



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM  
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2025



## Sustainable Development Goal 5

*An Expert Group Meeting in preparation for HLPF 2025:  
Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-  
based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for  
leaving no one behind*

UN Women Conference Room  
New York, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025

### Concept Note

#### **1. Introduction**

The 2025 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is focusing on “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind”. The 2025 HLPF will conduct an in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, SDG 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, SDG 14 – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, and SDG 17 – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

At the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the HLPF will provide an opportunity to assess progress on these goals, and identify transformative actions to radically accelerate progress on SDG implementation in the remaining five years, connecting with other intergovernmental processes such as the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30), the 3<sup>rd</sup> UN Ocean Conference, the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), and the Second World Summit for Social Development, creating synergies that underscore the interconnectedness of the SDGs.

In preparation for the review of SDG 5 – and its vital role in advancing sustainable development across the 2030 Agenda, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development Goals (UN-DESA/DSDG) and UN Women, together with other partners, are organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM).

The objective of the meeting will be to take stock of progress towards SDG 5; to identify innovative and actionable solutions that could accelerate progress toward SDG 5 while also generating synergies and addressing interrelations across

the various goals and targets; to consider new and emerging challenges since 2022 when the Goal was last reviewed, including in relation to economic disruptions and repeated shocks that have affected the world in recent years, from the COVID-19 pandemic to food, fuel and financial crises, the intensifying climate and environment crisis, and multiple conflicts, among others; to identify lessons learned and best practices on SDG 5 implementation over the past 10 years; and to reflect on ways to harness the political momentum from the SDG Summit, the Summit of the Future and the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women to deliver on SDG 5 by 2030.

These discussions will help inform the HLPF, assist in planning its sessions, and contribute toward identifying collaborations and programmes of work on SDG 5 in the next five years to implement the 2030 Agenda.

## 2. SDG 5

There has been some advancement, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation have declined in recent years, and women's representation in the political arena is higher than ever before. However, the world continues to lag in the promise to achieve gender equality by 2030. Despite commitments, parity in women's participation in public life remains elusive, and at the current pace of progress, achieving parity in management positions, is projected to take an additional 176 years (SDG 5.1)<sup>1</sup>.

Gender-based violence persists in all countries of the world, regardless of income, race, age, religion or other characteristic, and disproportionately affecting women with disabilities (SDG 5.2). The Internet, while offering significant opportunities and access to information, can also expose women and girls to online harassment and abuse. The Gender Snapshot Report 2022 revealed that 38 per cent of women had personally experienced online violence. Only 1 in 4 reported it to the relevant authorities and nearly 9 in 10 opted to limit their online activity, thereby increasing the gender digital divide. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this trend, which increased online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls, as they spent more time online<sup>2</sup>.

Though harmful practices that target women and girls are decreasing, the pace of change remains insufficient to keep up with population growth (SDG 5.3). Child marriage and female genital mutilation violate the rights of girls and have lifelong consequences. An estimated 640 million girls and women were married in childhood globally. While some progress has been made – today, one in five girls was married before the age of 18, compared to one in four 25 years ago, indicating that 68 million child marriages were averted in this period - the situation is less optimistic when it comes to female genital mutilation. Over 230 million girls and women have undergone this harmful practice and despite strides made by some countries to eliminate it, recent estimates show an increase of 30 million cases compared to eight years ago.

Heavy responsibility of unpaid care and domestic work trap women in poverty and inequality (SDG 5.4). On average, each day, women spend 2.5 times more hours on unpaid care and domestic work than men. The disproportionate burden on women is even worse in lower-income households, contributing to poverty, inequality and precariousness, including by limiting labour-market participation. Women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work is further intensified by cascading crises, multiplying conflicts and the accelerating impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.<sup>3</sup> Overall, 24.3 million more females live in extreme poverty compared to males. By 2030, a projected 8.1 per cent of women (compared to 7.6 per cent of men) will linger in extreme poverty, with gender inequalities contributing toward missing the central SDG target<sup>4</sup>.

Women's participation continues to lag in political representation and the labour market (SDG 5.5). As of 1 January 2024, women occupied 26.9 per cent of seats in national parliaments, up from 22.3 per cent in 2015. In local government,

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<sup>1</sup> The data in this document are from United Nations. [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024](#) unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> UN Women, 2022 SDG Gender Snapshot [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2022 | Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

<sup>3</sup> UN Women. 2023. [The Climate-Care Nexus: Addressing the linkages between climate change and women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work](#).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2024>

women occupied 35.5 per cent of elected seats in 2024. The gender gap in labour force participation has remained stagnant for 20 years, with 63 per cent of women in the labour force in 2022 and 92 per cent of men, compared to 64 per cent for women and 94 per cent for men in 2002.<sup>5</sup>

When women participate, they find narrower avenues for advancement. While gender gaps have closed at all levels of education globally, upper-secondary disparities remain concerning in three of eight regions<sup>6</sup>. While women account for 40 per cent of global employment, they only occupied 27.5 per cent of managerial positions in 2022, the same share as in 2016. Nearly all countries have gender gaps in digital skills and STEM, which significantly impacts the participation and leadership of women and girls in innovation and digital transformation, crucial for progress in today's rapidly evolving technological landscape.

There have been positive trends, yet far too many women still cannot realize the right to decide on their sexual and reproductive health (SDG 5.6). Data from 69 countries show that 56 per cent of married or in-union women aged 15–49 can decide on their sexual and reproductive health and rights, ranging from 38 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa to over 80 per cent in Europe. New data from 32 countries show that 19 have seen a positive trend in women's ability to make decisions on sexual and reproductive health, particularly in Eastern and Southern Africa. Conversely, Western and Central Africa has experienced notable declines.

Overall, and as the Gender Snapshot Report 2024 stresses, the cost is high if there's no investment in women's rights, and attention is needed to prove solutions that benefit women, girls and entire societies. For example, the annual global cost of the education skills deficit surpasses \$10 trillion, more than the GDP of France and Japan combined. If left unaddressed, the global gender gap in Internet use could cost low- and middle-income countries an estimated \$500 billion over the next five years,

### ***3. Framing the issues***

Women and girls continue to face discrimination, gender stereotypes, stigma and societal biases dictating their place in society, their roles, and responsibilities, which are holding everyone back.

For women in politics, challenges include limited legislative and party support, violence against women in politics, and gender bias in voter's perspective. The COVID-19 pandemic and multiple crises that have affected the world in recent times have pushed women's progress backwards, reinforcing traditional gender roles, such as framing women as caregivers, and impacting jobs and livelihoods in sectors where women were working in large numbers, such as in the informal work. The COVID-19 crisis also drove a spike in violence against women and girls, including intimate partner violence, compounded by economic, health and security stresses, movement restrictions, overcrowded homes and reduced peer support<sup>7</sup>.

Women are bearing the brunt of the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation. With less access to land, education, information and financial resources, women are most affected by extreme climate events, such as floods and droughts. Social protection measures are largely missing where they are needed the most urgently. In the 20 countries on the frontlines of the climate crisis more than 90 per cent of the population do not have access to any form of social protection cash benefit, be it child and family or unemployment benefits, or any support that can protect them from the ravages of climate change and environmental degradation<sup>8</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, extreme poverty is projected to deepen for women and girls globally. By the end of 2022, around 383 million women and girls were living in extreme poverty compared to 368 million men and boys. If current trends continue, by 2030, more women and girls will live in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa than do today. Women are more likely than men to experience food insecurity, and the gender gap continues to widen. Since 2015, the gender gap in moderate

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<sup>5</sup> UN-Women, 2024, SDG Gender Snapshot.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2024>

<sup>7</sup> <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/covid19/en/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/publications/flagship-reports/world-social-protection-report-2024-26-universal-social-protection-climate>

or severe food insecurity has widened in five out of seven regions<sup>9</sup>. Under a worst-case climate scenario, up to 158.3 million additional women and girls could be pushed into poverty by 2050 as a direct result of climate change, surpassing the number of men and boys by 16 million. The number of food-insecure women and girls could rise by as much as 236 million, compared to an additional 131 million men and boys<sup>10</sup>.

Women are systematically being left behind and with five more years to implement the 2030 Agenda, this calls for bold, targeted and intentional policy making to counter the disproportionate disadvantages that women and girls face and to urgently support progress on SDG 5. This begins with respecting, protecting and fulfilling women's and girls' human rights, including in the law and in practice. Empowered and educated women can lead meaningful lives and fulfil their innate potential. They can also unleash progress on development across their societies, families, and nations. Women's and girls' success has synergies with every other SDG. Holding back half of humanity is holding back progress on all of the SDGs.

The UN has identified six investment pathways for revitalizing SDG implementation, known as the Six Transitions. While gender equality is not a distinct transition, all six depend on realizing it, alongside urgent complementary action on key areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, such as ending violence against women, full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making, and in advancing the women, peace and security agenda. The review of SDG 5 will highlight the interconnections among gender equality and the six transitions.

#### **4. Key questions**

Stock taking:

*What are the trends in SDG 5 targets? Which areas have seen the most progress and which ones are lagging behind the most?*

*How does progress vary regionally? What can be learnt from the regional patterns?*

Lessons learned from first 10 years of the 2030 journey:

*What lessons have been learnt in policy making for gender equality in the last 10 years of implementation?*

*What can be done differently from the past and what should be reinforced and accelerated? What are the biggest impediments to progress?*

Challenges and impediments to shifting course:

*What are the most intractable underlying inequalities and injustices that prevent advances on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls?*

*What are the interests and power dynamics that pose the biggest challenge to change in social norms and discrimination against women and girls?*

*How have recent crises changed the dynamics of gender inequality and what policy instruments might be needed to overcome these new or deepening pressures?*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2024>

<sup>10</sup> UN-Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment) and DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), Statistics Division. 2023. Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023. New York: UN-Women and DESA.

## Opportunities and solutions for transformative change:

*What are the science- and evidence- based advances that can help achieve gender equality?*

*What are some new opportunities and alliances that can be leveraged in the achievement of SDG 5?*

*How can synergies with other goals be realized, while putting women and girls at the center? How investing in women and girls' rights is a pathway to sustainable development?*

### **5. Contribution to HLPF 2025**

The knowledge and insights of experts from different stakeholders, including government, civil society, youth, academia and the private sector, and from all regions and sectors, will be crucial for addressing these questions. The EGM will serve to bring together a cross-section of expertise on SDG 5 to help:

- Provide substantive inputs into the thematic reviews at the 2025 HLPF and its outcomes;
- Identify cases from different regions and specific countries (including those that are conducting or have conducted Voluntary National Reviews) that illustrate challenges or highlight innovative practices;
- Suggest effective resource persons for thematic sessions at the HLPF, as well as contributors to blog posts, e-discussions and other activities leading up to the HLPF;
- Inform collaborations and programmes of work going forward from 2025.

### **6. Participation and organization**

The EGM is part of a broader review of SDG 5, including reviews of specialized reports from United Nations systems partners and research institutions. Some of these inputs will also provide background material for discussions at the EGM.

Participation at the EGM will be by invitation only. 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 and UN WOMEN will prepare the event in consultation with other UN agencies. DESA/DSDG will also coordinate across other DESA divisions.

Individual sessions at the EGM will address specific themes. The mode will be interactive, with all participants encouraged to speak openly and informally.

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

## **ANNEX 1: SDG 5 Targets**

### **SDG 5.1**

End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.

### **SDG 5.2**

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

### **SDG 5.3**

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

### **SDG 5.4**

Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

### **SDG 5.5**

Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

### **SDG 5.6**

Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

### **SDG 5.a**

Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

### **SDG 5.b**

Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

### **SDG 5.c**

Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels