



WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN REVIEW 25 YEARS AFTER BEIJING



## UN WOMEN

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

## GENERATION EQUALITY

UN Women is bringing together the next generations of women's rights activists with the gender equality advocates and visionaries who were instrumental in creating the Beijing Platform for Action more than two decades ago. Collectively, these change makers of all ages and genders will tackle the unfinished business of empowering women through a new, groundbreaking, multigenerational campaign: "Generation Equality: Realizing women's rights for an equal future".

View the Report at: [unwo.men/eDNK50yyBhA](https://unwo.men/eDNK50yyBhA)

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**Phumzile  
Mlambo-Ngcuka**  
Under-Secretary-  
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Executive Director

**'Under-representation of  
women in power and decision-  
making is still the norm. We are  
impatient for that to change...  
Only half is an equal share, and  
only equal is enough.'**

# TAKING THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION FORWARD

September 1995 saw the largest-ever global gathering on gender equality: the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China. The commitments and actions that Member States agreed that year in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remain our most comprehensive and transformative agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. However, as we take stock of progress, it is clear that its implementation has fallen far short of the initial promise.

The complex and fast-moving political, social, economic and environmental changes of the past 25 years have brought welcome steps forward in some areas of women's and girls' lives. But we have also seen powerful pushback, with damaging reversals of hard-won advances in women's rights and the broader development agenda. Poverty, discrimination and violence are still strongly present in the lives of women and girls. Under-representation in power and decision-making is still the norm. We are impatient for that to change.

Equality isn't just one quarter of the seats at the tables of power. But that's the current reality of women's representation. Men are 75 per cent of parliamentarians, hold 73 per cent of managerial positions, are 70 per cent of climate negotiators and almost all peace negotiators.

Only half is an equal share, and only equal is enough.

This report's review of the Beijing Platform for Action draws on the most comprehensive and participatory stock-taking exercise ever undertaken on women's rights, to which 170 countries contributed. It highlights gaps and opportunities and proposes effective solutions. It helps us look frankly at where commitments have been broken, and to energetically recommit to action and implementation. This is also critical for the success of the UN Decade of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for which gender equality is fundamental.

2020 is a milestone year. Women's rights movements are mobilizing, urged on and supported by UN Women's Generation Equality campaign. We have initiated six Action Coalitions that will bring together governments, the UN, civil society and the private sector to generate resources and catalyse game-changing results for gender equality.

We don't have an equal world now, but we are determined to have one, and we won't stop until we get there.

# HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?

Today, a 15-year old girl in the developing world has more opportunities than ever before. Compared to previous generations, she is much less likely to live in extreme poverty, and has a better chance of growing up healthy and nourished. Thanks to shifts in laws, policies and social norms that have changed the world around her, she is more likely to be able to finish primary school and less likely to marry young and become a mother before she is ready. With more role models to look up to in the political leadership of her nation, this young woman can aspire to great things.

Yet, she will still be fighting against the odds because this progress, though important, has been incremental, uneven and insufficient. A billion people have escaped from extreme poverty since 1990, but poverty still has a female face. Although the number of out-of-school children at primary and lower secondary levels has nearly halved since 1995, 32 million girls of primary age are still out of school. The rate of child marriage has declined from one in four to one in five, but 650 million women alive in the world today were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Politics is still an overwhelmingly male domain, with three quarters of parliamentary seats held by men.

This picture falls far short of the vision that was laid out in the Beijing Platform for Action a quarter of a century ago. It also bodes ill for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals a decade from now, progress on which critically depends on greater gender equality.

The actions of the global community now will determine the prospects of not only the current generation of young women but future generations too. New and emerging challenges mean that even the continuation of slow progress can no longer be taken for granted. Change is urgently needed and will only be possible if everyone joins forces and acts with determination to achieve gender equality and justice for all.

## The world is at a turning point

The 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. Now, in an increasingly unequal world, the future looks much more uncertain. Momentum has been lost. The world's women and girls are running to stand still as hard-won victories have either stalled or are being reversed.

The gains of development have not been shared equally: Since the 1980s, the global top 1 per cent of earners have captured twice as much of the growth in global income as the 50 per cent poorest individuals.<sup>1</sup> While wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of the few, economic insecurity prevails for the many. Fiscal austerity measures have led to cuts to essential public services, with particularly harsh impacts for women in low-income countries who rely on them the most. The new wave of public spending cuts, which will be implemented in 126 countries by 2021, will hit health care, education and social protection, the very policies that have underpinned the progress seen since Beijing.<sup>2</sup>

Conflict and humanitarian crises have become more complex and protracted in the past 25 years, leaving women and girls more vulnerable than ever before. If the world continues on its current course, the escalating environmental crisis will destroy many of the development gains achieved to date. The poorest and most marginalized women and girls, who have contributed least to causing the problem, are already the most affected by irreversible environmental degradation and natural disasters. Along with the economic costs of the climate crisis, a rise in displacement, and forced migration, poverty and insecurity will have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including through greater exposure to abuse and violence.

All of these trends have coalesced in the rise of exclusionary politics, characterized by misogyny and xenophobia. Forty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), women's rights are being eroded in the name of a return to 'traditional values', and the institutions created to advance gender equality are being undermined.

Women's organizations that have been at the vanguard of change find it increasingly difficult to do their work where space for civil society is squeezed and funding is scarce.

## Women's voices are rising

Yet, across the world, women are raising their voices, joining together with allies in governments, the private sector and social movements to insist that bold systemic change is possible. These feminist leaders see gender inequality as inseparable from broader struggles for racial justice, workers' rights, climate justice, LGBTI rights, corporate accountability and more.

In doing so, they are shaping an alternative vision of a future where women's rights are at the centre of a better world for all.

## The way forward

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is the most comprehensive and transformative global agenda for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Today, its bold vision has renewed relevance.

Linking the Beijing Platform for Action's 12 critical areas with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, this report presents data and analysis across a series of thematic clusters. It makes recommendations for future action and showcases inspiring policies and programmes that are already making a difference.

To ensure that progress is accelerated and achieved across all of these themes, four universal catalysts for change come to the fore:

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### Support women's movements and leadership

From individual decisions about work or family life, to collective action for a better world, women and girls must be heard and heeded.

Women's voices in political decision-making, in communities, in parliaments and in peace negotiations are essential to support and sustain prosperous and peaceful societies. Women's rights organizations have transformed the world for the better. They are indispensable in bringing women together, amplifying their voices, and mobilizing their collective power to demand accountability and change.

## Harness technology for gender equality

New technologies hold enormous potential for the empowerment of women and girls, by creating jobs and opportunities for women in business, enabling the innovative delivery of public services, and finding ways to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

To harness this potential, it is essential to close the gender digital divide, which is particularly wide in low-income countries, so that women have equal access to and use of digital tools and can participate equally in the development of technology. At the same time, new risks such as cyber violence, threats to privacy rights or algorithms that perpetuate unconscious bias also need to be eliminated.

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### Ensure no one is left behind

The promise to achieve gender equality for all women and girls stands and falls with empowering and guaranteeing the rights of those who have been pushed to the margins by decades of structural discrimination on the basis of gender, class and ethnicity, among others.

Progress must be shared by everybody, with no woman or girl left behind. Data should be collected to show who is being excluded. All must be given a voice and a seat at decision-making tables so that policies and programmes are designed and implemented to respond to the rights and needs of everyone.

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### Match commitments with resources

Commitments to gender equality mean little without the financial resources to back them up. Yet, across the board, the percentage of development resources devoted specifically to gender equality typically languishes at less than 5 per cent.

In a world where annual military expenditure has reached US\$1.82 trillion, the problem is not a lack of resources.<sup>3</sup> Money should be steered to where it is needed most. A greater share of development funding from governments and private actors must be channelled to gender equality. A global push to eliminate tax evasion and avoidance along with progressive tax reforms at the national level, are also part of the answer.

In September 2019, the UN Secretary General called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs. There is no time to waste in shaping a world where the promises made at Beijing, 25 years ago, finally become a reality for all women and girls everywhere.

# SNAPSHOT

There have been important gains since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action:



## LAWS

Over the past decade, **131 countries** enacted

**274** legal and regulatory reforms

in support of gender equality.

## EDUCATION

**More girls are in school**

than ever before.

**Parity in education** has been achieved on average, at the global level, yet **large gaps remain across and within countries.**

## MATERNAL MORTALITY

The **global maternal mortality ratio** is still **too high**, (211 deaths per 100,000 live births), but has **fallen** by

**38%**

between 2000 and 2017.

But there is still work to be done:

## POLITICS

**1 in 4** seats are held by women

in national parliaments.

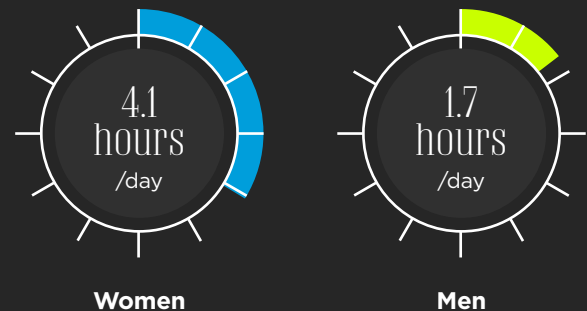
## POVERTY

Globally, women aged 25 to 34 are

**25%** more likely

than men to live in **extreme poverty** (living on less than US\$1.90 a day).

## UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK



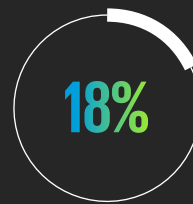
Women on average do **three times** as much unpaid care and domestic work as men, with long-term consequences for their economic security.

## LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

The **gender gap in labour force participation** among adults aged 25 to 54 has **stagnated** over the past 20 years, standing at

**31** percentage points.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



of ever-partnered women

aged 15 to 49 experienced **sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner** in the previous 12 months.

## GENDER PARITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Women are paid

**16%** less than men, and only



1 in 4 managers

are women.

## CLIMATE JUSTICE

The climate emergency will most affect those with **limited access to land, resources or the means to support themselves**. Globally,



of employed women

are working in **agriculture, forestry and fisheries**, but only

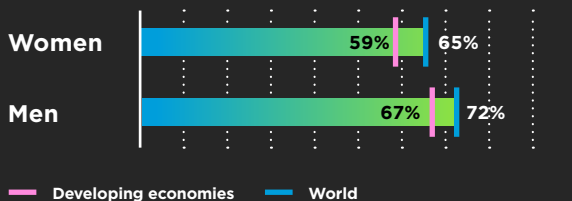


of agricultural landholders

are women.

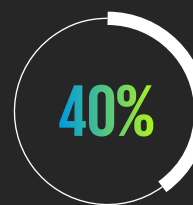
## ACCESS TO FINANCE

Share of women and men with an **account at a financial institution**



## ACCESS TO JUSTICE

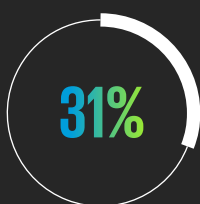
In most countries with data, less than



of women

who **experience violence seek help of any sort**, indicating barriers and lack of confidence in justice systems.

## YOUTH



of young women

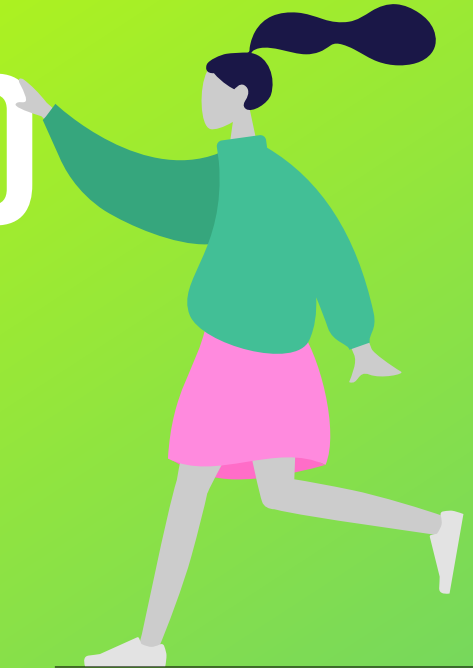
aged 15 to 24 are **not in education, employment or training** in 2020, more than double the rate for young men (14%).

## HEALTH

**190** million women

of reproductive age (15 to 49) worldwide who **wanted to avoid pregnancy did not use any contraceptive method** in 2019.

# INCLUSIVE ECONOMIES AND DECENT WORK



Current economic models are failing women and girls. Economic security and autonomy remain elusive for many women, especially in their childbearing years.

In most regions, the gender gap in labour force participation has stagnated over the past 20 years, and women's control of assets is limited. More than half of all women who work are in the informal economy, often in jobs where they lack even basic rights and protections. On average, women across the world are paid 16 per cent less than men.

While, in most regions, young women have made significant gains in education, they continue to face barriers to translating these gains into equal labour market opportunities. The countless hours women spend in unpaid care and domestic work remain a huge obstacle to being able to access decent employment.

Action is needed to transform the world of work in ways that help women thrive and achieve economic independence. Equal pay, ending occupational segregation and tackling violence and harassment at work are urgent priorities. Since more than one third of women globally work in agriculture, strengthening their access to land and providing better support for women farmers is essential. Policies are needed to ensure sweeping changes in the world of work benefit women. New technologies and digital platforms are transforming economies. Harnessing new technologies for women's financial inclusion and economic empowerment, to generate decent work and support women's businesses, will be critical.

Work-family reconciliation policies, such as paid parental leave, need to be extended to workers in the informal economy. A rapid scaling-up of trusted and affordable childcare services would have multiple benefits for women, families and the broader economy.

## Investing in childcare services: Reaping a triple dividend

Investments in affordable early childhood education and care services can help women participate in the workforce, improve child health and nutrition and create decent jobs in the paid care sector. Across different regions, the impact of rolling out quality childcare services is evident:

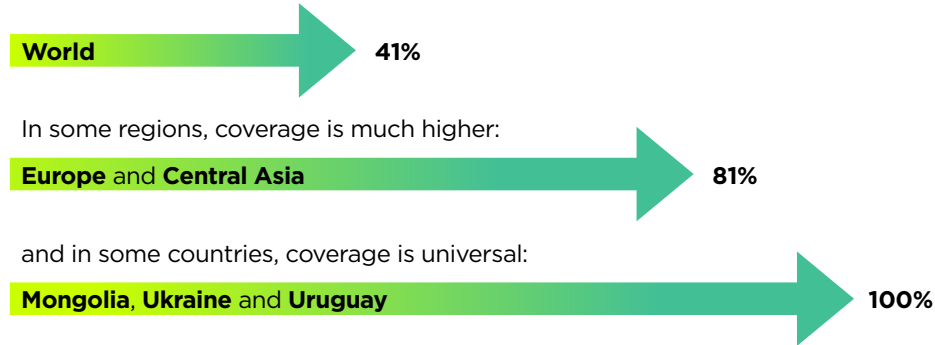
- Germany made nursery places for children under age 3 a legal right in 2013. This was accompanied by a massive expansion of subsidized childcare places. By 2017, 37 per cent of under-3s were enrolled, with a positive knock-on effect for mothers' paid employment.<sup>4</sup>
- Chile has expanded free public childcare services and extended their opening hours to fit in with the schedules of working parents. By 2017, 32 per cent of under-3s had a childcare place. Crucially, the gap in access between children in the richest and poorest families had also narrowed.<sup>5</sup>
- In Kenya, a pilot programme in an informal settlement in Nairobi found that women provided with subsidized childcare vouchers over a 12-month period were 17.3 per cent more likely to be employed than those who did not receive a voucher.<sup>6</sup>



# Women's economic independence is crucial to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women

Legal reforms are helping women and men to reconcile work and family life

Share of new mothers receiving a maternity benefit:

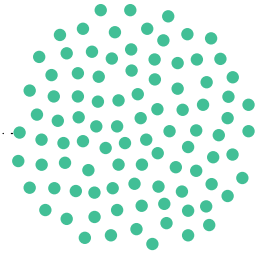


1974

Only **Sweden** provided paternity leave

2015

**94 countries** across the world did so



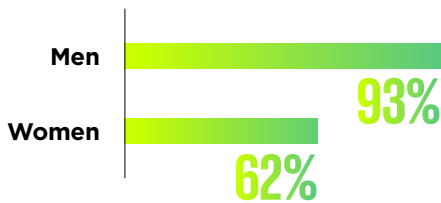
More efforts are needed to reach women in the informal economy.

Barriers persist: Many women are stuck in low-paid work, equal pay remains elusive and men occupy most senior positions

Women spend

**3X** as many hours as men in **unpaid care and domestic work**, limiting their access to decent work.

More men between the ages of 25 to 54 are in the **labour force** than women:



The global **gender pay gap** is stuck at

**16%** with **women paid up to 35% less than men** in some countries.

Globally,

**65%** of women

had an **account at a financial institution** in 2017, compared to

**740** million women globally work in the **informal economy**.

**72%** of men

Women from marginalized and excluded groups face even greater challenges, including a lack of access to key public services

A large share of **young women with disabilities** is **not in education or employment**. This ranges from



Unequal access in **early childhood education and care** in Egypt:

**65%** of children from the **richest families** have access compared to



**16%** of children from the **poorest families**.

# POVERTY ERADICATION AND WELL BEING



The improvement in women's and girls' health and education worldwide is one of the major success stories of the past 25 years. Today, more girls are in school than ever before, and on average, the gender gap in school enrolment rates has closed. Global literacy rates are rising, especially among the young. While much remains to be done, more women are able to access institutional maternity care and fewer are dying in childbirth.

Social protection is now increasingly acknowledged as one key driver in efforts to reduce poverty and combat inequality. The expansion of cash transfers such as child benefits and social pensions has led to greater economic independence and increased personal incomes for women. All of this has helped reduce the rates of extreme poverty across the world, a major achievement that has benefitted millions of women and girls.

Yet, poverty and inequality persist, and austerity measures are an impediment to further progress. In far too many countries, completing quality secondary education remains out of reach for millions of girls, with those in poor and rural families often left behind. Without childcare options, women often face the impossible choice between working and leaving their children alone or sacrificing the chance to provide an income for their families. After a lifetime of work and caring for others, most women lack an adequate pension for a dignified retirement. There is an urgent need for better access to gender-responsive social protection and quality public services to provide women with sustainable routes out of poverty.

Strengthening women's sexual and reproductive health and rights is another critical lever. Better access to family planning, for example, contributes to poverty reduction and improved health. By preventing unwanted pregnancies, it enables adolescent girls to finish school and supports women's labour force participation.

## Game-changers on family planning

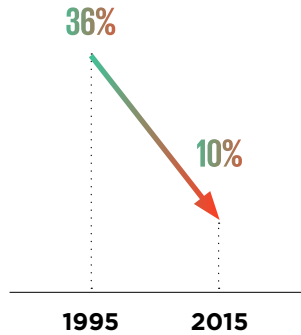
In Sub-Saharan Africa, a region of the world where overall access to family planning remains low, both Ethiopia and Rwanda have increased access to modern contraception by 40 percentage points since 2000.<sup>7</sup> Gaps in access to family planning between rural and urban areas and richer and poorer women have also narrowed. These remarkable success stories were achieved through:

- Investing in health infrastructure and improving the access and quality of services. Both countries have built new health centres and health posts in the hardest-to-reach areas.
- Sending trained health workers into rural communities to provide family planning advice, information and contraceptives.
- Increasing the availability of a range of modern contraceptives.
- Running public campaigns to improve awareness of and reduce stigma and myths about contraceptives.
- Building strong partnerships with donors, international agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations and religious leaders to promote family planning.

# Ending extreme poverty in a generation is possible, but only if gender equality is prioritized

## Extreme poverty is falling, and women and girls are more educated and living healthier lives

1 billion fewer people live in extreme poverty: The world's population living on less than **US\$1.90** a day fell **26 percentage points** between 1995 and 2015.



### MORE GIRLS ARE IN SCHOOL

Parity in education has been achieved on average, at the global level, yet **large gaps remain across and within countries.**

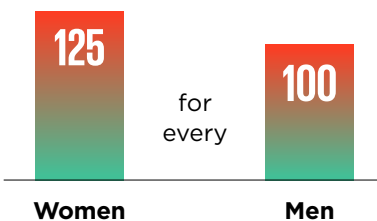
The global maternal mortality ratio is still too high, but has fallen by



between **2000 and 2017.**

## Millions of people remain trapped in extreme poverty, and access to education and health remains out of reach for many women and girls

Women aged 25 to 34 globally are **25% more likely** than men to live in extreme poverty.



### NEARLY HALF A BILLION

women and girls aged 15 years and over are **illiterate.**

In 2019,



million women of reproductive age worldwide who wanted to avoid pregnancy **did not use any contraceptive method.**

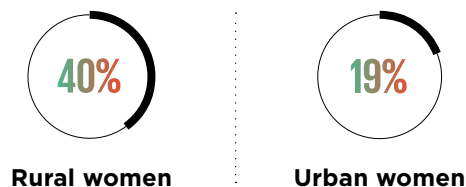
In sub-Saharan Africa,



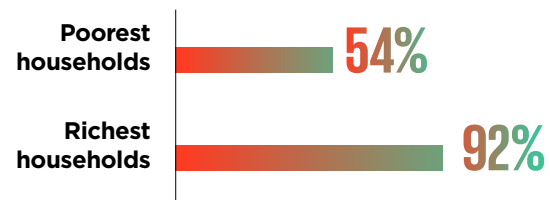
new HIV infections among 15-19-year-olds are girls.

## Women and girls from poor and rural households face severe discrimination and exclusion

In 59 countries, women and girls aged 15 to 49 from **poor households** are **four times** as likely to be illiterate as those from the **richest households.** By location, the gap between rural and urban women is:



In 64 countries, a **health professional was present during childbirth:**



# LEAVING NO WOMAN OR GIRL BEHIND

**Intersectionality** (*noun*)  
/ˌɪn(t)əˈseksSHəˈnælədē/

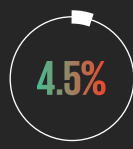
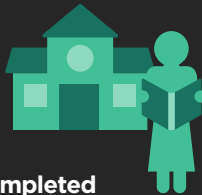
“The complex and cumulative manner in which the effects of different forms of discrimination (such as those based on race, class and gender) combine, overlap or intersect.”

In other words, whether you are born a boy or a girl, where you live, what kind of work your parents do, which ethnic group you belong to, among other characteristics, determine your chances in life to a great extent.

## NIGERIA

49.4%

of **women and girls** aged 15 to 49 have completed six or fewer years of education compared to **35.2%** of **men and boys**.



99.5% of **Fulani women and girls living in the poorest rural households** fail to complete more than six years of education

compared to 4.5% of **Igbo women and girls living in the richest urban households**.

## COLOMBIA



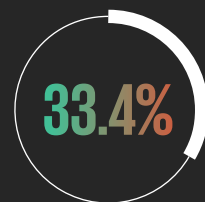
Women aged 18 to 49 living in **rural areas** are



12 times



more likely than those in **urban areas** to lack skilled health care during childbirth.



of indigenous women

living in the **poorest rural households** deliver without the assistance of a skilled birth attendant.

## BANGLADESH

95.2%



of the **poorest rural** women aged 20 to 49 in the Rangpur division were

**married before the age of 18**

compared to

41.3%



of the **richest urban** women in the Sylhet division.

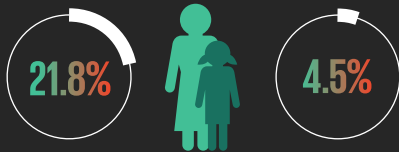
Averages do not tell the whole story. As these examples of intersectional analysis show, when inequalities combine or overlap, women at these intersections experience acute disadvantage.

By signing up to the 2030 Agenda, governments committed to 'leave no one behind'. This commitment means they must invest in data and innovative research and analysis that make visible the needs of women and girls facing overlapping forms of discrimination. Using these data, inclusive evidence-based policies and programmes are needed that redress past injustices, combat stigma and stereotyping and ensure the voices of excluded women and girls are heard. In doing so, it will be possible to move the promise to leave no one behind from rhetoric to reality.

## PHILIPPINES

**13.7%**  
of women and girls

aged 15 to 49 reported **no say in decisions** related to their own health care, own earnings or in large household purchases.



21.8% of **Cebuana women and girls living in the poorest rural households** report that they **have no say**

compared to 4.5% **Tagalog women and girls living in the richest urban households.**

## KENYA

**73.3%**



of Kalenjin women and girls aged 15 to 49 in the **poorest rural households** have **no access to improved water sources** compared to

**0.8%**

of Kikuyu women in the **richest urban households.**



## IRAQ

During the Iraq war and its aftermath, **adolescent fertility increased 30%** between 2003 and 2010, in part due to higher rates of early marriage.

**25.4%**

of young women in the **poorest households in the Kurdistan region** gave **birth before the age of 18** compared to



**9.9%**

of young girls living in the **richest households in the South/Central region** of the country.

# FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE, STIGMA AND STEREOTYPES



The world remains a dangerous place to be a woman. A quarter of a century after Beijing, violence against women and girls remains a global human rights violation of vast proportions. Deep-rooted drivers of abuse persist, and the rapid advancement of technology has opened up new digital spaces where women are being threatened, intimidated and harassed.

Amid this crisis there has been some important progress. Three quarters of countries now have laws against domestic violence, and there is growing evidence that violence can be prevented. Child, early and forced marriage, especially in some countries in South Asia, has recently declined. There have also been steps forward in efforts to end female genital mutilation (FGM).

Now, women and girls are ending the silence that has protected the perpetrators of gender-based violence for so long. A spotlight has been put on the violence and harassment that women face in public spaces and in the workplace, as well as in homes. Movements in every region are demanding an end to impunity and heralding a new era of accountability.

Global action needs to catch up to the demands of these powerful movements. New laws must be passed and implemented to stop all forms of violence against women, matched with properly funded and coordinated services for survivors. Prevention strategies must not be limited to awareness-raising campaigns and one-off initiatives. Instead, they must extend to long-term approaches that do not flinch at tackling the unequal power structures that are the root cause of the violence inflicted on millions of women and girls across the world.

## The power of change lies with communities

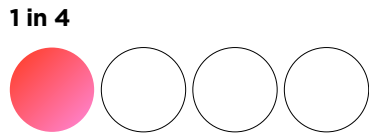
Community mobilization and activism are becoming increasingly vital and energizing forces in the drive to prevent violence against women and girls.

- The SASA! project was started in Uganda to challenge and change the attitudes, norms and behaviours within communities that continue to normalize and perpetrate violence against women. It has already seen great results: One trial showed that levels of physical partner violence were 52 per cent lower in places where the SASA! project was active compared to other communities.<sup>8</sup>
- The Rural Response System (RRS) works in central and coastal areas of Ghana. The team has reduced physical and sexual intimate partner violence and decreased levels of depression reported by women through challenging attitudes and helping link women to services.<sup>9</sup>
- In conflict-affected communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), faith leaders have been trained to model and communicate gender equality and non-violence. Evaluations show that this approach has halved physical and sexual intimate partner violence and changed attitudes that justify wife-beating and male entitlement to sex.<sup>10</sup>

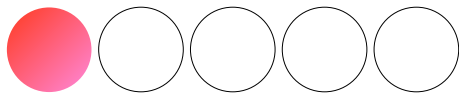
# Redoubling efforts to end violence against women and girls

Rates of child marriage and FGM have declined, but millions of girls are still affected

Child marriage has **gradually declined** since 1995 from



to approximately **1 in 5** today.

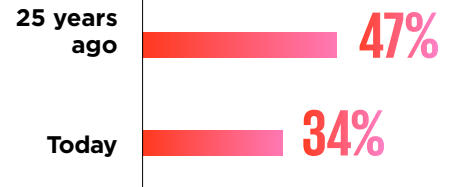


Yet,

**12 million girls**

**marry before age 18 every year** and many others remain at risk.

Percentage of **adolescent girls** aged 15 to 19 years who have **undergone FGM** in 31 countries:



Of these adolescent girls, **1 in 3** are **cut by a health professional**.

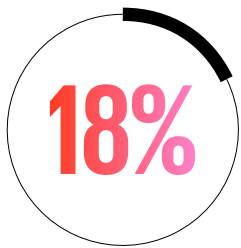
Women are rising up: The power of collective action to end impunity

**#MeToo #TimesUp  
#BalanceTonPorc #NiUnaMenos**



Women across the world are coming together to **demand accountability** for **sexual violence** and **harassment at work** and in other **public spaces**.

The long road ahead: Violence against women and girls remains pervasive and under-reported



of ever-partnered women and girls

aged 15 to 49 have experienced **physical and/or sexual violence** at the hands of a **current or previous partner** in the **previous 12 months**.

Survivors are **stigmatized** and **shamed**. Less than

**40%**

of women who experience violence

**report these crimes** or **seek help of any sort**.

Digital spaces have opened up a new front in gender-based violence

In the European Union,

**1 in 10**

women report having **experienced cyber-harassment** since the age of 15.

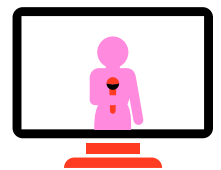
**Among adolescents and youth** aged 18 to 29 this share is as high as

**1 in 5**

Globally, only

**1 in 3**

reporters is a woman.



The **over-representation of men in the media** plays a **critical role** in **perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes**.

# PARTICIPATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND INSTITUTIONS



Women are entering politics in greater numbers than ever before, although change has been slow. Over the past quarter of a century, from a very low base, the proportion of women in seats in single or lower houses of parliament has more than doubled to 25 per cent. This has been driven by not only changes in electoral systems and the use of legislated gender quotas, but also the determination, tenacity and bravery of those women entering political life.

Men still dominate politics, holding more than three quarters of parliamentary seats. Only 14 countries have at least 50 per cent women in their Cabinets. Governments and political parties remain far too timid in their ambitions to make equal representation a reality. They must select and support women candidates, provide campaign funding and put a stop to the unacceptable violence women face when they go into politics.

Strong feminist movements are a foundation for thriving democracies and a catalyst of positive social and legal reform. They play an essential part in holding governments to account. Yet, in many parts of the world, their work and funding are increasingly restricted. Women human rights defenders and politicians face political smear campaigns, physical attacks, harassment and intimidation. Despite these threats, new generations of young feminists continue to bring energy and innovative strategies to the struggle for women's rights.

Gender-responsive institutions, including national women's machineries are essential for ensuring gender equality is integrated across all levels of government policies, planning and budgets. Yet, they urgently need the resources, authority and capacity to be able to do this effectively. There has been positive progress on gender-responsive budgeting. Out of 69 countries and areas, 13 reported having comprehensive systems to track gender budget allocations and 41 others have taken steps to introduce gender budgeting.<sup>11</sup>

However, there is still a long way to go because, across the board, financing for gender equality remains woefully inadequate to meet the scale of the challenge.

## The success story of quotas for women's representation in politics

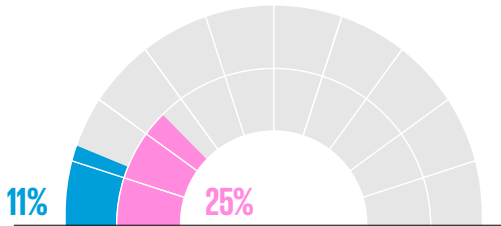
Since 1995, gender quotas, particularly legislated candidate quotas with sanctions, have become the single most effective tool in increasing women's representation in political life. They have led to more women entering politics than ever before, challenging the deep-rooted belief in many countries that only men are suited for leadership. In 2019, around 80 countries had legislated gender quotas in place. In Latin American and the Caribbean, the Beijing Platform for Action added international pressure and renewed momentum to national campaigns already under way. Gender quotas were introduced in most countries in the region, notably those with proportional representation electoral systems.<sup>12</sup> As a result, in 2019, Latin America and the Caribbean had the highest proportion of women in parliament in the world at 31.6 per cent.



# Women are demanding equal power and representation in political life

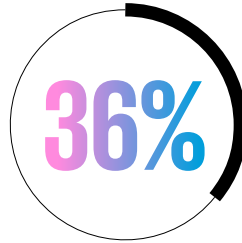
## More women are in politics than ever before

Across the world,



25% of all parliamentary seats are now **held by women**, more than double the proportion in 1995 (11%).

Access to decision-making positions at the local level is higher: women hold



of elected seats in local deliberative bodies.

In 2019 elections, women gained

**30%**

of parliamentary seats in **countries with quotas**, compared to

**18%**

in **countries without quota**.

## Despite progress, women are still largely excluded from politics, policies and budgets

In only

**14** countries

do women account for 50% or more of **cabinet members**.

In

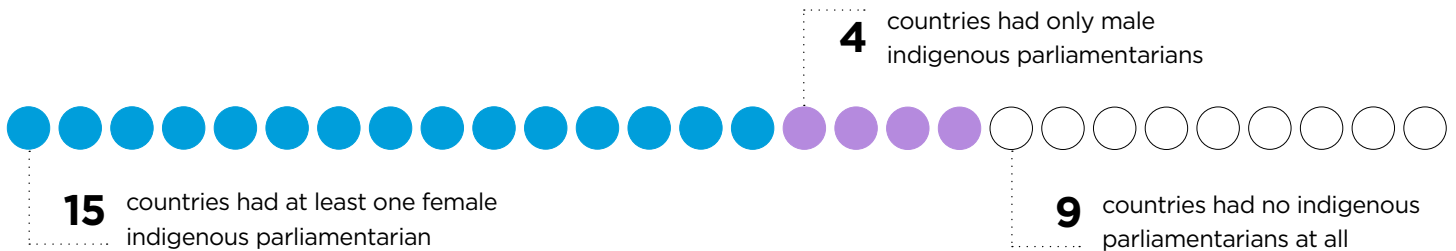
**80%** of countries

with data, national plans to achieve gender equality are in place. **Only one third are costed and resourced.**

Globally, a large share of women and men **believe men make better political leaders** than women



**Indigenous women remain significantly under-represented in political office.** Data from 28 countries found that



## Women face threats and attacks

The United Nations has **recorded and verified**

**187** killings of female

**human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists** in 41 countries since 2015.

**Backlash against female politicians:**

violence and harassment are a daily reality, but their full extent has **not been quantified** on a global scale.



# FEMINIST VOICES

Millions of people across the world stand on the right side of history every day. They speak up, mobilize and take big and small actions to advance women's rights.

## Peggy Antrobus

Caribbean feminist activist, author and leader of the Jamaican delegation to the First World Conference on Women.

**“At the UN Women’s conferences, women from around the world first encountered each other in a sustained and ever deepening process... [that] was to nurture and expand this movement in a way that not even its strongest protagonists could have imagined.”**

## Sana Afouaiz

Director of Womenpreneur, which advances women's entrepreneurship and roles in technology and innovation in the Arab States.

**“Women’s rights are not a charity nor a privilege, they are human rights.”**

## Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls

Pacific women's rights activist and Chair of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.

**“Almost 20 years since the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325, we don’t just need to be at the peace table. It’s time to redesign the table.”**



## Vanessa Nakate

Ugandan climate activist and Founder of the Rise Up Movement.

**“Climate change does not just cause floods and disasters, many girls’ dreams are destroyed as well... Climate change is a social issue, it’s a gender issue.”**

## Racha Haffar

Founder and president of 'Not 4 Trade,' the first anti-trafficking NGO in Tunisia.

**“I want to create a better world where everyone is living equally and is respected, regardless of their gender, sex and sexual orientation. I can’t believe that we are in the 21st century and we are still fighting for gender equality. We have to smash the patriarchy!”**

## Pip Gardner

LGBTI leader and activist in the United Kingdom.

**“Homophobia and transphobia are driven by gender discrimination, it’s the same forces and arguments that have been used to discriminate against all women. We need to come together and realize that we are fighting the same fight: for our human rights to be respected and defended regardless of gender or sexuality.”**

## Ana Peláez Narváez

Spanish disability rights activist and the first woman with a disability to be represented on the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

**“There are 600 million women with disabilities in the world, but many disability rights organizations do not pay attention to the gender dimensions, and many women’s organizations don’t include women with disabilities... Nothing about disability should be done without women with disabilities.”**

## Teodora Mileska

Student in North Macedonia and peer educator for comprehensive sexuality education.

**“Gender equality is not only about women, it’s about everyone. Every single person joining the movement for women’s rights makes it stronger and better.”**

## Alicia Garza

Co-founder of Black Lives Matter, United States.

**“My definition of feminism is a social, political, economic system by which all genders are valued, respected and can live dignified lives.”**

## Maria Alejandra Rodriguez Acha

Co-Executive Director of FRIDA, the Young Feminist Fund, in Peru.

**“The fight for social justice is not separate from the fight for environmental sustainability. The most impoverished people, rural indigenous women, for example, are the most impacted by natural disasters.”**



## Jaha Dukureh

UN Women Regional Goodwill Ambassador for Africa, survivor of female genital mutilation and child marriage.

**“We must work with religious and traditional leaders, communities of men, boys and parents who think differently. We must listen to and understand their rationale and belief systems respectfully... This approach would create an enabling environment for dialogues, and breakthroughs in social norms, mindset and behaviour change.”**

## Wazhma Frogh

Afghan women’s rights activist, and co-founder of the Women and Peace Studies Organisation, Afghanistan.

**“Women are pushing to be part of the peace process. And when it becomes inclusive, it doesn’t only bring women, but also many men who haven’t had an opportunity to be heard... We talk about the needs of the communities, justice, schools, health, education, not just about men deciding which power positions to hold.”**

## Natasha Wang Mwansa

Zambian activist on health and gender equality and youngest-ever recipient of the WHO Global Health Award.

**“We are not going to be beneficiaries any longer... We need positions of power. We see improvements when young people decide enough is enough and make moves to influence decision-making.”**

# PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES



Women's leadership in building peaceful and inclusive societies has never been needed more urgently.

Over the past 25 years, conflicts and humanitarian crises have become more complex, violent and protracted. At the same time, military expenditure has nearly doubled, reaching US\$1.82 trillion in 2018.

Women have a critical role to play in times of conflict and crisis. During war and instability, they are often exposed to greater levels of violence and inequality. Yet, they also step into new roles as breadwinners, combatants, first responders and leaders of peace movements.

Where women's groups and leaders are meaningfully involved in peace negotiations, it is more likely that an agreement will be reached and implemented. At a local level, it is often women who resolve community tensions, broker ceasefires or create civilian safe zones.

A growing number of countries are recognizing the essential role of women's leadership in these troubled times. But peace brokers, international organizations and governments must be bolder in insisting that women are given seats at the peace table.

More resources and funding must be channelled into women's organizations that operate on the frontlines of local peacebuilding and humanitarian response. Access to justice must be improved and services that respond to and prevent gender-based violence scaled up if women are to play this crucial peacebuilding role.

## Women's pivotal part in negotiating and sustaining peace

Evidence from numerous peace processes shows that women are critical actors in shaping and implementing inclusive and sustainable peace agreements.

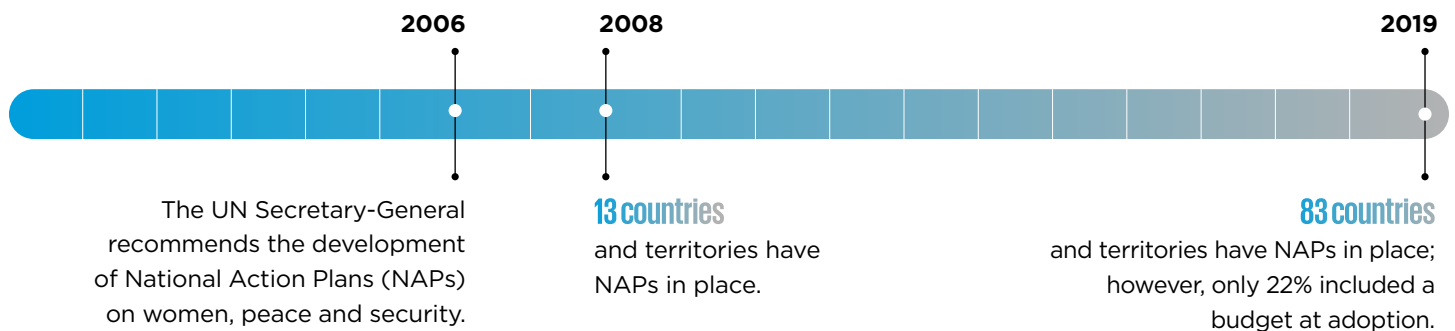
In Colombia, civil society groups called a National Summit of Women and Peace to demand that women be allowed to participate in peace talks. As a result, 20 per cent of the Government's negotiating team and 43 per cent of the delegates from the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) were women. These female negotiators then worked alongside women's organizations to broaden the peace agenda to include land rights for indigenous women, reparations for sexual and gender-based violence and political participation of women.<sup>13</sup>

In South Sudan, 44 women's organizations created the 'Women's Coalition' to strengthen women's influence over the peace process. They were a driving force in the formal peace talks in Addis Ababa, providing technical support to women participants. They also negotiated a deal to ensure that women accounted for 35 per cent of all representation in executive bodies in the peace accord.<sup>14</sup>

# Realizing women's rights underpins all efforts to build peaceful and inclusive societies

## Women's rights in the peace and security agenda

Since 1995, **17 landmark normative frameworks**, including 10 UN Security Council resolutions, have emphasized that women are key to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. National Action Plans are driving implementation.

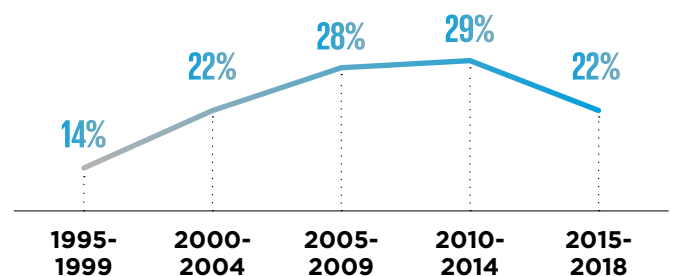


## Despite their essential role, women are often excluded from peace processes

Between 1992 and 2018, only



Peace agreements that included provisions on women, girls and gender issues:

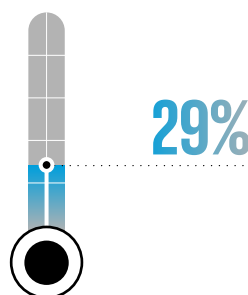


## Violence against women spirals during conflict and crisis

At least



Goal



Only 3 in every 10 dollars of the **funding** needed to **address gender-based violence in humanitarian crises** was raised in 2019, leaving a **funding gap** of

**US\$132 million.**

# CLIMATE ACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY



The global climate emergency is the biggest crisis that humanity has ever faced. In 2020, the world stands on the brink of a full-scale ecological breakdown. Millions of people have already been affected by the rapidly changing climate, land degradation and biodiversity loss, which will only worsen existing poverty, conflict and inequality.

Women and girls in the world's poorest and most marginalized communities have contributed the least to the climate emergency but are suffering the brunt of its catastrophic effects. Women's access to land, which is already restricted, is being further undermined by environmental degradation and land grabbing. Food and water shortages, polluted air and increasingly severe climate-related disasters such as droughts, floods or wildfires are taking a disproportionate toll on their health and rights.

Transformative action must be taken by governments, businesses and civil society to mitigate the most damaging consequences of the climate and environmental crises. Old polluting and unsustainable strategies of economic growth must be replaced by new green models that put ecological and social well-being first.

Women and girls must be part and parcel of the solution. They have been at the forefront of climate action and environmental movements for decades, and their involvement in conservation efforts and natural resource management leads to better outcomes. It is time to listen to them—in their communities, on the streets and in global climate talks—if there is to be any hope of saving the planet and humanity.

## Women and girls demanding a better future

As the environmental crisis intensifies, a new wave of feminist movements calling for climate and environmental justice has emerged to carry on the work of generations of women activists before them.

Across the world, women and girls in their millions are mobilizing to demand an end to the plundering of natural resources and unsustainable and damaging consumption and wealth accumulation. The intersectional approach of groups such as Haus of Khameleon, led by young transgender feminists in Fiji and the Pacific, are making crucial connections between ecological and gender justice, peace and security. Youth climate movements are also setting the agenda for transformative change. More than 13 million young people in well over 200 countries and territories have taken part in 89,000 school strikes, inspired by the activism of Greta Thunberg, Vanessa Nakate and other young climate activists around the world.<sup>15</sup>

Despite very slow progress overall, the work of the Women and Gender Constituency, which aims to embed women's rights within the climate change convention framework, helped secure a new five-year Gender Action Plan to scale up gender justice in climate solutions at the Conference of the Parties (COP 25) in 2019.<sup>16</sup>

# Climate justice and environmental sustainability depend on gender equality and the leadership of women and young people

No time to lose: Young people are mobilizing in their millions to call out inaction on the climate emergency

**“The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.”**

Greta Thunberg—UN Climate Summit, New York, 23 September 2019

**13 million**



young people

in well over 200 countries and territories have risen up in **protest to demand government action towards a zero-carbon world.**

## Those who hold the power are failing to act

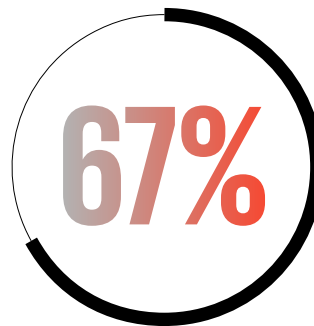
The world needs to **radically change production and consumption patterns** as harmful emissions **continue to rise**. Greenhouse gas emissions rose

**48%**

between 1990 and 2016.

In 2019, **levels of heat-trapping CO2** in the atmosphere were at the highest level observed in nature in at least 800,000 years.

**The voices of women and girls are not being heard:**



of decision-making roles are occupied by men

under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

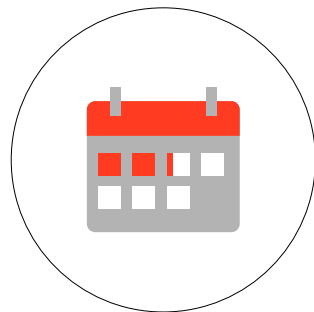
## Those who emit the least stand to suffer the most

The average **American** or **Australian** is responsible for emitting as much **CO2** in

**2.3 days**

as an average **Malian** or **Nigerian** does in

**one year.**



The climate and environmental crisis will most affect those with **limited access to land, resources or the means to support themselves**. Globally,

**39%**

of employed women are working in **agriculture, forestry and fisheries**, but only

**14%**

of agricultural landholders are women.

**Climate disasters can lead to increased violence against women and girls.** Displacement and mass migration can give rise to unsafe living conditions, increased poverty and isolation, and expose women and girls to violence and abuse.

# REALIZING THE VISION OF BEIJING

In **2020**, a girl of 15...

is likely to live in a country where extreme poverty remains common

There are 60 million 15-year-old girls around the world, and 89% of them live in less developed regions where poverty is widespread.

enjoys improved access to education, yet girls from poor and rural areas still face barriers

An estimated 32 million girls of primary school age are out of school compared to 27 million boys.

risks experiencing violence and harmful practices, including intimate partner violence

1 in 5 adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 has already experienced intimate partner violence in the previous 12 months.

In **2030**, the 15-year-old girl of today **will be a woman of 25**. Over the next 10 years, transformative action is needed so that she will...

enjoy equal rights within marriage

Currently, many women are required by law to obey their husbands (in 19 countries), and marital rape is often not explicitly criminalized (in 111 countries).

is burdened by caring and domestic responsibilities

Globally girls aged 10 to 14 spend around 9 hours per week doing household chores, 50% more than boys.

remains at high risk of becoming pregnant, especially where access to modern contraception is limited and sexuality education is poor or non-existent

There are 62 million births to adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 during 2015-2020, with most occurring in less developed regions (96%).

pursue the level of education that she desires and have access to employment opportunities of her choice

Currently, 31% of all young women globally are not in employment, education, or training, compared to 14% of all young men.

have the same opportunities as men to balance paid work and care

Currently, women do much more unpaid care work than men, limiting their paid work opportunities: 58% of women aged 25 to 29 are in the labour force compared to 90% of men.

have an income of her own and a life free from poverty

Currently, more women live in poverty than men: Data from 91 countries show that, 50 million women aged 25 to 34 live in the world's poorest households, compared to 40 million men of the same age.



In 2020, a 15-year-old girl stands on the cusp of adulthood. She was not even born in 1995, when feminists came together in Beijing, but thanks to their vision and the collective efforts since then of governments and civil society, her life chances on average have expanded.

Yet, as this report shows, there is more to do to ensure that all adolescent girls have strong foundations to fulfil their potential in life. This is particularly true for women and girls who experience multiple forms of discrimination. Unpacking the averages reveals that for those who live in a rural area, have a disability or belong to an ethnic minority, the promises of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda remain far from realized.

In 2030, the 15-year-old of today will be 25. Without accelerated action now, she will continue to face unacceptable inequality and discrimination. It does not need to be this way. The UN Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals is the world's chance to change this picture for current and future generations of women and girls.

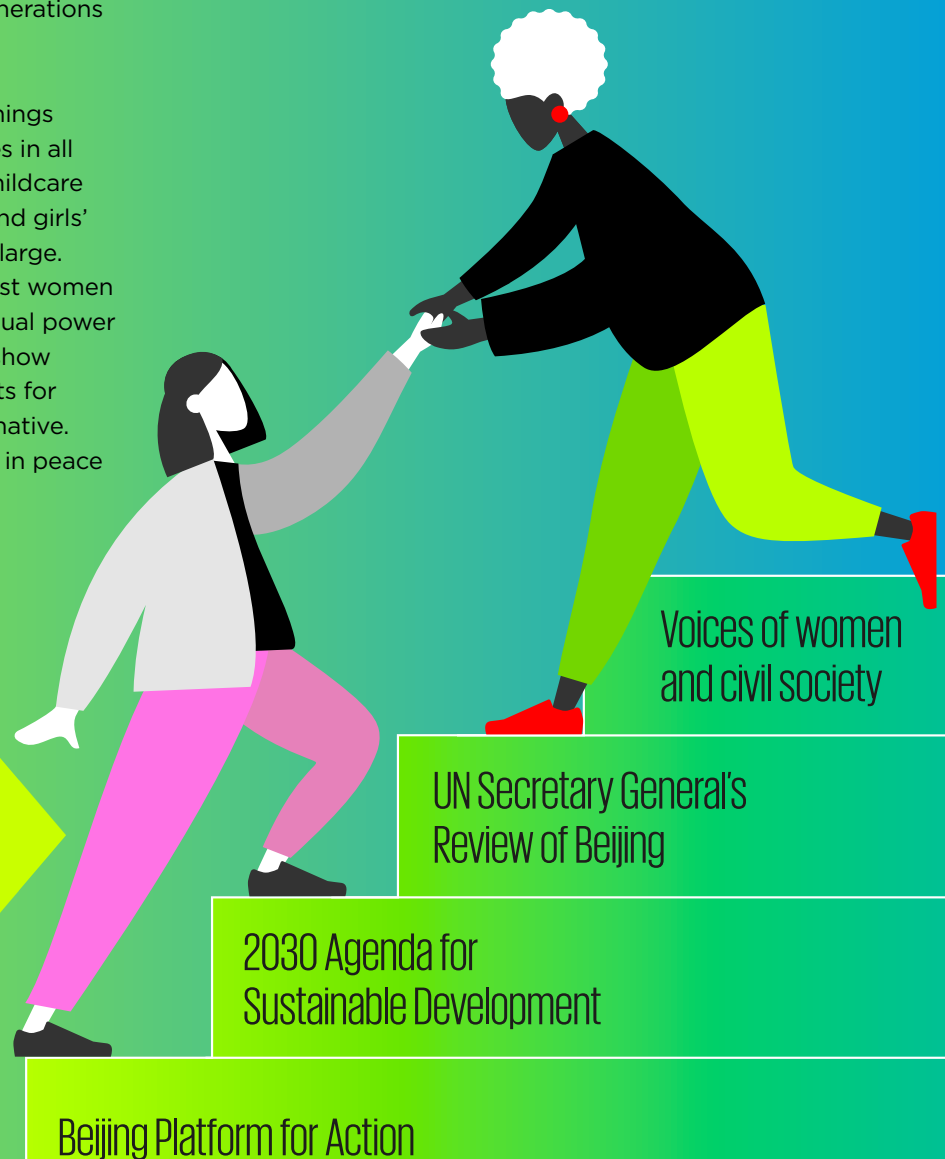
The examples in this report show that turning things around is both possible and necessary. Countries in all regions have scaled up education, health and childcare services, reaping huge dividends for women's and girls' rights as well as for societies and economies at large. Proven strategies now show that violence against women and girls can be prevented by tackling the unequal power relations that underpin it. Where governments show the political will to use gender quotas, the results for women's political participation can be transformative. Having women in positions of power, in politics, in peace

processes and in environmental management leads to better outcomes for all.

What's needed now is a concerted drive to scale up, expand and deepen policies and programmes that can accelerate progress on gender equality. UN Women has initiated six multi-stakeholder Action Coalitions on issues that hold the potential to realize the vision of the Beijing Platform for Action.

At the centre of each Action Coalition are the rights of adolescent girls. Across all of the Action Coalitions will be a focus on making progress in the challenging contexts of conflict and crisis. Cross-cutting levers will drive change forward, including using data and research to ensure policies and programmes are evidence-based; transforming social norms and attitudes in support of gender equality and women's empowerment; and creating an enabling legal and policy environment.

Forging ahead to the next decade...



# ACTION COALITIONS

Action Coalitions are global, innovative, multi-stakeholder initiatives that will mobilize governments, civil society, UN agencies, and the private sector to catalyze collective action and drive increased public and private investment to deliver concrete, game-changing results to advance equality for women and girls.

Looking forward to the UN Decade of Action, these Action Coalitions will bring new energy, ideas and resources to accelerate progress towards the achievement of both the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for all women and girls.



## CROSS-CUTTING LEVERS:

### Learn:

Data and evidence

### Influence:

Norms  
Laws and policies

### Build and deliver:

Financing  
Education  
Service delivery

A focus on contexts of conflict and crisis across all the Action Coalitions.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> UNESCO 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> Ortiz and Cummins 2019.
- <sup>3</sup> SIPRI 2019.
- <sup>4</sup> OECD 2019; Müller and Wrohlich 2020.
- <sup>5</sup> Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, Gobierno de Chile 2017.
- <sup>6</sup> Clark et al. 2019.
- <sup>7</sup> Olson and Piller 2013; Dieudonne et al. 2016.
- <sup>8</sup> Abramsky et al. 2016.
- <sup>9</sup> Jewkes et al. 2019.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> UNSD 2018.
- <sup>12</sup> Krook 2006.
- <sup>13</sup> Bouvier 2017.
- <sup>14</sup> Kezie-Nwoha and Were 2018.
- <sup>15</sup> Fridays for Future 2020.
- <sup>16</sup> WEDO 2019.

## Photo credits

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### **Maria Alejandra Rodriguez Acha**

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### **Natasha Wang Mwansa**

Women Deliver

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