

Sustainable Development Goal 5 and interlinkages with other SDGs

*An Expert Group Meeting in preparation for HLPF 2022:
Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development*

Virtual meeting, 27-28 April 2022

Concept Note

1. Introduction

The theme of the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) is “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The 2022 HLPF will have an in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, 14 on life below water, 15 on life on land, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The forum will consider the different and particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across all SDGs and the integrated, indivisible, and interlinked nature of the Goals.

In preparation for the review of SDG 5 – and its role in advancing sustainable development across the 2030 Agenda, the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA/DSDG), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) are organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM).

The objective of the meeting will be to take stock of where we are in terms of progress towards SDG 5; to consider what has changed since the SDG was last reviewed in 2017, including in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic; to consider interlinkages with other SDGs and opportunities to leverage synergies and minimize trade-offs; to share knowledge about success stories, good practices and challenges; to identify particular areas of concern; and to suggest ways forward in terms of policies, partnerships and coordinated actions at all levels.

This event will help inform the HLPF and the planning of its sessions as well as contribute to the evidence base for collaborations and programmes of work on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls going forward from 2022.

2. Progress and gaps in implementation of SDG 5 and its interlinkages with other SDGs

The 2017 HLPF – when SDG 5 was last reviewed – demonstrated that some progress had been made to advance gender equality, including legal reforms, more girls in school, and fewer child marriages. There are also many more women serving in parliament. Nevertheless, discriminatory laws and social and

gender norms remain pervasive, and women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of decision making and political leadership.

The socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 have disproportionately affected women and girls and threaten to push back recent progress and further entrench persistent gender inequalities. Lost jobs and livelihoods, derailed education and increased burdens of unpaid care work, and increased rates of gender-based violence are among the struggles women and girls have faced with greater intensity since the onset of the pandemic.¹ As the health crisis morphed into a full-blown economic recession, women bore the brunt of job losses, seeing their economic autonomy stifled and their poverty risk rise. Women's employment-to-population ratios declined proportionally more than men's for all country income level groups in 2020, and job recoveries are expected to be slower for women, with 13 million fewer women employed in 2021 compared to 2019.²

Negative impacts are compounded for women and girls who are marginalized based on multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, age, income, geography, disability, or other characteristics. Women migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as forcibly displaced women living in humanitarian crises, are also at heightened risk, particularly in light of travel restrictions and rising gender-based violence. These groups also frequently face overcrowded conditions, lack of water and sanitation, and limited healthcare facilities. Women and girls with disabilities reported barriers to accessing health services, including for sexual and reproductive health.

The pandemic has had both direct and indirect impacts on women's health. Clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines have not adequately considered sex and gender.³ Women's health services as well as social services such as shelters and one-stop crisis centres, already poorly funded, faced major disruptions that cut lifelines for survivors of violence and undermined sexual and reproductive health services. When schools and care services closed, women stepped in to provide support and unpaid care, for families and communities, often at the expense of their own mental and physical health, increasing their time-poverty, often with negative implications for their earning potential outside the home. Even before the pandemic, women spent about 2.5 times as many hours on unpaid domestic work and care work as men.⁴

As countries locked down, reports of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, to helplines and other services spiraled upwards. Data collected by UN Women through rapid gender assessments on the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women confirm a shadow pandemic.⁵ More

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-COVID-19-en.pdf>; see also <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/whose-time-care-unpaid-care-and-domestic-work-during-covid-19>

² ILO. 2021. *An uneven and gender-unequal COVID-19 recovery: Update on gender and employment trends 2021*. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_824865.pdf

³ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-24265-8>

⁴ UN. 2021. *Secretary-General's SDG Progress Report 2021*. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG_SDG_Progress_report_2021.pdf

⁵ <https://data.unwomen.org/features/emerging-data-violence-against-women-confirm-shadow-pandemic>

than half of women surveyed reported that they or a woman they know experienced violence since the onset of COVID-19.⁶ UNICEF and UNFPA estimate that with more girls out of school, an additional 10 million child marriages⁷ and 2 million female genital mutilation cases⁸ may occur in this decade.

Despite women's central roles in responding to COVID-19, including as 70 per cent of health and social care workers, they are underrepresented in leadership positions and decision-making spaces (30 per cent of leaders in the global health sector).⁹ Women also make up less than one quarter of members in all COVID-19 national committees.¹⁰ Large gender gaps remain in the use of information and communications technology¹¹ (mobile phone ownership among women is on average 8.5 percentage point lower than for men)¹² with implications for women's empowerment and access to information. Digitalization has also exposed women to increasing risk of cyber violence and ICT-facilitated violence.¹³ As the world continues to evolve and expand in the use of technology and platforms, so too does the expansion of spaces through which violence can be perpetrated. This was evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic where containment efforts reduced access to information and services, driving increased use of technology and online spaces¹⁴.

The latest data for each indicator under Goal 5 reveals a long road ahead. Globally, only 1 of the 18 indicators (including sub indicators) is assessed as being "close to target".¹⁵ Where data are available over time, they reveal limited or no progress across regions and in at least one case a deteriorating outlook. The full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not yet known but is expected to further erode progress. Strong legal and policy action as well as resources for implementation and inclusion of women in recovery efforts are critical to stem the tide and get back on track.

Moreover, data gaps need to be urgently addressed – this was a key takeaway when SDG 5 was reviewed at the 2017 HLPF. Limitations in the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data, including gender data, remains a challenge hampering policy to narrow gender equalities. In 6 out of 18 SDG 5 indicators, global data remain insufficient to assess current levels. Trend data are even more sparse. Only 2 of the 18 indicators have sufficient data to assess progress over time across all regions. Furthermore, sex-disaggregated data is frequently lacking, resulting in insufficient information on

⁶ <https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/Measuring-shadow-pandemic.pdf>

⁷ UNICEF. 2021. *COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage*. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/covid-19-a-threat-to-progress-against-child-marriage/>

⁸ UNFPA. 2020. *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage*. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf

⁹ WHO. 2019. *Gender equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries*
<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311314/WHO-HIS-HWF-Gender-WP1-2019.1-eng.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://wrds.unwomen.org/practice/listing-toolbox/covid-19-global-gender-response-tracker>

¹¹ <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2021.pdf>

¹² UN. 2021. *Secretary-General's SDG Progress Report 2021*.
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG_SDG_Progress_report_2021.pdf

¹³ UNIDO, UNODC, Permanent Missions of Finland, Norway and Sweden in Vienna. 2022. Summary of recommendations – Vienna Discussion Forum, 4 November 2021; UN Women. Online and ICT facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19. 2021.

¹⁴ <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-making-all-spaces-safe>

¹⁵ <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/progress-sustainable-development-goals-gender-snapshot-2021>

differential progress on the SDGs based on sex. Without a bold commitment to fill these gaps, the picture of progress will remain incomplete.

3. Addressing compounding crises and leveraging interlinkages to achieve gender equality

Five years after the first HLPF in-depth review of SDG 5 progress, the world stands at a turning point with a narrowing window for transforming economies and societies in line with the 2030 Agenda. The pandemic has drawn attention to long-standing structural impediments that have held back progress on multiple SDGs, with disproportionate impacts on women and marginalized groups. A livelihoods crisis has pushed large swathes of people behind and increased their vulnerability to shocks and hazards; a care crisis has left millions of children and care-dependent adults without support while imposing hard choices and enormous costs on women and girls. At the same time, the pandemic has provided a warning about the environmental and climate crisis that, like the pandemic, is already erasing hard-won progress on gender equality.¹⁶ The direct and indirect impacts of disasters, and the disruptions and displacement caused by climate change, reinforce, or exacerbate the patterns of inequality already present.¹⁷

Progress on the SDGs, including SDG 5, requires attention to the underlying risk drivers compounding crises exacerbated by the pandemic that are deeply rooted in an economic system that, despite significant cross-country variations, displays some critical features everywhere: it freerides on women's unpaid and underpaid labour, exploits the natural environment and has led to an extreme concentration of wealth and power among the few while causing a deep sense of insecurity and disenchantment among the many.

Global partnership and cooperation, including around finance, fair and equitable trade, and support for technological progress and innovation, are essential for sustainable development. At the same time, the structural drivers of gender inequality must be dismantled. The elimination of discriminatory laws, negative social norms and practices in all public and private spheres, as well as of all forms of violence against women and girls, are crucial to build sustainable and inclusive societies and reduce inequalities within countries.

Given the interlinked and indivisible nature of the SDGs, accelerating progress on SDG 5 would have impacts across the 2030 Agenda. Likewise, the SDG framework includes comprehensive commitments across the board that contribute to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and in this regard policy decisions should harness these interlinkages.

Global partnership for sustainable development is more imperative than ever given the economic devastation caused by the pandemic, assaults on women's enjoyment of their human rights and the looming climate and biodiversity crises. States have an obligation to respect women's and girls' human rights; discriminatory practices and frameworks present a barrier to sustainable development. The pathway to achieve the SDGs by 2030, based on the current trajectory, looks very rocky indeed.

¹⁶ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/feminist-plan-for-sustainability-and-social-justice>

¹⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Research-paper-Beyond-vulnerability-to-gender-equality-en.pdf>

Building forward differently and better will hinge on placing gender equality at the centre of all aspects of pandemic response and economic recovery to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. More broadly, stemming the erosion of progress on gender equality calls for robust laws and policies to uphold women's rights, as well as equal opportunities and benefits, backed by sufficient financing for implementation and access to promising technologies.

Women and girls continue to be resilient and play a key role in the frontline response to and recovery from the pandemic. It is essential to build on the strength and capacities of women and girls and invest in the care economy to ensure their full participation in programming, decision-making and leadership structures, while strengthening collaboration with women-led and feminist organizations. Increased representation of women in COVID-19 task forces, use of gender-responsive budgeting to design and deliver response and recovery measures, and greater prioritization of gender-responsive recovery measures are essential for advancing women's rights and equal participation.

The targets under SDG 5, including in relation to discrimination and violence, unpaid care and domestic work, participation in decision-making at all levels, sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic resources, and technology, have the potential to accelerate pathways to sustainable development and COVID-19 recovery. However, comprehensive analysis and policies beyond these targets and the gender-analysis of other Goals are necessary to fully achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, including in areas such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, energy, infrastructure development, and financing. Increasing global funding for gender issues, including through greater official development assistance, foreign direct investment, government support programmes and private sector incentives will be critical to implementing transformational change. Increased national funding and revenue will be critical for financing of the gender equality agenda, especially for sustainability and long-term change.

This EGM will provide the opportunity to discuss strategies for accelerating implementation of SDG 5, and gender equality more broadly, while addressing the root causes of gender-based discrimination, a crucial step for promoting gender-responsive laws, policies, institutions, programming, and budgeting across sectors.

4. Key questions

Stock taking:

- What is the current status of progress and trends on the SDG 5 indicators, as well as other gender-related indicators?
 - What has changed since SDG 5 was last reviewed at the 2017 HLPF?
 - How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted progress on SDG 5, taking into account women and girls impacted by intersecting factors?
- What are new obstacles or opportunities in implementation, including through interlinkages both within SDG 5 and across other SDGs and connections to other processes?
- What data are missing and how can this be addressed? How is marginalization and the situation of women and girls furthest behind being addressed? Where are the data disaggregation gaps?
- Are there any new or promising methods for tracking progress, including from additional data sources? Are there systems for tracking financing against SDG targets?

Challenges:

- What are some critical gender gaps observed in strategies to accelerate SDG progress (across all SDGs) and COVID-19 recovery?
 - What are the impediments to systematic integration of a gender perspective in sectoral policies?
 - How can the needs of marginalized groups of women and girls, particularly those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, be integrated at the global, regional, and national levels?
- What are the main constraints countries are contending with in the current socioeconomic crisis and how can limitations on fiscal space, including due to debt and limited liquidity, be addressed more effectively? What role(s) can international organizations play to support countries in responding to and prioritizing gender-responsive measures in light of fiscal constraints? Are there examples of strategies and partnerships that can address the barriers faced by Member States in SDG 5 implementation, particularly in terms of adequate financing for SDG Goal 5?
- What measures are needed to ensure the participation and leadership of women in the decision-making processes in sectors and issues where they are most underrepresented?

Opportunities:

- What are the promising strategies to combat the persistence of a global discriminatory cultural construction of gender? What steps have been taken to repeal discriminatory laws and practices, including those that discriminate against women on traditional, cultural or religious grounds and laws that exclusively or disproportionately criminalize action or behaviour by women and girls, taking into account the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination?

- What promising strategies have governments and other stakeholders pursued to accelerate action on SDG 5, including to make up for regression in the trajectory of progress due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the projected impacts of climate change?
- What lessons have we learned through COVID19 response and recovery efforts which can be scaled up to support increased progress against SDG 5 implementation? How can the integration of a gender perspective be strengthened in national COVID-19 recovery strategies and budgets to support women’s economic security and address women’s and girls’ disproportionate share of unpaid care, reproductive labor, and domestic work? Are there opportunities to harness linkages between SDG 5 and other SDGs to accelerate action?
- How can we harness the power of data to transform policies and redirect financing, to advance implementation of SDG 5?
- What are the main barriers, opportunities, and promising practices to advance gender equality in the areas of:
 - Gender-responsive social protection and health systems
 - Technology and infrastructure development
 - Financing, including gender-responsive budgeting, economic access, and international trade
 - Protecting natural resources, climate resilience, and biodiversity
 - Accelerating efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls and harmful practices, including through emergency response plans

5. Contribution to HLPF 2022

The knowledge and insights of experts—both practitioners and academics—from across the world will be crucial to addressing these questions. The EGM will serve to bring together a cross-section of such expertise from a diversity of countries and regions to help:

- Provide substantive inputs, including a concrete set of recommendations, into the thematic reviews at the 2022 HLPF and help inform its outcomes;
- Identify cases from regions and specific countries (including those that are conducting or have conducted Voluntary National Reviews) that illustrate challenges or highlight innovative practices;
- Suggest effective presenters for the specific sessions at the HLPF, as well as contributors to blog posts, e-discussions and other activities leading up to the HLPF; and
- Influence collaborations and programmes of work going forward from 2022.

6. Participation and organization

The EGM is part of a broader review of SDG 5, including specialized reports from various agencies and think tanks. Some of these inputs will also feed into the EGM.

Participation at the EGM will be by invitation. A limited number of experts from think tanks, academia, NGOs, the private sector, and Governments will be invited. Experts from the UN system and other international organizations will also be invited to participate.

UN-DESA/DSDG, UN Women and UNFPA will prepare this virtual event in consultation with the broader UN System. DESA/DSDG will also coordinate across other DESA divisions in this connection.

Individual sessions at the EGM will address specific themes. The mode will be interactive, with panel discussions in plenary sessions and working groups in breakout sessions. This is a working-level meeting, with all participants encouraged to speak openly and informally.

The EGM will be conducted in English. All presentations/papers/remarks will be made available online.