

Expert Group Meeting on:

Beijing +30: Emerging issues and future directions for gender equality and women's rights

Virtual Meeting convened by UN-Women

13–15 August 2024

CONCEPT NOTE

I. Background

In 2025, the global community will mark the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)¹ and enter the countdown towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To mark this pivotal moment, the Commission on the Status of Women at its 69th session (CSW69), will undertake a review and appraisal of progress made in its implementation and of the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.²

As part of the 30-year review, the Economic and Social Council³ called on all States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) and of the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly held in 2000.⁴ The Council urged governments to collaborate with relevant stakeholders at all levels on preparations for the 2030 review so as to benefit from their experience and expertise. It also encouraged United Nations Regional Commissions to undertake reviews to feed into the global review.

To facilitate national-level reviews, UN-Women together with the regional commissions, issued a guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews.⁵ This guidance note clusters the BPfA's 12 critical areas of concern into six overarching dimensions that highlight its alignment with the 2030 Agenda. The six clusters are as follows:

- I. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work
- II. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services
- III. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes
- IV. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions
- V. Peaceful and inclusive societies
- VI. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

The review and appraisal of the implementation of the BPfA every five years is a rallying point for women's rights organizations and gender equality advocates around the globe, and a major milestone for UN-Women. After years of devastating global crises – from the COVID-19 pandemic to the current food, fuel, financial, humanitarian and climate crises – this will be a pivotal year for recovering lost ground and reigniting the global commitment to gender equality and women's rights.

UN-Women has developed a corporate strategy to mark Beijing +30, around the key themes of **accountability, recommitment and resources** to the rights of all women and girls, everywhere in all their diversities. This strategy includes a year-long campaign centred around the 12 critical areas of the BPfA and the demand for an accountability pact.

The centerpiece of the normative, intergovernmental aspects of the review of the BPfA is the Secretary General's report "*Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform*

¹ [Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women](#), Beijing, 4–15 September 1995, chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

² General Assembly resolution [70/1](#).

³ ECOSOC resolution [2022/5](#).

⁴ Resolution [S-23/2](#), annex, and resolution [S-23/3](#), annex.

⁵ [Guidance note](#) for comprehensive national-level reviews, October 2023. UN-Women.

for Action”, which will inform discussions at CSW 69 and the political declaration that Member States will adopt at that session. The report will provide an assessment of the implementation of the BPfA and make recommendations for accelerating progress synergistically to realize the human rights of all women and girls. It draws on national reports, findings from regional preparatory, complementary global data analysis and expert insights.

The last two editions produced for the twentieth and twenty-fifth anniversary respectively, have bolstered UN-Women’s thought leadership and provided indispensable insights on progress, bottlenecks and good practices for the acceleration of progress on gender equality.⁶ Findings have not only been used in the year-long engagements related to the Beijing anniversary, but also fed into the Generation Equality Forum and UN-Women’s strategic planning process. In a recent consultation conducted by UN-Women’s Research and Data section, the Beijing +25 review report was cited as one of the most used reports by external respondents.

To inform the forthcoming *“Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”* at its thirtieth anniversary UN-Women will convene a virtual expert group meeting (EGM) on **13–15 August 2024**. A draft agenda is included in [Annex 1](#).

II. Key issues and objectives

The overall objective of the EGM is to assess what has changed over the last five years in the pursuit of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and women’s and girls’ human rights, and how those changes are impacting on future prospects for achieving the objectives of the BPfA and the SDGs from a gender perspective. The findings will inform the overall narrative of the report as well as a forward-looking set of recommendations for accelerating the implementation of the BPfA, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the SDGs in a synergistic manner. The EGM will look at three cross-cutting issues in line with UN-Women’s corporate strategy for the Beijing +30 anniversary:

1. **Accountability:** Taking stock of progress, gaps and challenges towards the implementation of the BPfA, and other global gender equality standards and commitments.
2. **Recommitment:** Future-proofing the BPfA by protecting the gains, creating new opportunities and tackling risks as part of a forward-looking agenda for gender equality and women’s rights.
3. **Resources:** Ensuring adequate financing and political support to implement the BPfA and accelerate progress on gender equality as the engine of the 2030 Agenda.

Each of these three themes will be discussed at the virtual EGM held over three half days, with short written inputs to inform each discussion (see [Annex 1](#) for a draft EGM agenda). In addition, we will commission one longer overarching background paper on accountability, to take stock of where we stand on this critical issue and where further progress can be achieved.

⁶ Beijing +20 report available at: [https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/previous-sessions/csw59-2015/official-documents\(E/CN.6/2015/3\)](https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/previous-sessions/csw59-2015/official-documents(E/CN.6/2015/3)); Beijing +25 report available at: [https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw64-2020/official-documents\(E/CN.6/2020/3\)](https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw64-2020/official-documents(E/CN.6/2020/3))

1. Accountability (retrospective review): Taking stock of progress, gaps and challenges towards the implementation of the BPfA, and other global gender equality standards and commitments

The 1995 Beijing conference came at a high-water mark of democracy and multilateralism in the world. Gender equality advocates were cautiously optimistic that democratic and accountable governments would respond to women's demands for sweeping change in laws, policies, practices and social norms across all dimensions of society. The complex and fast-moving political, social, economic and environmental changes of the past 30 years have brought welcome steps forward in some areas of women's and girls' lives. But amid climate change, increased displacement and humanitarian crises, austerity, democratic erosion and growing polarization, we have seen powerful pushback, with the rise in exclusionary forces globally, and anti-gender equality actors influencing resource allocation, political and policy processes and priorities. This has resulted in damaging reversals of hard-won advances in women's rights, the erosion of accountability for commitments to gender equality, and the hollowing out of institutions and processes that the BPfA had tasked with advancing gender equality and monitoring progress, such as national gender equality machineries.⁷

Emerging civil society strategies, which depend on the governance context and relative strength of democracies, have focused on strategic litigation, alliance building, intersectional approaches and working across social movements at a grassroots level, on the one hand, as well as on wider efforts to reclaim the state by safeguarding inclusive democratic deliberation, representation, accountability processes and institutions, on the other.⁸

Against this background, the first day of the EGM will focus on accountability by taking stock of achievements and gaps. The following questions will guide the discussions:

- In the last 30 years, how have the thinking, approaches and emphasis evolved around the core values that shape BPfA? What have been the successes and limitations of a mainstreaming approach and how has this been transformative?
- What have been major achievements in the implementation of the BPfA, including in the context of conflict and crises? While there are recorded gains around normative standards, laws, policies, etc.; have these sufficiently translated to substantive equality, empowerment, or women and girls' greater protection and enjoyment of their rights?
- Where are the main bottlenecks to and potential drivers of further progress? What accounts for differences across and within regions and countries? Who is benefiting the most and who is being left behind?
- Why is there public and visible resistance; clawing back or even questioning of globally agreed principles and commitment, especially to gender equality, rights and empowerment of women?
- How have existing mechanisms and strategies been effective in ensuring accountability for progress in the implementation of the BPfA, SDGs, CEDAW and Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, among other relevant frameworks, in the current political context? What has been the

⁷ Roggeband, C. and A. Krizsán. 2020. "Democratic Backsliding and the Backlash against Women's Rights: Understanding the Current Challenges for Feminist Politics." UN-Women Discussion Paper No. 35. New York: UN-Women.

⁸ Tabbush, C. "Defending Women's Rights in Hostile Times: Understanding Patterns of Backlash to Push Forward for Gender Equality." UN-Women Policy Brief No. 27. New York: UN-Women. Forthcoming.

role and effectiveness of women's organizations, civil society networks and coalitions? What has worked and not worked in the past five years?

2. Recommitment (prospective and future dimension): Future-proofing the BPfA by protecting the gains, creating new opportunities and tackling risks as part of a forward-looking agenda for gender equality and women's rights

Thirty years after Beijing and as the countdown to the 2030 Agenda begins, it is imperative to address accountability gaps to prevent backsliding, accelerate progress and get back on track to deliver the promises of the BPfA, the 2030 Agenda, and other gender equality commitments such as CEDAW, Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security and the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The Summit of the Future in September and the resulting Pact for the Future will bring world leaders together to forge a new international consensus on how we deliver a better present and safeguard the future. Together with the +25 year anniversaries for Beijing +30 and Security Council resolution 1325⁹ in 2025, they provide a unique opportunity to **recommit** to the BPfA and the feminist agenda for peace, and to look at how global cooperation can better deliver on them.

This segment on recommitment recognizes the enduring importance of these platforms and resolutions, and the effort and progress, unfinished business, challenges and emerging issues that will shape their ongoing implementation. The questions to be addressed include the following:

- Protecting gains: What are the effective approaches, key constituencies and ways of working that can protect the gains made and create new opportunities? How can the universality of human rights be reinforced and abuses of cultural relativism to limit women's rights be rejected? How do we expand the understanding of substantive equality, so that women have the rights, the ability, and are empowered to make decisions about their lives in the public and private spheres?
- Commitment to go to scale: In which sectors and on what policy areas have sustainable and impactful approaches been applied which can be scaled up? Where have the greatest challenges been and what new approaches can be adopted?
- Addressing old and new dimensions, while anticipating future opportunities and challenges: Where has there been the least progress, where do efforts need to be redoubled (e.g., rights to land and water for indigenous and rural women, racial justice)? Which new dimensions of gender equality have emerged in recent times that require more attention? What opportunities and challenges are on the horizon (e.g., how do we harness the opportunities offered by technology and artificial intelligence for gender equality and women's rights while avoiding its downsides)?
- Reclaiming citizens' voice and civic space: What has been the experience galvanizing or fracturing movement building, limiting voice and agency of rights' holders? What are the key elements to inform and shape such spaces in ways that expand possibilities for advancing gender equality, rights and empowerment of women and girls?
- Revitalizing normative spaces: Under what circumstances can global, regional and national institutional mechanisms to advance gender equality (e.g., CSW, national gender equality machineries, international and regional human rights mechanisms, etc.) protect women's rights and

⁹ [Security Council resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#).

hold member states to account for their obligations? How can we strengthen normative spaces such as CSW, the Human Rights Council, as well as international and national courts and national parliaments in their role for establishing positive norms that advance equality, rights and empowerment?

3. Resources (enablers for implementation and impact): Ensuring adequate financing and political support to implement the BPfA and accelerate progress on gender equality as the engine of the 2030 Agenda

Accelerating progress on gender equality and sustainable development requires not only accountable states, but also sufficient resources. Mobilizing adequate financing for the implementation of the BPfA and other global normative standards requires profound reforms based on solidarity and redistribution within and between countries. At the global level, feminists, alongside other civil society actors, have been calling for a radical review of the global financial architecture to create a more enabling macroeconomic environment. At the national level, the concept of fiscal pacts has been gaining traction across some regions,¹⁰ offering an opportunity to articulate a feminist vision and agenda for policy action and institutional reforms that have gender equality, sustainability and social justice at their core. In this vision, financing strategies and budgetary processes would no longer be driven by the relentless pursuit of economic growth, productivity and efficiency gains. Instead, the question of how societies can collectively organize and finance care for people and the planet to ensure the “survival and flourishing of life”¹¹ would claim centre stage.¹² In doing so, fiscal pacts could also rebuild trust between citizens and public institutions by generating a mutual understanding of reciprocal obligations, and a shared agreement that these public institutions will use their authority, including their fiscal authority, to respond to people’s rights and needs.¹³

Against this background, this panel will consider the following questions:

- What changes are necessary in the global economic system to redress injustices and inequalities?
- What reforms are needed at global and domestic level to deliver long-term, sustainable and affordable financing for gender equality and sustainable development at the required scale?
- What kind of processes are needed to build broad-based coalitions for progressive, gender-equitable fiscal pacts, bring stakeholders with divergent interests and power resources together to generate consensus and lasting political support?
- What examples are emerging of national fiscal policies to simultaneously reduce inequalities, advance gender equality and regenerate natural resources? How can they work in tandem with other economic policies, such as monetary policies addressing debt and interest rates?
- What role can women’s funds, thematic funding modalities (e.g., global funds for education, HIV, Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, etc.) and diverse forms of philanthropy play in advancing the agenda?

¹⁰ See <https://www.cesr.org/call-to-chile-and-colombia-to-promote-a-new-fiscal-pact-for-latin-america-and-the-caribbean/>.

¹¹ Nelson, J. and M. Power. 2018. “Ecology, Sustainability, and Care: Developments in the Field”. *Feminist Economics* 24(3), pp. 80–88; Barca, S., G. Di Chiro, W. Harcourt et al. 2023. “Caring Communities for Radical Change: What Can Feminist Political Ecology Bring to Degrowth?” In *Contours of Feminist Political Ecology*. W. Harcourt, A. Agostino, R. Elmhirst et al. (Eds.). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 178–206.

¹² Turquet, L., C. Tabbush, S. Staab et al. 2023. “Feminist Climate Justice: A Framework for Action”. Conceptual framework prepared for *Progress of the World’s Women* series. New York: UN-Women.

¹³ [A/HRC/55/54](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/hrc/55/54).

III. Profile of participants

The EGM will be attended by up to 30 experts, invited by the Executive Director of UN-Women. In selecting the experts, criteria of regional diversity will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners with strong track records on the given themes, in accordance with the objectives identified above. UN-Women will provide an honorarium for online participation and the preparation of short written inputs. Select UN-Women staff, as well as staff from other United Nations entities will attend the EGM as observers.

IV. Documentation

The documentation for the meeting will include a number of short written inputs based on participants' relevant areas of expertise. The inputs will be made available on the UN-Women website.

V. Organization

The EGM will be convened by UN-Women on 13–15 August and will be virtual. It will be conducted in English with interpretation available in French and Spanish. The EGM will meet in plenary. Plenary presentations will create the framework for discussions. Two co-chairs will be appointed by the experts at the beginning of the EGM to oversee the meeting and preparation of the EGM report.

VI. Expected outcomes

The outcome of the EGM will be a report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations directed at Member States and other stakeholders. The report will be widely disseminated, made available at CSW 69 and on the website of UN-Women.

VII. Agenda

Provided separately.