuals without consent
Accountability	Use data to hold duty-bearers to account

Source: OHCHR (2018).

TEMPLATE Evidence matrix

Issue	<i>For example: child marriage in the Northern region </i>
State claim	<i>Quote and paragraph number from the State report </i>
Structure evidence	<i>Law, policy or institution, with reference </i>
Process evidence	<i>Implementation, budget, cases handled, with source </i>
Outcome evidence	<i>Change in women's situation, with source and year </i>
Second independent source	<i>Second type of source supporting the same finding </i>
Gap or contradiction	<i>What the State report omits or misstates </i>
Suggested question	<i>Question for the Commission to ask </i>
Recommendation	<i>Specific, measurable and time-bound action </i>

4.7 Documenting cases

Individual cases bring a report to life and show the human cost of a gap in law or practice. Use them carefully. Describe only what is needed to make the point, remove identifying details and obtain informed consent (see Module 5). A short anonymised account, supported by data that show it is not isolated, is far stronger than a long story without context.

4.8 Digital security

Shadow reports often contain sensitive information. Store interview notes and case files in encrypted folders, limit access to the people who need it, avoid sending names by unsecured messaging and agree in advance how long the data will be kept. Free guidance in French and English is available from digital security organisations, including helplines that support civil society.

4.9 Where to find evidence, cluster by cluster

Table 10. Common sources of evidence for each cluster

Cluster	Common sources
Equality and non-discrimination	Constitution and codes; gender ministry reports; data on women in parliament, government and the civil service

Cluster	Common sources
Protection from violence	Police and court statistics; DHS violence module; shelter and helpline records; forensic services
Marriage	Civil registration data; DHS data on age at first marriage; family court decisions
Health and reproductive rights	Health information systems; maternal death reviews; DHS; health budget documents
Economic, social and cultural rights	Education and labour surveys; land registries; social protection databases; JMP water data
Right to peace	National action plans on women, peace and security; composition of peace bodies
Armed conflict	Humanitarian needs overviews; UN and NGO reports on conflict-related sexual violence
Specially protected groups	Census disability data; reports of organisations of widows, older women and women with disabilities

Source: RFLD, for training purposes.

Module 5. Ethics, safety and do no harm

Learning objectives

- Apply the principle of do no harm to the collection and use of information.
- Obtain and record informed consent.
- Assess and reduce the risk of reprisals.

5.1 The principle of do no harm

Collecting information on violations can put people at risk. OHCHR's Manual on Human Rights Monitoring states that monitors have an obligation not to jeopardise the life, safety, freedom and well-being of the people who cooperate with them (OHCHR, 2011). Its chapter on the protection of victims, witnesses and other cooperating persons identifies four core elements:

- **informed consent:** the person understands what your organisation can and cannot do, how the information will be used and what risks it may bring;
- **confidentiality:** no identity is disclosed without explicit consent;
- **risk assessment** before and during contact;
- **preventive measures:** discreet contact, minimal exposure and secure storage.

5.2 Informed consent

Consent must be free, informed and specific. It is not a signature on a form. It is a conversation in a language the person understands, in a safe place, in which she can ask questions and refuse without consequences. Consent can be withdrawn at any time, and the report must respect that choice even if it means removing a strong case.

Explain clearly that a shadow report will be published. The Commission publishes shadow reports with the names of their authors, although authors may ask for anonymity if they fear retaliation (ACHPR, 2022a). The individuals whose stories you describe must never be identifiable without their explicit agreement.

TEMPLATE Informed consent record

Purpose explained	<i>The interview will inform a shadow report to the African Commission, which will be published </i>
What we can and cannot do	<i>We cannot provide legal representation or compensation; we can refer you to services </i>
How information will be used	<i>Anonymised account; no name, village or identifying detail unless you agree </i>
Risks discussed	<i>Possible risks and how we will reduce them </i>
Right to refuse or withdraw	<i>You may stop at any time and ask us to remove your information until [date] </i>
Storage	<i>Where notes are kept, who can see them, when they will be destroyed </i>
Consent given	<i>Oral or written; date; name of interviewer; language used </i>
Referral offered	<i>Services offered (health, legal, psychosocial) </i>

5.3 Research on sexual violence

When a shadow report touches on sexual violence, extra care is needed. The World Health Organization (WHO) published ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies in 2007. They are widely summarised as eight principles: the benefits must outweigh the risks; methods should present the least risk; care and support must be available before information is collected; the safety of all involved is paramount; confidentiality must be protected; informed consent is required; data collectors must be carefully selected and trained; and children need additional safeguards (WHO, 2007; wording to be checked against the original before quoting).

In conflict settings, such as parts of the Sahel or eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Global Code of Conduct for Gathering and Using Information about Systematic and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, known as the Murad Code, offers ten principles for everyone who gathers such information, including activists, survivor groups and funders (Murad Code Project, 2022).

5.4 Reprisals

Engaging with the Commission can expose human rights defenders and witnesses to intimidation. Rule 74 of the Rules of Procedure obliges States to ensure that there are no reprisals against persons who provide information to the Commission (ACHPR, 2020b). The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Focal Point on Reprisals gathers information on reprisals, keeps a database, gives guidance on urgent cases and reports at each session (ACHPR, 2023d).

Before you submit: a short risk check

- Could any person or organisation named in the report face retaliation?
- Have you removed all identifying details from case descriptions?
- Does any coalition member need to request anonymity?
- Who will contact the Focal Point on Reprisals if a problem arises, and how?
- Are digital copies of evidence stored securely?

5.5 A trauma-informed approach

Many women who share their experiences for a shadow report have lived through violence or loss. A trauma-informed approach recognises this and avoids causing further harm. In practice, it means:

- giving the person control over what she shares, when and where;
- avoiding repeated interviews on the same events, which can retraumatise;
- having a trained person conduct interviews on sexual violence, preferably a woman, if the interviewee wishes;
- explaining what will happen next and keeping promises, however small;
- knowing in advance where to refer the person for health, legal or psychosocial support;
- taking care of the interviewers, who can also be affected by what they hear.

EXERCISE A difficult case

A woman you interviewed about domestic violence agreed to share her story. Two weeks before submission, she calls to say that her husband has heard about the report and she is afraid.

1. What do you do immediately?
2. How do you adapt the report?
3. What support can you offer, and to whom do you refer her?

Discuss in small groups and agree on a protocol for your coalition. (30 minutes)

Module 6. Writing the shadow report**Learning objectives**

- Apply the format rules of the Commission's Guidelines on Shadow Reports.
- Structure a report that engages the State report directly.
- Write questions and recommendations that the Commission can use.

6.1 Format rules

The Commission adopted its Guidelines on Shadow Reports at the 72nd Ordinary Session in 2022 and published them in English, French, Portuguese, Arabic and Kiswahili (ACHPR, 2022a). They follow Resolution 436 of 2020, which called for such guidelines (ACHPR, 2020c).

Table 11. Key requirements of the Guidelines on Shadow Reports

Item	Requirement
Who may submit	National human rights institutions, NGOs with observer status, institutions and any other interested party
Length	15 pages at most for the main text; cover page, footnotes and up to 10 annexes do not count
Format	Word file, 12-point font, 1.5 line spacing, numbered paragraphs and pages
Contents	Table of contents, executive summary of one page at most, introduction
Language	At least one official language of the African Union
Joint reports	Encouraged; all signatories listed on the cover or in an annex
Evidence	Reliable and objective information, such as court cases, official reports, research and statistics
Publication	Published with authors' names; anonymity may be requested where there is a risk of retaliation
Deadline	At least 30 days before the examination (Rule 79(3))

Sources: ACHPR (2020b, 2022a).

6.2 A proven structure

The structure below follows the Guidelines and the eight clusters of Part B. Adapt it to your focus.

TEMPLATE Shadow report outline

Cover page	<i>Title; State and report concerned; session; names of submitting organisations; contact </i>
Table of contents	<i>With page numbers </i>
Executive summary	<i>One page: main findings, three to five priority recommendations </i>
1. Introduction	<i>Who you are; how the report was prepared; methodology; limits </i>
2. Issues by cluster	<i>For each issue: State claim; your evidence; analysis; suggested questions; recommendations </i>
3. Follow-up of previous concluding observations	<i>What the State has and has not done since its last examination </i>
4. Summary of recommendations	<i>Numbered list, grouped by cluster </i>

Annexes*Up to 10: list of signatories, data tables, legal texts, case summaries |*

6.3 Engage the State report paragraph by paragraph

The Guidelines ask that each issue cite the passage of the State report concerned, say whether it is accurate, give the evidence, suggest questions and propose concrete and implementable recommendations (ACHPR, 2022a). A simple table can make this structure visible to busy Commissioners.

Table 12. Example of an issue section (fictional State)

Element	Example
State report	Para. 112: “The Child Protection Act 2019 sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for both sexes.”
Assessment	Accurate on paper, but incomplete. Customary and religious marriages are not registered and fall outside the Act.
Evidence	Latest DHS: 31% of women aged 20 to 24 married before 18; ministry data: 12 prosecutions in five years; three case files documented by the coalition
Question	How does the State ensure that customary and religious marriages respect the minimum age of 18, and how many cases have been prosecuted since 2019?
Recommendation	Amend the Marriage Registration Act within 12 months to require registration of all marriages, and report on prosecutions in the next periodic report

Fictional example prepared by RFLD for training purposes.

6.4 Writing good questions

Commissioners appreciate questions they can ask directly. ISHR advises grouping suggested questions by theme and sending them in advance to the Country Rapporteur Commissioner (ISHR, 2025). Good questions are short and precise, ask for data or explanations and cannot be answered by a simple yes or no.

Weak and strong questions

Weak: What is the Government doing about violence against women?

Strong: How many shelters for survivors of violence are funded by the State budget in 2026, in which regions, and what share of the budget of the Ministry of Gender do they represent?

6.5 SMART recommendations

A recommendation is SMART when it is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (OHCHR, 2022; UPR Info, 2015). UPR Info classifies recommendations into five categories of action, from requests for assistance (category 1) to specific, tangible and verifiable actions (category 5). In its analysis, category 5 accounted for 36% of recommendations. The more demanding categories 3 and 5 were accepted by States in 55% of cases, against 88% for the softer ones (UPR Info, n.d.). Aim for category 5, knowing that it is harder to win.

Table 13. From vague to SMART

Vague recommendation	SMART recommendation
Strengthen efforts to combat gender-based violence	Adopt and fund, by the end of 2027, a national action plan on gender-based violence with a dedicated budget line, and report on its execution in the next periodic report
Promote women's political participation	Amend the electoral law before the next legislative elections to require that at least 40% of candidates on each list are women, with alternation
Improve access to reproductive health services	Publish within 12 months national guidelines implementing Article 14(2)(c) of the Protocol, consistent with General Comment No. 2, and train health workers in every district hospital

Examples prepared by RFLD for training purposes.

Concluding observations of the Commission often use formulas that civil society can propose word for word, such as “provide in its next periodic report information on...”, “take steps to pass a law on...” and “allocate adequate resources to...”. The concluding observations on Malawi adopted in 2022, for example, asked the State to report in its next report on the status of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill and to pass a law on sexual harassment (ACHPR, 2022b).

EXERCISE Upgrade five recommendations

Take five recommendations from a past concluding observation or from your own drafts. For each one:

1. Identify its UPR Info category.
2. Rewrite it as a category 5 recommendation: who must do what, by when, and how progress will be measured.
3. Check that it remains realistic for your State.

(45 minutes)

6.6 Guidance cluster by cluster

The eight clusters of Part B give your report its skeleton. For each cluster, the guidance below suggests what to look for, where to find evidence and what kind of questions Commissioners can ask. It is indicative and should be adapted to your State.

Cluster 1. Equality and non-discrimination

What to look for. Discriminatory provisions in the constitution, civil, family, nationality, labour and criminal codes; the definition of discrimination against women in national law; the existence and funding of a gender equality mechanism; temporary special measures.

Evidence. Legal texts and draft bills; reports of the gender ministry and the national human rights institution; data on women in public office, employment and education.

Sample question. Which provisions of national law still discriminate against women, and what is the timetable for their repeal?

Cluster 2. Protection from violence

What to look for. Laws on domestic violence, rape (including marital rape), sexual harassment, female genital mutilation and technology-facilitated violence; services for survivors; police and justice responses; data on femicide.

Evidence. Police and court statistics; DHS modules on violence; shelter records; case files; reports of the Special Rapporteur and of UN bodies.

Sample question. How many cases of rape were reported, prosecuted and resulted in conviction in each of the last three years, and how many shelters are funded by the State?

Cluster 3. Marriage

What to look for. Minimum age of 18 for all forms of marriage; registration of customary and religious marriages; consent; polygamy; rights during marriage and at its end, including property under General Comment No. 6; rights of widows and inheritance.

Evidence. Marriage and family laws; DHS data on child marriage; court decisions on property and inheritance; documented cases.

Sample question. What measures ensure that customary and religious marriages are registered and respect the minimum age of 18?

Cluster 4. Health and reproductive rights

What to look for. Access to contraception and family planning; maternal mortality; the legal framework on abortion and its consistency with Article 14(2)(c) and General Comment No. 2; HIV and General Comment No. 1; services for adolescents; obstetric violence.

Evidence. Health ministry statistics; DHS; budget lines for reproductive health; reports of health facilities; court decisions.

Sample question. What steps has the State taken to align its abortion law with Article 14(2)(c) of the Protocol, and what share of the health budget funds family planning?



Health and reproductive rights are often the most contested cluster in State reports. RFLD convening.

Cluster 5. Economic, social and cultural rights

What to look for. Education of girls and retention in school; women's employment, pay and social protection; access to land and credit; food security and clean water under Article 15; housing; environment and development under Articles 18 and 19.

Evidence. Education and labour statistics; land registries; budget data; reports by UN agencies; RFLD's report on women, water and Article 15 for the water dimension.

Sample question. What share of registered land titles are held by women, alone or jointly, and what measures increase that share?

Cluster 6. Right to peace

What to look for. Women's participation in peace processes, conflict prevention and mediation; national action plans on women, peace and security; reduction of military spending in favour of social development, as foreseen in Article 10(3).

Evidence. Composition of negotiating teams and peace committees; national action plans and their budgets; reports of regional and UN bodies.

Sample question. How many women took part in the last national peace or reconciliation process, and in what roles?

Cluster 7. Armed conflict

What to look for. Protection of women and girls in armed conflict and displacement; sexual violence as a weapon of war; accountability; services for displaced women; recruitment of children.

Evidence. Humanitarian data; reports of the UN and of human rights organisations; documentation that follows the Murad Code.

Sample question. How many cases of conflict-related sexual violence have been investigated and prosecuted, and what reparations are available to survivors?

Cluster 8. Specially protected groups of women

What to look for. The situation of widows, elderly women, women with disabilities, women in distress, women in detention and other groups at risk under Articles 20 to 24; intersecting discrimination.

Evidence. Disaggregated data, where it exists; reports of organisations representing these groups; testimonies collected with consent.

Sample question. What data does the State collect on women with disabilities, and how are they used to design services?

6.7 Style

Write for a reader who has little time and who may be reading in a second language. Use short sentences and plain words. Put the main finding at the start of each section. Define abbreviations. Give the source of every figure in a footnote. Avoid insulting or political language: the strength of a shadow report lies in its evidence.

6.8 Final checklist before submission

- The report speaks to the State report and cites its paragraphs.
- The main text is 15 pages or fewer, in Word format, 12-point font, 1.5 spacing, with numbered paragraphs.
- There is a one-page executive summary.
- Every figure has a source, and every major claim rests on two types of evidence.
- Each issue has suggested questions and SMART recommendations.
- Identifying details have been removed and consent recorded.
- All coalition members are listed and have validated the text.
- The report is in at least one AU language; a second language version is planned if possible.
- The submission date leaves a margin before the 30-day deadline.

Module 7. Submitting and advocating around the session

Learning objectives

- Submit a shadow report correctly and on time.
- Plan advocacy before and during the session.
- Prepare a short oral statement.

7.1 Submitting the report

Shadow reports are sent to the Secretary to the Commission by email, by hand or by post (ACHPR, 2022a). The Secretariat is located at 31 Bijilo Annex Layout, Kombo North District, Western Region, P.O. Box 673, Banjul, The Gambia (telephone +220 441 05 05 / 441 05 06) (ACHPR, n.d.-c). The general email address used by civil society is au-banjul@africa-union.org (ISHR, 2025). Check the address on the Commission's Secretariat page before sending, ask for an acknowledgement of receipt and keep a record of the date and time of submission.

Copy the report to the Country Rapporteur Commissioner for your State and to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (ISHR, 2025).

7.2 Briefing Commissioners

Commissioners receive many documents before each session. A short briefing note of two pages, with your five priority questions and recommendations, increases the chance that your issues are raised. Where possible, request a meeting with the Country Rapporteur and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women before the examination, either during the NGO Forum or in the margins of the session.

7.3 At the NGO Forum

The NGO Forum is an opportunity to build alliances, present your findings in a special interest group and propose resolutions. Draft resolutions are usually due a few days before the Forum opens (ISHR, 2026). A resolution adopted by the Forum and presented to the Commission gives your issue a wider platform.



Presenting data at an RFLD network meeting. The NGO Forum offers a platform for the findings of shadow reports.

7.4 At the public session

During the public session, observers may register to make statements on the human rights situation in Africa, on the activity reports of Commissioners and special mechanisms, and in panels. At the 89th Session, statements on the human rights situation are scheduled on several days, and side events take place in the margins (ISHR, 2026). Registration usually closes two to three weeks before the session. Sessions are broadcast live on the Commission's YouTube channel, which allows partners who cannot travel to follow the examination of their State.



Delegates from RFLD's network prepare statements during a regional session. Short, precise statements are the most effective.

7.5 A three-minute oral statement

Speaking time is limited, often to a few minutes (to be confirmed for each session). A good statement addresses one issue, gives one strong piece of evidence and makes one clear request. Equality Now's written intervention on the activity report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women at the 83rd Session offers a useful model: it commends the Rapporteur's work and then sets out five themed requests, including on reservations and State reporting (Equality Now, 2025). A spoken version must be much shorter.

TEMPLATE Oral statement (about 350 words)

Opening	<i>Thank you, Madam Chair. [Organisation], an NGO with observer status, speaks on behalf of [coalition] </i>
Issue	<i>One sentence naming the issue and the State or region concerned </i>
Evidence	<i>One or two facts, with source and year </i>
Link to the Protocol	<i>The article of the Maputo Protocol and, where relevant, the General Comment concerned </i>
Request to the Commission	<i>One or two concrete asks, for example a question to the State or a recommendation </i>
Closing	<i>Thank you. Our full shadow report is available at [link] </i>

7.6 Working with the media

Media coverage before and after the examination raises public awareness and puts pressure on the State to follow up. Prepare a short press release in the national languages, offer interviews with members of the coalition and share the concluding observations as soon as they are published. Agree in advance who speaks for the coalition, and never expose individuals who shared their stories.

7.7 A briefing note for Commissioners

TEMPLATE Two-page briefing note

Heading	<i>Shadow report on [State], [session], submitted by [coalition] </i>
Context	<i>Three lines on the State report and the coalition </i>
Priority issue 1	<i>Finding in two sentences, with the key figure and source </i>
Priority issue 2	<i>Same format </i>
Priority issue 3	<i>Same format </i>
Suggested questions	<i>Five questions, numbered, each on one line </i>
Priority recommendations	<i>Five SMART recommendations </i>
Contact	<i>Name, email and phone of the person available during the session </i>

7.8 Social media

Social media can amplify the examination of your State, especially when the session is streamed. Share short messages with key figures, the link to your report and the hashtag of the session. Never post photos or names of survivors, and think twice before naming officials in a way that could expose your coalition to legal action or reprisals. Agree on the key messages in advance and designate who posts on behalf of the coalition.

EXERCISE Plan your session advocacy

Your State will be examined on the third day of the next public session.

1. Draw up a timeline of advocacy actions from four weeks before the session to two weeks after.
2. Identify which Commissioners you will brief and how.
3. Draft a three-minute statement using the template.

Present your plan in plenary. (60 minutes)

Module 8. After the session: follow-up

Learning objectives

- Understand how concluding observations are adopted and published.
- Build a national follow-up plan.
- Use the Commission's procedures when a State does not report.

8.1 Concluding observations

After the examination, the Commission adopts concluding observations, usually at its next session and no later than two sessions after the examination. They are sent to the State within 30 days and then published on the Commission's website. They identify priority issues and set the date of the next report (ACHPR, 2020b, Rules 82 and 83). Commissioners follow up through their promotion activities, and the concluding observations are referred to in the Commission's activity reports to the AU Assembly.

8.2 A national follow-up plan

Concluding observations change nothing unless they are known and used at national level. In November 2024, the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria held separate meetings in Windhoek with civil society organisations on shadow reporting and with ministries of gender, justice and defence on the implementation of the Commission's recommendations to Namibia (Centre for Human Rights, 2024). This model of dialogue with both sides can be adapted in any country.

TEMPLATE Follow-up plan

Recommendation	<i>Text of the concluding observation, with paragraph number </i>
Responsible institution	<i>Ministry, agency or parliament committee </i>

Action needed	<i>Law, policy, budget or programme required </i>
Indicator of progress	<i>How you will know that the action has been taken </i>
Coalition lead	<i>Organisation that monitors this recommendation </i>
Advocacy actions	<i>Meetings, letters, media, parliamentary questions </i>
Timeline	<i>Milestones until the next State report </i>
Status	<i>Not started, in progress, achieved </i>

8.3 Preparing for the next cycle

Follow-up is also preparation for the next shadow report. Keep a simple file for each recommendation, with the evidence you collect over time. When the next State report is published, you will already know what has changed, and your shadow report can focus on implementation. UN bodies follow the same logic: the UPR guidelines ask stakeholders to focus on the follow-up of previous recommendations (OHCHR, 2022).

8.4 When a State does not report

Some initial reports are more than 35 years overdue. In 2023 the Commission adopted Resolution 566, known as its proactive approach, which allows it, where a State has failed to report for a prolonged period, to send written questions, hold a public dialogue and adopt concluding observations without a report (ACHPR, 2023c). This is an important opening for civil society in non-reporting States. Organisations can provide the information the Commission needs to prepare its questions and can encourage the Commission to use the procedure.

Looking ahead: the AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls

The AU Assembly adopted a Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls in February 2025 (African Union, 2025). By May 2026 eight States had signed it and none had ratified it; fifteen ratifications are needed for its entry into force. Monitoring is expected to sit with the African Commission, led by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women, with progress reporting folded into the existing reporting cycle (African Union, 2026). Shadow reports may soon be able to address the Charter, the Maputo Protocol and the Convention together.

Module 9. One evidence base, three mechanisms

Learning objectives

- Compare the requirements of the African Commission, the CEDAW Committee and the UPR.
- Plan how the same evidence can serve all three.

9.1 Comparing the mechanisms

Most African States are party to both the Maputo Protocol and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and all of them are reviewed under the UPR. Each mechanism has its own rules.

Table 14. ACHPR, CEDAW and UPR compared

Feature	ACHPR shadow report	CEDAW alternative report	UPR stakeholder submission
Length	15 pages, plus up to 10 annexes	3,300 words (individual) or 6,600 (coalition)	2,815 words (individual) or 5,630 (joint)
Deadline	At least 30 days before examination	Set for each session by OHCHR	About six months before the session
Channel	Email, post or hand delivery to the Secretary	OHCHR online system	OHCHR online system (uprdoc)
Languages	Any official AU language	English, French or Spanish	Any official UN language
List of issues	No formal stage	Yes, including list of issues prior to reporting	No
Follow-up	Commissioners' promotion activities	Formal follow-up on selected recommendations	Voluntary mid-term reports

Sources: ACHPR (2020b, 2022a); IWRAW Asia Pacific (2025); OHCHR (2022, n.d.).

Since June 2022, the CEDAW Committee has applied a simplified reporting procedure to all States that do not opt out: it sends a list of issues before reporting, and the State's replies become its report (OHCHR, n.d.). The Committee selects a small number of recommendations for follow-up within one to two years, and NGOs may send information by the State's deadline (CEDAW Committee, 2010).

9.2 Cutting the same evidence three ways

A coalition can build one evidence base and present it in three formats: a full report to the African Commission, structured on the eight clusters of Part B; a CEDAW version mapped to the articles of the Convention and the Committee's General Recommendations; and a UPR submission focused on the implementation of earlier recommendations. The facilitators' manual of UNDP and Equality Now already teaches the Maputo Protocol and CEDAW side by side (UNDP & Equality Now, 2023). This manual adds tools on ethics, triangulation and session advocacy at the African Commission.



One evidence base can feed regional and UN mechanisms. RFLD members at a joint learning session.

EXERCISE Map your calendar

For your State, find the dates of the next examination by the African Commission, the CEDAW Committee and the UPR.

1. Which comes first?
2. Which evidence can you collect once and use for all three?
3. Which organisation in your coalition will lead each submission?

(30 minutes)

Annex A. Three-day workshop agenda

Table 15. Suggested agenda for 20 to 30 participants

Session	Content
Day 1, morning	Opening; Module 1, the Maputo Protocol and the duty to report; exercise “Know your State”
Day 1, afternoon	Module 2, the Commission and the procedure; exercise “Count back from the session”
Day 2, morning	Modules 3 and 4, planning and evidence; exercise “From claim to indicator”
Day 2, afternoon	Module 5, ethics and safety; exercise “A difficult case”; consent template
Day 3, morning	Module 6, writing; exercise “Upgrade five recommendations”; drafting an issue section
Day 3, afternoon	Modules 7 to 9, advocacy, follow-up and synergies; session plan; evaluation and closing

Annex B. Self-assessment for participants

Before and after the workshop, participants can rate their confidence on a scale of 1 (not confident) to 5 (very confident) on the following statements:

1. I can explain the reporting obligation under Article 26 of the Maputo Protocol.
2. I know how to find my State's report and the date of its examination.
3. I can apply the format rules of the Guidelines on Shadow Reports.
4. I can test a State claim using structure, process and outcome indicators.
5. I know how to obtain informed consent and reduce the risk of reprisals.
6. I can write SMART recommendations.
7. I can prepare a three-minute oral statement.
8. I can design a national follow-up plan for concluding observations.

Annex C. Model extract of a shadow report

The extract below is fictional. It shows how the elements described in Module 6 fit together on a page. The State, figures and organisations are invented for training purposes.

Shadow report on the Republic of Kanembo, Part B (Maputo Protocol)

Submitted by the Kanembo Coalition for Women's Rights (12 organisations) to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, ahead of the examination of the combined 5th and 6th periodic report of the Republic of Kanembo.

Executive summary (extract)

1. The Kanembo Coalition welcomes the State's first report under the Maputo Protocol and the adoption of the Gender-Based Violence Act in 2022.
2. The report, however, gives no data on the implementation of the Act. Our evidence shows that only 4 of 18 districts have a specialised police unit, and that no shelter is funded by the State budget.
3. The report does not mention the 34% rate of child marriage in the Northern Province or the absence of registration for customary marriages.
4. We ask the Commission to recommend that the State fund the Act, register all marriages and publish disaggregated data on violence and marriage in its next report.

Issue 2.1: Implementation of the Gender-Based Violence Act 2022

5. **State report, paragraph 214:** "The adoption of the Gender-Based Violence Act 2022 demonstrates the Government's commitment to protecting women."
6. **Assessment.** The Act is an important step and conforms in large part to Article 4 of the Protocol. Its implementation is weak, and the report contains no information on budget, institutions or results.
7. **Evidence.** The 2025 budget allocates no specific line to the Act (Ministry of Finance, Budget Law 2025, Annex 3). Police data show 2,140 complaints of domestic violence in 2025, of which 96 reached court

(National Police, Annual Report 2025, p. 41). Interviews with 46 survivors in three districts, conducted with informed consent, confirm that survivors are often sent home to “reconcile”.

8. **Suggested questions.** What budget has been allocated to the implementation of the Act in 2025 and 2026? How many complaints, prosecutions and convictions have been recorded since its entry into force, by district?
9. **Recommendations.** (a) Create a budget line for the Act in the 2027 budget law and publish its execution annually. (b) Establish specialised police units in all 18 districts by the end of 2028. (c) Provide in the next periodic report disaggregated data on complaints, prosecutions and convictions.

What makes this extract work

It quotes the State report precisely. It acknowledges progress before setting out gaps. Each finding is supported by two types of source. Questions ask for data the State should have. Recommendations name a measure, a deadline and a way to verify progress.

Annex D. Key legal texts

African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Article 62

Each State Party shall undertake to submit every two years, from the date the present Charter comes into force, a report on the legislative or other measures taken with a view to giving effect to the rights and freedoms recognised and guaranteed by the present Charter.

Maputo Protocol, Article 26: Implementation and Monitoring

1. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of this Protocol at national level, and in their periodic reports submitted in accordance with Article 62 of the African Charter, indicate the legislative and other measures undertaken for the full realisation of the rights herein recognised.
2. States Parties undertake to adopt all necessary measures and in particular shall provide budgetary and other resources for the full and effective implementation of the rights herein recognised.

Rules of Procedure of the ACHPR (2020), Rule 79(3), as summarised

Institutions, organisations or any interested party shall send their contributions, including shadow reports, to the Secretary at least thirty days prior to the examination of the report. Such contributions should follow the Commission’s Guidelines on Shadow Reports and speak to the actual report.

SRC: Sources: ACHPR (1981, 2020b); African Union (2003). Verify the exact wording against the official texts before quoting in a submission.

Annex E. Glossary

Affiliate status. Status granted by the Commission to national human rights institutions, allowing them to take part in sessions without a vote.

Concluding observations. The Commission's assessment of a State report, with recommendations and the date of the next report.

Country Rapporteur. The Commissioner responsible for monitoring the human rights situation in a given State.

General Comment. An authoritative interpretation by the Commission of a provision of the Charter or of a protocol.

Interpretive declaration. A statement by which a State specifies how it understands a treaty provision. The Commission lists Cameroon's general declaration among reservations to the Protocol.

NGO Forum. The Forum on the Participation of NGOs, convened by ACDHRS before each public session of the Commission.

Observer status. Status granted to NGOs that meet the Commission's criteria, allowing them to attend sessions, make statements and propose agenda items.

Part B. The part of a State report that covers the Maputo Protocol, structured in eight clusters.

Reservation. A unilateral statement by which a State excludes or modifies the legal effect of certain treaty provisions in its application.

Shadow report. A report submitted by an organisation other than the State to inform the Commission's examination of a State report.

SMART recommendation. A recommendation that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

Annex F. Useful resources

- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights: state reports, reporting status, concluding observations and guidelines (achpr.au.int).
- Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria: Maputo Protocol resources and state reporting pages (maputoprotocol.up.ac.za).
- International Service for Human Rights: road map for civil society engagement and session alerts (ishr.ch).
- African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies: NGO Forum registration and statements (acdhrs.org).
- Solidarity for African Women's Rights: coalition resources on the Protocol (soawr.org).
- UNDP and Equality Now: facilitators' training manual on shadow reporting (undp.org).
- RFLD: DCONUESÈ Data Center and RFLD Academy online courses (rflgd.org).

Annex G. Sample questions by article

The questions below can be adapted to your State and inserted in the “suggested questions” section of your report or briefing note.

Table 16. Sample questions for the Commission

Article	Sample question
Art. 2: Non-discrimination	Which discriminatory provisions remain in the family and nationality codes, and when will they be repealed?
Art. 4: Violence	How many complaints of domestic violence were filed, prosecuted and resulted in conviction in each of the last three years?
Art. 5: Harmful practices	What budget supports the implementation of the law prohibiting female genital mutilation, and how many cases were prosecuted?
Art. 6: Marriage	How does the State ensure that all marriages, including customary and religious ones, are registered and respect the minimum age of 18?
Art. 7: Separation and divorce	How do courts apply the principle of equitable sharing of property set out in General Comment No. 6?
Art. 9: Participation	What share of seats in parliament, government and local councils is held by women, and what measures will increase it?
Art. 12: Education	What measures keep pregnant girls and young mothers in school?
Art. 14: Health	What steps has the State taken to implement Article 14(2)(c) and General Comment No. 2?
Art. 15: Food security and water	What share of women live in households that must collect water, and what measures reduce their time burden?
Art. 19: Development	What share of the national budget is tagged as gender-responsive, and how is it tracked?
Art. 21: Inheritance	How do courts apply equal inheritance rights where customary law provides otherwise?
Art. 23: Women with disabilities	What data does the State collect on violence against women with disabilities?
Art. 26: Implementation	Which institution coordinates the implementation of the Protocol, and what budget does it have?

Source: RFLD, for training purposes.



RFLD's network brings evidence from communities to the African Commission. RFLD convening.

Annex H. Planning calendar

TEMPLATE Shadow report calendar

State and report	<i>Name of the State; title and period of the report; date of publication on the Commission's website </i>
Session	<i>Number, dates and venue of the session; date of examination if known </i>
Submission deadline	<i>Date of examination minus 30 days (Rule 79(3)); internal target one week earlier </i>
Evidence phase	<i>Start and end dates; data requests sent; interviews planned </i>
Drafting phase	<i>Dates of first draft, coalition review and fact-check </i>
Validation	<i>Date of validation meeting; deadline for signatures </i>
Translation	<i>Language versions planned; translator; deadline </i>
Advocacy	<i>NGO Forum dates; statement registration deadline; briefing meetings </i>
Follow-up	<i>Expected date of concluding observations; national follow-up meeting </i>

Abbreviations

ACDHRS	African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies
ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
GC	General Comment
ISHR	International Service for Human Rights
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NHRI	National human rights institution
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound
SOAWR	Solidarity for African Women's Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WHO	World Health Organization

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Women Leaders Network for Development

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Member & Local Platforms