

Expert Group Meeting on:

Gender Equality, the Empowerment of All Women and Girls and Their Human Rights Across the Sustainable Development Goals: Assessing Progress towards the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (priority theme of the 71st session of the Commission on the Status of Women)

Virtual meeting convened by UN Women

30 June to 2 July

Three daily sessions scheduled from 8.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. ET (New York time).

CONCEPT NOTE

I. Background and purpose

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission applies a thematic approach to its work and considers one priority theme each year. In accordance with its Multi-Year Programme of Work (2026–2029), the 71st session of the CSW will be held from 8 to 19 March 2027 with the priority theme of “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

In line with its mandate, UN Women will support the substantive preparations for CSW 71, including convening an expert group meeting (EGM) on the priority theme. The purpose of the EGM is to:

- Convene leading experts from academia, think tanks and civil society and organizations relevant to the priority theme to gather the best expertise and knowledge globally;
- Provide an opportunity to take stock of the latest research and analysis globally on the priority theme, including key trends, best practices and gaps in policy responses and implementation;
- Develop informed, practical and action-oriented recommendations to inform the drafting of the Secretary-General’s report on the priority theme and to influence and expand the global normative frameworks relevant to the priority theme.

UN Women prepares the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme, to be issued for the 71st session of the CSW, including recommendations for further action, as part of supporting consideration of the priority theme. The EGM report will serve as a key input into the Secretary-General’s report.

The EGM recommendations will also inform the draft ‘agreed conclusions’ of the Commission, which will be further negotiated and, ultimately, adopted by Member States in the March CSW session.

II. Overview of the priority theme

In September 2015, the 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Comprised of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 169 targets and 234 indicators, the 2030 Agenda provided a new comprehensive, integrated, human-rights based and universal framework for global development, centring sustainability – across its economic, social and environmental dimensions – as a global public good to be achieved by all countries and for all people.

The SDGs were informed by an unprecedented level of participation and consultation. Countries from the global South played a leading role in the negotiationsⁱ and broad-based civil society mobilization ushered in the participation of more than 1 million people from across the world in open consultations.ⁱⁱ This process strengthened national ownership and created fertile ground for the “domestication” of global goals, enabling countries to adapt and integrate the SDGs into their own development plans, institutional frameworks and policy priorities in ways that reflect local contexts and aspirations.ⁱⁱⁱ

Global women’s rights coalitions successfully advocated for a ‘twin track’ approach to gender equality which, in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, combined a strong stand-alone goal with robust gender mainstreaming across all other goals and targets. UN Women supported this approach through the publication of two influential position papers which included proposals for both the standalone goal and mainstreamed targets and indicators.^{iv} The 2014 edition of the *World Survey on the*

Role of Women in Development report also focused on sustainable development to further cement the importance of gender equality across the three social, economic and environmental pillars. This substantive research and data work enabled UN Women's extensive participation in the intergovernmental process and kept the profile of gender equality high.

As a result, SDG 5 includes targets that have been long-standing priorities of feminist movements, such as violence against women and girls and harmful practices, land rights, unpaid care and domestic work, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and participation and leadership. Along with the acknowledgement of gender equality as "a crucial contribution to progress across all the goals and targets",^v and the emphasis on intersectionality and leaving no-one behind, this was celebrated as a major victory by global women's rights advocates.^{vi}

Since then, SDG 5 has often been referred to as an accelerator, catalyst and "docking station"^{vii} of all the goals, underlining the interconnectedness between the standalone goal and the mainstreaming approach. Indeed, gender equality and women's rights are necessary conditions for the eradication of poverty and hunger, the achievement of good health, quality education, and full and decent employment for all, among others. Ending violence against women and girls, for example, has been assessed as a necessary requirement to achieve at least 14 of the 17 SDGs.^{viii}

Importantly, SDG targets and indicators were not entirely defined by the availability of already existing data, but also by what was considered important and meaningful to measure. This approach ushered in a new era for gender data – driving innovation in indicator development, expanding data collection and strengthening the use of evidence to track progress and inform policy. When the 2030 Agenda was adopted, only one third of SDG indicators had good data coverage and 39 per cent lacked internationally agreed methodologies. Today, almost 70 per cent have good coverage and all 234 indicators have well-established methodologies.^{ix} However, not all SDGs include gender-sensitive indicators, with particular gaps in the environmental goals (6, 7, 13, 14, 15).^x

Although data availability on SDG 5 indicators continues to lag behind other goals, it has improved significantly, due in no small part to the support provided through programmes like Women Count. Between 2019 and 2024, for example, the number of countries with data on laws guaranteeing equal land rights increased fivefold from 16 to 82 countries.^{xi} Data on intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence was available for 168 and 140 countries, respectively, in 2025.

Despite these gains, more than a decade into implementation, the impact of the 2030 Agenda on the lives of women and girls has been mixed. Only 35 per cent of SDG targets are on track and none of the 18 SDG 5 indicators are on course to be met by 2030. This makes it a critical juncture to take stock of what has enabled or hindered gender-responsive implementation and to draw forward-looking lessons for 2030 and beyond.

III. Focus of the expert group meeting

The overall objective of the EGM is to assess what difference the 2030 Agenda has made on the ground for gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and their human rights; to identify policies, institutions, processes and partnerships that have enabled or hindered progress; and to draw forward-looking lessons for accelerating implementation to 2030 and shaping a more ambitious post-2030

framework. The findings will inform the narrative of the Secretary-General's report and a set of forward-looking recommendations for Member States, the United Nations system and other stakeholders.

Rather than reviewing each of the 17 SDGs in turn, the EGM will focus on cross-cutting principles and enablers of implementation: gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive institutions; the promise to leave no one behind; localization; financing; and governance, monitoring and accountability. Thematic priorities, including violence against women and girls, sexual and reproductive health and rights, the care economy, social protection and environmental sustainability, will be brought in under these broader frames.

The EGM will be organized around five substantive sessions.

Session 1. Progress, setbacks and future priorities for gender equality and sustainable development towards and beyond 2030

Ten years into implementation, the 2030 Agenda has produced a mixed record for gender equality. The twin-track approach opened important entry points for gender mainstreaming and elevated long-standing feminist demands within the global development framework. The 2030 Agenda has also catalyzed growth in gender data and statistics, with improved data availability and the development of new methodologies. At the same time, key gender-related targets remain off-track; structural drivers of inequality, including the concentration of wealth and power, have not been adequately addressed; and the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda were underdeveloped from a gender perspective. Looking towards 2030 and beyond, the questions of what the SDG framework has delivered, where it has fallen short and what lessons it offers for the post-2030 process are central.

- What tangible difference has the 2030 Agenda made for advancing gender equality in global, regional and national policy spaces since 2015?
- What have been the most significant setbacks, in terms of outcomes, resources or political space? What lies behind these reversals?
- What role have global norms – and the 2030 Agenda in particular – played in safeguarding hard-won gains and driving further progress in a context marked by conflict, climate crisis, democratic erosion, weakening multilateralism and declining ODA?
- What lessons can be drawn from SDG implementation for feminist priorities in a possible successor framework of the SDGs beyond 2030?

Session 2. Insights from national implementation: Impact of the SDGs on gender equality discourses, policies and institutions

Much of the focus under the 2030 Agenda has unfolded at national and subnational level. Emerging evidence indicates that efforts to localize the 2030 Agenda opened up new entry points for gender mainstreaming, with gender equality advocates, feminist groups and women's rights organizations proactively seeking out engagement opportunities to ensure gender-responsive implementation. As central coordinating bodies for gender mainstreaming, national women's machineries have been key drivers of progress where they have been adequately resourced and positioned in government. Cities and subnational governments have emerged as important sites of innovation, while interministerial coordination, sectoral ministries and partnerships with trade unions, women's rights organizations and the private sector have shaped what has been possible. The care economy is a particularly instructive case of an area where the 2030 Agenda was followed by a period of intense policy adoption and diffusion.

- How have the SDGs (re)shaped national and local discourses, laws and policies on gender equality?

- How have gender-equality advocates and feminist organizations used SDG language, processes and reporting mechanisms (e.g., VNRs, local reviews) to open new political spaces or overcome institutional resistance?
- What processes and institutions, such as gender-mainstreaming practices, coordination structures or planning and budgeting routines, have emerged or changed as part of SDG domestication?
- Which mechanisms (e.g., regional platforms, city-level coalitions, interministerial bodies) have been effective in translating SDG norms into policies and institutional innovations that accelerate gender equality?
- What lessons can be drawn about how a future global development agenda might strengthen the discursive and institutional foundations needed for coherent, multi-level implementation of gender equality commitments?

Session 3. Addressing intersecting inequalities: The promises and limitations of the 2030 Agenda's leave no one behind principle

The commitment to 'leave no one behind' was one of the most distinctive features of the 2030 Agenda, signaling a shift from average progress to a focus on those furthest behind. A decade on, however, evidence shows that progress has been particularly limited for women and girls facing intersecting disadvantages on the basis of income, age, geographic location, disability, race, ethnicity, indigenous status, migration status, sexual orientation and gender identity. Voluntary National Reviews suggest that the leave no one behind principle has often been narrowly interpreted, with limited attention to the structural drivers of inequality. Strengthening data on intersecting inequalities, while essential, will not on its own deliver change; social movements, cross-movement alliances and women's rights organizations have been critical drivers of progress and accountability for those furthest behind.

- How well did the 2030 Agenda address intersecting inequalities, including through the leave no one behind principle? How has this principle been interpreted in national implementation, both strengths and limitations?
- How can efforts to reduce gender and other horizontal inequalities remain effective when broader economic structures are driving ever-greater concentration of wealth, income and political influence?
- What are the strengths and limitations of current data systems in making intersecting inequalities visible? What innovations show promise?
- How have social movements, feminist organizing, and cross-movement coalitions shaped action on inequality, and what lessons can be taken forward for 2030 and beyond?

Session 4. Financing and partnerships for gender equality and sustainable development

Inadequate and poorly aligned financing remains the single largest bottleneck to gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) renewed political attention to the global financial architecture, but the gap between rhetoric and resources remains wide. Official development assistance is declining sharply, debt service is crowding out social investment in many low- and middle-income countries, and the gender equality marker of bilateral official development assistance continues to capture only a small share of total flows. At the same time, opportunities are emerging in the form of progressive and gender-responsive tax reforms, debates on global public investment, expanded roles for public development banks and innovative or sustainable finance instruments. Mobilizing adequate, predictable and rights-aligned financing in a 'post-aid world' will be central to any credible agenda for gender equality and sustainable development.

- What has been achieved, and what remains insufficient, after FfD4 regarding the financing of gender equality and sustainable development?
- How can financing architecture evolve in a “post-aid world,” including through Global Public Investment, expanded domestic resource mobilization and progressive taxation?
- What opportunities and risks emerge from new financing instruments (e.g., sustainable finance, blended finance, climate finance) for gender equality?
- What kind of partnerships – at global, regional and national level – have delivered meaningful progress on gender equality and sustainable development?
- How should financing be structured for areas where investment has demonstrably driven progress such as maternal health, social protection and care services, and for emerging priorities such as climate adaptation and just transitions?

Session 5. Governance, monitoring and accountability

The current crisis of multilateralism poses particular risks for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for any successor framework. ‘Global governance by goal setting’ has been an important mechanism for advancing gender equality at the global level, but its effectiveness depends on robust follow-up, monitoring and accountability. The voluntary national reviews and the High-Level Political Forum have provided platforms for sharing experience, but their connections with human rights mechanisms remain weak, and gender data gaps persist, particularly across environmental and climate-related indicators and on the situation of the most marginalized groups. Reinvigorating multilateralism and strengthening multi-level governance – from global processes to subnational implementation – will be essential to deliver on existing commitments and to shape a credible post-2030 architecture.

- What does the current crisis of multilateralism mean for the post-2030 agenda? Can “global governance by goals” still drive progress?
- How can monitoring and reporting mechanisms be strengthened (e.g., VNRs/HLPF, human rights bodies, feminist accountability frameworks) to ensure that commitments translate into action?
- What is needed to close gender data gaps and how can gender data and statistics be used to drive accountability?
- What multi-level accountability arrangements – from local to global – have proven effective, and how can these be institutionalized in a post-2030 framework?

IV. Profile of participants

The EGM will be attended by up to 25 experts, invited by the Executive Director of UN Women. Experts will include academics, researchers and data specialists based in academia, think tanks and civil society organizations, with strong track records on the themes outlined above. In selecting experts, regional balance, diversity of perspectives and inclusion of voices from the Global South will be prioritized. UN Women will provide an honorarium for online participation and for the preparation of short written inputs. United Nations agencies will be invited to participate in observer status. Select UN Women staff will also attend as observers.

V. 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.

VI. Organization

The EGM will be convened by UN Women from 30 June to 2 July and will be virtual. It will be conducted in English. The EGM will meet in plenary. Plenary presentations will create the framework for discussions. Two of the experts will be appointed as co-chairs to oversee the meeting and preparation of the EGM report.

VII. 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 71 and on the website of UN Women.

VIII. Agenda

Provided separately.

ⁱ Fukuda-Parr, S. and B. Muchala. 2020. “The Southern origins of sustainable development goals: Ideas, actors, aspirations.” World Development 126.

ⁱⁱ UN Women (2018) Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York.

ⁱⁱⁱ Novovic, G. 2021. “Can Agenda 2030 bring about “localization”? Policy limitations of Agenda 2030 in the broader global governance system.”

^{iv} UN Women. 2013. [A transformative stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment: Imperatives and key components](#); UN Women. 2015. [Monitoring gender equality and the empowerment of Women and girls in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: opportunities and challenges](#).

^v [A/RES/70/1](#)

^{vi} e.g. IWHC (International Women’s Health Coalition). 2017. Power Lessons: Women’s Advocacy and the 2030 Agenda. New York: IWHC.

^{vii} [https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/deputy-secretary-general/statements/2020-09-15/deputy-secretary-generals-keynote-address-UN Women-10-years-prepared-for-delivery](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/deputy-secretary-general/statements/2020-09-15/deputy-secretary-generals-keynote-address-UN-Women-10-years-prepared-for-delivery)

^{viii} [Sustainable-Development-Goals-and-Violence-Against-Women-and-Girls.pdf](#)

^{ix} United Nations. 2025. [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025](#).

^x UN Women. 2018. [Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

^{xi} UN Women. 2025. [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025](#)^v.